

ABSTRACT WANDERINGS

from the LA Borderlands

JUNE 24, 2023 - JULY 29, 2023 ■ AVENUE 50 STUDIO

LINDA ARREOLA

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exhibition at Avenue 50 Studio, Los Angeles.

Abstract Wanderings from the LA Borderlands
June 24 - July 29, 2023
Curated by Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia

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ABSTRACT
WANDERINGS
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Avenue 50 Studio
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

CURATED BY
Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia

LINDA ARREOLA

Discovery Channel

I hope Linda Arreola will never be discovered.

Whether proudly proclaimed or subtly implied, the narrative of art world discovery is always the same. The artist, who for decades has struggled in anonymity, is lifted into prominence and acclaim by a well-timed and exquisitely installed exhibition. The story flattens all the wrong turns and false starts, and smooths over the jagged edges of complicated creative practices in favor of a legible tale of struggle and success. By doing so, the institution proves to itself and to the public that it is capable of benevolently righting its own wrongs of omission, while at the same time re-asserting its status as the ultimate arbiter of aesthetic taste and value.

Arreola deserves success! Her works ought to be seen by many people, and she should be richly rewarded for it in critical attention, financial gain, and professional opportunity—but every proud Chicano knows not to trust the promises of discovery. Still, the smell of money that today grows around Latinx art is intoxicating; here is the opportunity of discovery on a massive scale—not of individual artists, but of whole peoples. It breathes new life into old fears and jealousies, and quickens pride and greed. Will all the money and attention go to young MFA's and west side galleries? How much will make it to the community spaces that for decades were the only places that showed and supported Latinx and Chicanx artists? And what about those in-between generations, too old for Getty internships and too young to have walked out of Roosevelt and Garfield? How long will all of this last?

In some ways, Arreola is well positioned to be a beneficiary of this moment. Her practice seems to lend itself well to a story of art world discovery. Over many years, she has developed a personal language, refining shapes, colors, compositions and techniques to create abstract paintings of startling beauty and poise. If you froze the world in 2019, and Arreola's practice with it, then carried it 20 years into the future, you would have the makings of a great art world discovery—a new Luchita Hurtado or Carmen Herrera. But the world did not stop, and neither did Arreola. Her most recent works—those created since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and featured in this publication—represent a major shift in her practice, and to my eyes, are some of the most confrontational paintings she has made to date. They are built from the same formal bones as her other works, the same precise edges

and subtle textures, the crossing forms and stencil lettering. Yet whereas in the past these elements came together with the grace of a symphony, or the cool sophistication of experimental music, the new works are intentionally less harmonious and more unsettling. They make it harder to pigeonhole Arreola as an artist, harder to know where she will go in the future.

The colors stand out first, especially the oranges and blues, much harsher than usual. Yet despite their boldness and contrast, they seem to cancel each other out. Maybe it has something to do with the relative saturation of the different paints, or the way that Arreola's compositions break up and distribute the color across the surface of the canvas, but whatever the cause, the effect is striking, like a flashing alarm that you can see but not hear. The shapes and words are similarly urgent but cryptic, their message clear but meaning shrouded. The straightforward utilitarian font seems to promise clear communication, but they are not always legible, despite the thick relief of the paint. They remind me of the instructions on city streets, jumbled and misread from the passenger seat of a speeding car—"DOWN SLOW". A slow motion emergency, the paintings are trying to warn us, they are trying to make us see the signs that we have grown too accustomed to notice, and recognize dangers that we can no longer see surrounding us.

Once you do recognize the words, another layer of understanding creeps into works like *Eye on Prize*, *Billions*, and *U Lost / I Won*. Instead of the hopeful aspiration or spiritual contemplation of earlier works, these are tuned into an anxious awareness of numbers, units, and amounts. Rather than meditate or swirl or come together, these paintings accumulate, triangulate, and multiply, prompting comparisons: how many you have versus how many they have. Do you have enough—do you want more? How much do you have left: money, friends, ideas, time. The lines begin to stack like bar graphs, drop and climb like the stock exchange, or bleep like the inscrutable screens at the edge of a hospital bed.

Arreola is hesitant to frame these works through the lens of the pandemic, though they were all made in the years since COVID-19. I think that is smart on her part, both because no one really likes COVID art, and because there is a risk of thinking that these paintings are only about one thing, when they are actually about everything. If I took the time to write down my thoughts and anxieties about art, and discovery, and a Latinx 'moment' it is not because I think these are the subject of Arreola's paintings. Just as they are not about the pandemic, they are not about art. But the mood, or the sets of

conditions that they so accurately convey—greed, anxiety, and a creeping sense of mortality—can be found anywhere and everywhere around us.

It makes sense that Arreola is a fan of Francis Bacon. You can see the British painters' claustrophobic rooms echoed in the corner-joining forms of *Sereno*, but you can feel the same existential dread in all of these works as they touch on every aspect of life. You can find it when you look in the mirror (*Little Gray Hairs*), or in the memories of childhood (*Pot Latch/ Latch Key*) or in secret hopes for the future (*Lotto Billionaires*). And children? *Uvalde Children* is a painting not so different from the others in this series. The same oranges and blues, the same blocked letters, the same lines, here closely layered and horizontal. But it should be different, it should be yelling and screaming, gnashing teeth and burning stations. In a kinder world this painting would not exist, let alone be so devastatingly commonplace, one of many daily disasters ticking across our lives. Writers on Arreola's work have tended to emphasize the big picture: spirituality, democracy, and aesthetics. It's not that they were wrong, but that the artist is still changing. The unsparing and unsentimental topicality of these newest works, and the unknown directions that Arreola will take next, are what make me excited for her continued success, and fear the one-dimensional flattening of museum discovery.

