

Make 'Em All Mexican: Emilio, 2016 ©Linda Vallejo, 2016 Courtesy of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

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The 88th Academy Awards are almost here. And while we don't know who the winners are just yet, we do know that the vast majority will be white.

In a repeat of last year's #OscarsSoWhite controversy, the Academy has again failed to nominate a single person of color for any of the acting categories.

So how to respond to the lack of people of color? L.A. artist [Linda Vallejo](#) says, "[Make 'Em All Mexican.](#)"

That's the title of an art series she's been working on since 2011. In her most recent, Oscars-focused works, Vallejo takes existing photographs and transforms them with watercolor paint.

"That's how I wield a brush to change the color of history and the color of culture," Vallejo says.

The idea of focusing on the Academy Awards came from Chon Noriega, professor of cinema and media studies and director of UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center.

Noriega says he got the idea to contact Vallejo when the Oscar nominations came out this year. He knew she could take on the issue of the lack of diversity from an artistic, humorous point of view.

"I think it's what's been missing from the discussion," Noriega says. "There's been a lot of outrage when white British actors are cast to play Mexican drug lords, or even Michael Jackson, but no one's suggesting it could go the other way. And I think if it did go the other way, there's not a problem."

The painted images in Vallejo's series include one of Cate Blanchett, transformed into "Catarina Blancarte." Another image is of actor Paul Muni, a Hungarian-born actor who won an Oscar for playing a Latino character in the film "Bordertown." Vallejo has reimagined him as a Mexican actor, renamed "Pablo Mundial."

Another work in the series is a side-by-side comparison of the Oscar statuette, and the Mexican actor/director Emilio "El Indio" Fernandez. Fernandez, according to urban legend, served as the model for designer Cedric Gibbons who created the statuette.

While there's no proof that Fernandez actually was the model, Noriega says "the legend is important. It is telling you something important about the history."

What we do know about Emilio Fernandez, Noriega says, is that he started out as an extra in Hollywood in the 1920s and later became the preeminent director of Mexican cinema in the 1940s.

Plus, Vallejo adds, when you look at the photographs there really is a striking resemblance, "which means that all the Caucasian actors are going to be standing up with their Academy Award who's actually a brown guy."

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