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In her series 'Make 'Em All Mexican,' artist Linda Vallejo imagines #OscarsSoBrown



Artist Linda Vallejo's series "For Your Consideration: Make 'Em All Mexican" imagines an all-Mexican Academy Awards lineup including a row of brown Oscars statuettes. (Linda Vallejo / UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center)



By **Carolina A. Miranda** · Contact Reporter

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This may be the moment of #OscarsSoWhite, but one Los Angeles artist prefers to imagine it as the year of #OscarsSoBrown.

Since 2011, [Linda Vallejo](#) has transformed found bits of Americana -- a Bob's Big Boy statue or figurines of Elvis and Gary Cooper from "High Noon" -- into more Mexican-ized icons with careful applications of brown paint. Big Boy therefore becomes "Muchachote," Elvis becomes "El Vis" and Cooper is turned into "El Vaquero de High Noon."

Now the artist has released a series of painted images that address [the Oscars' lack of diversity](#) -- depicting Audrey Hepburn as "Aurora Hernandez" and Cate Blanchett as "Catarina Blancarte."

She has even created one work in honor of Paul Muni, the Hungarian-born actor who wasn't Latino but played one in the movies: the disbarred lawyer Johnny Ramirez in the 1935 Bette Davis vehicle "Bordertown." With a coat of paint, Vallejo transforms Muni into "Pablo Mundial."

"Hollywood wants it all white?" Vallejo laughed recently. "Well, guess what? We want it all brown."

Vallejo's series, done in partnership with UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center, which will archive the images and host them on its website (chicano.ucla.edu), is a humorous, biting nod at the lack of a Mexican American presence.

"I've been a film buff forever," Vallejo said. "I love films. I love the Academy Awards. I get all excited about it. But I think that the Mexican American story is not being told. There are a lot of great scripts and screenplays that have been coming out of the black experience. ... But the Mexican American story, it's sort of this sidebar."

Certainly, when it comes to Latinos, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has a pretty lousy track record. The last time a Latino won the lead actor award was more than half a century ago -- in 1950, when Puerto Rican actor José Ferrer took home the statuette for playing the title role in "Cyrano de Bergerac."

No Latina or Latin American actress has ever won for lead actress. And the last Latina to win the supporting actress award was Rita Moreno -- in 1961. The most recent Oscar awarded to a Latino actor was to [Benicio del Toro](#) in 2000, who won the supporting actor award for his role in "Traffic."

"Like everybody, I read the front page of the L.A. Times about the Oscar nominations and I thought, 'We have to be able to do something,'" said Chon Noriega, a professor of cinema and media studies at UCLA, who also oversees the university's Chicano Studies Research Center. "There has been a lot of indignation and a lot of calls for change. And there have been changes, incremental changes, at the academy. But I wanted to do something that could change the way people look at things rather than simply arguing them down."

So he reached out to Vallejo about doing a few of her "Make 'Em All Mexican" works inspired by the Oscars. Vallejo, who first launched the project five years ago by painting the characters in a vintage "Dick and Jane" children's storybook, says the extreme nature of what she does never fails to ignite a conversation.

"Sometimes people are like, 'Why did you make them so dark?'" she said. "And I say, 'Brown is brown. That's how people see you no matter what color you are.'"

"It's about making it really obvious," Noriega said. "By changing the color, it profoundly upsets not just what is in front of you, but the ideas of popular culture that you carry inside of you."

For the series, titled "For Your Consideration: Make 'Em All Mexican," Vallejo even takes on the iconic Oscar statuette itself, rendering it in silky shades of chocolate brown.

Those pieces reference a long-running Hollywood legend that Mexican actor and director Emilio “El Indio” Fernandez served as a model for designer Cedric Gibbons' creation of the statuette back in 1928, when the Oscars were first launched. As the story goes, Mexican actress Dolores del Rio recommended Fernandez to Gibbons, who needed a well-built nude model for the design.

A spokesperson for the academy, along with a fact sheet on its website, said that no live models were used in the fabrication of the statuette. But it is unknown whether Gibbons may have used figure studies to create an early rendition of the Oscar for the first issue of the academy's magazine in 1927.

The possibility that the Oscar is Mexican is irresistible to Vallejo: “This image of beauty, of refinement -- people pick up Oscars and they are like “They are soo beautiful.”

Which means that come Academy Awards night on Feb. 28, there may be at least one Mexican on stage: A small naked one in the hands of a teary best actress.

For more on Linda Vallejo's "For Your Consideration: Make 'Em All Mexican" series, log on to ucla.chicano.edu.

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