

A PRAYER FOR THE EARTH
ECO INSTALLATION
by Linda Vallejo

*a crystal willow, a poplar of water,
a tall fountain the wind arches over,
a tree deep-rooted yet dancing still,
a course of a river that turns, moves on,
doubles back, and comes full circle,
forever arriving
Octavio Paz, Piedra de Sol*

My first memory of painting was at four years of age and it has continued as my life's dedication. My goal as an artist has been to consolidate multiple, international influences gained from a life of study and travel throughout United States, Mexico, and Europe. My creative influences are many and varied. They include the surreal, violent, and spiritual images of Picasso, Goya, and Dali, the monumental forms and brilliant coloration of the Mexican muralists Rivera and Siqueros, and the sensual power of Georgia O'Keefe's landscapes. I have always had a keen interest in ancient architectural sites, history, and mythology. I have visited several sites in both Mexico and Europe, studied ancient philosophy and symbolism, and participated for the past twenty years in indigenous ceremonial rights. All of these influences have been brought together to create ***A Prayer for the Earth Eco Installation***.

During the first twenty years of my career, my painting and sculpture investigated humanity's fundamental and metamorphic relationship with nature through the completion of over 200 "fantastic realism" landscape oil and acrylic on canvas paintings and 50 earth-based sculptures made of found tree fragment and handmade paper. As I continued to explore images to articulate the significance of our relationship to the natural world, I began looking for ways to incorporate these paintings and sculptures into a three-dimensional presentation. After much investigation and experimentation, I produced *A Prayer for the Earth*.

A Prayer for the Earth was originally presented at The Carnegie Art Museum in California. This first full immersion environment combined paintings representing the beauty of nature; earth-based mixed-media sculpture focusing on a symbiotic relationship to nature; a central "mandala" of manipulated photographs with images of pollution juxtaposed with images of international indigenous cultures in the act of ceremony and prayer; all surrounded by a mixed media assemblage depicting earth, water, fire and air. *A Prayer for the Earth* has been successfully installed at the Los Angeles Natural History Museum, the Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum, and the Orange County Center of Contemporary Art in 2006 and 2007, and the Los Angeles Municipal Barnsdall Art Gallery in 2008.

A Prayer for the Earth asks the viewer "What is the value of nature in calming and resolving the confusion and losses created by the far-reaching postmodern problems of raging pollution?" The environment draws the viewer into a space where their attention is divided between images that portray the loss of natural resources and human life juxtaposed with images of the beauty and solace of nature and the natural world. My goal is to create a space that communicates the idea that without nature humanity, history and culture as we know it are lost, that nature is the thread that encircles and describes all of us, regardless of gender, race, age, or creed, and finally, that nature is beyond politics, religion, market, and even art!

What critics and curators say about the work:

William Moreno, Executive Director, Claremont Museum of Art, California, states, “What makes Linda Vallejo’s art so compelling and relevant to contemporary life? For one, her broad command of a variety of mediums: painting, sculpture and site-specific installations are all within her prolific oeuvre. There is nearly something for everyone. Ms. Vallejo’s interests and subject-matter spans are considerable. Themes of beauty, consumption, war, excess, world pollution, iconic references to international indigenous peoples and earth-based installations all reside in her works. Ms. Vallejo has a natural affinity and bond with the natural world and that connection is reflected in her ethereal works. Her paintings of surreal, electrified and transformed landscapes suggest a more vibrant and alluring reality. Color and energy swirl throughout the canvasses and transport you into her alternative world. Her work is not held hostage by fashion or trend – rather she is a singular voice with apparitions all her own. Such visualizations and the tactile nature of the work resonate in a contemporary and abstracted world – we crave the “here, now and hope” of a less complicated life. No commitments are implied in her work, but rather veiled assurances and alternatives. Such well-composed and thoughtful gestures seem hard to come by in our image and information-saturated lives. Ms. Vallejo’s posture is one of deep concern and commitment. One can’t ask for more than that.”

Betty Ann Brown, Ph.D. and Professor, Cal State University, Northridge, Historian, Critic, and Curator states, “In sumptuous landscape paintings, spirit-infused installations, and troubling yet humorous assemblage sculptures, Linda Vallejo’s artworks interrogate our ambivalent interactions with the planet. On one hand, we love Mother Earth and revel in her beauty. Vallejo articulates this love in luscious landscapes that seem to breathe with a vital force. Her hills and trees pulsate in undulating zones of electric color. The expressive intensity of her color recalls the work of Vincent Van Gogh. The richness of the sensual abstraction with which Vallejo addresses natural forms recalls Georgia O’Keeffe’s New Mexico oeuvre. Some of us—particularly the indigenous peoples of this continent—see the terrain as divine. Longtime practitioner of Native American rituals, Vallejo composes complex installations that give physical form to her “Prayers for the Earth.”

However, there is a down side to our relationship with the planet: many cultural practices pollute the environment. Linda Vallejo’s work ranges over diverse media but remains united in impact. She gives physical form to the words of Chief Seattle: “All things are connected, like the blood which connects one family. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth.”

ANN LANDI, Contributing editor of ARTnews and author of the four-volume Schirmer Encyclopedia of Art states “Linda Vallejo’s art grows out of her experiences with multiple cultures over the course of decades of far-flung travel and careful study in Europe, the United States, and Mexico. She has also been involved with Native American and Mexican rituals and ceremonies for the past 25 years. That makes for a rich and heady brew of influences, all of which become distilled in Vallejo’s hands into compelling installations, paintings, sculpture, and collages. That Vallejo is able to channel and draw on so many aspects of her multicultural experience without breaking stride or overloading the viewer is a testament to her strengths as an artist. And her recognition that culture is no longer a matter of one dominant tradition makes her very much part of a mainstream that is constantly looking to expand the borders and boundaries of contemporary art and life.”