



"HOLDING THE WORLD UP," 2011

Linda Vallejo

RE-PURPOSED COMPOSITE FIGURINE AND ACRYLIC

10¼" X 8" DIAMETER

PHOTO: COURTESY AVE 50 GALLERY

LOS ANGELES

Linda Vallejo: "Make 'Em All Mexican"
at Avenue 50 Gallery

Linda Vallejo began in the '80s as part of the stridently Latino movement including ASCO, demanding a place for brown artists, and noting the near absent representations of non-white experience/selfhood at every level of US culture. Her work has included performances enacting indigenous rituals, meso-American figurative styles remotely calling up mythic Olmec or Mayan heads, and conspicuously non-modernist colors—pinks, saturated yellows, gaudy blues—typical of age-old folk traditions but linked by mainstream reflex to tourist-pandering souvenirs like *serapes* and *sombreros*. In her current show, Vallejo turns to found objects re-purposed from thrift store curios, advertising, film and museum masterworks, variously painted, collaged, and re-configured so all skin is brown. Third grade primers feature Dick and Jane re-imagined as a Pedro and Maria; an ad hawking all-American ale features what could be a *campesino*; ceramic figurines of a Rococo couple wear the default wigs and cinched waists, but blanched, powdered faces have given way to rich, chocolaty skin.

For 30 years we've grown used to seeing hybridity addressed in art; think of Cindy Sherman, Adrian Piper's *Colored People*, or Morimura inhabiting the persona of Marilyn Monroe. To a quick read then, Vallejo's collisions of race can seem obvious, a bit rehashed, and raising what we'd like to think are *passé* '70s concepts: The discomfort they create, and our initial response to dismiss them as old news is part of her point. First, their almost vaudeville ubiquity here only points out the *absence* of such faces in actual images that culture uses every day. Secondly, subtle things drive home just how deep race still runs. A found candy dish sports fussy little nude figures around its long stem. In typical white porcelain, these read as decoration—playful *putti*. Colored brown by Vallejo, we almost can't help but read the little cherubs as toiling, carrying not a dainty vessel, but a load. The exaggerated clichés here seem deliberate, designed to remind us that however much myriad identities/realities are marketed both in academia and consumer culture as the new 'post race' norm, the ideology of racial dominance continues.

—MARLENA DONOHUE