



***Exploring Cultural Identity: Two new solo exhibits open at the Luis De Jesus LA gallery***  
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***Karla Diaz' "Mal de Ojo (Evil Eye)."***

Two new solo exhibitions opened at the Luis De Jesus Los Angeles art gallery this month: Karla Diaz' "Mal de Ojo" and Frank Romero's "California Dreaming." The exhibitions both opened on Sept. 13 and run through Oct.25.

"Mal de Ojo" presents a series of self-portraits that delve into the many facets of Diaz' identity, from familial bonds and cultural heritage to her alter egos, and with them, her fears, hopes and dreams. Employing watercolor on paper and acrylic on canvas, the artist transforms the genre of self-portraiture into a space of storytelling and collective memory — an invitation to see identity as both deeply individual and inherently shared.

Known for her kaleidoscopic storytelling and richly layered compositions that blend Mexican and American vernacular and pop cultural influences, Diaz continues to expand her exploration of the complexities of identity. The exhibition's title, "Mal de Ojo (Evil Eye)", references a cross-cultural superstition of a malicious gaze believed to bring harm or misfortune. Diaz reinterprets this folklore as a need for both self and communal protection. Through surreal, dreamlike imagery and a vibrant color palette, she reflects on the power of vulnerability, introspection and the shared strength of community.

Diaz's choices in color, clothing, objects and backgrounds chronicle a collective unconscious shaped by cultural iconography, humor, superstition, familial traditions, current affairs and other dynamics that shape Latinx experiences.

Diaz lives and works in LA. She received her Master of Fine Arts from the California Institute and her Bachelor of Arts from California State University, Los Angeles. She is a co-founder, alongside Mario Ybarra Jr., of the collective and community artist space Slanguage in Wilmington, CA.

of Hollywood to the vast openness of the Sonoran Desert. Through abstracted nightscapes illuminated by Romero's signature expressionist color palette, Romero's new work introduces playful flying saucers, a departure from his classic LA freeway motifs. The UFOs, soaring from Hollywood to Roswell, are nostalgic and futuristic, nodding to

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vintage Hollywood props and holding a cheeky resemblance to sombreros. They hold space for humor, social critique and the complex emotional layers of collective memory and Chicanx experience.

“In the 50s, there was a phenomenon about flying saucers in the news,” Romero said. “I look back at that era with humor because I think it's kind of funny. It harkens back to a time in my life when things seemed less serious, although at the time, I did not hear about Eisenhower deporting Mexican nationals. It was not discussed in the news... when I was growing up, the UFO wasn't just related to science fiction, it was symbolic of a primordial fear of something coming. I thought it was rather silly. And these paintings are tongue-in-cheek, they're supposed to be jokes. They are jokes. But really, though, the government has labeled the Mexican American this and others like us similarly before.”

Romero employs various media — including painting, neon, sculpture, and murals—to explore narratives related to the Chicanx experience, Latin American heritage, and American Pop culture. Pulling together a diverse cast of signs and symbols to invent a visual language reflective of the multiculturalism at the core of the Chicanx community, his works provide insight into his life as both an artist and a Mexican American from East LA. Romero has spent his life traveling, living, and working between Los Angeles, New York, New Mexico, and France.

Romero, along with fellow artists Carlos Almaraz, Gilbert “Magu” Lujan, and Roberto de la Rocha, co-founded the artist collective Los Four, whose 1974 exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was the country's first Chicano exhibition at a major arts institution.