On many days I'm more optimistic about museums, the world, and our ability to make things better, together. But when I look at Arreola's latest works I get nervous, and I start to second guess myself. Under capitalism, can anyone's art fully flourish, much less Latinx artists? Will we even be around for long enough to find out? I begin to doubt my feelings of comfort and optimism. It's a good feeling, I think. A useful one.

Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia is a curator and writer from Alhambra, California. He works as a curatorial assistant at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College and as Curator at Large for *The Mistake Room*, Los Angeles. In the fall, he will begin his first year as a doctoral student in art history at the CUNY Graduate Center.

2020 - 2023

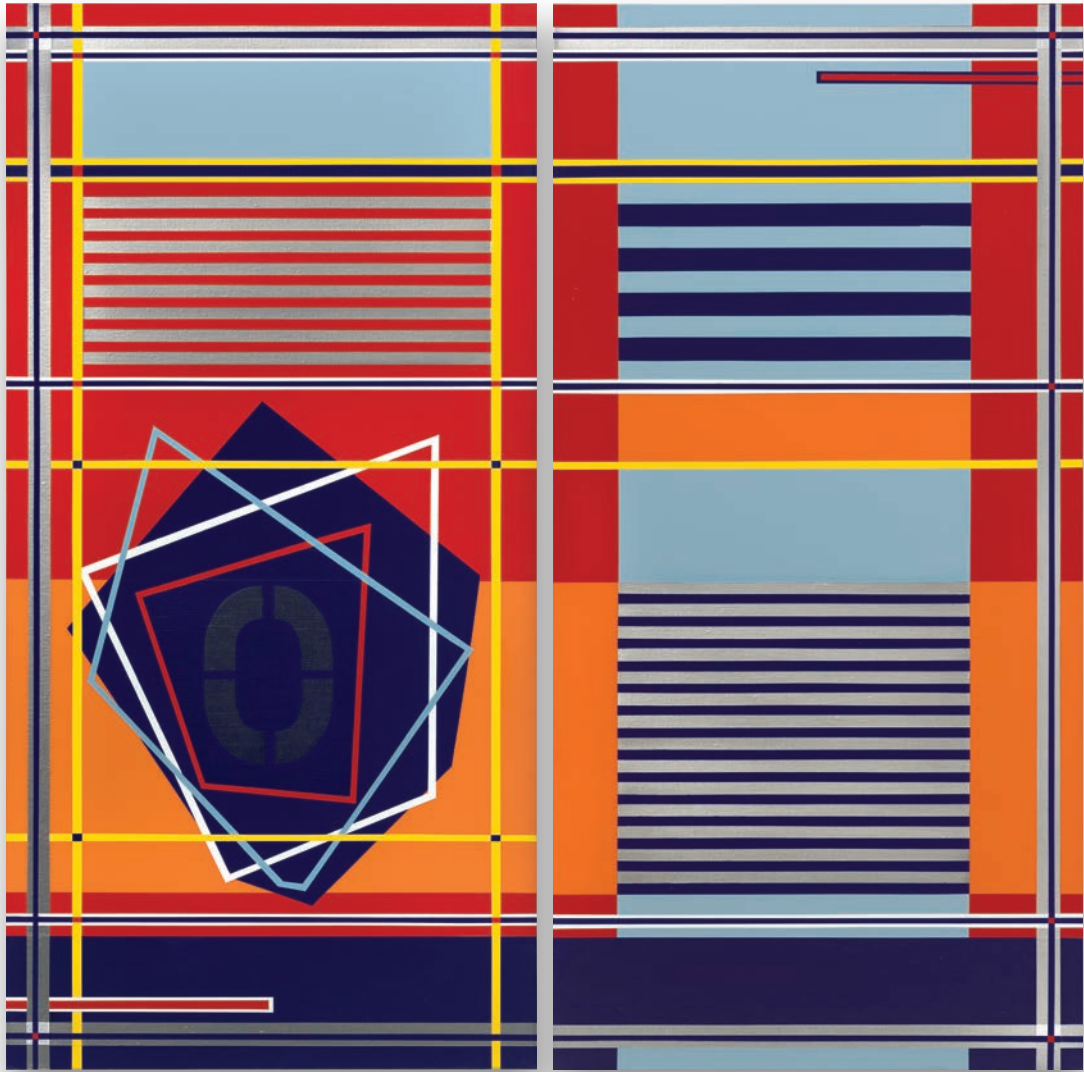
First Wanderings

2020

acrylic on canvas

diptych 48" x 48"

Note: Selected artworks in the exhibition at Avenue 50 Studio are indicated by an asterisk ().*



Spike

2020

acrylic on canvas

diptych 48" x 48"



Jubilee

2020

acrylic and graphite on wood panel

24" x 18"

