

# The New York Times

CALIFORNIA TODAY

## *Visualizing Latino Populations Through Art*

Tuesday: An exhibition at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes explores questions of identity.



By Jill Cowan

Nov. 26, 2019

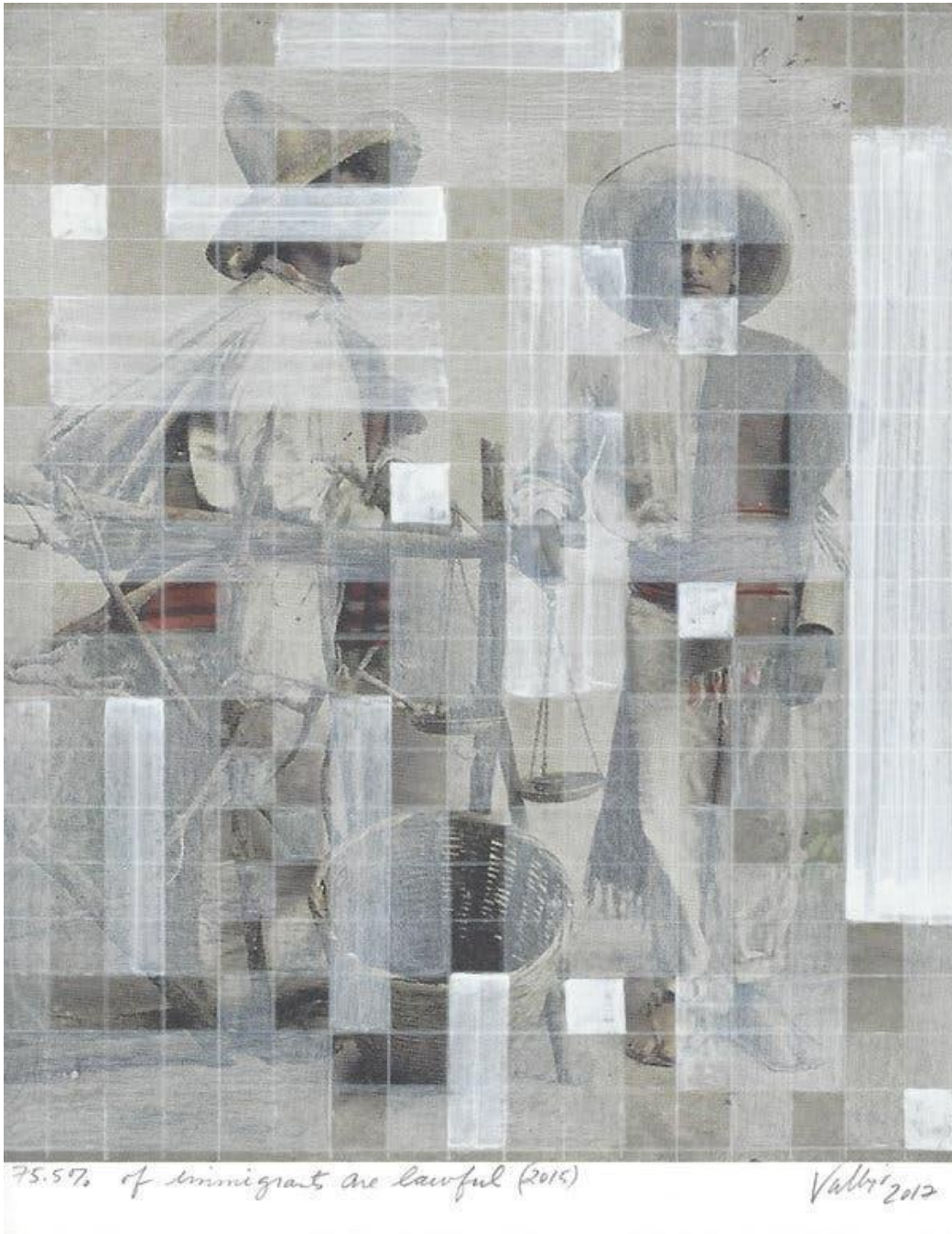


*The exhibition space showing “Linda Vallejo: Brown Belongings,” at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes. Credit...Linda Vallejo*

Recently, my colleague [Jose Del Real](#) wrote about the role of [LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes](#), the Mexican-American community center and museum in downtown Los Angeles, in educating visitors about many of the lesser known — [and darker](#) — narratives from the city’s history.

In an exhibition that's open there now, the artist Linda Vallejo aims to counter the fact that the perspectives of Latinos are still too often overlooked — even if she knows she doesn't have all the answers to complex questions about identity and what it means to be a person of color in the United States.

“How I think about myself as a brown person, how I feel about myself and how the world sees me,” Ms. Vallejo told me recently. “I think we need a safe space to be able to speak about these things.”



A piece called “75.5% of Immigrants Are Lawful,” by Linda Vallejo. Credit...Linda Vallejo

*“Linda Vallejo: Brown Belongings,”* which opened this year, is the museum’s first show dedicated to the work of a solo Latina artist.

It includes works from several series that Ms. Vallejo, who was born in Los Angeles and is based here now, has created over years.

Among them are the series “Datos Sagrados,” or Sacred Data, and “The Brown Dot Project,” which both use statistics about Latino and immigrant populations in the U.S. as a jumping point.



*The piece titled “Datos Sagrados: 30% of the U.S. Population Will Be Latino in 2050,” by Linda Vallejo. Credit...Linda Vallejo*

In a piece from the former, called “30% of the U.S. Population Will Be Latino in 2050,” the number is translated into an abstract mandala-inspired design.

In “The Brown Dot Project,” each hand-painted dot represents people or percentage points.

Ms. Vallejo said she gathered the statistics from a variety of sources like the Pew Research Center and the census — but she hopes viewers will also take the pieces as cues to explore further.

“There are multiple learnings here,” she said. “Math and art actually do connect — and you can do research yourself.”

Ms. Vallejo said she hopes her work will provoke not just serious introspection, though.

“Make ’Em All Mexican,” is a series featuring pop culture figures — Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley — and icons like “Winged Victory of Samothrace,” painted brown.





*The piece called "La Victoria," by Linda Vallejo. Credit...Linda Vallejo*

They pose questions about how the music industry might be different, had, say, Presley been Latino or how subsequent generations of Hollywood would've been shaped by a Latina Shirley Temple. The mode of asking is a little cheeky, she said, and that's intentional.

"I always appreciate it when someone is cracking up," she said.

***"Linda Vallejo: Brown Belongings," will be on view at LA Plaza until January 13, 2020.***