

# Shades of Us

Portraits by Eloy Torrez



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Guest curated by Jimmy Centeno

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# Foreword

The history of portraiture is centuries old, meant to memorialize important people or those rich enough to commission portraits of themselves and their families. But historically when artists had no commissions, they turned to their own friends and families. Even after the invention of the camera and its popularization, artists still choose to paint portraits in order to document lives that were meant to be remembered by someone, at least the artist. The simplicity of the composition allows artists to focus on details that reflect the subject’s personality and create character.

In 2018, Eloy Torrez was inspired by an exhibition that he saw at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. *David Hockney: 82 Portraits and 1 Still-life* focused on individuals close to the artist – family, employees, friends – who each sat for the artist for a period of several days. The paintings are all simple seated portraits, traditional poses without the theatrical props that often tell personal stories, with equally simple backgrounds that vary only in their shades of blue and green, separated by a line that sharply splits the canvas. Like Hockney, Torrez focuses on the individual portrait, but without the ritual of sitting for the artist, which allows for a greater degree of interpretation and imagination. Torrez similarly keeps his backgrounds simple, but sometimes adds paintings on the wall, his father’s boots on the floor or a fishing pole, with a variety of designs and colors for the floor and wall. Everyone is seated, but on different chairs and benches.

Like the different shades of skin color from black to white, the shades of each portrait (including two in black and white) become important artistic tools used by Torrez to display strong, individual personalities. There are stark differences in the gaze, posture, and mood of each subject, from the pensive Cástulo de la Rocha to the mysterious Alicia Velasquez, the smiling Beau Buck, the determined Betty Avila, and the sideways glance of Rigo Jimenez that reveals his keen dealer’s eye. The artist’s wife, Juliane Backmann, is shown seated with one knee to her chest, in a gesture of casual intimacy. Although Torrez knows his subjects well, even if not personally, this is where he differs from Hockney. *Shades of Us* is meant to celebrate our differences, our individuality, while also remembering what we all have in common.

Torrez has mastered the genre of portraiture, including self-portraits, largely because he succeeds at capturing the spirit of his subjects; he understands them, and connects with them in a symbiotic way. If there is any question, one needs only to look at the artist’s self-portrait in the exhibition, with his intense, direct glare looking out to the viewer with confidence, defiance, and a desire to connect.

Susana Smith Bautista, Ph.D.  
*Director and Chief Curator, AltaMed Health Services*

For the Muckenthaler Center, with a mission to “enrich the human spirit through the arts”, Shades of Us comes along at a fascinating and formative moment. Eloy Torrez uses this collection to show us the raw and honest faces around him at a time when it has never been more important to see “realism.” Artists for time immemorial have used their talents (and their “isms”) to show us their interpretation, their vision of truth. We now live in a culture where those we turn to for truth unvarnished have usurped the artist’s tools of perspective. They have adopted the notion that truth is shaped by preconceptions, rather than having their message shaped by truth.

We needn’t identify the culprits by name or by group. We simply must resolve to remain aware of their affectation and vigilant against their pressures. There is no other choice – unless you are Eloy Torrez.

Eloy turns that paradigm on its head by choosing this moment in history to create, in photo-realistic terms, the people of our community. Among his subjects are self-made businessmen and women, noted artists, city-wide political figures, and others close to the artist. Individually they are journeys into the soul of the various subjects. Collectively they represent a mosaic of the artist’s social community.

They are portraits in a world of avatars.  
They are truthful in a post-truth culture.  
They are individual in a world that tries to label us by group.

And saying all of that shortchanges the artist by describing his work only in the temporary terms. These are portraits of the people of our times. And history should record them no differently than the portrait of Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco di Bartolommeo, that Da Vinci painted, “Girl with a Pearl Earring” by Johannes Vermeer, or Kehinde Wiley’s Obama.

As we harken back to that mission statement, the one about “enriching the human spirit,” there’s a final point to make. Through this enjoyable and enlightening process, I have gotten to meet more than half of the subjects of these portraits. Those include Cástulo de la Rocha, who spoke to me about the personal connections of a lifetime and how they remain a guiding force in his life. It includes Gil Cedillo who spoke to me with a modesty and a sense of wonder about forces large and small that change lives. They include, most deliciously, a woman who tapped me on the shoulder and asked, “Can you tell me where I am hanging? I think I’d like to see myself.”

Farrell Hirsch,  
*CEO, The Muckenthaler Center*



On behalf of AltaMed Health Services, I am proud of the role we played in organizing and supporting this exhibition, and the work of the great Eloy Torrez. Eloy is a master portrait artist who has always been able to capture the soul and spirit of his subjects, particularly from within the Latino community of Los Angeles. More importantly, Eloy brings those individual portraits together, all different shades, to function as a microcosm of our larger world. The idea that people of different backgrounds, races, and beliefs are entitled to equal representation and treatment is key in the world of community health; Eloy’s work is an important part of the AltaMed Art Collection and absolutely helps us illustrate this vision on AltaMed’s primary care and corporate office walls.

We have spoken often about how art exists in part to document when formally documented history is so selective. In honoring the artists of the AltaMed Art Collection, we have previously emphasized that the artist has something of a duty to document a community’s history when academia or journalism do not; our own exhibitions have put on display subjects ranging from police brutality to protests, from hot dog stands and street vendors to the vibrant colors of East LA. The work does not have to be political in subject, but art itself is political – the artist gives power and significance to their subjects by selecting them, and the choices

made in creating a work are only possible because of bias and perspective. No two artists could paint or write about a single subject in the exact same way.

Portrait artists spend time with their subjects. They study them, develop opinions of them, decide where their significance lies. Eloy Torrez has dedicated his time and attention to relatives, activists, politicians and artists, giving them equal weight and attending to their stories in ways that hold personal significance to him. He doesn’t place emphasis on the roles they are most known for but the details he most strongly associates with them. Though an artist’s role is to document, art cannot be objectively true – we can only relay as much as we understand, and so art is the truth, interpreted.

