

Eloy Torrez



Vamos a Jugar en las Ruinas

Let's Go Play in the Ruins

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A Survey Exhibition 1990 – 2017
Curator *Dr. Sally Mincher*

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Foreword

Eloy Torrez is a master of portraiture. For over three decades, he has combined realism, surrealism, and syncretism to produce allegories of human psychology and experience. His powerful fusion of realist representation and phantasmagorical allusion creates a timeless style that inspires introspection and exploration. His unique style and body of work distinguishes Torrez as one of the great painters to emerge from the Chicano Movement.

Portraiture for Torrez is a window and a bridge. His exquisite rendering of the human figure reveals the sitter's inner qualities. Not surprisingly, Torrez tends to explore the eyes of his sitters, who are often animated in a theatrical way that portrays the mystery and passion of human experience. The subjects of Torrez's work frequently stare directly at the viewer, and the unflinching gaze is seductive. One must return the gaze as it provocatively requests attention and thus self-reflection. The spaces of self and other are fused when the viewer is caught by the gaze of Torrez's subjects. The portraits insist on human connection.

Classical forms of human portraiture focus on details: the delicate facial hairs, folds and wrinkles of human flesh, or the warp and weave of textile. Almost hyper-realistic, the portrait traverses between the worldly and other-worldly, between the sacred and the profane. When monumental in size, such as the mural *The Pope of Broadway* (1985, restored 2016), Torrez emphasizes the gesture. In this case, the gentle tilt of Anthony Quinn's head, his lifted shoulders, bent knees, raised palms, and expressive fingers form a posture of celebratory dance and sacred interior. Torrez captures the Mexican American actor during an inner moment, all others have faded from Quinn's awareness. Yet, Quinn is grounded, specifically located in the Los Angeles downtown shopping district frequented by Chicanas and Chicanos. Torrez portrays him within the lobby of the Bradbury Building, the architectural landmark directly across the street from The Victor Clothing Company, the site and patron of the mural. In this monumental portrait, Torrez breaks from the realist style to further cement the bridge between the everyday and the sanctified. The artist uses mannerism to dramatize Quinn's posture which extends the magnificence of Quinn and his location into the sacred. The Christ-like gesture bestows blessings on all who pass before this offering to Mexican American grandeur. If Kent Twitchell's murals have made Los Angeles freeway drivers and passengers feel a sense of place as they speed through the urban megalopolis, then Eloy Torrez's public art provides Chicanas and Chicanos with a sense of belonging when anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant rhetoric reaches a feverish pitch.

Art historian, Sally Mincher, has followed Torrez's artistic career since 1985, the year he completed *The Pope of Broadway*. She has an excellent understanding of Torrez's working methods, his preoccupations, influences, and sources of change in his art. Her vantage point from the University of Essex allows for fresh interpretations of the Chicano Movement and Torrez's contributions to it. She posits that Torrez works in "two strands," one that participates in the representative and romantic portrayals of Chicana/o protagonists and another that engages subjectivity and emotion. Both insist that the personal is embedded in the social realm, which squarely places Torrez in the context of artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Eschewing art for art's sake, Torrez encounters art with life. In this way, Torrez influences Los Angeles art and its preference for aesthetic engagement rather than autonomy.

Karen Mary Davalos



Thinking of Dali, 1991

Director's Statement

Through his art and music, Eloy Torrez has explored the Chicano/Mexicano reality and diaspora for over 30 years, advancing the deeper and more meaningful side of our sovereignty in the United States. His imagery has never failed to radiate familiarity yet at the same time reveal his unique perspective on the world and the people around him. It is like his seminal piece, "The Pope of Broadway", layers of clues and iconography, compounded by a celebration of life and popular culture. Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center is honored to host his survey exhibition and accompanying educational programs for our community to celebrate one of our most prolific and accomplished artists of the contemporary Chicano Art Movement.

Maria Jimenez-Torres, Executive Director, Plaza de la Raza



Magic and Truths in Our Midst *by Sally Mincher*

Part One – Connections

In the past, in the present

The wave of creative expansion among Chicano/a artists during the early 1980s reflects the complex processes of cultural flux occurring in the Mexican American community across the United States. This 'renaissance' of cultural production embraced compounded issues of identity, the failures of the so called 'Hispanic Era', and multiplicities of civil rights matters. Responding to the evolving social complexities of life, artists' collaborative commitment broadened the span of painting while formal artistic developments were also advanced in their individual practices. This evolution coincided with a revival of painting's importance in the international art mainstream that was generated by the museum, collector, critic, dealer consortiums of America and Europe. Chicano/a artists, however, developed painting in unique ways that were distinct from the self-consciously historicist values and from the triviality with which mainstream postmodern painting became associated; in the Chicano Art Movement, painting has continued to be developed as a provocative voice. Eloy Torrez graduated from Otis Art institute (1983) into this milieu when he embarked on his chosen method of expression, painting.

Building on the power of symbolism in realist painting Eloy Torrez has explored the association between art and the representation of people through a convergence of classical, modern and post-modern idioms. For Torrez painting is the vehicle through which he investigates themes of the internal and external subjectivities of people. This exhibition gives the opportunity to survey the course his art has taken in a career spanning over three decades and to view the developments in his preoccupation with the physiognomy of people.

In his early years, the existential effects of social disunion, of displaced double-identities and the impact of the mid-century pressures to assimilate and conform to Anglo-American society created confusing, jumbled foundations for Eloy Torrez's artistic career. Even since his infancy, his parents, following the aspirations and ambitions of Americanism of the 'Mexican-American Era', avoided speaking Spanish in their home in 1950s USA.¹ Nevertheless, through his childhood Torrez was also exposed to contrasting worlds through mythology and legends, Catholic and ancient traditions, in a space of doubled heritage. Positioned between a fictionalised, idealised unity and a situation of social instability and disintegration, such entangled experiences impacted upon Torrez's mind-set in later life. The actuality of being Chicano did not rest easily for Eloy Torrez, prompting him to vacillate and question his position as he explored the direction of his

art. Torrez's eidetic memory of symbolic religious imagery, classical depictions of the maternal body, or the phantasmagoria of fragmented ruins and sediment of the earth, all became distilled into his art in later years. This amalgam was enriched further by his strong interest in European classical artists, especially the heroic anatomical features of the great masters of the Italian High Renaissance, the eloquent observations of Rembrandt, or the essence of the expressionism of El Greco. Eloy Torrez's search for aesthetic identity, which could have prompted him to obscure or even to jettison his ethnic heritage for the sake of achieving receptivity in the broadest artistic arena, has in contrast led him deeper into questions of identity and the human condition that have permeated his art in varied and subtle ways throughout his career.



Quarai Ruins, Manzano, New Mexico

The Quarai Ruins²

We do not find disillusionment in Torrez's art, rather, painting is the vehicle through which he scrutinizes the intimacies and curiousness in peoples' everyday lives and the multifaceted temporality of our world. The complexity of experiences during childhood in his grandparent's home-town in Punta de Agua, central New Mexico, included art of the Catholic churches. It is not only a shared conception of style that Eloy found in such imagery, but also an intrinsic erotic passion, such as in an image of Jesus that hung at home in the kitchen. The contradiction of pain in the wounds of the hands bearing the stigmata and the accompanying religious ecstasy, he believes, "had an impact especially when you see it every day. It made me aware of the inner and physical self and how these artists captured it".³ The multiple, complex propositions of religious imagery, the traditions of classical modes of portraiture, and the intensity of the enflamed local landscapes in the 'Land of Enchantment' have all fuelled Torrez's imagination.⁴

Childhood memories of the frequent visits Torrez and his brother made to their grandparents' village in Punta de Agua and Manzano, also infuse his work. In the early 1960s, before this site had been classified as a protected historical landmark, Eloy recalls he, his brother and cousins would wander and play among the Quarai Ruins. The site basically consists of the ruins of a small prehistoric settlement, a small church, a large 17th century pueblo, and a 17th century Spanish (Franciscan) mission and church. Petroglyphs have been found in the southern portions. For the children, this place presented a complexly physical amorphous world of mystery and drama. They found themselves in a paradoxical situation, within a wondrous maze, yet confronting a daunting, ghostly expanse of detritus materials, ruins, and nature. For these children, however, this conglomeration of topology, materiality and light, the juggernauts of derelict structures, and the intangible historical possibilities, were not perceived as empty palaces.

