

Graciela Iturbide's "Las Californias" reveals decades of intimate portraits from to Tijuana



Graciela Iturbide, Rosario, Lisa, and Friends, White Fence, East LA, 1986, Signed by the artist in ink on recto, Silver Gelatin Print, 11 x 14 in, 27.9 x 35.6 cm

NEW YORK, NY.- Ruiz-Healy Art presents Graciela Iturbide: Las Californias, a solo exhibition showcasing the work of the internationally acclaimed photographer. Graciela Iturbide: Las Californias will be on view at the New York City gallery from November 13, 2025, to January 16, 2026. A fully illustrated catalogue will be published alongside an essay written by Dr. Ricardo Romo, author of East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio, first published in 1983. This exhibition marks Iturbide's second solo show with the gallery and her first at our New York City location.

Graciela Iturbide is celebrated for her poetic black-and-white photographs, which blend documentary storytelling with deep explorations of identity and culture. For over fifty years, Iturbide has captured, among others, the lives of Indigenous Mexican communities, rituals in India, and landscapes across the United States. Iturbide describes her work as "photo essays," drawing inspiration from Henri Cartier-Bresson, Tina Modotti, and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, with whom she worked in the early 1970s; her elegant compositions document the world around her while embracing spontaneity and beauty.

Las Californias showcases Iturbide's work from East Los Angeles, California, to Tijuana, Baja California, illustrating the complexities of life in the borderlands. Captured in the East Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyle Heights in 1986, Iturbide photographed a group of predominantly deaf Mexican American women connected to the White Fence gang. Iturbide first met the White Fence gang while on a tour of the United States alongside fellow photographers for the book *A Day in the Life of America*. This initial meeting developed into a thirty-three-year friendship and an extensive photographic story spanning 1986 to 2019.

In her White Fence series, Iturbide focused on hearing-impaired cholas — Lisa, Arturi, Cristina, Rosario, and her baby, Boo Boo — all living in an apartment in Boyle Heights, portraying their daily lives with empathy and respect. Cholo/a is a term originating in Spanish Colonial-era Mexico that designated people of mixed race, Indigenous people, or people of low social status within the caste system. After the Second World War, the term was adopted in California as a subculture.

White Fence is a Mexican heritage gang formed in the 1920s that initially served as a partner of La Purisima Church. After WWII, the gang separated from the church, renaming itself permanently to the White Fence gang, a reference to a white fence in Boyle Heights that separated Mexican and White residents in LA. In the White Fence series, many of the subjects are captured using sign language, which serves to communicate both their gang affiliation and their daily interactions as hearing impaired women. In the photograph *Cholas I (con Zapata, Juárez y Villa)*, White Fence, East LA,

Iturbide notes a disconnect between Chicano culture and Mexican history. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, she recalls the moment she captured this photograph: "For me, it was very interesting because they have a nostalgia about Mexico that isn't always based in fact. A group of them told me, 'We want you to photograph us by the mural of the mariachis.' It was a mural of Mexico's historical heroes: Benito Juárez and Pancho Villa [and Emiliano Zapata]. They can be really mistaken about Mexico, but they still have a profound nostalgia for it."

During one of her trips to California, to visit the White Fence gang, Chicana artist Ester Hernández introduced Iturbide to the renowned farmworkers' leaders and civil rights advocates, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, founders of the United Farm Workers (UFW). Iturbide's portraits of the Chicano icons reflect the collective spirit of the Chicano struggle, a movement in which Mexican Americans reclaimed their history, culture, and identity. Figures like Huerta and Chávez, along with cultural symbols such as the Thunderbird and the Virgen de Guadalupe, represented this transformation. The once-pejorative term "Chicano" grew into a symbol of cultural pride and resistance, celebrated through art, music, protests, and fashion. Iturbide also photographed Mexican nationals in Tijuana, Mexico, a city bordering San Diego County, California, who longed for a life in the United States and to pursue the American Dream. These photographs formed the La Frontera series.

In the exhibition, Las Californias, Iturbide's gaze is neither distant nor merely anthropological: it is one of closeness and respect. Before taking a photograph, Iturbide always obtains permission from her subjects, allowing them to express themselves as they wish. Both of these series, La Frontera and White Fence, serve as symbols of collective resistance, aspiration, and identity. In White Fence, the work offers no fixed narrative but instead a collection of fragments: fences, walls, shadows, and gestures. The La Frontera series explores themes of belonging, separation, and hope. Las Californias does not simply depict a geographic or social space: it encourages reflection on belonging, identity, the marks of migration, and the power of the image as an act of memory and intercultural dialogue. The exhibition invites viewers to consider not only the history of Chicano identity in California but also the universal themes of migration, community, and the delicate yet powerful search for home.

Graciela Iturbide is renowned for her cinematic black-and-white photographs, which depict indigenous groups and settings in her native Mexico. Iturbide's frames, which she describes as "photo essays," draw inspiration from the work of Henri Cartier Bresson, Tina Modotti, and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, with whom she worked in the early 1970s; her elegant compositions document the world around her while embracing spontaneity and beauty. She has had solo exhibitions at the Tate Modern, London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Mapfre Foundation in Madrid, among others. Her work is the subject of over thirty-five monographs. She continues to live and work in Mexico.

Iturbide's work is in the permanent collections of over 40 major international museums, including SFMOMA, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Pompidou Center. In 2008, Iturbide won the Hasselblad Award from the Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg, Sweden. Her many honors include the Premio Princesa de Asturias de las Artes, Oviedo, Spain, (2025); William Klein Prize (2023); Outstanding Contribution to Photography Award (2021); Infinity Award: Cornell Capa Lifetime Achievement (2015); National Tribute, Mexico (2014); Lifetime Achievement Award, Bangladesh (2013); Lucie Award (2010); National Prize of Sciences and Arts, Mexico City (2009); Hasselblad Foundation Photography Award (2008); Legacy Award from the Smithsonian Latino Center (2007); Hugo Erfurth Award (1989); and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1988).