I thank and celebrate Eloy Torrez for his creative contributions in documenting the Latino community. I also express my gratitude to the Muckenthaler Cultural Center for partnering with us and hosting this exhibition in one of the most beautiful and culturally relevant spaces in Orange County.

Cástulo de la Rocha,  
*President and CEO, AltaMed Health Services*



# Pensar el mundo a través del arte – Thinking the World through Art

For artist Eloy Torrez, the Shades of Us portrait series is like a music album in which each song is different in tone and rhythm, but similar in theme. His artwork steps in and out between figurative, realistic paintings and surreal scenes with elongated, timeless landscapes. His friends, family and acquaintances are his painted subjects, through which he asks difficult questions. Torrez is constantly traveling to the well of wonder as his main source of inspiration.

In this body of work, Torrez negotiates between body gestures, the language of clothing and fashion, and shades of color as a unique combination in the personal language of each of his painted guests. Torrez is guided by his musical background in the rendition of this series. The canvas and his surgical brush strokes are where Torrez builds mystery similar to a sheet of music in the process of becoming a song. His meticulous details in every portrait are the fine-tuning needed in finalizing his artistic quest into human interaction and the meaning of ideas that shape people’s lives. Torrez’s inquiry into the process of thoughts is, what do we think and why?

This series comes in full bloom during the pandemic and the isolation of human contact that came with it. How does Shades of Us tie in with the Black Lives Matter movement, or with the migrant caravans making their way from Central America to the US border? What role does each of his painted guests play in the field of life? Is there a connection or not? This body of work is Torrez’s subjective visual essay in which not only does he expose his imaginary talent, but examines it in the form of an existential search for a sense of place, purpose and meaning. The start of Torrez’s artistic curiosity begins with the magic that glowed from his grandmother’s altar where she would place her favorite grandchild’s drawing, and from his attempt to understand the man

behind his stoic, traditional father. Grandmother’s altar would be for Torrez the kid, the most competitive space in the house.

Is Torrez attempting to say in this series that we are the same because we are different, and if so, how? What role do fashion and clothing play in each portrait? Are they statements that come before a conversation? In Paulina Alvarez’s portrait, Torrez ponders the question of place and identity. Alvarez wears a shirt with an imprint that reads, Angelino New Yorker. Alvarez’s shirt is a reference that takes the viewer beyond a multicultural definition to one that is closer to an inter-cultural interpretation of layered identities that link diverse geographical locations.<sup>1</sup> It is a tres leches way of painting a complex construct of individuality. With a gentle posture and a tender stare, Torrez manages to magnetize her radiance on canvas. Alvarez’s look is neither inferior or superior as it establishes an exchange of presence and agency upon contact with incoming gazes.

In a second rendition, Torrez taps into Daniel Martinez’s arm tattoos wearing a black shirt with NASA written across in large letters. What most caught Torrez’s attention are the large silver Native American rings and bracelets that Martinez wore for the portrait sitting. These become perhaps the most subtle yet powerful objects in his portrait. Many Native American cultures identify the blue hued turquoise as the stone of life. The contrast between a mythical stone and Martinez’s NASA logo shirt represents two oppositional beliefs; NASA as an epiphany of western science and civilizing culture, and Native American mythological beliefs. Is the wearing of the silver rings and bracelets a fashion statement by Martinez, or does it elude the challenge posed by First People’s mythology of nature as a living thing against western objectification of the natural world by means of science? Does western science acknowledge the contributions by non

western sciences?<sup>2</sup> Martinez’s pose is slightly angled to one side of the canvas. His hands slightly resting on his knees reveal pronounced veins very similar to those of working hands. It is said that life maps its traveled roads on the hands and eyes of the individual. In the case of Martinez, his mature gaze is a pause that comes before a reply. With a slight hint of skepticism, Martinez seems to await a visual reply from the observer; a sign of hope perhaps, during challenging times.

The exchange of looks between the visitors and the gaze in each portrait beams across this series. The interchangeable eye-to-eye contact in several of the portraits is strong and striking. Instinctual visual dialogues surround the spectator, the guest, and the visitor. What are the social relations within the context of vision and gaze? Can the act of seeing be hierarchical towards others? In other words, is the gaze an extension of power? Is there a difference between a male and female gaze? For Native American scholar Nancy Marie Mithlo, “Seeing is not only seeing. Seeing is also thinking, processing, comprehending, and remembering.”<sup>3</sup> Torrez combines his personal interpretation of the gaze as one key component in Shades of Us. It is here where Torrez shapes his interior, silent conversation in combination with that of his painted guests to have their eyes speak for themselves. There are no deferred looks, nor do they look away. No look is utopist, nor are they unfriendly. All are fixed in looking back to the viewer. They move in any direction. They follow us around. They cease to look down. Is there such a thing as a neutral gaze? The gaze in Shades of Us is not ambiguous. Instead, what viewers might interpret as ambiguous is the quest to know what they are thinking and why. The portrait gaze links body, fashion, and power together to tell Torrez’s persistent narrative of who we are. The most essential line of visual communication in modern cultures is fashion and clothing, followed by the gaze. As children we learn to read

our parents’ and adults’ eyes to understand the mood; are they happy, upset, or in thought? What would a child’s reading or interpretation be of Torrez’s portraits’ eyes?

