

The Latino Art Museum is pleased to announce a solo exhibition by artist Linda Vallejo
NATURE AND SPIRIT

Exhibition Dates: October 2 through October 26, 2002

Museum Member Preview: Saturday, October 5, 6 pm

Reception: Saturday, October 12, 6 pm

Artist Lecture: Saturday, October 26, 6 pm

Reflections on "Nature and Spirit" by renowned writer Susan Sontag

Since the late nineteenth century, when Impressionism enthralled California artists and led them outdoors to paint, the play of light over the state's stunning array of natural forms has been of perennial interest to California painters. Linda Vallejo's paintings, particularly those in her current show, *Nature and Spirit*, at the Latino Art Museum, demonstrate her affinity with this lineage even as she weaves the human figure and symbolic imagery into her work. The public's increasing desire to protect and preserve the natural environment has been accompanied by an upswing in interest in California landscape painting. Vallejo's work supports this connection. Because she appreciates the world with eyes that see more than radiant appearances, she extends the concerns of the plein-air painters to include the inner light of the natural world. The lush surfaces and energetic brushwork of Vallejo's paintings couple with their meditative stillness to assert the inseparability of human from natural forces.

In this new series of paintings, Vallejo contemplates the landscape and the paradoxes it suggests. "Horizons: Skyline I" and "Sacred Lands," depict sandstone boulders in the Santa Monica Mountain that are at once sturdy and solid, transient and transparent. The sky's enveloping weather billows in forms as rounded as the hills but with an immanent power as though it will dive into the ground, dissolving barriers between inside and outside. Continuing her exploration of paradoxes, even Vallejo's most ardent images appear to be poised between action and resolution. In other paintings in the series especially "La Tormenta" and "Dusk," the sky appears viscous and pulsing as though its sheer physicality will rend all other elements, exposing their usually hidden vitality.

Suggestive of the Chinese image of yin/yang that symbolizes the simultaneous, interpenetrating powers of activity and receptivity, darkness and illumination, the paintings in this series evoke a world where seemingly opposing elements inhabit one another. Vallejo's work, as it carries the viewer into the interior of boulders, trees, sea, and sky, suggests that nature, also, penetrates and transforms the viewer. In "Sacred Oaks: Moonlight," Vallejo's imagery reverses direction and portrays the motion of light and energy as it moves from inside to outside. Rather than depicted through a detailed realism, the tree in this painting nearly vibrates with its own vital energy. Moonlight would seem to affirm the tree except that the tree also radiates light into the night sky making it a compatriot in the work of illumination. Vallejo's interest in seeing through surfaces is also evident in "Sacred Oaks: Prayer for a World at War." Here the sun co-mingles with the

tree's limbs confirming their intimate work of photosynthesis that is carried out unseen in the canopy. Similarly, the oak tree's roots are compressed into a convoluted sphere suggesting a brain: a hidden source of knowledge and a reservoir of transformative energy that informs the tree and, potentially, the viewer.

Vallejo's current series evolves from her previous one, "Los Cielos," which included several works showing human figures merged within or centered in nature. In "Spirit of the Trees: Women's Gift," included in the new collection, a glowing, nude, female figure emanates from the core of a tree trunk: a North American Aphrodite born from the arms of a tree in Topanga Canyon. Vallejo's paintings acknowledge her connection to Western traditions even as she transforms familiar references. Similarly, in "Water Spirits: Women's Inner Life," the viewer is allowed to see the vulva/ seashell that lies beneath the surface of the waves. In these paintings, the intimate human connection with what is wild and seemingly discordant with urban culture is presented as a subject for contemplation.

The works in Spirit and Nature demonstrate a special kinship to two early twentieth century landscape painters, Maynard Dixon and Chiura Obata. Dixon, especially in "A Desert Valley: Panamint, California" and "Navajoland," painted the sky as though it were as substantial as sandstone mountains. And Obata's watercolors, for example "Sunset Water Tower" and "Devastation," prefigure Vallejo's in their direct encounter with nature and their lyrical contemplation of the human condition. Vallejo's paintings, also, resonate with the work of Georgia O'Keefe whose vocabulary of boulders, sky, bones, and flowers elucidates the passage between the interior and exterior of natural forms. In paintings that contribute masterfully to her lineage, Vallejo presents a contemporary vision of the natural world that celebrates the inner as well as the outer light.

Susan Suntree is a poet, writer, and performer whose work investigates the dynamics of art, science, and nature as they engage contemporary life. Recent publications include "Write!" in *Reflections on the Writing Life*, Mark Waldman Ed. (New York: Putnam/Tarcher, 2001); "FrogWorks in Los Angeles," in *Playing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-based Performance*, Susan Haedicke and Tobin Nellhouse, Eds. (University of Michigan Press, 2001); and *Wisdom of the East: Stories of Compassion, Inspiration, and Love*, Editor (Chicago: Contemporary Books/McGraw-Hill, 2001). Her recent one-woman performance, *Sacred Sites/Los Angeles*, explores the prehistory and sacred geography of Los Angeles, which is also the subject of her forthcoming book.

WHAT: NATURE AND SPIRIT; ONE WOMAN EXHIBITION BY ARTIST LINDA VALLEJO

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WHERE: LATINO ART MUSEUM; Graciela Nardi, Director
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