

**National Women's Caucus for Art
New York, NY**

WCA Lifetime Achievement Awardee Linda Vallejo 2022

We honor you, Linda Vallejo, for your work that addresses Mexican American identity within the context of American art and pop culture.

Linda Vallejo as a person and artist can best be defined by her continual searching and experimenting outside the familiar boundaries that we know of, unafraid to take risks and forge her own path. This characteristic can be mainly attributed to three major experiences in her life: growing up in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1960s as a Mexican American, witnessing violence and racial prejudice; living in Europe as a teenager and then after college, where she visited all the great museums to see Picasso, Goya, Velazquez, Rodin and more; and at Self Help Graphics in East Los Angeles starting in 1977 where she found an important community of Chicano artists that helped her to find her own place, both geographically (eventually landing on the opposite end of town) and in relation to the Chicano movement. She has allowed herself to be transformed through everything she experiences in life, and her artwork is always a reflection of those inner thoughts, feelings, and questions about life. The process of reflection sometimes takes a while to understand and listen, creating artwork that builds upon all these internal and external forces. Two years after 9/11, this reflection became the installation HOPE, In the Midst of War, Death and Destruction (2003), which she described as "a political and spiritual statement focusing on the reconciliation of opposites."

In Linda's recent series Make 'Em All Mexican, The Brown Dot Project, and Brown Oscars (all part of what she calls Brown Belongings), she makes bold socio-political statements about how Latinos have been excluded from Hollywood, pop culture, children's books, and even the traditional canon of art history. These are not her first political works, but they represent an important culmination in her various styles and media since the 1970s. Most notably in the Datos Sagrados (Sacred Data) and Cultural Enigma works from 2017 and 2019/20 respectively, also part of Brown Belongings, which incorporate her interest in spirituality and cosmology to question the nature of culture and identity through both figurative and abstract imagery. Linda calls these "cultural Rorschach tests" because she wants viewers to ask themselves about their own identity, how they choose to display their cultural presence to the world, and how much they know about other cultures. The only answer that Linda provides is the data that she meticulously gathers, revealing difficult truths about Latinos in the U.S. that provide a stark and often surprising contrast with the beautiful and delicately drawn works on paper.

Linda has always been spiritual, but her journey started with Christianity and western European symbols and expanded to classical Greco-Roman mythology, and then to an even broader embracing of her own indigeneity with Mesoamerican pre-Columbian beliefs and symbols. Not a linear progression, rather a layering that allows for a compression of time and space within her frames, as in Garden of Eden (1978) with pyramids and celestial symbols, or The Universe (1974) with a Christ-like figure at the center with a white dove above his head. In the 1980s her cross-cultural spirituality manifested itself in her Tree People drawings and sculptures made with branches, feathers, and other natural materials, in the mid-1990s, in her Los Cielos series of beautiful paintings of the heavens, some with female figures floating; and A Prayer for the Earth installation in 2004 where she reminds us of the beauty and power of the earth, as well as its fragility.

However, to write about Linda one cannot focus only on her art, but on all her professional accomplishments and on her roles as a devoted wife, daughter, and mother that continue to nourish her with love. As a businesswoman, Linda owned two galleries in Los Angeles. She served on nonprofit boards, taught classes, and continues to be a successful consultant to artists and nonprofits on grant writing and the business of art. Although Linda skillfully managed to separate the different parts of her life, she is equally driven and skilled in all aspects, and somehow finds a balance between being practical while also vulnerable with her dreams and hopes. Her spirituality gives her balance, her Native American spiritual beliefs heal her soul and fuel her artistic purpose. For fifteen years Linda volunteered in California prisons to conduct indigenous ceremonies for Native American women, which she also practices regularly. She "fills the well" with her life experiences needed to provide her with the imagery and beliefs to create the sensitive and meaningful work that she strives for, continually asking deep questions of both herself and her viewers about culture, identity, color, class, power, and politics.

Susana Smith Bautista, PhD, Director and Chief Curator, AltaMed Art Collection