How does the history of race evolve amongst a diverse group of people? In the case of Latinx people, where can we find the thickest point of intersection that unites us all? Is it in culture, language, politics, race, class, history, food or ideas? Can it be found in one or two of these categories, or can it be all? Shades of Us captures the diverse complex spectrum of individual identity and expressions found in the American social and cultural fabric. Is our identity conditioned by the dominant western structure of assimilation into the American Dream? For Torrez, being Latinx does not imply a homogeneous group of people. In homegrown, engaged cultural criticism, artist Amalia Mesa-Bains argues, “within the Latino population, there are enormous struggles over identity, over relations of power and the marketing of Latino Identities.”<sup>4</sup> This is precisely why he decides to name his series of portraits, Shades of Us. A Latin@ doctor might not have the same political affiliations as a working class Latin@. What role does skin tone play in the Latin@ culture? Does being light-skinned Latinx translate to upward mobility? Where do we meet the origin of this racialized perception? Can it be found in the 19th century science known as Social Darwinism, or the anthropological categorization of non-white communities, or did it begin centuries before during colonization with the Mestizaje? For Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano, “the idea of race in its modern meaning, does not have a known history before the colonization of America. [...] Social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities in America-Indians, Black and Mestizos, and redefined others.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the categorization of people by color is not natural. Race is the founding element of domination by modernity.

<sup>1</sup> In *homegrown: engaged cultural criticism*, South End Press Collective 2006, p. 81 bell hooks and Amalia Mesa-Bains discuss the origins of the term multicultural as “first introduced into the business world in the US, long before a progressive discourse about diversity had begun in colleges, universities, and other institutions.” For bell hooks multiculturalism came in response to movements for self-determination.

<sup>2</sup> This has been one fundamental question in decolonial discussions. Scholar George Saliba in *Islamic Science and The Making of the European Renaissance*, The MIT Press Cambridge Mass. 2007, pp. 193-232 exposes the expropriation of Islamic science by Europe. One of many examples is: The Fundamental role by Islamic Science in the development of astrological knowledge in Copernican Theory.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Marie Mithlo, *Making History: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts*, University of New Mexico Press 2020, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks and Amalia Mesa-Bains, *homegrown: engaged cultural criticism*, South End Press Collective 2006, p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Anibal Quijano, *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*. Nepantla: Views from South vol. 1/3, Duke University Press 2000, p. 534.

In the portrait of Betty Avila, director of Self Help Graphics, an art cultural center in Los Angeles, California, the backdrop is a stage-like scene. With velvet, reddish long curtains behind Avila, our attention is drawn to the role of art and theater in society. There is mystery in the scene. What lies behind the curtain becomes Torrez’s metaphorical play between what people veil and unveil, what is private and public. The canvas becomes his stage by which his singing is done with brushstrokes. Avila sits between two chipped cement columns with exposed red brick underneath. She wears jeans and a business-like blouse. Her expression reflects commitment, confidence, and assurance of a young emerging Latina woman in a leadership role. Torrez recalls being caught by surprise by Avila’s violet-colored two-tone slippers. He immediately decided to emphasize her individual marker in this rendition of her. This would not be the only object of attention for Torrez. The second attraction for him was Avila’s necklace. It consisted of one solid stone in the middle of her necklace around her buttoned-up blouse. Avila’s necklace is the center of her identity. With no other way to express identity while dressed in western clothing, the stone becomes the symbolic link to her Mesoamerican identity and Latina / Chicana heritage.

The painting of Los Angeles City Councilmember Gil Cedillo at the height of his political career is one of admiration. Councilmember Cedillo is a well-respected leader in the Latino community. An advocate of immigrant rights, Cedillo would play a crucial role in drafting legislation that allows undocumented immigrant citizens in the state of California to acquire a driver license. It would be an uphill battle won in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Torrez met Cedillo in Guadalajara, Mexico in 2019 during a traveling exhibition organized by AltaMed and titled, Building Bridges in Times of Walls: Chicano / Mexican Art from Los Angeles to Mexico.<sup>7</sup> The exchange between an artist and a community political leader would give rise to a new friendship between Torrez and Cedillo. They both have similar backgrounds,

having grown up as teenagers in Barstow, California and even attended the same high school. Cedillo is casually dressed with blue jeans, a blue shirt, and a grey sports coat resting on what seems to be an American Drew Arm Chair. A solid oak wood molding horizontally makes its way across one third of the canvas. Oak is one of the most strong and durable woods. Torrez masterfully captures the beautiful grain in the wood molding similar to the way that he paints veins in many of his portraits’ hands. Could this be Torrez’s subconscious expression of seeing Cedillo as a solid oak tree, with strong convictions for social justice? The admiration for Cedillo and his commitment to the community is visible in this painting. With a slight gesture of a smile, Cedillo is rendered as an inviting and receptive public servant. During the opening reception of this exhibition, Councilmember Cedillo would share his state of suspense. How would he interpret a portrait of himself? He walks into the Muckenthaler’s Cultural Center main gallery. He greets people, spins across the portraits, and meets Torrez standing nearby his image. He would not be disappointed. Cedillo immediately sent a cell phone picture to his sisters; they were all in awe.

One of the most striking images in this exhibition is the portrait of Torrez’s father, Eloy Torrez Sr. The exhibition room for this portrait is designed specifically to emulate the comfortable posture of a relaxed Torrez Sr. sitting on a very comfy, weathered sofa chair. With one hand at ease on one armrest, and the second hand gently holding on to the curvature shape of the sofa’s second armrest, Torrez Sr. is set between a binary hold; holding on and letting go. His father’s hands are soft. They no longer have the protruding veins so relevant in this portrait series. Torrez’s Sr. seems to have lost command of attention, and instead he is attentive and alert. The cowboy boots next to the chair once worn by his father have become the symbolic cue of a retired stoic, Mexican father. Torrez speaks of his father as being a big,

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.kcet.org/shows/h87/clip/gil-cedillo-and-the-fight-to-return-drivers-licenses-to-undocumented-immigrants> (by Pilar Marrero, visited May 1, 2021)  
<sup>7</sup> <https://altamedfoundation.org/building-bridges/> (visited May 1, 2021)

tall, strong man. At least that is how Torrez saw his father as a child. Stoic and traditional, his father is at ease. Torrez Sr.’s chair seems to be on top of what looks like an endless wood raft navigating through an endless elongated twilight landscape with thin and long stratus clouds, stretched above the skyline. Beside the boots, there is one other cue that is magnified in the painting; it is the yellow and black ribbons on Torrez’s Sr. swimming trunks. Is this a coincidence or not that the colors of the ribbon are also the color combination commonly used for precaution in construction sites. Is this the artist’s childhood memory warning of a time of his strict father’s discipline, or is this a caution to pay attention to his old, aged father? The portrait of his father is the softest of images of an aging man at the threshold of an incoming dawn.