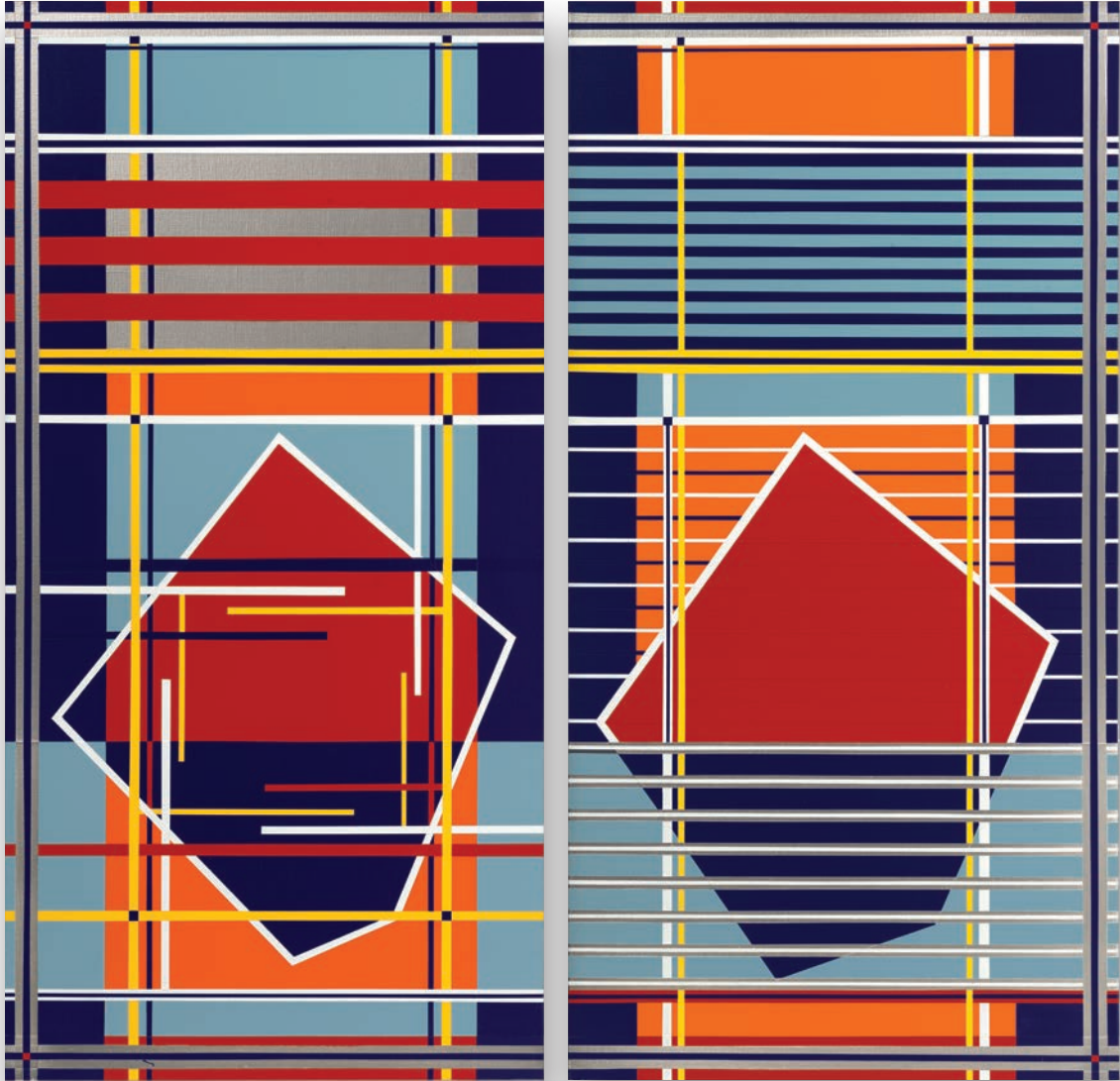


Too Isolated

2020

acrylic on canvas

diptych 48" x 48"



Billions*

2020

acrylic and graphite on canvas

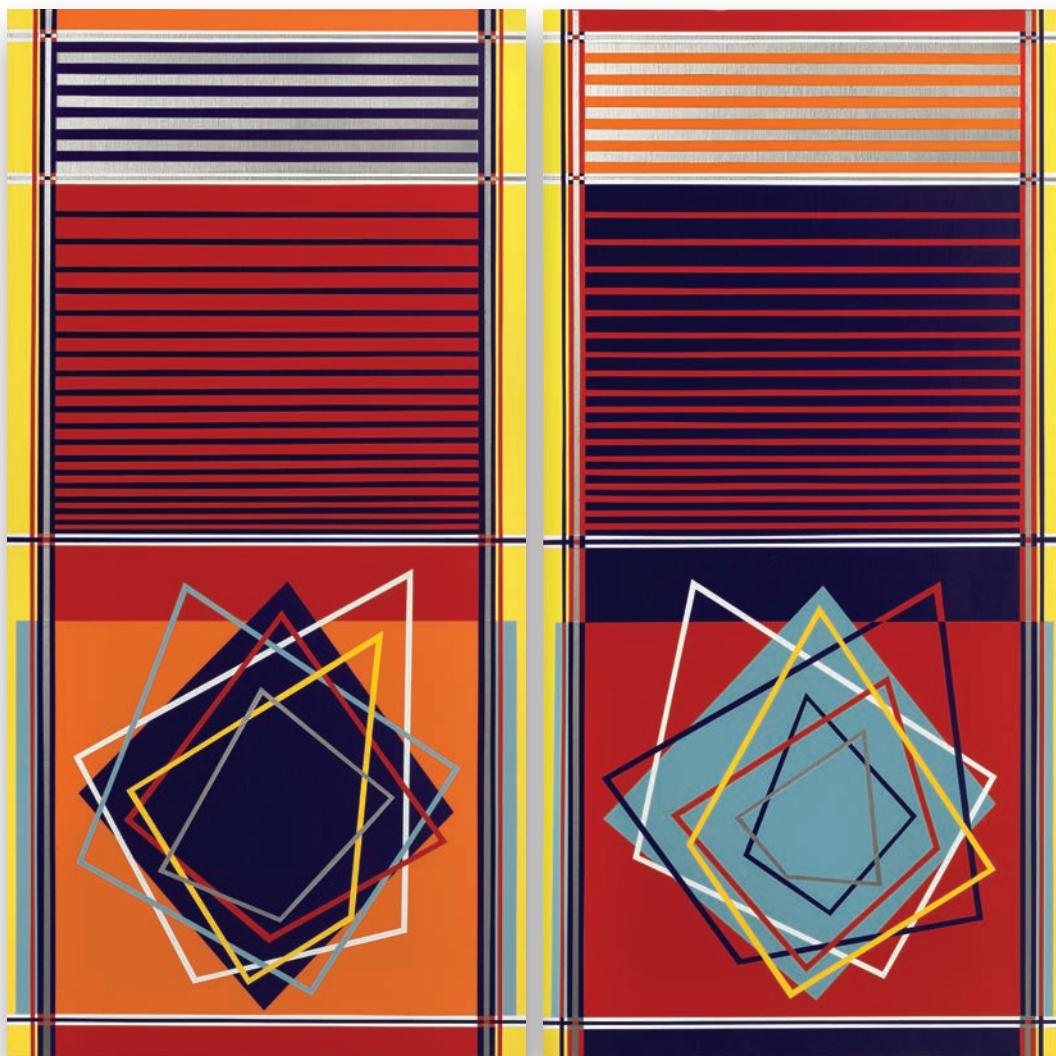
diptych, 48" x 48"



