



LINDA  
VALLEJO  
MAKE  
'EM ALL  
MEXICAN

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Several years ago, I made trips to China as well as New York and other major US cities. When I travel, I always visit museums and galleries to get a sense of what is happening in the national and international art scene. On these trips, I noticed a growing trend from the mundane to the fantastic—sculpture made of pre-produced objects, collages combining digital work and hand drawn forms, and images that juxtaposed seemingly contrary cultural symbols and icons.

After seeing hundreds of images, my thought and creative processes began to shift. I found myself ruminating, “What would the world of contemporary images look like from my own personal Mexican-American, Chicana lens?” Many months later, as I was sitting in a restaurant with an artist friend, I found myself blurting out, “I’ve collected all these images, and I just wanna make ‘em all Mexican like me!” I found myself furiously painting directly on antique photographs and figurines to deconstruct iconic images to create an America that included me.

Make ‘Em All Mexican seems to carry a strong electric charge. To some viewers, the images are hyper-political; for others, they are emotional portals to a past remembered and sometimes forgotten; and for others they are just down right hilarious. When I discovered an image of the Queen Mother, I marvelled to myself, “I found her.” There she was, decked in diamonds and surrounded by the beauty of the palace. This is how I see my grandmother, even though she came from poverty and only had a fourth grade education; to me she will always be “Mi Reina.”

I would like to give special thanks to Dr. Karen Mary Davalos for her insight and vision in curating this exhibition of new work, Kathy Gallegos for carrying the torch in representing Chicano art for over ten years at Avenue 50 Studio, and Armando Durón for always championing me and my work.

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CURATORIAL STATEMENT

The postmodern sense of humor reflected in Linda Vallejo's new series, *Make 'Em All Mexican*, playfully and satirically reappropriates images of Western civilization and American heritage. In this way, the series poignantly visualizes and alters the way we think about race, representation, and belonging. The artist makes them all Mexican by painting directly on vintage photographs and advertisements, fine art reproductions, mass-produced offset prints, and collectable figurines, changing their color and facial features using brown and black gouache or oil paint. Her reappropriation of images visualizes an alternative history, one that can be interpreted as the reconquest of the American Southwest or as anti-immigrant hyperbole. At the same time, the artist's devilish rhetorical move that makes them all Mexican challenges the myths that support the statement: "You don't look Mexican."

Linda Vallejo appropriately stages her alternative history in book format and through collectable figurines, items that symbolically carry cultural authority as repositories of memory and knowledge, history and identity. Significantly, she follows the format of books from the ancient world, and her folios are sequentially designed like an accordion. It is style that makes the books sculptural and conceptually anchors the series in the force and authority of classical antiquity.

*Make 'Em All Mexican* is quietly disorienting. Each deconstructed and reconstructed image creates an optical illusion. The viewer has the sense of looking simultaneously at two portraits—the original and the Mexican one—a sensation that is strongest when the original is easily recognized. The result is a sense of closeness to the work but also a distancing effect as viewers stare at a strange and a familiar face.

KAREN MARY DAVALOS