Torrez’s art career extends beyond a 35-year span. He is known for his larger-than-life-size building murals and his surreal, dream-like paintings. Born and raised in a small town in New Mexico, Torrez would experience the endless open landscape with bright and colorful sunrises and sunsets. He would transfer this childhood experience into his artwork. His storytelling allegories were forged amongst nature and the exploration of local ruins. As a teenager in Barstow, Torrez would once again be drawn to the open spaces in California’s semi-Mediterranean desert topography. He seems to be followed by nature’s biographies found

Jimmy Centeno is a multimedia artist. He is also a welder by trade, and has taught welding technology at Compton Community College. Most of his work is philosophical in content, influenced by storytellers from the Global South and Mesoamerican mythology. He has coordinated cultural events between communities and universities and for the Association of Philosophers in the U.S (AfyL), and is a founding committee member of Philosophies of Liberation Encuentros (PLE).

Centeno holds a degree in Latin American studies with an emphasis in art and Latin American philosophy from California

in New Mexico and California. There is no doubt that the vast open landscapes play a major role in Torrez’s perception of space. The principal quest for Torrez in Shades of Us is diversity and the function it plays in today’s society, in our landscapes, and even in ourselves.

Recalling a childhood memory, Torrez always wished to be on his abuela’s altar. That is where she would put her favorite grandchild’s drawings. Today with his grandmother’s physical presence no longer here, she guides the hand of the curator to install one of Torrez’s portrait series above the Muckenthaler’s fireplace mantle.

Perhaps the many inquiries presented in Torrez’s exhibition can be manifested as an existential moment of reflection: to know yourself in a new way is to alter the very same act. Pensar el mundo a través del arte (thinking of the world through art) is what most stands out in Shades of Us.

This essay is dedicated in memory of Latinamerican indigenous philosopher Amauta\* Juan Jose Bautista.  
\*Amauta is a Quechua word for wise one.

Jimmy Centeno,  
*Guest Curator*

State University, Los Angeles. He started practicing art in high school when he was first introduced to an industrial metal shop program. He is the founder of the organization Latin American Art Research (LAAR), as an educational tool to promote studies and interest in the contributions of Latin American Art in the United States and Europe. Centeno was born and raised in South Central Los Angeles. He is currently the curator for Casa0101 Theater in Boyle Heights, and is an independent scholar, curator, writer and art consultant based in Los Angeles.

Figurative and portrait painting present fascinating circumstances. After seeing David Hockey’s exhibit at LACMA titled *82 Portraits and 1 Still Life* I wanted to explore my world a little deeper, portray people that I know or am intrigued by as he did in his work. During one of our conversations I shared my plans for this new series with Cástulo de la Rocha. It piqued his interest and he said let’s exhibit this series at AltaMed when you are ready. The working title of the exhibit was “Shades of Brown” focusing on the complexity of the Latino community. As I worked with this initial mindset I kept thinking about growing up in New Mexico. When I was a child in the ‘60s most every one there used the term Hispanic to identify with and I didn’t understand what it really meant. There is an overwhelming Native American presence in New Mexico; about a mile away from my grandparent’s home we used to climb the old mission church walls and play hide n seek in its chambers. Outside you could find

evidence of the native peoples presence. We would look for pottery shards, arrowheads and such. There was a subliminal understanding of self, having intertwining roots from the indigenous people of the Southwest and Europe. That became the metaphor; it meant endless possibilities of how to think of self and tap into all of the components that make us who we are. The theme of the show expanded beyond the initial thought and the title became Shades of Us. Daniel Martinez made a comment, when he came to the studio for his portrait reference photo: “It’s really about you, we are your subjects as you explore something about yourself.”

I would like to thank Cástulo de la Rocha and all the participants who made this project possible.

Eloy Torrez

**Ricardo Muñoz** and I were introduced by a musician friend, Carlos Guitarlos, at an El Grito event on Olvera Street. He is a retired judge and art aficionado and over the years has acquired a collection he is proud of. I painted for him portraits of his family, including his mother-in-law. He and his wife were activists in the Chicano movement and met at one of the campus

programs discussing recruiting people of color into prestigious colleges in California. Whenever he's out on the town he usually wears his son's varsity baseball jacket. Family is most important to him and he is a sports fan, a former runner in high school. The jacket is a metaphor for these attributes.

*Portrait of Ricardo Muñoz, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



Margaret Garcia and I were artists in residence at a Self Help Graphics back in the early eighties. Both of us held workshops with the barrio mobile. Whenever I encounter her

I'm being transported back to that formative time in my life. Her personal style for the photo session preceding the painting was also a flashback; she had an impressive beehive hairdo.

