

Linda Vallejo
Tree People 1980-1990
Artist Statement

The *Tree of Life* is a symbol found in many cultures of the world, from the universal family tree, to the Mexican tree of life, to the Biblical tree of life found in Revelations.

I began working on a *Tree of Life Installation* as a response to a community invitation to participate in an altar exhibition. I am not an altar maker but hoped to respond to the invitation with a work that would share symbols from the Chicano/Mexicano cultural and ceremonial calendar. I invited friends to decorate a tree I arranged in a community gallery. I received objects in the mail along with offerings from visitors during the installation. After the installation of this first *Tree of Life*, I began receiving gifts of branches and trees. In my work, I do not judge or make decisions which confine, so I took the gifts and began my series of sculpture.

Between 1980-1990 I completed over 100 *Tree People* sculptures; figurative mixed media handmade paper sculptures. My foraged the city and traveled to the mountains to collect wood that had good form. I do not analyze the wood fragments or make artistic decisions for the forms. I began with a feeling and an image. Carried by this impression, I allowed sculpture to evolve without judgement. I used the found tree fragment as armature onto which I molded cotton rag paper pulp. A finished sculpture could be a larger than life face with the roots of a tree growing from out the top its head. The original configuration of the wood dictates the final image.

At times these pieces embody the “human” face of nature - fire, water, earth, and air, as well as the Mesoamerican gods Mictlantecuhtli, Lord of the region of death, and Quetzalcoatl, the Mesoamerican poet king whose symbol of the feathered serpent.

The 21st Century has inundated with images “morph” human and machine, i.e., artificial intelligence, replicants, the Bionic Man, and Darth Vader. *Tree People* returns us to the pre-historic images of human “morphed” with nature and animal.

