

Linda Vallejo at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes



91.2% of Los Angeles' Eastside community no taller than 1501/1382

Vallejo 2019

Linda Vallejo, *The Brown Dot Project Adobes: 91.2% of Los Angeles' Eastside, Brown Belongings*, LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes; Image courtesy of the artist

Rethinking Brownness: Brown Belongings by Linda Vallejo

**LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes, Los Angeles
through January 13, 2020**

Written by David S. Rubin

Linda Vallejo has spent much of the past decade investigating the deeply personal subject of what it means to be a brown-skinned American. With daily media coverage of current controversies over the citizenship question on the 2020 Census, Latin American migrant children living in inhumane concentration camps, and the tenuousness of the future of DACA, Vallejo's research project couldn't be any timelier. Her findings, which are presented in the form of more than 125 paintings, drawings, and sculptures, should elicit more questions than answers, which is exactly the artist's stated intention.

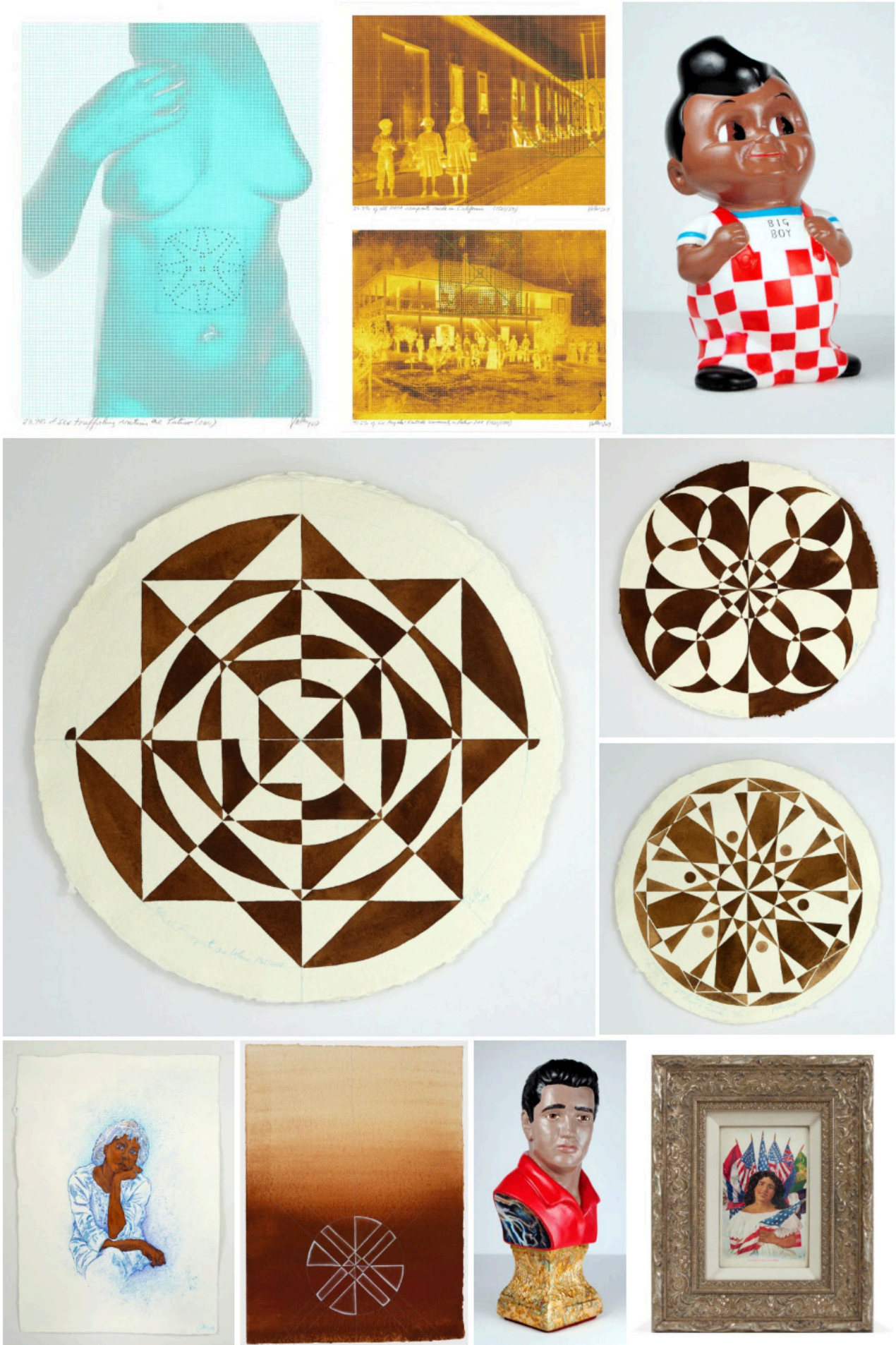
Although nonlinear and non-chronological in presentation, the exhibition is devoted to five themes (and some subthemes) that reveal the range and depth of Vallejo's inquiry. She began the project with the series Make 'Em All Mexican, for which she altered found and mostly kitschy historical or cultural representations of white people by painting their skin and blond hair or blue eyes (where applicable) in different shades of brown. The generic question asked is simply, "What if?" What if the likes of George and Martha Washington, the woman behind the Mona Lisa smile, the familiar couple in Grant Wood's American Gothic, or media icons such as Elvis Presley and Bob's Big Boy had had brown skin? Would this have changed the course of history? Would our perceptions and assumptions about what it is to be Mexican, Mexican American, Latinx, Chicanx, or Indigenx be different than they are today?