The sediment, rocks and debris before them constituted a treasure trove of riches where, "we would find arrowheads and other archaeological material, remnants of the communities who lived there for thousands of years". As they walked and played, each encounter held significance for the boys in this mysterious place with "plenty of crows following our every move". Eloy recalls, "there was a black pond that we always stopped at and I imagined large creatures deep in the black water". These experiences, conceived as part of the arcana of the existence of time, were among other dramatic reference points that were also familiar to young Eloy, such as the institutional symbolism of Catholic New Mexico. In this child's perception walking into a local church, the physical impact of the building and the intensity of, "the bombardment of symbols and images and the death masks of entombed people was like a walk into another dimension, as if encountering the presence of death itself".



Eloy (right) with his grandparents José and Juanita and his brothers Roger and Mike

What is retrieved from dust is also the paradox of what has been lost. Although in their explorations and playful adventures the children had no sense of any pantheistic significance, their discoveries in the debris of broken monuments and ruins presented them with material through which to consider their own existence. Did those traces of lost hieratical orders left in the earth suggest the broken spirit of grand beliefs? Many of Torrez's paintings can be interpreted as variations of this theme derived from the children's innocent perceptions of an indefinable, incomprehensible world. When translated into the language of his paintings, such recollections of telluric significance do not historicize or attempt to replace one set of archaeological tropes for another. Rather, these memories feed into the contemporary, contextual spaces that Torrez constructs in allegorical fusions of an exaggerated, irrational, surreal imagery. He combines the familiarity of material trappings and the existential consciousness of various characters. Organized within scenes of urban materiality, or land, sea and sky, his representations of such confounding spaces, where fiction and reality are blurred, prompt us to seek, to find a unity, perhaps even reification of human desire for a materialised world. For Eloy Torrez, the process is not of reification but a philosophical humanistic search;

"we could travel back in time and be one with the indigenous people. When we got to the ruins the vibe was different, I didn't know why. It was just different. I knew it was once a mission church; we would climb the walls play hide 'n' seek and do all things kids do at an early age. As time elapsed I began to realize how things transpired in the history of this place. Change was instilled on the native people of this region. I was a result of that change. With that understanding my duality was embraced, somewhere deep in my subconscious I knew I had ancestry from the southwest and most likely from Spain".



Prodigy, 2005

Elements of these memories are laced through Torrez's pictorial vocabulary. From this well of stimuli, the confluence of the historical, the land and the social, he generates an inferred sense of disintegration or lack of permanence, or notions of mythic and cultic semantics, all assimilated into contemporary moments of both social and personal situations, as in *Prodigy* (2005), and *Sustain* (2005). Perhaps he is proposing that no one escapes history; even in the accumulations of social transformation we are forming connections, living new histories.

In his art, Torrez is finding a path through existential uncertainty, seeking where the life-energy is taking the collectiveness of humanity. The curious thing to consider is how these early impressions have become translated into the language of Torrez's art that reflects life within a contemporary urban world. How does the amalgam of his early experiences, the divine, religious, figurative idealism, the mysterious and timeless power of nature, and other varied, cultural and artistic influences flow into Torrez's representations of a contemporary space we inhabit?

Los Angeles, City of Angels

The childhood relationships and fantastic moments were in strong contrast to the context Torrez encountered as a teenager when, in 1967, his family moved to Barstow, California. His earlier fantastical curiosity would be tempered now by the impact of the urban environment and the bigger American matrix of concerns such as the Cold War, the Space Race, the Vietnam War, and the emergence of the hippie counterculture.⁵ Like many teenagers of that era who had to subjectively find their own terms of personal meaning within this society, how was Eloy Torrez to find his singularity? Given his predilection for drawing domestic scenes at home and copying illustrations from art books, his high-school art teacher, Gloria Redfield, encouraged Torrez to join the drawing classes at Barstow Junior College. Here, a young, dynamic, charismatic drawing teacher, Jim Savoie, was a profound influence, instilling his own excellent draftsmanship in Torrez and expanding his young student's knowledge of art by regular visits to the Norton Simon Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Torrez began to develop a mastery of figurative composition leading him to embark on a formal art training at Otis Art Institute; here he was influenced by teachers Charles White and Arnold Mesches.

Torrez began his studio work in Los Angeles in 1978 and was artist in residence at Self Help Graphics & Art (1984-88).⁶ He became part of the community of artists that had clustered in the downtown area of Los Angeles around 3rd Street and Broadway, the site of the Victor Clothing Company, now an important landmark,

famous for the imposing presence of its murals.⁷ The owners of the building supported many artists during the 1970s and 1980s providing studio spaces and commissioning interior and exterior murals, including Torrez's *The Pope of Broadway*. The large, spacious, but commercially neglected buildings of this neighborhood — monuments to the laps of time, to an earlier era of architectural elegance — provided cavernous work spaces in which artists could explore the dynamics of large-scale art. Here, Torrez had a new freedom to explore the immediate surroundings in contrast to a place he had left, an outward reality relative to an inner spirituality.

Through the 1980s and 1990s Torrez developed his unique personal style of painting. The controlled, enigmatic, tonal subtlety and detailed realism of his paintings evolved in contrast to the type of freedom and heroism of neo-Expressionism that was a predominant trend in the 1980s. Torrez alludes to the spirit of that zeitgeist in later works however. Among the fantastic elements in *The Bridge* (1996) and in *Juliane with Umbrella* (1994), he makes a reference to Carlos Almaraz's well-known series of *Car Crash* paintings and thereby salutes the role of painting in the Chicano Art Movement's aims to break through to new revelations. Like Almaraz, Torrez uses painting as a vehicle through which to undermine a conventional sense of social reality. He has made painting his language of criticality but not with Almaraz's exuberant, overloaded use of colour and spontaneity. In Torrez's art, we find a different 'unexpectedness' and a sombre type of drama. His visions probe personal spaces and privacy, they press against existential, transitional, personal stability within a social milieu. What has emerged in the maturation of Torrez's art is his deftness in exploring mystery and passion in a choreography of human encounters. He scrutinises aspects of humanity through a number of avenues to explore the depths of its psyche, showing not only the prevailing insecurities but also its vested 'rights and liberties'⁸

Eloy Torrez paints people, the spaces they inhabit and the dynamics of their relations. In his art, Torrez embraces the paradoxical: emptiness and presence, mimesis and alterity, heroism of grandiose spectacle and the intrigue of intimate emotion.⁹ With his exposure at an impressionable age to the trappings of American popular culture, such as comic-book heroes and TV shows, and to the wonders of a realm elevated out of reach in the art of the Catholic Church, Torrez perceived a network of jumbled relations of the everyday world in the Southwestern United States. These influences — the symbolic exaggerated anatomical forms and the apocalyptic nature of a fantasy world — shaped his direction toward a search for a truth beyond that.



Juliane with Umbrella, 1994

The air is hot, the air is cool; the land is dusty-dry, there is water everywhere. These mysterious, contradictory elements are channelled metaphorically into Eloy Torrez's paintings as he explores experiences that pervade our daily lives and the uncertainty of personal identity. Their emotional associations illuminate his own psyche while bringing us to consider the depths of our own. His art touches multiple historical contexts, abstractly connecting us to the past as it brings us to reflect on enigmatic moments of life in the present. The theatrical and dramatic spaces in his paintings, with their disoriented or dreamlike perspectives in a not-so stable world, confuse the real and the fictional of our interior and exterior worlds. Those spaces and the various elements contained within them make direct references to events in Torrez's personal life: the landscapes of his early life in Albuquerque and urban Los Angeles, and destinations of his travels in Paris, Venice and elsewhere. Similarly, portrayals of the people around him, including those he has known intimately as well as astute observations of complete strangers, form his intensely personal expression.