Cosmic Coupling

2020

acrylic on canvas
diptych, 48" x 48"

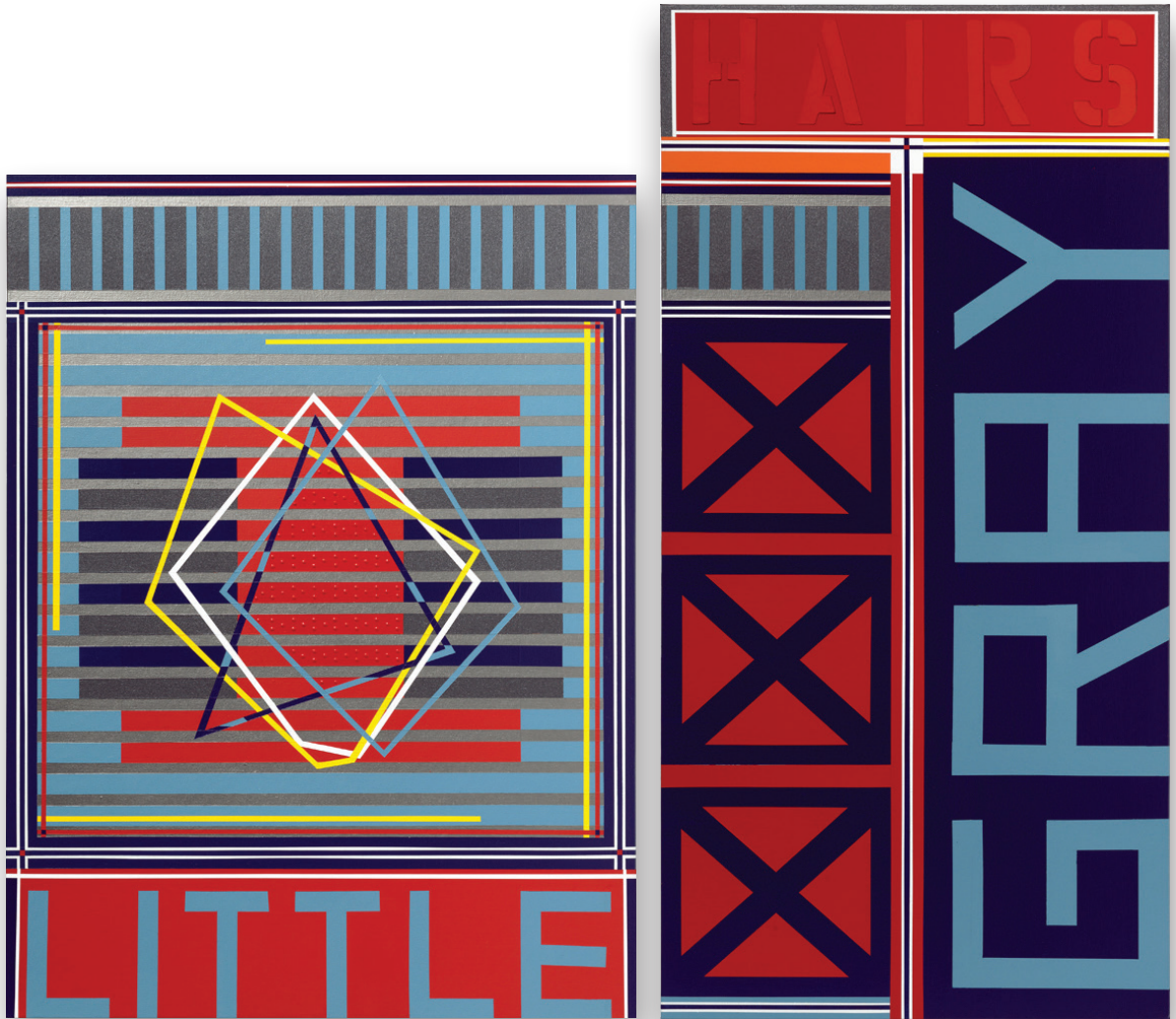


Little Gray Hairs*

2021

acrylic on canvas

diptych, 40" x 30" and 48" x 24"