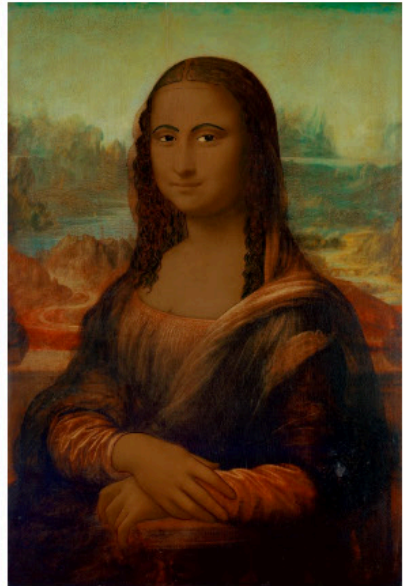
Vallejo approached the next two thematic groupings like a statistician, cleverly translating quantifiable data into visual imagery as opposed to numbers. For The Brown Dot Project, she did her own census taking, recording the percentages of Latinx populations in such areas as housing, occupations, and education level by painting tiny brown dots into grid modules. Some take the form of indigenous textile designs, while others are organized into configurations referring to the topic or superimposed over postcards featuring related imagery. In the subsequent series Datos Sagrados (Sacred Data), Vallejo opted for a more visceral approach, with data concerning immigration presented as brown patterns painted on white handmade paper to form circular abstract mandalas.