What might seem on the surface to be ambivalence to national politics and ideologies or concepts of ethnicity, indigenism or multiculturalism, is deceptive. Torrez has not sidestepped these aspects or precluded a political stance in his art; a nationalistic sentiment is often present in a nuanced way. Although the directness of his political expression varies, the political and nationalistic projections of the preceding

Chicano generation has fed into his motivations. He has worked within the Chicano art community, in a public forum with commissions in the community, as well as separate from it in private isolation.

All in all, the various experiences of Torrez's early life that fuel his imagination have generated a range of genres, themes and narratives at different stages of his career. As his personal style has evolved, Torrez has worked a mix of international ideas and national motifs into a combination of Realism, stylised Synthetism and Symbolism, Surrealism and Pop, and a nationalist Romantic vision. This exhibition presents a selection from this broad range of his art.



Entrada Al Mundo Nuevo, 1991, design for a mural in St. Denis, France

Part Two – The public face, the private struggle

Transformative presence in urban spaces

Across his oeuvre, Eloy Torrez's representations revel in the paradoxical. He invites us to celebrate the world around us but also involves us in an expanse of unsettling emotional experiences. While he reiterates various features, symbolic icons, and spiritual signals that reflect familiar aspects of his local culture, the narratives in his paintings resonate beyond the local, evoking universal themes. Torrez's observations of the existence of a varied range of protagonists: society's youth, friends, lovers, workers, people in ordinary, everyday situations, both domestic or in public places, are presented in two contradictory ways. One approach delves into private contexts, the intimacy of a marriage or a friendship experience, and concerns subjectivity, feelings, emotions and dramas of the human condition. In such works, he probes the depths of a surreal imaginary in peoples' disquieting unconscious relationships with the land, the environment, and each other. The second approach is a declaratory expression that signals art as a communal activity. These traditionally representative, celebratory, immediate portrayals represent the conscious recognition of a social expression. What connects these two strands in the body of Torrez's art is the power of emphatic detail in his recognition of the intricacies of the personalities and the expressions of experience in their faces. His art links the personal to the social realm.

Torrez invites us to celebrate our place in the world through a range of social themes in the numerous public art commissions he has completed since 1983. It might be assumed that among his works, these murals would least of all link his overlaid language of painting aesthetically to a metaphysical or spiritual expression. But Torrez has brought his own particular style and nuanced expression to the traditional Chicano art form of muralism. Even though the West Coast mural movement is highly celebrated, the history, civic importance, and the symbolic significance of muralism for the Chicano Movement is less well-known outside the United States of America. Despite its uniquely political and precarious history, and attempts to contain its development, the impact of the Chicano Mural Movement has not only endured to the present but has contributed to developments in public art. Eloy Torrez is among the many artists who have made the power and richness of the Chicano Mural movement continuous and contemporary.

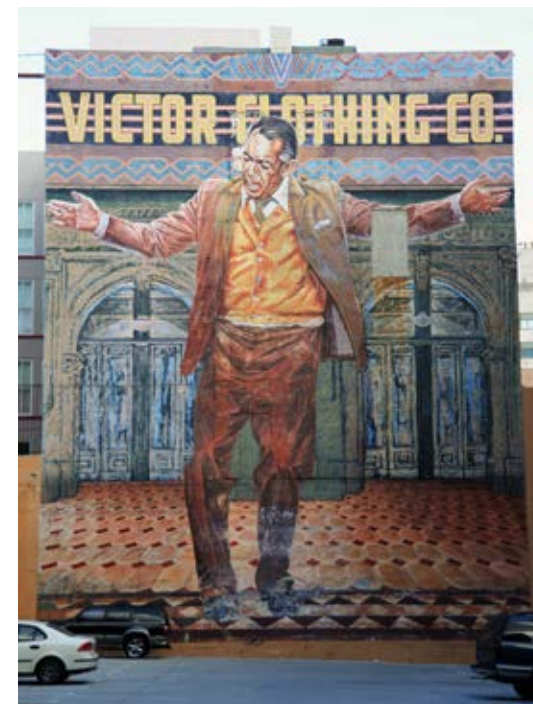
In contrast to knowledge and understanding of this particular art form, a more generalised public notion of large scale, high-impact imagery has been typified as the mainstream phenomenon of the ubiquitous American billboard. One such example is the famous cigarette smoking, archetypal Texan cowboy, monumentally situated at the bend of Sunset Boulevard (at the corner Marmont Lane) from the early 1970s to 1999. Dominant in its dignified setting, this theatrical image functioned anti-thetically to Chicano muralism. The advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes with its

sublimized image that exuded “manly ruggedness” and ‘the American way of life’ in “Marlboro Country”, was laced with ironies. The billboards phenomena not only traversed America but this format provided a worldwide aesthetic of Americana, epic monumentality that symbolically permeated both mainstream and alternative (oppositional) art from Pop Art of the 1960s to contemporary conceptual art, such as by artist Barbara Kruger.

Torrez has also exploited this trope of monumental staging in his art as simulacrum of photograph or film still. In various works in which he has mixed collage, allegory and displacement to alter people’s perceptions of space, time, and reality, Torrez has drawn on the Pop art mode and fused it with the sensibility of a Renaissance fresco to form a ‘visionary’ whole in a number of murals. Like other artists born in the 1950s who have grown up with an influx of images from mass media during their impressionable childhood years, described by art historian Douglas Crimp as the ‘Pictures Generation’, Torrez is also among that generation whose art production has been informed by a particular relationship to mass culture.¹⁰ Although the materiality of his painting is dramatically different from the way post-conceptualists used photographic reproduction in structuralist works to interrogate language, Torrez’s reference to the impact of media imagery also concerns the way ideological subjectivity is constructed.

It is not surprising, as the Hollywood industry casts its shadow on society, that artists have felt compelled to comment on the power and impact of this behemoth. Eloy Torrez has confronted the subject of Hollywood in a seemingly appropriate fashion in three well-known celebratory and monumental murals. However, these works are multi-layered, inviting complex readings as well as the messages intimated by their placing in strategic locations. For instance, one of the main tenets of the Chicano Movement, the importance of education, is subtly, yet emphatically, conveyed by the position of *Portrait of Hollywood* (2003) on the walls of Hollywood High School. By overstating the voluptuousness of Hollywood legends on a grand scale relative to the rhetoric of multiculturalism, Torrez achieves a potency that belies the subtleties of his explorations of people and their place in the world.¹¹ Dolores del Rio, a super-star of the 1920s and 1930s, and Dorothy Dandridge, best known for being the first African-American actress to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress in 1954, are among the diverse ethnicities of thirteen figures in the compositional arrangement of this work. The romantic portrayal of these protagonists and simultaneous critique of the Hollywood industry in a sweeping image is anti-authoritarian and defiant. Moreover, by collapsing different eras into one concentrated experience, this mural is as much a statement on *time*. Apart from the presentation of simple historic facts and its subversive force as it points to what the industry has suppressed, the unexpected relationships between the dramatic figures of Torrez’s murals make them ‘transitional objects’. As well as an homage to these actors’ contributions in a protracted resistance to racial prejudice, this mural also hints towards the underlying erroneousness of perceptions of unity and stability.