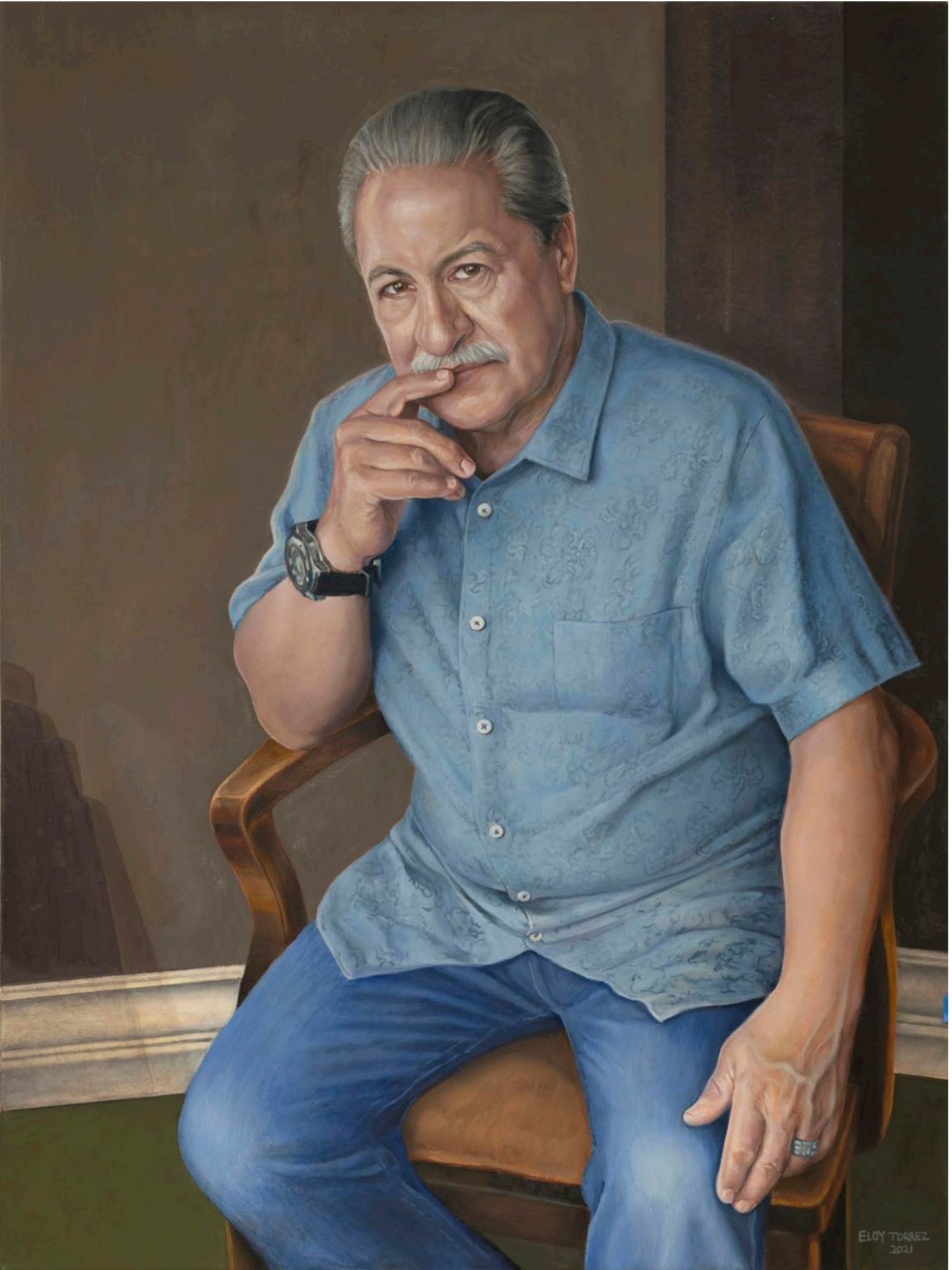
Portrait of Margaret Garcia, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"



**Cástulo de la Rocha** is President and CEO of AltaMed. I chose him because I wanted to include Latino individuals who are contributing substantially to the community and are part of the Chicano rights movement. He has built the extensive art collection at AltaMed. We first met at an art opening downtown, where Marquis Lewis, a.k.a. Retna, introduced

us. Being a big Anthony Quinn fan he was curious about how I created the Pope of Broadway mural at the Victor Clothing Company. He is always eager to gain insight into the artist's thought process and viewpoint. We had enlightening conversations over exquisite bottles of wine from his collection. In my portrait I show him attentively listening.

