

Linda Vallejo

by John Mendelsohn

John Mendelsohn writes articles and reviews on contemporary art for Cover Magazine and ArtNet Magazine and has contributed to the forthcoming book, A Book of Images: Reflections on Symbols, C.G. Jung Institute, New York.

The phrase “an artist’s vision” makes a metaphor from the act of seeing, equating it with both creative imagination and a kind of insight. It suggests a “second sight” beyond the observable into the depths the world, a reconfiguration of reality as we think we know it. Linda Vallejo’s work is an artist’s vision of the state of our planet through the lens of culture, spirituality, and her own individuality. Her art seeks to make visible our profound connection to nature and the dire consequences of our separation from it.

Vallejo addresses these concerns in A Prayer for the Earth, an installation of sculpture and painting. She has made a sacred space that embraces the profane, in the form of the evidence of environmental degradation that it presents. She celebrates the earth’s beauty as she mourns its damage. By turn impassioned, soulful, and whimsical, the artist’s work becomes a prayer for healing our broken relationship with the world.

In her work, Vallejo has drawn upon the wisdom of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and her own spiritual training in those traditions. A Prayer for the Earth embodies the teachings that see the integration of all things, animate and inanimate, in a single sacred cosmology. This sense of wholeness is in the central mandala with earth, water, fire and air forming cardinal points on the great wheel at whose heart is the blue earth, protected by images of the world’s traditional indigenous peoples. A number of panoramic landscape paintings are alive with an almost psychedelic fervor. Colored auras and forms that move with a dancing energy identify the landscapes as both inherently alive and the object of visionary meditation. The Tree People are sculptures that originate with rescued tree limbs. Covered with paper pulp in bas relief, the limbs have a presence animated by living spirits. With human faces, wounded nature is allowed to speak of loss, love, and the possibility of regeneration.

Gold and silver altars venerate nature’s sanctity in the form of the Mud Woman, a female earth spirit, both Eve and Venus. Other sculptures and collage, made from pre-produced objects and recycled materials, comment on the human propensity to turn the planet into a theme park of earthly delights, by whose amusements we are endlessly entertained, narcotized until we can no longer see that we and the earth are being taken on a long dangerous ride.

Vallejo gives us a sanctuary where the personal and the global find a common language, charged with outrage and love.