Even though on face value Torrez’s murals are celebratory, they also have flexibility in their psychological levels of meaning. One way this occurs is the method of orientation of the subject in space. *Legends of Hollywood* (1983), for instance, despite its cinematic subject, exploits the Pop Art aesthetic in its stylized graphic arrangement of iconic characters and the flatness of space in which they are situated.¹³ Produced while still in the formative years of his career, Torrez was not simply imitating an existing stylistic model in this work but was drawn to Pop Art in his search for a way of presenting a certain complexity in figurative representation in popular culture. By 1985, Torrez pushed this aesthetic into the surreal scale of the seventy-two feet high, mannerist pose of Anthony Quinn in *The Pope of Broadway* (1985, restored 2016). Similar to the way René Magritte evokes a questioning of reality in his Surrealist works, its distorted perspective indicates that film is a symbolic medium. The powerfully seductive vision of *The Pope of Broadway* shows the ambiguous character of the fluid medium of film, its reality is also the stuff of a fantasy space. In her reassessment of contemporary American art history, Sandra Zalman amplifies the significance of the medium of film and its links to the fundamental concepts of Surrealism.¹⁴ ‘Why Film’ is the crucial question art historian Dawn Ades poses in her essay on Salvador Dalí.¹⁵ The answer, Zalman states, is that, “like photography, film holds a position intermediary between the facts of the world and the possibility for a play on these facts.” In taking the symbolic form of media culture as his subject, Eloy Torrez, in effect, embarked upon the complexity of the constructions of understanding of the simulacra, that which is at the crux of Surrealism.¹⁶



The Pope of Broadway, 1985



Marlboro Country, 1980s, Sunset Boulevard¹²
Photo: Alastair Mc Kay

Finding, filling, fixing, the urban spaces

By the late 1990s, Chicano muralism had evolved in disparate directions but, despite its significant importance in the context of public art (and the advances of site-oriented practices), its vital distinction was still mostly neglected by the mainstream art world. Torrez was not deterred; he worked on the interior mural for the Metropolitan Water District Building, *Water, Essence of Life* (1998). His educational background, interest in art history and other varied cultural influences, all infused Torrez's energies and belief in his approach to making overt references in his art. Typically, public art works such as this involved mandates for the commissions but Torrez was not swayed, he was determined as ever to incorporate his own interpretive readings. The subject of this work, a history of the water industry of the West Coast, is presented in a way that emphasises a central theme of Torrez's art, the communicative nature and relationships between people across time. The lush, romanticized imagery of this work belies its serious meanings; its complex composition is used to particular effect allowing multiple messages to emerge. The elements of this mural reflect Diego Rivera's model that celebrates the land of America's indigenous people, the triumphs of industry, the glamour of a positive future.



Water, Essence of Life, Mural for the Metropolitan Water District, 1998

But this is a strange manipulation of elements. Industry and the commercial center of Los Angeles are sliced into an unrealistic idyll where swans and the eagle co-exist. The celebration is tainted with an air of questioning of what is the fate of the collection of people? Is this authoritarianism in disguise?



Laborer's Union Local 300 commission, 2013

Similarly, there is ambivalence in Torrez's double portrait of construction workers titled, Local 300 (2013). In a diptych form, the works celebrate the people whose working lives are devoted to building the infrastructure and iconic architecture of Los Angeles. These paintings are triumphant in their acknowledgment of those men who do 'the grunt work' in sustaining the bedrock of the city, and their contribution to the community of Los Angeles. The message in these paintings is made clear by the classic formality of composition and the pose of the subjects, in a type of staging that might be used in honoring a city dignitary. But the formal composition and static pose reveal little of their biographical identity. Although incongruous with such formality, the work clothes the men are wearing hold significant importance in the pictorial arrangement that includes views of the buildings these men have worked on. Consequently, these images correspond to a symbolic tribute to their work and to a collective identity of the ubiquitous city construction workers. From within this symbolic arrangement, almost as if it is opaque, the subjects address us directly and we must return this gaze straight into the face of these men. It is in this focus, not generalised but very specific observation, that their expression is wide open for all to search to find what is there.

One aspect that emerges across the range of Torrez's murals, from the earliest to his most recent, is the role of photography as his source of reference. Although it is only one of the ways that Torrez gathers material for his art, as his work has developed, the way that photography has been incorporated into the medium of his painting has also evolved. These developments in the nature of the interaction between the protagonists of his paintings and the role of the photographic image culminated in two exhibitions, *Flashback to Now* (2012), and *Campos and Canals, the Maze* (2014), in which Torrez linked certain works with the photography of Juliane Backmann.¹⁷ The dialogue between their discrete art forms and their different types of imagery (which at times is juxtaposed as one composite picture) converge as a single statement, bringing together the theatrical dimension of Torrez's painting with the conceptual focus on space and time of Backmann's photography. In such works, this relationship of drawing and painting with photography, the effect of a simultaneous coherence and fragmentation, generates

a dynamic between Torrez's subjective and fantastical way of interpreting the world with Backmann's liberating, analytical photographic observations. A metonymic connection between the two forms creates an unsettling *frisson* that dissolves the iconic status of Torrez's subjects within the objective vision of certain locations. It suggests a future direction for Torrez's painting that takes his focus on the figurative presence within a narrative subjectivity towards a melding of enigmatic emotional concerns and an objective reading of social situations and places. In *The Steps We Take*, (one of the series of four panels produced for the El Monte Station of the Los Angeles Metro, 2012), for instance, momentary encounters of commuters occur within a dominant vacant, urban space, which is transmuted into the conceptual, discursive 'site' of the city.¹⁸



The Steps We Take, 2012

Part Three – Voyeur of Life

The Land of Enchantment and Surrealism

The varied commissioned public-art projects that range over diverse subjects — stars of cinema, city workers, cultural icons — are inadvertently linked to the main body of Torrez's oeuvre by virtue of his philosophical approach across all branches of his work, which constitutes the search into the meaning of humanity. A key aspect of this understanding that is inherent in the varied subjects of his more private paintings is the hermeneutical nature of human existence, specifically in the intersections of relationships. Following philosopher Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the spectrum of the human subject and the power of language (in different contexts) to reveal and to conceal the truth of who we are and how we live, art is the interpretive tool through which Torrez explores human experience, how people relate to one another and to the world. One deliberate strategy of this aim is the particular way Torrez uses narrative in his paintings. Crucially, the ambiguity of his narrative functions to render the nature of the human subject as equivocal, fallible, and mysterious, but also as potentially powerful and creative. Torrez scrutinizes the ways human vulnerabilities co-exist with human capability, power and possibility. A common undercurrent that runs through his art is the mediation between the solitariness of the individual and communal social ambitions for community and connection.

In his exploration of people within a web of relationships, situations and environments, Torrez's desire to create narrative drew him toward the aesthetics of Surrealism. It was a natural interest for Torrez in the early phases of his career to gravitate to Surrealism for its complex weaving of philosophy, mythology, allusions and disjointed propositions, such as the shock or discomfort in the art of Salvador Dalí. Even though their significance in modern art became overshadowed, renown works by European Surrealists: René Magritte, Giorgio de Chirico and Dalí, undoubtedly formed a large influence in his early work. Torrez could relate Surrealism's qualities of the irrational, its questioning of the psyche, or its transforming of everyday encounters into dreamlike events, to his own explorations of the mystery of life itself. Torrez would be attracted to modes of figuration in Surrealist painting for a range of reasons, particularly its fluidity, links to popular culture, and its ability to rejuvenate and remain contemporary. However, various other influences also converged into this process of finding his inspiration that involve his own chronology and cultural beliefs as a native of the American Southwest with its complexities of inherited psychology of its people and of the land. Mexican Surrealism, magic realism and the metaphysical power of the landscapes of the Southwest (as it had infused the spirituality of Georgia O'Keefe's art) would also have impacted exponentially upon Torrez's imagination. The timeless features of earth, air, fire and water of New Mexico (that also emanated as part of European Renaissance art), and the heightened awareness of life's connectedness or hidden meanings also became incorporated into Torrez's work.

In the paintings of the 1990s, we find all these influences combined in a mosaic of stirring elements, such as the symbolic, iconic chess pieces and floating clocks (with no hands) reminiscent of Salvador Dalí, and the distortions of scale of Magritte; or in incongruous combinations of protagonists whose bodies are posed in classic religious style while surrounded by creatures who look back to a Mesozoic era, but with comic-book melodrama, all set precariously within specious landscapes. *The Place Time Forgot* (1993), is one such work, its triptych format providing a window into a world of irrational illusions, suggestive of the duration of time, past and future. Although strongly identified as an altarpiece format (since the Middle Ages), triptychs have also been used outside of that context, one most famous work being *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510) by Hieronymus Bosch, an artist Torrez is fascinated by.



The Place Time Forgot, 1993

Through his career, Torrez has explored compositional techniques in a variety of ways. In many works he has combined flatness, shallow depth, Renaissance illusionism and single point perspective in a spatial conglomeration used to effect a meta-physical irrationality. Although designed as a co-ordinated whole in a single work, his strategy of amorphous pictorial space serves as a method of articulating, by exaggerated treatment, the incongruous intelligibility of visionary language that evokes deep inner questions about religion, existence and time. In this period of his career, this strategy of combining fantastic landscapes, allegorical symbolism of Renaissance-styled figures with detailed furling drapery, Pop imagery, and contemporary vernacular is wilfully romantic.

