



UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The facts are on our side. Consider the percentages that artist Linda Vallejo employs in the titles of recent works: *30% of the US Population Will Be Latino in 2050*; *Los Angeles 48.3%*; *75% of Immigrants Are Lawful*; *National Latino Artists 9.12%*.

But facts about demographic change are not enough to combat the ongoing dehumanization of people who are central to daily life and public culture in Los Angeles, California, and the United States. Last Saturday, Andy Ruiz Jr. became the first Mexican-descent heavyweight champion, knocking down his opponent Anthony Joshua four times. Yet for days the press focused on the loser. Joshua was a victim of the “Drake curse” (having been photographed with the rapper). He had a panic attack before the match. And on and on . . . The fact that the “chubby Mexican,” as Ruiz was called, beat Joshua fair and square was never the point. There was, in effect, no “human interest” story about this California native.

Linda Vallejo's current exhibition, [*Linda Vallejo: Brown Belongings*](#), at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes in downtown Los Angeles, aims to change the conversation by using data to create new ways of looking at the Latina/o population. Literally. In *The Brown Dot Project*, dots representing census data are plotted onto gridded velum, becoming shapes, figures, and objects that place numerical data in the realm of culture and lived experience. In her series *Datos Sagrados*, Vallejo converts data into geometric patterns in shades of brown and white, a gesture not only to abstractions produced by the avant-garde in the early twentieth century but also to art produced in the Islamic world since the seventh century. These historical gestures situate her work in the context of two crossings: that of the Moors crossing the Strait of Gibraltar to the Iberian Peninsula, and that of Mexicans crossing the US border during the Mexican Revolution and the rise of U.S. agribusiness, which required a massive labor force. These histories, woven together, are all about place and belonging. Brown belongings.

The show also includes works from Vallejo's [*The Brown Oscars*](#) series, which started as a research-based project with the CSRC in the wake of the all-white Oscar nominations for acting in 2016. Vallejo applied brown paint to photos documenting these and other actors, but also to the Oscar award itself, which is said to have been modeled after a [*Mexican actor-director*](#).

[LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes](#) is a longtime partner with the CSRC. Its mission, stated on its website, is to present “untold stories [about] Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and all Latinos in the founding and continuing evolution of Southern California.” *Brown Belongings* runs through January 13, 2020. The artist is committed to making herself available for student groups wanting to see the exhibition. School's out for the summer, but this is a show everyone must see!

Chon A. Noriega

Director and Professor