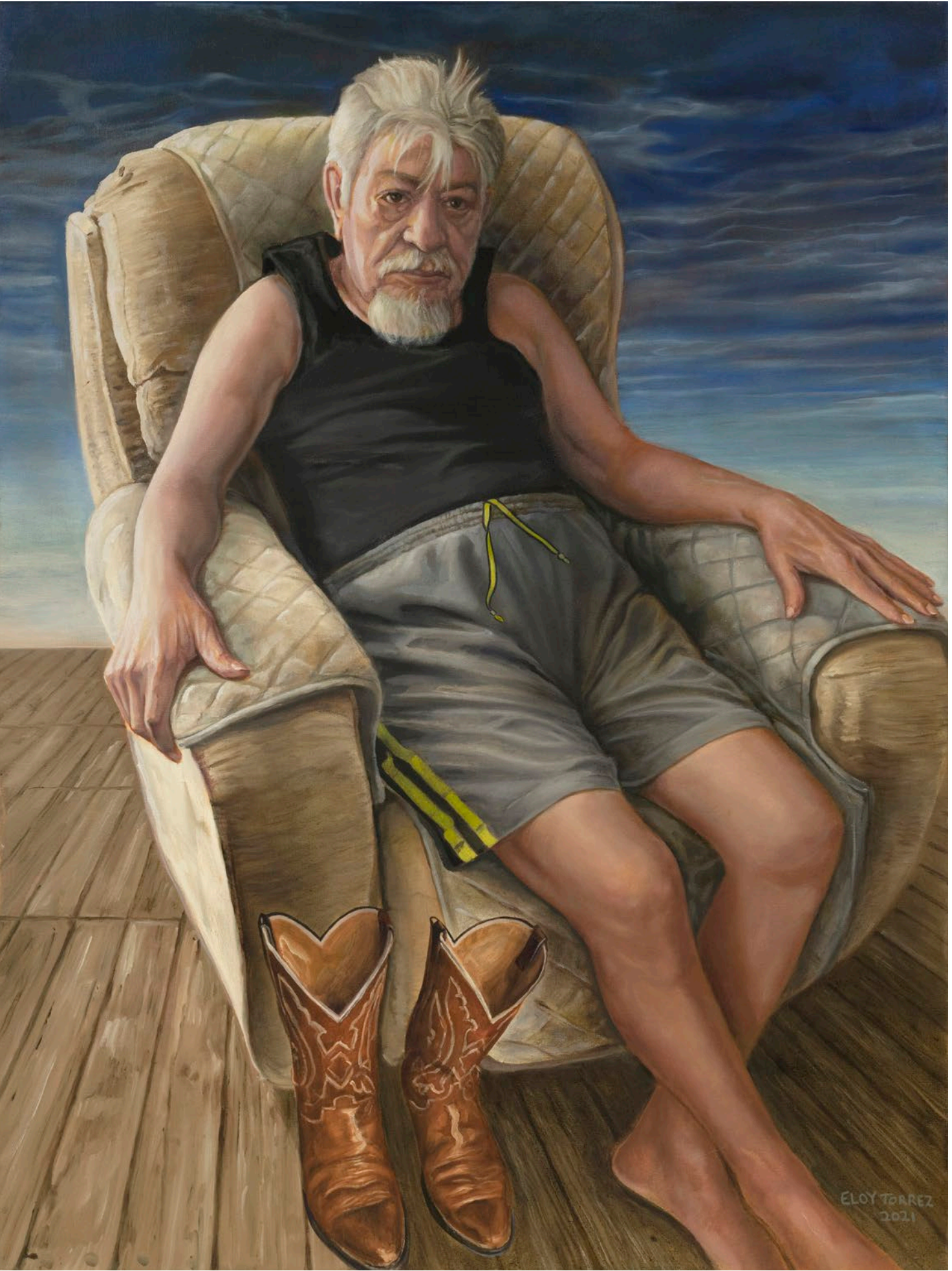
*Portrait of Cástulo de la Rocha, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Eloy Torrez Sr.** is my father. I am the eldest of four sons and named after my dad. He was barely nineteen when I was born and I saw him go through the various stages of life. He quit school in the eighth grade and went to work. When he and my mom started the family he moved us from the tiny rural town of Punta De Agua to the city of Albuquerque. Everyone called him Eloy and me Eloycito. His imposing presence for me as a child made me try to distinguish myself early. I focused on music and

art rather than following his example as a tradesman. When he was thirty-three we moved from New Mexico to Barstow, California for a new job. Nowadays I try to connect with my dad as much as he will allow me to. At this stage in life he is more introvert and less imposing. The cowboy boots are now off and by his side; they symbolize the strength and masculine attitude from his younger days.

*Portrait of Eloy Torrez Sr., 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Dulce Stein** is a single mother of five. She is a community art activist, runs the Neutra Museum in Silverlake and has been committed to exhibiting local artists. At her openings we feel the atmosphere of a family gathering. She has a colorful

presence, is not afraid to show vulnerability and voice her opinions, and most of all she is full of generosity and energy. Her portrait has gone through many changes in aiming to acknowledge all of these qualities.

*Portrait of Dulce Stein, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



Tim Sanchez is a military man. I met him through social media and our shared interest in arts and basketball. We had insightful conversations regarding his involvement in the

military. I wanted to include a Chicano / Latino individual coming from that perspective.

*Portrait of Tim Sanchez, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Alicia Velasquez** is a musician, a punk rock pioneer from East Los Angeles. She is still producing successful records. As part of the Punk Rock generation I played in bands myself and was always aware of her as one of the Chicana

trailblazers. When I ran into her at an opening for Shizu Saldamando I instantly realized that she should be part of the series. When I painted her I asked her to just be herself. I learned a lot more about her at that time.

*Portrait of Alicia Velasquez, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



Lucas Rael is the son of my first cousin and loves to fish. With roots in Mexico and New Mexico he lives in Orange County and represents a new and different generation of the Latino experience. His parents, having made the most of their

own potential, have opened up every opportunity for him. His and my experiences share similar roots but are different as far as environment and generations are concerned.

Portrait of Lucas Rael, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"



**Kerry James Marshall** is an internationally known artist. We both attended Otis Art Institute in the late seventies and early eighties. I did a portrait of him back in 1982 and wanted to do a second one at this stage in his life. In asking him to participate my intention was to experience a time travel

moment, reminiscing and catching up, remembering poignant moments in art school, influential teachers, even that time when we painted a house in South Central Los Angeles together to pay the rent.

*Portrait of Kerry James Marshall Version 1, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Betty Avila** is the executive director at Self Help Graphics. I was impressed with her, as she represents the current generation and new direction of that institution. Remembering my conversations with the late Sister Karen Bocallero, who was

the director while I was an artist in residence there in the early eighties, I became curious about how the two would have related to each other.

*Portrait of Betty Avila, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Yolanda Daniele** is a friend and collector. She is a vibrant member of the art community. She and her husband made an art form of attending events, making every effort to

add their playful creative spirit. I painted her portrait several times over to do her justice.

*Portrait of Yolanda Daniele, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Daniel Joseph Martinez** is a conceptual, multimedia artist provocateur. His work investigates challenging issues about the American social structure. He's a Chicano artist of my generation and we were part of a traveling exhibit in France in the early nineties. At that time conceptual art was a mystery

to me. His work drew me in and got me to examine my own thought process. His strong presence in the portrait demanded me to simplify the background in the painting and also apply that concept to the ones that followed.