Good Grief

2021

acrylic on canvas

48" x 36"

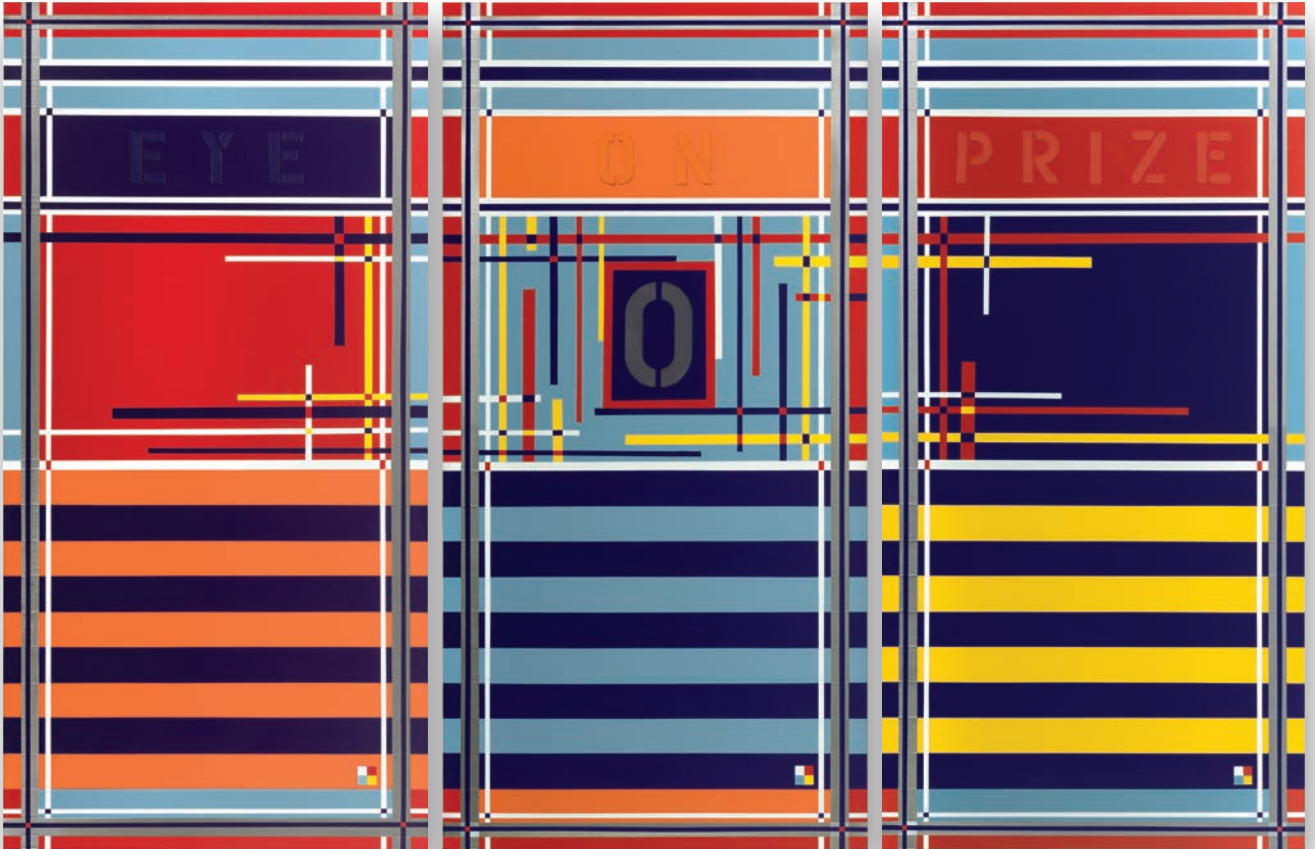


Eye on Prize*

2021

acrylic on canvas

triptych 48" x 72"