The same compositional traits, weaving of leitmotifs and attention to the figure, have also been carried into autobiographical works. Torrez's self-portrait with his former wife Margaret in *Little House* (1997), which is highly reminiscent of Magritte's painting, *Personal Values*, aggressively disrupts any compositional logic with its distortions of space and scale. Furthermore, seven sets of eyes in this domestic scene amplify the tensions of the moment, which is doubly intruded upon by we, the viewers, who are drawn into this scene in a way that is too close for comfort.



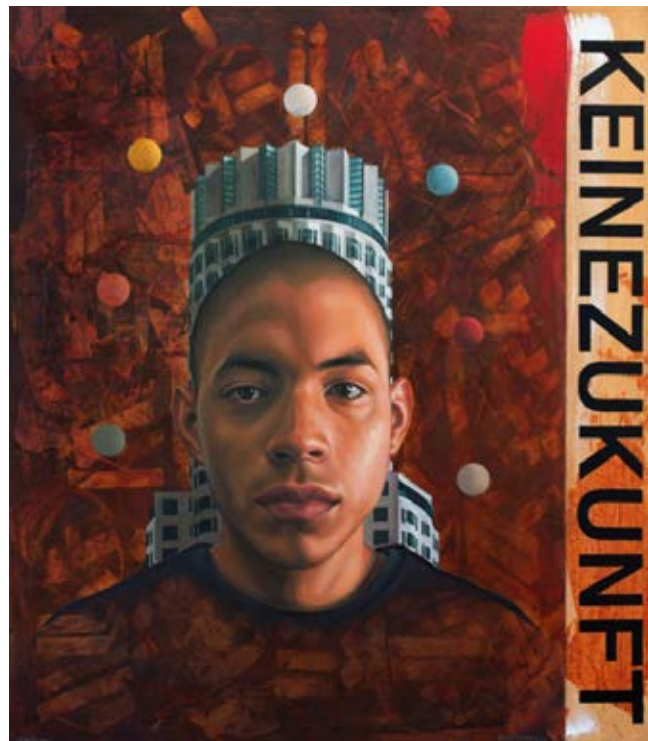
Little House, 1997, Collection of Margaret Guzman

As a subject, the self-portrait proposes a type of introspection, a selfreflective objectification, but in his self-portraits, Torrez has positioned himself looking out as well as looking inward, in conjunctions of dramatic settings with unexpected objects or motifs, and cryptic elements that recur in other works. *Somewhere Between Los Angeles and Albuquerque*, 2012 (see page 55), for instance, exposes Torrez's love of the theatrical. Positioned symmetrically in the foreground of an expansive desert landscape, Torrez lurches towards us while his wife Julianne casts us a backward glance. The composition pulls the viewer back and forth between the seemingly endless desert space and the exaggeratedly squeezed perspective of a towering concrete building representing urban existence. Orchestrated by innuendo, the scenario refers to aspects of Eloy's life, his childhood in New Mexico, the architecture of his second studio (on North Spring Street), his consciousness divided between two worlds, while the video-still on a lap-top and a pair of sound-amplifiers refer to Torrez's other creative activity as a musician. Three central figures, signifying wealth and status of the corporate world, suggest the artist's interactions with such agencies in the course of his city experiences, in the game of life. This powerful image evokes questions about who these people are, what are their intentions? What are the rules? Furthermore, this uncertainty has been vocalised with these literal references finding expression in the words of one of Eloy's songs in which he declares, "I'm speaking to you from inside the box".¹⁹

This work is suggestive of the competing forces of the natural world versus the rigid conformity of a social façade, particularly as Eloy's alter ego of the performer is masquerading behind the cultivated cynicism of a dandy ready to disrupt the rules. Intimating the iconic white-faced Pierrot (whose conception has taken on many complex meanings in multiple artistic movements since its seventeenth-century Italian origin), the mythic, soulfully sincere, naive clown is disturbing to authority, including in the realm of music. As David Bowie expressed, "I'm Pierrot. I'm Everyman".²⁰ This work suggests the flux of life's events, it confronts what is not hidden and what is still hidden. The unresolved questions suggested by the scene correspond to the existentialist theme in Torrez's art.

Portraits and multiple flux

In contrast to the complex compositions of groups of people, the many individual portraits, which feature personal friends, famous artists and actors, and everyday people of the streets, form a separate genre within Torrez's oeuvre with their compelling focus on subtle nuances of physiognomy in highly formal compositions. Frequently, the subject is presented straight on or slightly elevated flanked by theatrical surroundings or with attire that imparts a slightly regal air. In others, Torrez has focused on the head only, sometimes positioned at a sideways view, but mostly, the face charged with expectation and emotion meets our gaze directly. These subjects address the viewer evincing a certain recognition, as with the three musicians in *Norteños* (2014), who evoke memories of social, musical festivities among Mexican American and Latino communities.



Keine Zukunft, 2009, Collection of Rigo Jimenez

individual portraits. As a genre, they present more than a specific view of the world. Their intimate scale and focused cropping of the subject are a means of constructing more than just observations of people, rather, they are a route to Torrez's questioning of how we attribute certain meanings and how the emotional power of the community endows certain regard upon people. In these works, Torrez questions how these images might catalyse our own self-identification. Whether their gaze is directed at the viewer or elsewhere, we are left wondering with whom they are engaging? These detailed

These portraits are less enigmatic than his other works. For Eloy, the significance of the *mariachis* lies not only in their value as a cultural symbol, but in the way they connect to his childhood memories of his own father's enjoyment in singing *ranchera* music with its lyrics about love stories and romance.²¹ These family moments sparked the basis of Eloy's involvement with music and for him, the three *norteños'* portraits represent the root of his connection with music and the freedom that the arts provide; their image is temporal. Torrez has used extremely considered colouring and hues that accentuate a delicate balance between their poise and proud demeanour, but also their sensitivities. The boundaries of the image intensify the essence of these sensitivities. Torrez says, "these portraits also capture a sense of vulnerability or of struggle, and perhaps of victim".

Spiritual, cultural, historical, social and personal meanings are inherent in a broad range of Torrez's

observations of people living in Torrez's own city, Los Angeles, and people in other countries depict expressions of individual experience while they emit a universal humanity. It is Torrez's aim to break through statically conceived formations of cultural identity. Rather, he seeks for the sense of the indeterminate multitude of experiences that amalgamate, as he puts it, "in the collective soul".



Floating Heads, 2016

Torrez has developed this idea in a recent ongoing series of paintings, in which an even more exaggerated margin of cropping isolates the face. This is a way that Torrez makes the manner of representation integral to the experience of the closeness of others. Influenced by works by artist Christian Boltanski, which involve black and white, close-up photographs of faces that have been grouped to form the whole concept in one work, Torrez was inspired to focus on this aspect in a similar way. Not only are the themes of existential consciousness (of memory, death and childhood) in Boltanski's works coincident with Torrez's explorations, but also Torrez has explored his strategy of building complexity into an installation by accentuating the minimalist qualities of its components. Void of color and contextual reference, Torrez's multiple, refined, black and white oil paintings that penetrate the inward depth of sociological, psychological and emotional experience are also designed to be grouped in an installation. This is a progressive development from Torrez's earlier multiple representations within one work, it is a provocative step for Torrez in his approach to the subject of contemporary society and the complexity of the urban crowd. The multiplicity in this project is also ambiguous and, as in many of Torrez's works, offers variable significations. With no indication of the relations in their compartmented space, void of movement, the individuals might signify individual confinement, perhaps a lack of freedom of movement or lack of connection. This is the pessimistic view; on the other hand, hanging together in an installation-form coheres their iconic dignity and their aura evoking an optimistic significance for the future.