*Portrait of Daniel Joseph Martinez, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Paulina Alvarez** was part of coordinating the art exhibit of Charles White's students at the former Otis Art Institute in the MacArthur part area of Los Angeles. In conversation I learned that she was from Oaxaca and had studied and lived in Mexico, New York and Los Angeles. I was intrigued by this

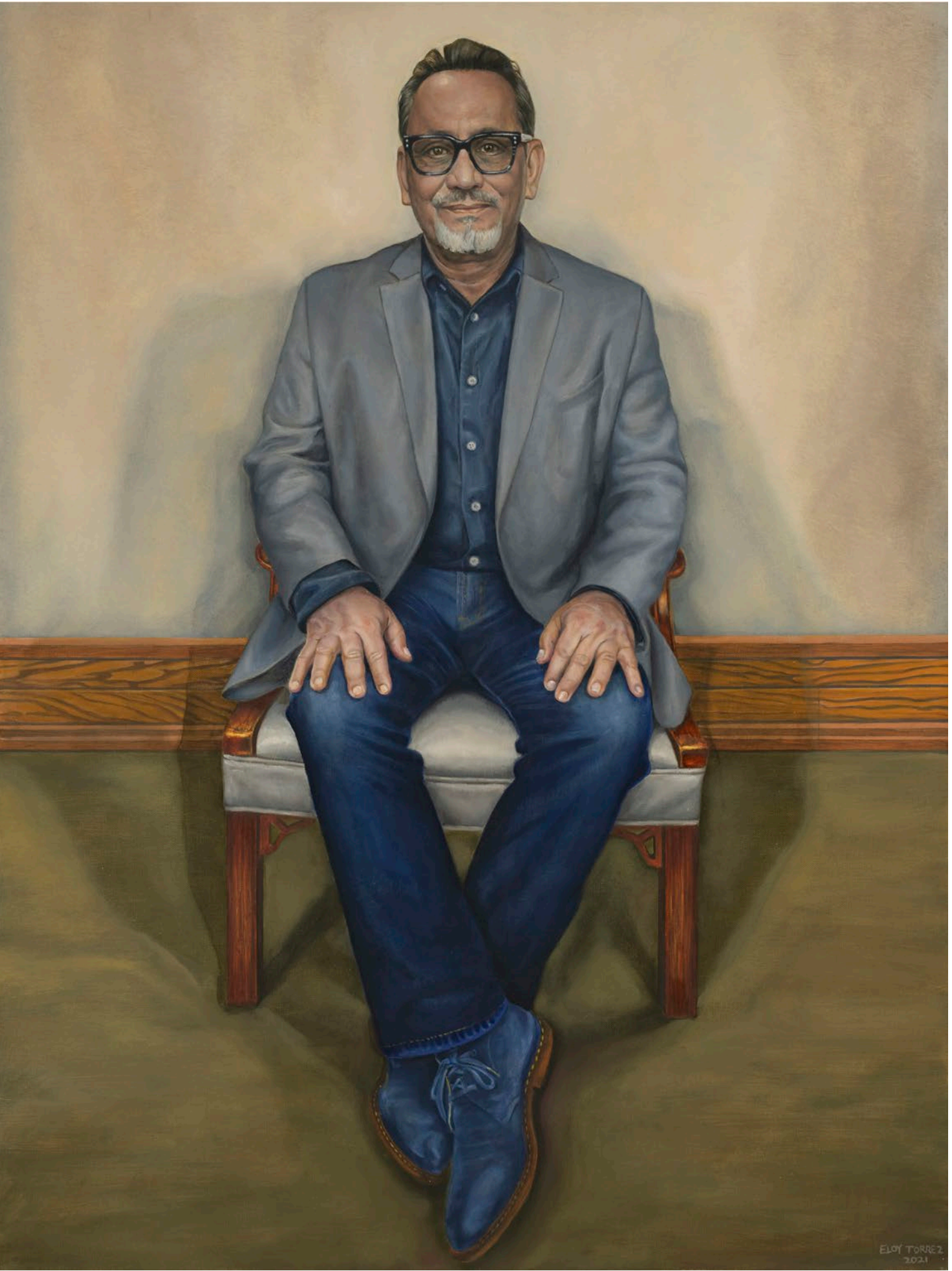
young, up-and-coming woman being a part of an exhibit that celebrated Charles White, one of my instructors when I attended the Institute. Back in the environment of art school she made me think of where I was in my self-awareness when I was her age, and where she would go from here.

*Portrait of Paulina Alvarez, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Gil Cedillo** is a politician and member of the Los Angeles City Council. I met him at an event for Mexican wine makers at Union Station. After realizing we had a Barstow connection (he was born there and I lived there as a teenager) we talked about art, murals and music. I got to know him better during a flight back from an art event in Guadalajara to Los Angeles. Him being a politician represents another intriguing facet of Chicano life.

*Portrait of Gil Cedillo, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



Beau Buck is an entrepreneur and bon vivant with an interest in Chicano art. We met at an art opening and he commissioned me to paint a portrait of his two daughters. Over time we

became good friends and have talked just about anything under the sun. His curious mind takes us from philosophy to science, politics and everything in between.

*Portrait of Beau Buck, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Rigo Jimenez** is a gallerist and collector. For one of his gallery openings he was wearing a plaid blazer (the type one would wear at an expensive prep school), a striped tie and tan slacks. This represented to me a combination of aspects

about him. Once a child TV actor, he is now an ambitious art dealer and also a down-to-earth family man with roots in Mexico. I asked him if I could paint him in that same outfit.

