



# Laura Aguilar, East LA's Fearless Photographer, Dies

Laura Aguilar, LA's groundbreaking lesbian, Chicana photographer, died. She was 58.

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LOS ANGELES, CA — [Laura Aguilar](#), a Los Angeles photographer, known for chronicling the denizens of a working-class Eastside lesbian bar in the 1990s and for utilizing her nude body like sculpture in desert landscapes, has died at a nursing home in Long Beach, it was reported Thursday. She was 58.

"She died in peace having spent her last day with many loving visitors," Sybil Venegas, an independent curator and friend who helped manage the artist's affairs toward the end of her life, told the Los Angeles Times.

Aguilar had long contended with diabetes and was suffering from end-stage renal failure at the time of her death, The Times reported.

"Laura's passing is a profound loss," said Chon Noriega, director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, according to The Times. "She had an ability to cut through the biases and habits of thought that makes us see a smaller world than actually exists. And she did it as an expression of the stunning beauty of the human body, including her own."

Aguilar was recently the subject of the retrospective "Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell" at the Vincent Price Art Museum on the campus of East Los Angeles College, and her photography appeared last year in the two-part exhibition "Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A."

The shows helped resuscitate her profile at a time when her health was in decline.

In a review of "Show and Tell" for The Times, Leah Ollman wrote that Aguilar took the medium of photography and pushed it forward "by turning her lens toward photographically under-represented subjects like herself: Latina, lesbian, large-bodied." The exhibition chronicled the artist's beginnings in the late 1980s, when she created portraits of East Los Angeles artists in Day of the Dead costumes. She photographed high-profile Latina lesbians as a way of countering the whiteness of the mainstream gay-rights movement, and later hauled her camera to a lesbian haunt in El Sereno so she could capture a slice of Latina lesbian working-class life.

Over the course of her career, Aguilar's images were featured in exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, Artpace in San Antonio and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. In 1993, her photography was included in the Aperto section of the Venice Biennale.

But Aguilar made little money from her work, surviving on odd jobs, grants and the occasional residency. After the late 2000s, health and financial

troubles made it increasingly difficult for her to work. The artist is survived by a nephew, Michael Aguilar.