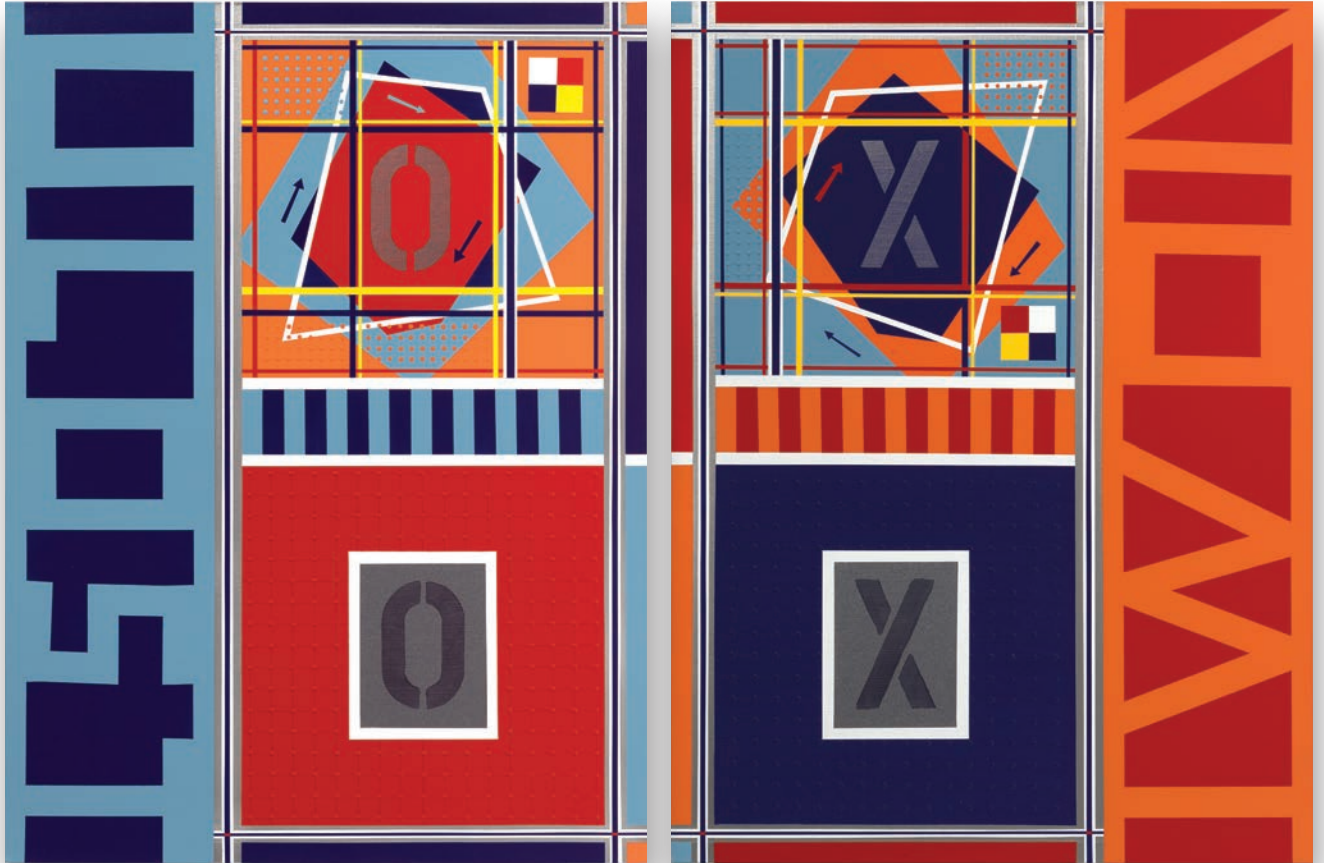


U Lost/ I Won*

2021

acrylic and graphite on canvas

diptych 40" x 60"



Spaces of Solidarity

2021

acrylic and graphite on wood panel

4-piece, 48" x 36"

YELLOW

BROWN



WHITE

BLACK

Dump*

2022

acrylic on wood panel

16" x 12"



Pot Latch/Latch Key*

2022

acrylic and graphite on canvas

diptych 48" x 72"



Heavy Reign

2022

acrylic and graphite on canvas

48" x 36"

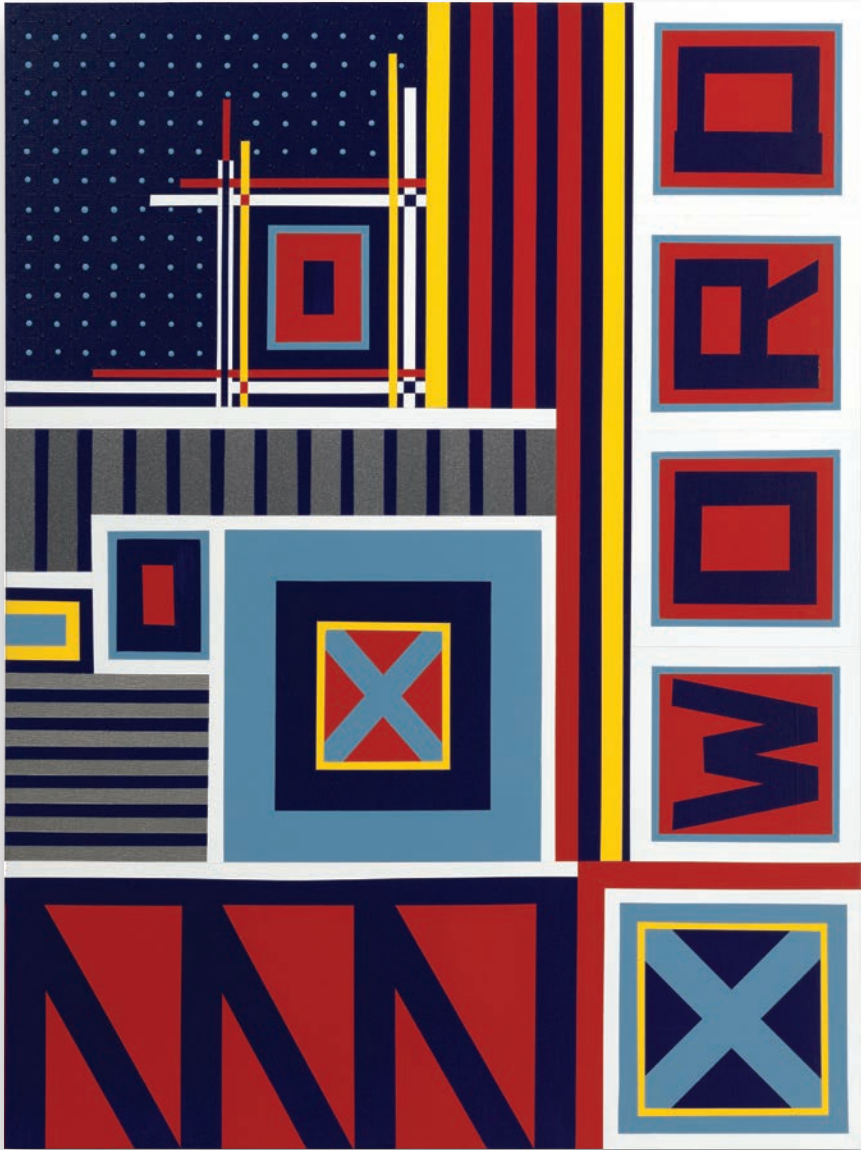


WORD

2022

acrylic and graphite on canvas

40" x 30"



