

**LINDA VALLEJO**  
***Make 'Em All Mexican***  
**Artist Statement**

My formative years were spent in far flung locations throughout the United States and Europe. During my artistic grounding, I became increasingly immersed in the Chicano/Latino/Mexican-American arts and the indigenous communities – experiences that have informed my cultural perspectives and, by extension, my art practice.

It has taken my entire artistic career to fuse an image that defines my multicultural experience of the world and my place in it. Like most of my contemporaries I was taught the finer points of the Western classics, art and architecture, but later found myself living and creating in a milieu where symbols of beauty and culture were manifest in a decidedly alternate circumstance.

The intersection of these two disparate worlds led me to create what my gallerist has called “the work of a lifetime.” My mentor, renowned artist Chuck Arnoldi, said; “Only you could do this work, Linda. It is truly unique.”

*Make 'Em All Mexican* leads you down an ironic path to find yourself confronted by some of the most difficult questions of our time, “Do race, color, and class define our status in the world?” “Is it possible to be a part of and earnestly contribute to multiple cultures simultaneously?” “Does color and class define our understanding and appreciation of culture?”

To date I have produced over 100 *Make 'Em All Mexican* sculptures, handmade books, and mixed media paintings from re-purposed porcelain and plaster figurines, postcards, magazine pages, paintings, and posters found in antique stores, yard sales, and estate sales. I literally take precious images of national and world culture and “make them Mexican” by painting directly on antiques.

*Make 'Em All Mexican* images to date include a “brown” Elvis Presley, Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble, Marie Antoinette and Louis August, the Rose Parade Queen and her court, the Queen Mother, and a complete array of the Greek and Roman gods. The most recent of these figures are also decorated with tattoos to “bring them forward” to modern times.

Several years ago, I made a series of trips that included a visit to China as well as to New York and several other major cities in the U.S. It is my custom to include museums and galleries in my itinerary 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, wildly untamed images created from found objects put to fascinating new uses, photographic collages combining digital work and hand drawn forms, and images that juxtaposed seemingly contrary cultural symbols and icons.

In New York I encountered the work of Mexican artist Abraham Cruz-Villegas who used wire clothes hangers to create a lyrical floating white sculpture reminiscent of Alexander Calder. Photographer Wang Qing-Song re-purposed Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* using a staged photograph with Chinese models. Ana Mendieta's solo exhibition at the Hirshhorn in Washington DC thoroughly moved me. I was fascinated by her ability to combine what appeared to be incongruent media to create an expressive whole.

After seeing these works and hundreds more, my thought and creative processes began to shift. I found myself ruminating, "I'm a person of the world. What would the world of contemporary images look like from my own personal Mexican-American, Chicano lens?" "How would I combine new media or juxtapose incongruous forms to create an image particular to myself and my heritage?"

In an effort to create a uniquely personal postmodern cultural image, I began taking notes about these ideas of crossing media and culture. I started collecting offbeat items that somehow spoke to me— - newspapers, figurines, postcards, photographs— – and then storing them in odd little cubby-holes. My goal was to place them into the cauldron of my creative mind to see what images would bubble up.

It occurred to me that I must be the quintessential post-modern American—a woman, Mexican, born of poor immigrant grandparents, raising highly educated children, essentially living the American dream. Yet even as a third generation American, like so many others, I remain invisible in the cultural landscape. One day, 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!"

This impassioned yearning came from a realization that visual representations of the American dream somehow did not include me, or my loved ones. It came to me that I had never seen the golden images of Americana with familiar faces—friendly faces, sure, but not familiar ones. I found myself furiously painting directly on antique photographs and figurines to deconstruct iconic images to create an America that included me. I began aimlessly browsing antique malls to find images that I could "call my own.

The *Make 'Em All Mexican* series carries 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 another group, they are just down right hilarious. The series is definitely strange and unfamiliar. Recently on television sculptor Richard Serra stated that the work of the artist is not necessarily to create the unique, but rather "the unfamiliar." I have re-created a familiar world to create a new unfamiliar image, one that is unfamiliar to everyone that's not Mexican...

## **Critical Commentary**

**George Lawson, George Lawson Gallery**, states “As the MEAM series matures, as it gets past the joke, which is essentially a fulcrum, and into the incredibly long lever that is Vallejo’s imagination, the seemingly inexhaustible variations on the theme manifest themselves as a pliant language and a tool for examining the function of art in our culture. Vallejo asks questions about the source of an image’s power, and the role images play in securing and perpetuating social hierarchies. she is asking what if...what if you wandered out tomorrow evening and the northern star had shifted south, and the constellations in the pantheon sky of art history set a whole new course charted by a whole new set of navigators? What if instead of all roads leading to Rome, they led to Mexico City?”

**William Moreno, former director of Mexican Museum, San Francisco, and curator**, states, “The focus of Vallejo’s newest suite of works titled *Make ‘Em All Mexican*, is anything but subtle. Conceptually-informed, poignant and ironic, she melds populist cultural conventions and racial politics into an edgy brew, adroitly tapping into that nebulous space between anger and laughter.”

**Armando Duron, Chicano art collector**, states, “The pieces have a whimsical quality about them, one that allows those who choose to view them exclusively through the lens of whimsy a way to continue laughing. Vallejo has used satire and wit to make her point. She has not constricted the works within a purely political prism. Indeed, they exude pathos and irony, commentary and comedy, parody and ridicule.”

**Karen Mary Davalos, Professor and Chair Chicana/Chicano Studies Department, Loyola Marymount University** states, “Vallejo re-appropriates Western and American icons. Using widely recognized images, such as Hollywood celebrities, Norman Rockwell paintings, Victorian figurines, classical European portraiture, and the school primer, *Dick and Jane*, Vallejo repaints the figures as Mexicans. Vallejo conceptually performing two critical acts, first she defaces the work that she recolors, and second, she takes the image (and its history, power, and meaning) and changes it for her own purpose.”

**Gordon Fuglie, Director and Head of Curatorial Affairs, Central California Museum Association** states, “Amidst the roiling national debate about American identity, veteran California Latina artist Vallejo creates a realm in which US popular culture is overlain with a Mexican-American sensibility. Gleefully raiding the world of classic commercial images of middle class WASP life, Vallejo gives common American icons a new sabor or flavor. The result is the satirical series *Make ‘Em All Mexican*. In 2010, Vallejo began acquiring numerous popular 20th century collectables, as well as appropriating vintage commercial imagery from the internet, stocking her studio with these materials in order to “make ‘em all Mexican.” A year later, Vallejo is well on her way to producing a compelling body of work, combining various media, juxtaposing incongruous forms to create images and objects not only peculiar to the artist’s Latino heritage, but also resonating across racial and social lines.