Theatre and 'The Truth'

The profound experience of historical (and ongoing) migration that is embodied within Mexican American collective consciousness across generations inevitably emerges as a subject in Torrez's art, as in *Migration* (2000-2005). The metaphorical complexities in this work, however, present more than a simple representation of the struggles or the triumphs of moving from one place to another, they also express Torrez's philosophical questioning of people's subjectivity in American society and globally. The tension in this work is between the notion of autonomous selfhood and alterity. Situated within a fictional scene, the demeanor of the commanding figure of a young woman positioned astride a white horse is suggestive of promise and certainty. White horses have a special mythological significance in many cultures around the world, they are often associated with warrior-heroes, fertility, or as possessing exceptional properties, transcending the normal world by having wings, mythologised as divinatory, a prophesy or warning of danger, or as having power over negative forces. Other interpretations include a theological concept of this distinctive symbol as representing the ultimate destiny of humanity or the end of time.

In this painting, the dreamlike scene eerily parallels the all too real, ongoing condition of uncertainty of experiences of transnational spaces and the corresponding processes of the creation of belonging in nation-state contexts. Aspirations towards new freedoms are overshadowed by a dark cloud threatening loss of any certainty. Instead, the menacing atmosphere suggests potential limitations and (new) inequalities in an ongoing quest for belonging and constructing a binding identity. The fragility of personal (as well as national, racial, and cultural) wellbeing is exaggerated by the vertiginous motion of flying sea-birds, detritus floating on the ocean and the ghostly presence of an abandoned vessel. This procession of the spirited young woman, with parents and children, is on a path leading to an unknown destination.



Migration, 2000 – 2005

The subject of perilous places is one of the recurring images that Torrez incorporates into his pictorial discourse that links fantasy, dream and the unconscious with ordinary material, everyday human values. The figures and their identity as individuals in Torrez's compositions engage the viewer so closely that their surroundings might almost become a subordinate subject. But the sense of these figures' presence within certain environments or situations is a significant aspect of Torrez's motive and reasons for the works. Besides specialising in observations of people he encounters, including personal friends, musicians, artists, as well as various strangers, his interest in travelling has expanded the range of social milieus from his local Los Angeles to include scenes inspired by a recent residency in Venice, Italy. These two places could not be more opposite. It could be assumed that these recent works would be less romantic in their manner as his art becomes more directed towards making concrete the observations of people's relationships. Or, it might also be supposed that Venice would prompt works on history and decay. But the fantastic and Surrealist specter of Venice inevitably emerges, especially in the painting, *Palazzo alla Deriva* (2014), in which Torrez has stripped back his existential expression. The space of the painting itself is a place that holds our thoughts, the sense of the real as illusion reflects Torrez's search for understanding his and our relation to the world. When Torrez shifted his focus to this new location and cultures different to his own, his studies of people in the city's community, young people, workers, elegant ladies, and commuters, in their every-day situations, again confront human interiority. We can discern aspects of communality and isolation (in the environment), vulnerability, relationships in transition, our own and their existence in time.



Palazzo alla Deriva, 2014

As Torrez's art has evolved, he has developed his dialogue about existential issues in new ways. Whereas earlier representations of the body, sometimes in fantastical settings or suggestive of religious imagery, were imbued with his personal symbolic meanings in a certain kind of world, his more recent figurations are presented in various contemporary contexts in the register of daily life. They appear to be more direct, 'truthful' accounts that render seemingly straightforward versions of individual and social experiences. However, these observations, that reveal aspects of peoples' spirit through specific small details, do not represent pure objectification. Instant readings will offer only an introduction to the complexity of the image, which also signifies what is absent, such as the complex dimensions of abstract concepts of sovereignty and race. Torrez continues to explore the unexplainable depths of people, such as in multiplicities of identity, family relationships, childhood and memory.

Even though his working technique in painting and drawing has continued in a ritualistic manner, the new directions in his art suggest transpositions between the romantic arrangements of elements of fictional worlds, past eras, and even antiquity, to his highly scrutinized perception of the everyday in the present. Influenced by Renaissance models, Torrez still uses the actual pose of his subjects as a device to communicate meaning, such as in *Hijo, me pones Preocupado*, 2017 (see page 60) that references the type of grouping and interaction of figures in *The School of Athens* by Raphael.²² The three figures in Torrez's small painting are a family group confronting the differences between generations. 'Son, You Worry Me to Death' is the sentiment of the Father who is concerned about the future of his two sons. But the tension between the characters in this domestic scene has other connotations. Although it is not Baroque in style, this picture relates to a group of three philosophers in Raphael's monumental fresco. It is not only Raphael's artistry in orchestrating a great variety of human figures that attracted Eloy to this famous work but that, significantly, they are expressing "mental states by physical actions," in a "polyphony" in the ongoing dialogue of Philosophy.²³ Torrez has set up a variation of part of Raphael's fresco, that is famously understood as an exhortation to philosophy and knowledge. On one level, Torrez's version apprehends the conflicts between generations, but it also intimates other serious questions, and in this contemporary scene the dialogue must ask, "what has happened?" For Torrez, this work represents his concern on the present uncertain political situation in the USA.



'To Be Continued...', 2010 - 2017

Although his dialogue may not appear to be in direct opposition to established traditional views, whether they are: theological concepts (such as the Catholic representation of beliefs by means of the depiction of human bodies), prescriptive Eurocentric flawed democratic ideals, or inflexible personal and social attitudes regarding the status quo, it is important to Eloy that his art is a vital ongoing process of expression that explores a more complex intelligibility. It is a process of taking a 'past' language and transposing it into future values. Torrez has not only incorporated this aim into the language of his art but, in some instances, into his working processes. The subject, philosophical methodology and artistic practice of one such work is summed up in its poignant title, *'To Be Continued...'* (2010 - 2017).

Taking a pictorial paradigm of the panorama that casts a totalizing gaze, *'To Be Continued...'* (comprising four successive panels) has been developed over a period of several years, with Torrez intending to continue adding panels in an ongoing filmic evolution. Its choreographed narrative of moments enacted among a culturally mixed, social gathering juggles the theatrical and the real, harmonious familiarity and the unexpected. Its eloquent message lies in the interactions and tensions between the figures, their secrets disclosed in a pose. Strategically, as in all his art, the message is also in the numerous small details woven into the imagery. Torrez explains, "I am fascinated with how you overlook something you didn't see before, every time you examine an image". The ironies in this depiction of a Los Angeles social occasion are subtle. The scene is composed of disparate elements, apart from the intense vitality of party activities, musicians conveying joyful, romantic energies, and the erotic force in the seductive pose of the closest reveller inviting viewers into the scene, there are also distant features obliquely placed, of dark, looming clouds on the horizon and wolves breaking through into the safety of the enclosed foreground. While this work reflects an optimistic sense of emotional and physical social reality, at the same time it hints at a vulnerability to threatening forces. It is simultaneously a whole scene collectively integrated, yet faceted.

Alongside the ongoing, open-ended works, *'To Be Continued...'*, and the collection of black and white paintings of heads, that will also evolve unpredictably over time, Torrez has applied a variation of this process of adding-to and extending a work indefinitely in another three dimensional formation, *Come As You Are* (2015-2017). In this recent work featuring a child's portrait, Torrez's action of combining the painting within an arrangement of various objects is a strong component of the subject itself that relates to time, memory and social ritual. This new departure of incorporating actual objects into an assemblage was inspired by his experience of encountering *the stuff* that five sisters had accumulated in their parents' attic over many years since childhood. These were: ordinary, intimate objects, sentimental personal treasures, old toys, memorials, souvenirs and other types of paraphernalia. Torrez decided that the massing of this conglomeration, and the memories they arouse, constitutes a mode of language that is a part of the owners' self-identity.

With Torrez's assemblage of the painted child's portrait within a dark, carved picture frame and a variety of objects arrayed around it, we can delve into the metaphorical history of the items with the sense of a living presence of the child. This manoeuvre is suggestive of the Mexican and Mexican American tradition called *fotoescultura*, which, in practices of remembrance or commemorating special events, doubles the indexicality of photography into a tangible sculptural form. These elaborate formations with photographic images of family portraits set into deeply carved relief surrounds are often used in home altars. Art historian Monica Garza has argued that the Mexican aesthetic sensibility of *fotoescultura* relates to the popular Mexican Catholicism

tradition that emphasises the physical presence of spiritual figures, which ‘to the foreign eye’ merges the secular and the sacred.²⁴ In the *fotoescultura* form, the significance of the opaque photographic icon is as much ritualistic as visual. Torrez also attributes a type of ritualistic involvement to the collecting and saving of objects that hold the essence of past events and inheritances, and that may also hold a link to (personal) loss. A combination of meanings becomes infused into the collection that takes on a type of autobiographical role following its owner along a path of time. Childhood items, such as the toy puppets in his assemblage, also emphasise the self that has transitioned to adulthood, and in this flux of change, they may render repressed emotions. The projected memories, ambitions, and social rituals that infuse the spirit of such collected items turns them into a cultural sign.



