



LA Photographer Known for Nude Self-Portraits Dies at 58

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Los Angeles photographer who chronicled the patrons of a working-class lesbian bar in the 1990s and captured her own body like a sculpture amid desert landscapes, died on Wednesday. She was 58.

Laura Aguilar died peacefully at a nursing home in Long Beach after one last day with "loving visitors," Sybil Venegas, an independent curator and friend, told The Los Angeles Times.

Aguilar had diabetes and suffered from end-stage renal failure, Venegas said.

Her loss is profound, Chon Noriega said, director of the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"She had an ability to cut through the biases and habits of thought that makes us see a smaller world than actually exists," he said. "And she did it as an expression of the stunning beauty of the human body, including her own."

Aguilar was doing lesbian portraits in the 1990s, a time when many Latinos were not open to homosexuality, Venegas said.

"Everyone talks about gender and identity and body politics now," Venegas said. "But in 1990, she was way out there ... It was a very different world than today."

Aguilar's series of nude self-portraits drew widespread critical attention. She photographed herself draped over rocks, curled into the fetal position and otherwise inserting her naked body into desert landscapes.

Susanne Vielmetter, who organized several Aguilar exhibitions at her gallery in the early 2000s, said the work was "decades ahead of its time."

"It was all about photography and the gaze," she said. "She was both the subject and the object. She was both the photographer and the mood."

More than 130 of Aguilar's works are on display at the Frost Art Museum at Florida International University in Miami through June 3. Organizers say the show is Aguilar's first major career retrospective.