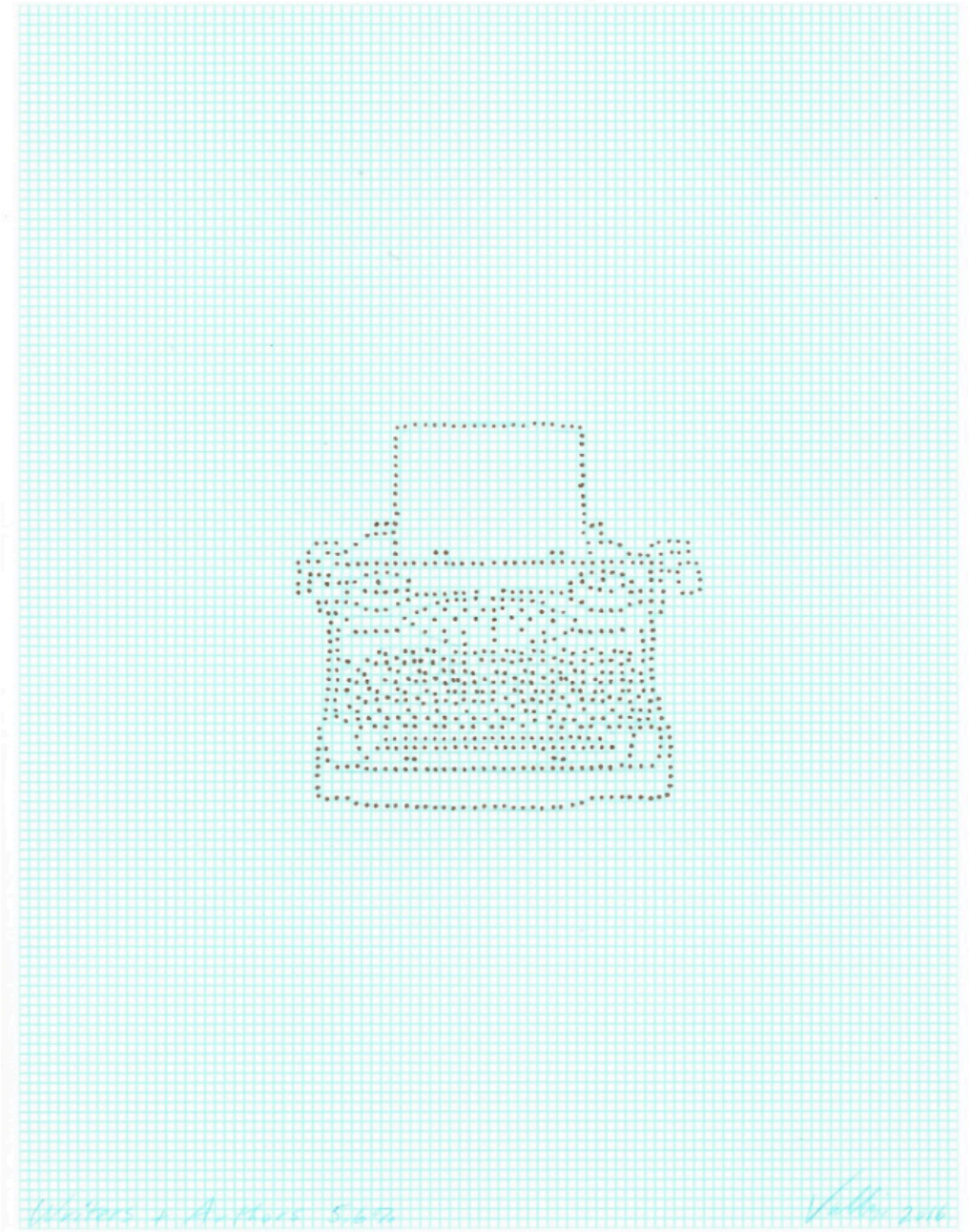
In the final series, Cultural Enigma, Vallejo adds to the mix dialogues about revisionist history and what it is simply to be human, to be part of the global population. One group is comprised of portraits of anonymous brown-skinned figures dressed in shimmering light blue clothing. With their poses and features appropriated from compositions by well-known Caucasian artists, the images call attention to the dearth of representation of artists of color in art history books and curricula. A second series, which Vallejo views as "abstract Rorschach tests," encourages viewers to find their own meanings in iridescent blue abstract symbols that float against luminous fields rendered in various shades of brown.

In the end, this comprehensive survey should provoke thoughtful reflection on some of the most pressing issues of our time. It also demonstrates how small mundane objects can be transformed to pack a remarkably mighty punch.

LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes
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Published by Author

Kristine Schomaker is a new media and performance artist, painter and art historian living and working at the Brewery artist complex in Los Angeles. For over 14 years she has been working with various interdisciplinary art forms including online virtual worlds to explore identity and the hybridization of digital media with the physical world. Whether virtual or physical, the object-based work Kristine creates combines elements of color-based gestural abstraction, animation, pattern and design, neo-Baroque and Populence. Using installation, text, photography, mixed media, video and performance for her ongoing conceptual project My Life as an Avatar, she visualizes a narrative/dialogue with her virtual persona, Gracie Kendal. Kristine then documents her experiences on her blog. In 2012, exploring ideas of community, Kristine turned a local gallery into a modern day creation of Gertrude Stein's salon of the 1920's with a live mixed-reality dinner party merging the physical world with the online virtual world. Over the summer she also performed The Bald and the Beautiful in which she had her head shaved as a statement to challenge society's standards of beauty. Currently, Kristine is working as an Artist-in-Residence through the Linden Endowment for the Arts creating an immersive virtual environment which she is planning to bring into the physical world via sculpture/public art work. [View all posts by Author](#)