Lotto Billionaires

2022

acrylic on canvas

40" x 30"



Uvalde Children*

2022

acrylic and graphite on canvas

diptych 48" x 48"



Southland

2023

acrylic and graphite on canvas

48" x 36"

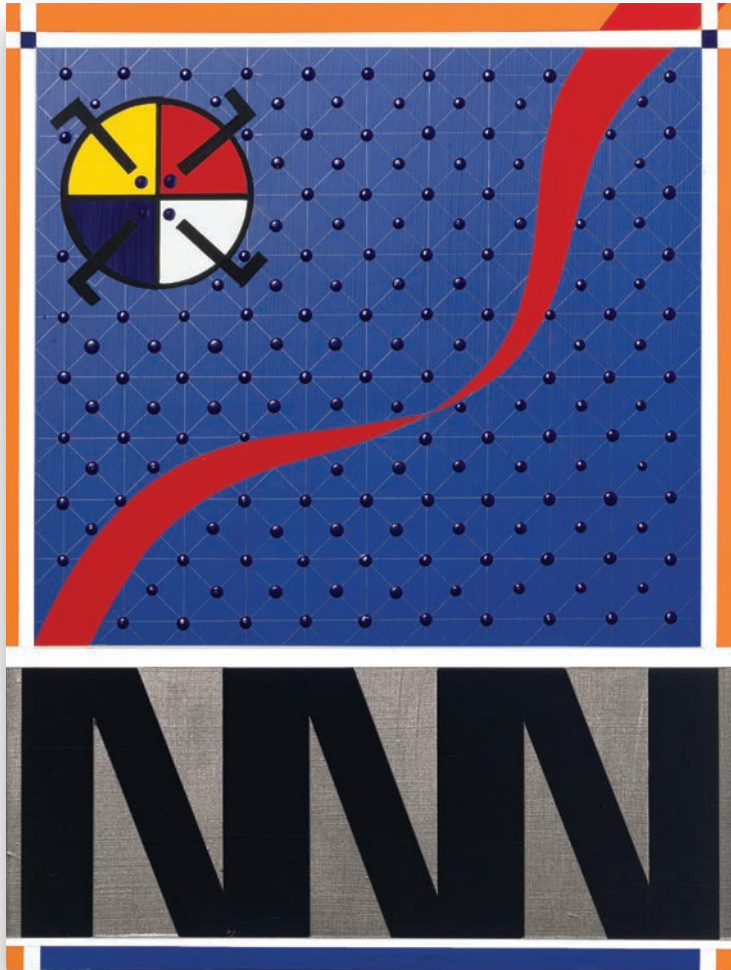


Ancestral Calling #1

2023

acrylic and graphite on wood panel

16" x 12"