Come as You Are, 2017

Even though the objects and picture-frame in Torrez’s installation allude to the past, this is a work that probes more than reflective memory and the passing of time based on nostalgia and tradition. Discovering and attaching meaningful value to knickknacks found in *tienditas* is a phenomenon that crosses cultures and generations. This explicit notion influenced Torrez’s observation of this young girl as she was listening to the song ‘Come As You Are’ by one of the most popular alternative-rock groups Nirvana (1987-1994) whose underground music made ‘grunge’ popular and consequently blurred the boundaries of the manifestations of the force of popular culture. The girl in this work is a metonym for the ever shifting attitudes among younger generations. Her vital, joyful energy sug-

gestive of festive party celebrations, and the psychic play, jokes and puzzles woven into this mixed-media presentation comprises a hybridized work that might be affiliated with the plurality of Pop Art propositions. *Come as You Are* is aligned with contemporary art that depicts aspects of the self in transition and ideas of continuity.

Whether in the expansive arrangements of people situated within allegorical narratives of contemporary life with all their complex significations, or conversely, in the focused, individual studies with their context strategically cropped from the viewer’s gaze in a laying bare of physiognomy, Torrez’s artistic devices support his aim to explore a new approach to notions of identity that transcend the familiar boundaries and determination of identification. Indeed, as Stuart Hall has pointed out, cultural identities “belong[s] to the future as much as to the past. [...] like everything else that is historical, they undergo constant transformation.”²⁵ Torrez’s focus on peoples’

individual attributes, that constitutes a major characteristic of his style, paradoxically and ambiguously, could potentially unravel entrenched identifying signifiers of nationality, gender or race. This approach is an extension of the idea of the individual stifled by Rationalism, and the timeless empirical versus metaphysical knowledge.

Eloy Torrez’s particular mode of realism belies the unique, non-conformist way he has asserted his presence as a contemporary artist and contributed to the Chicano Art Movement. In his broad range of paintings and public-art works, and extensive body of drawings, Torrez adeptly takes us into a world where different realities are present and avenues of thought are opened up by his complex combinations of imagery and cumulation of subtle signs. The intense rendering of his portraits not only inscribes the subjects’ personal psychological depths, but, even more, makes them function as a vehicle leading us to understand more broadly the intricacies of various social milieus, or to question the inchoate spaces of our own unconscious. Even when the works hold deeply personal meanings for Torrez, or the experiences or the adventures he depicts do not quite fit our own, we are gradually introduced to a range of complexities, such as ideas of transition, concepts of time, history and transience of human life, and the eschatological questioning of life as we know it. We are left wondering is he suggesting a new way of living or thinking, or a change in the environment, or the reaching of a new level of consciousness.

There are multiple levels of paradox in Torrez’s art, the mood varies from theatrical and fantastical, celebratory, flamboyant and playful, to threatening, foreboding and uncertain. In some of his paintings, the expressive poses and gestures of the women are alluring and evoke a sexual charge, but the evocation of desire may be either pleasurable or disturbing. The exploration of metaphysical concerns, the unpredictable, invisible and enigmatic, are offset against everyday familiarity. His images depict the local, yet aspire to the universal. All these ideas span his oeuvre in differing ways, and the titles bring their own perspective to bear on the works.

As much as Torrez’s art stems from his personal experience as a Chicano, the content of his art also impacts across our protean twenty-first century society. This survey exhibition invites the imaginative viewer to make significant connections to the topography of his imagery and its philosophising subject. As we speculate on the future direction of his art, we are reminded of the title of his large work, ‘*To be continued...*’.

¹ See, Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*, (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 16.

² The Quarai were a Tiguex (Southern Tiwa) Pueblo band of American Indians that originated in present-day New Mexico. Because of Apache hostilities they fled to El Paso in around 1675; later they moved to Isleta del Sur on the Rio Grande. Quarai, also known as Quarai State Monument, is also the name of a historic site that was designated a U.S. National Historic Landmark District. It was declared a National Historic Landmark District in 1962. It includes 13 structures including a pueblo and a mission which is known as Nuestra Señora de La Purísima Concepcion de Cuarac. It stands 40 ft tall and once had walls that were approximately 3 to 6 ft wide. It is included in Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. Retrieved 14.03.16, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quarai>

Retrieved 14.03.16, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiguex_Pueblo

³ Eloy Torrez. All unsourced quotes are the artist’s, from a series of discussions between the author and the artist at his studio, 1990 – 2017.

⁴ ‘The Land of Enchantment’ (‘Tierra del Encanto’) is the nickname, officially adopted in 1999, for the state of New Mexico reflecting its unique scenic beauty and rich history.

⁵ Cold War (1945-1991); Space Race (1957-1975); Vietnam War, U.S. involvement (1962-1973). The Woodstock Music Festival of 1969 has become an icon of the 1960s hippie counterculture (August 15-18, 1969).

⁶ The print atelier and arts center, Self Help Graphics and Art, was founded in 1970 in the heart of East Los Angeles by Sister Karen Boccalero to support emerging Chicana/o and Latina/o artists and promote arts in the community. See; <http://selfhelpgraphics.com/>

⁷ See; <http://www.publicartinla.com/Downtown/Broadway/victor/>

⁸ J. N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*, (Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1996, also, Vintage Books, New York, 1997), p. 296.

⁹ For postcolonial theorist and literary critic, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak’s theory of alterity, see; Spivak, ‘Who Claims Alterity?’, in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani, eds., *Remaking History*, (Seattle Bay Press, 1989), pp. 269-92. (Also presented in a 2014 symposium on ‘Remaking History’ at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia). Transcript retrieved 08.18.17 from; <http://theoria.art-zoo.com/who-claims-alterity-gayatri-chakravorti-spivak/>

¹⁰ In her review of the exhibition catalogue publication for The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 2009, regarding the ‘media-saturated childhoods’ of this particular generation, Margaret Iversen emphasizes the importance of art theoretical propositions of Rosalind Krauss and Douglas Crimp writing in the 1970s and 1980s who emphasized the „psychologized temporality“ of the experience of such artists’ work. Max Benavidez puts forward a similar argument about the impact of mass media imagery and the cinematic sensibility that infuses the art of Chicano artist, Gronk. See respectively; Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, (exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 21 Apr.–2 Aug. 2009).

Margaret Iversen ‘Pictures without Theory’ in *Art Journal*, Vol. 69 (2010), No. 3 (Fall): 128-31.

Douglas Crimp, ‘Pictures’, *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88, and Crimp, ‘The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism’, *October*, no. 15 (Winter 1980): 91-102.

Max Benavidez, Gronk, *A Ver: Revisioning Art History, Volume 1*, (The Chicano Studies Research Center Press, Los Angeles, 2007).

¹¹ Portrait of Hollywood (1983), the Hollywood High School mural (at north Highland Avenue and west Sunset Boulevard), portrays 13 famous entertainers across the entire east wall of the school’s auditorium. From left to right, the characters are Dorothy Dandridge, Dolores del Rio, Brandy Norwood, Selena, Lana Turner, Laurence Fishburne, Cantinflas, Carol Burnett, Cher, Ricky Nelson, Bruce Lee, Rudolph Valentino, and Judy Garland. In 2007, Torrez added a 50-foot (15 m) tall mural of John Ritter, who died four years earlier, on the connecting portion of the building’s north wall. All but four of the entertainers, Cantinflas, Lee, Selena and Valentino, were students at Hollywood High School.

¹² <http://flickrhivemind.net/Tags/california,marmont/Recent>

¹³ Legends of Hollywood (1983), includes portraits (from left to right) of Marilyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart, Fred Astaire, Bette Davis, James Dean, and Clark Gable. The mural was destroyed in the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

¹⁴ Dr. Sandra Zalman, *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture: Dissident Modernism*, (Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, UK and Burlington, VT, USA, 2015), pp. 179-180.