*Portrait of Rigo Jimenez, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**John Miner** is a master silkscreen printer. He has apprenticed with and worked for Richard Duardo. We share a love for art and music and got to know each other better at a Fourth of July party in East Los Angeles. He's an avid collector

and trader of vintage records. I saw photos of him teaching at Pasadena City College in his lab coat and that was the way I wanted to portray him. Under the coat he's wearing his "Music is a Natural High" T-shirt from Detroit and cholo-style bandanas.

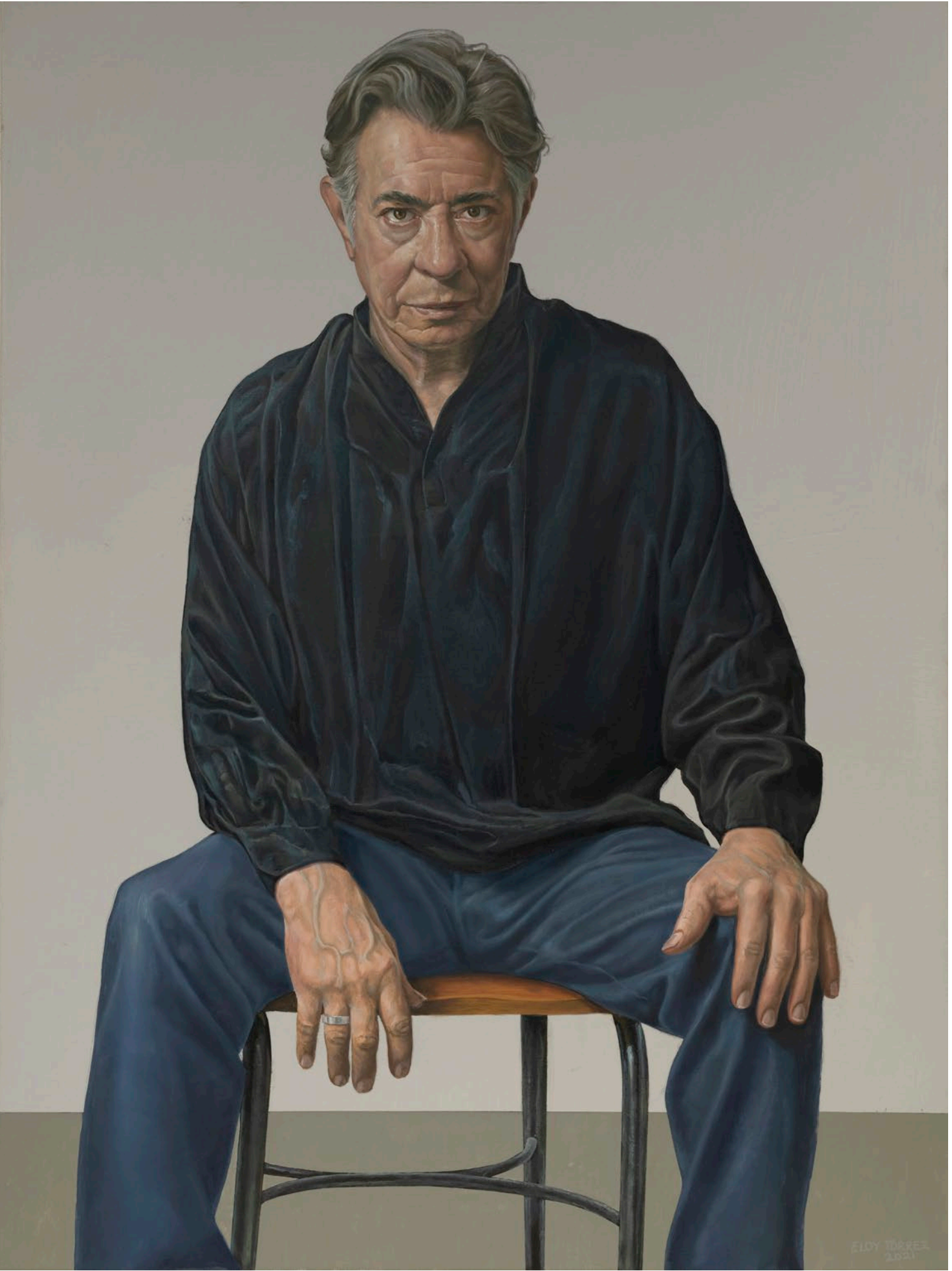
*Portrait of John Miner, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Self portrait** I've done self portraits ever since I started to draw as a teenager. Charles White once said to Kent

Twitchell, whom I was assisting with a mural at Otis Art Institute: "Keep an eye on Eloy, he's going to do a self portrait on that button".

*Self Portrait of Eloy Torrez, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Juliane Backmann** I have painted Juliane many times over the last three decades for all kinds of projects. Our relationship evolved from collaborators and friends to love and marriage much later. We shot a music video together for a song

I had written about being an artist in isolation during the covid lock down. I portrayed her in character from that film, wearing one of her assemblage sculptures.

*Portrait of Juliane Backmann, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*



**Kerry James Marshall** After I finished the first portrait I kept looking at it and felt that I needed to do another, showing him with a different body language and attitude. Besides that I applied apply another color scheme, making a reference with a wink at one of his self-portraits from 1980.

*Portrait of Kerry James Marshall Version 2, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"*





Painter and songwriter Eloy Torrez was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He grew up there and in Barstow, California, where he took his first art classes at the Barstow Community College, then studied art at the Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles. Since 1973 he lives and works in Los Angeles, creating an extensive body of work that includes studio paintings, public art and music compositions. His body of paintings and murals is a manifest of life in Los Angeles and a tribute to its people.

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, the Covenant House in Hollywood, the Boys & Girls Club of Hollywood and the HeArt Project / Central High School Drawing & Painting Workshop.

# Acknowledgements

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