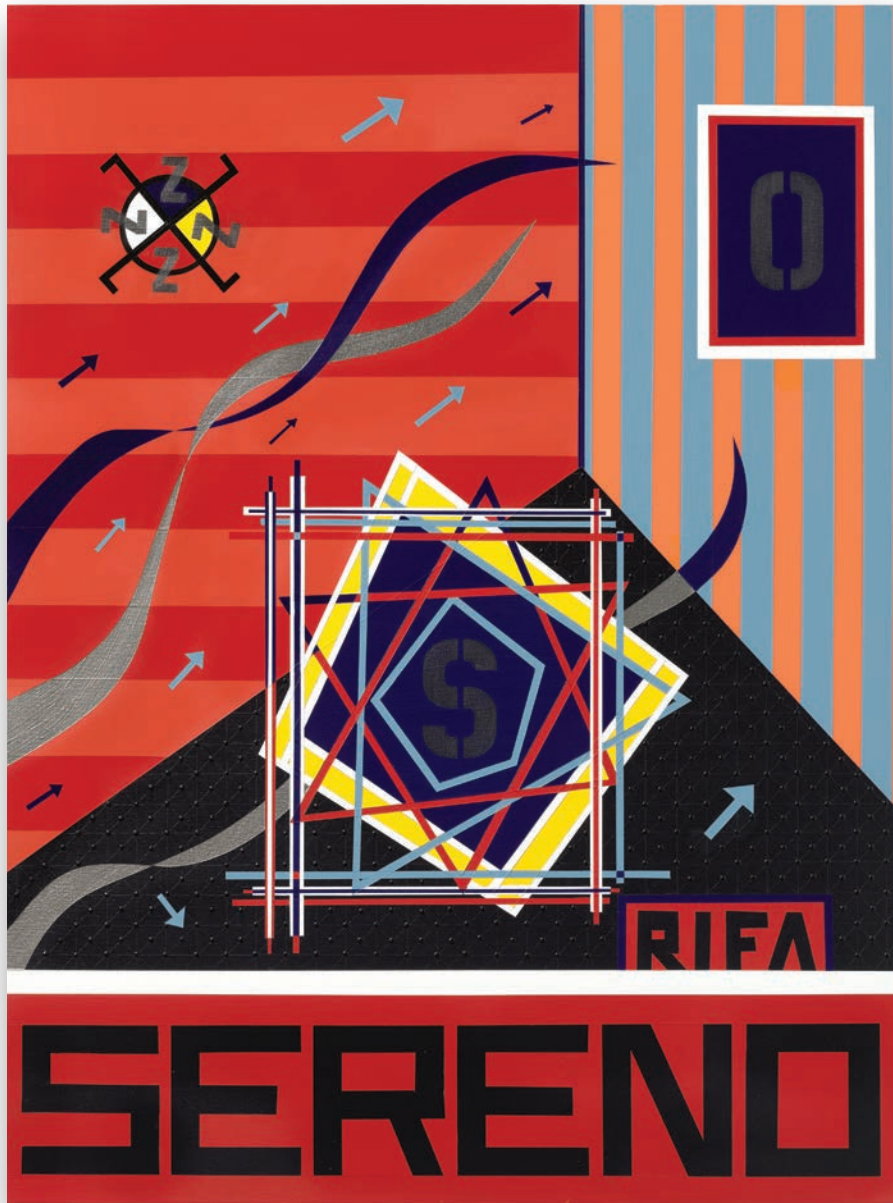


Sereno*

2023

acrylic and graphite on canvas

40" x 30"



Director's Notes



I was once advised by an established gallery owner in Mexico to, “Choose the artists you work with wisely because they will become your friends and family”. Linda Arreola is one of those artists I have called a friend and family for over two decades. I know her for the professionalism she dedicates to her career and for her love of the Chicax/Latinx art community. We are honored to exhibit a survey of her work.

There are a number of people I would like to acknowledge in supporting the “Abstract Wanderings from the LA Borderlands” exhibition. We are excited to work with emerging curator Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia who curated and wrote the catalog essay that invites us to more deeply explore Linda’s geometric abstract expressions.

We are proud to have a catalog that will document this exhibition. I would like to acknowledge artist/designer Val Echavarria of Casa Marengo Art & Design for her vision in creating the “Abstract Wanderings” catalog. She is a sought-after professional for her catalog design and compositions.

A special thank you to Dulce Soledad Ibarra, who I call the “wall whisperer” for her skilled installation of this exhibition and to our administrative assistant Jovany Gonzalez who works quietly behind the scenes promoting our exhibitions on social media and assisting in operations.

Lastly I want to thank our community for their continued support of our gallery. Without you, we would not be here 24 years later.

Thank you all for your contributions.

Kathleen Gallegos

Founder and Director
Avenue 50 Studio, Inc.



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www.avenue50studio.org

Special Thanks

I would like to give a special thank you to Kathy Gallegos, founder and director of Avenue 50 Studio, not only for the opportunity to have a solo exhibition at this honored venue, but to acknowledge its 24 years of service to the Latinx community. So many notable Chicax/Latinx artists have exhibited in this space and many started their careers having had their first exhibition on the Avenue 50 walls. It is with great pleasure that I am now in the ranks of solo exhibitions at Avenue 50 Studio.

I would also like to give a special thank you to Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia for writing the catalog essay and curating the exhibition. His writing and insights give me great hope for the future of Chicax/Latinx art.

Linda Arreola

Credits:

Design: Val Echavarria / Casa Marengo Art & Design

Photography: Art Works Fine Art Publishing

Printer: Typecraft, Pasadena, CA

List of Works

2020

First Wanderings, acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 48"

Spike, acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 48"

Jubilee, acrylic and graphite on wood panel, 24" x 18"

Too Isolated, acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 48"

Billions,* acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 48"

Cosmic Coupling, acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 48"

2021

Little Gray Hairs,* acrylic on canvas, diptych, 40" x 30" and 48" x 24"

Good Grief, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"

Eye on Prize,* acrylic on canvas, triptych, 48" x 72"

U Lost/ I Won,* acrylic on canvas, diptych, 40" x 60"

Spaces of Solidarity, acrylic on wood panel, 4-piece, 48" x 36"

2022

Dump,* acrylic on wood panel, 16" x 12"

Pot Latch/Latch Key,* acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 72"

Heavy Reign, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"

WORD, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"

Lotto Billionaires, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"

*Uvalde Children**, acrylic on canvas, diptych, 48" x 48"

2023

Southland, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 48" x 36"

Ancestral Calling #1, acrylic and graphite on wood panel, 16" x 12"

Sereno,* acrylic and graphite on canvas, 40" x 30"

* Selected artworks in the exhibition at Avenue 50 Studio.

All artworks are from the collection of the artist.

Linda Arreola is an abstract artist from Los Angeles with a background in sculpture and architecture. She received her B.A. and M.A. degrees in Fine Art, with a specialty in sculpture, from California State University Los Angeles. She later went on to receive a Master of Architecture from UCLA. Early in her career she created sculptural works of simple geometries of wood and steel cable. Following her studies in architecture, she explored painting, installation and printmaking. She is one of the featured artists in the book, *Contemporary Chicana/Chicano Artists*. In 2008 she designed a public artwork for the main plaza of the East Los Angeles Civic Center, commissioned by the L.A. County Department of Public Works. She was awarded the City of Los Angeles (COLA) Individual Artist Fellowship in 2010 and the California Community Foundation Fellowship in 2017. In 2022 she created artworks commissioned by the U.S. Department of State for the *Summit of the Americas*, in Los Angeles.

Linda Arreola

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