¹⁵ The exhibition, Dalí: Painting and Film, was curated by Dawn Ades, Montse Aguer, Fèlix Fanés, Matthew Gale, and Helen Sainsbury. Curators at LACMA: Ilene Fort, American Art, and Sara Cochran. This exhibition was organized by Tate Modern, London, in collaboration with the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres, Spain, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), (2008).

See, Dawn Ades, ‘Why Film’ in *Dalí & Film*, (Exhibition catalogue) edited by Matthew Gale; special advisors: Dawn Ades, Montse Aguer and Fèlix Fanés.

¹⁶ Dr. Sandra Zalman, *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture: Dissident Modernism*, pp. 179-180.

¹⁷ Juliane Backmann (wife of Eloy Torrez) was born in Muenster, Germany. She studied photography at the Academy of Photo Design in Munich. Her works have been exhibited throughout the United States and Germany.

¹⁸ For discussion on this concept, see; Miwon Kwon, ‘One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity’, in: *October*, 80, Spring, 1997, pp. 85-110.

¹⁹ *Inside the Box*, CD; words and music, vocals and guitar by Eloy Torrez, Bass and keyboards by Pepe Rodriguez. Produced and recorded by Pepe Rodriguez at Vernee77 studios.

²⁰ David Bowie interview with Jean Rook, The Daily Express, 5th. May 1976. Retrieved from; <http://www.bowiegoldenyears.com/articles/760505-dailyexpress.html>

²¹ Norteño (Spanish for northern), is a genre of Mexican music popular in Mexico and the United States. The word ranchera was derived from the word rancho because the songs originated on the ranches and in the countryside of rural Mexico. Rancheras, romantic songs that have been adapted by bands from northern Mexico and the southwestern US, are sometimes called norteños.

²² The School of Athens, representing the subject of Philosophy, was painted between 1509 and 1511 by Italian artist Raphael. It is one of four main frescos that decorate the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican.

²³ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, (Phaidon Press, London, 1953, 2nd. Edn.), p. 94.

²⁴ Monica Garza, ‘Secular Santos’ in *Afterimage*, Vol. 29, No. 6, (May/June 2002), pp. 8-9. See also, Batchen, Geoffrey *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, (Van Gogh Museum, Netherlands, and Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2004) pp. 60-62.

²⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, (Lawrence & Wishart, New York, 1990), p. 225.



Selfportrait in Surreal Landscape 1976 *Acrylic on Canvas* 37" x 48" Collection of the artist



Bridge 1996 *Oil on Canvas* 66.5" x 115" Collection of Doug Martinez



Meat 2010 *Oil on Panel 48" x 48"* Collection of the artist



Abandoned 2010 *Oil on Canvas 18" x 36"* Collection of the artist



Mandolin Player 2010 *Oil on Canvas* 21.5"x 25.5" Collection of the artist



La Abuela Manuela Con su Nieta Maria Estela 2010 *Oil on Canvas* 37.5"x 44.5"
Collection of Ricardo Muñoz



L.A. Nueva Chicana 2004 *Oil on Canvas* 60" x 60" Collection of Doug Martinez



Rey de la Risa 1999 *Oil on Canvas* 20" x 16" Collection of Cheech Marin



Diane Gamboa 2000 *Oil on Canvas* 23"x 18" Collection of Cheech Marin



MUT 1994 *Oil on Canvas* 12.5" x 33" Collection of the artist



Momentum 2005 *Oil on Canvas* 37" x 45" Collection of Jacob Rael



Convergence 2005 *Oil on Canvas* 37" x 44.5" Collection of AltaMed



Barbone 2014 *Colour Pencil on Paper* 11" x 14" Collection of the artist



La Principessa 2013 *Collaboration with Juliane Backmann C-print and Colour Pencil on Paper* 22.75" x 11"
Collection of Domingo Rodriguez



Palazzo alla Deriva 2014 *Oil on Canvas* 40" x 30" Collection of the artist



Girl with the Headphones 2014 *Oil on Panel* 14" x 11" Collection of the artist



Expansion-Aliso and Spring 2015 *Collaboration with Juliane Backmann*
Oil on Canvas and Lambda print 28.5" x 80" Collection of Eloy Torrez and Juliane Backmann



Nimble Fingers | Güero | Chingo 2014 *Oil on Panel 16" x 20"* Collection of the artist





Two for Me One for You 2010 *Oil on Canvas* 15" x 19" Collection of Juliane Backmann



Somewhere between Los Angeles and Albuquerque 2012 *Oil on Canvas* 5 Panels 51"x 65"
Collection of the artist



The Man Who Loved Too Much But Not Enough 2010 – 2017 *Oil on Canvas* 37" x 44.5"
Collection of the artist



She Said He Said 2011 *Oil on Canvas* 2 Panels 36" x 48" Collection of the artist



Migration 2000 – 2005 Oil on Canvas 4 Panels 33.25" x 150.25" Collection of the artist



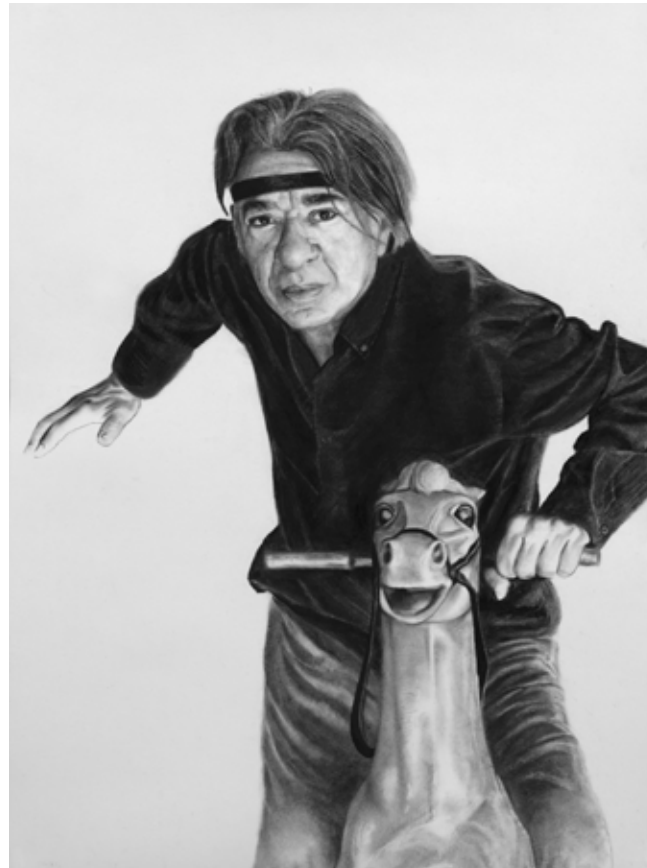
Hijo, Me Pones Preocupado 2017 *Oil on Metal* 12"x 23.75" Collection of the artist



Come as You Are 2017 *Oil on Canvas* 3 Panels *mixed media* 66"x 81.5" Collection of the artist



To Be Continued 2010 – 2017 *Oil on Canvas 4 Panels 64" x 306"* Collection of the artist



I am the Lone Ranger I am Tonto 2017 2 Drawings Charcoal on Paper 30" x 24" each
Collection of Juliane Backmann

Biography

Artist and songwriter Eloy Torrez was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1954. He studied art at the Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles. He has lived and worked in Los Angeles for over thirty years and has created an extensive body of work that includes personal paintings, public art and music compositions.

Torrez' awards include the 2009 C.O.L.A Award, the 2004 California Community Foundation Grant, the 1995 Brody Fellowship for the Humanities and the Hollywood Arts Council "Charlie" Award for Public Art. He is also a recipient of several artist residencies and has conducted art workshops for all ages at Self Help Graphics & Art, the Covenant House in Hollywood, the Boys & Girls Club of Hollywood and the HeArt Project / Central High School Drawing & Painting Workshops as well as other entities and schools in Southern California.



Eloy Torrez in his studio in Downtown Los Angeles

Acknowledgements

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