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The Year in Latinx Art: At a Time When Art Seems Impossible, It Is Still Healing

BY MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN
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Bella Maria Varela, *Shark Bait ooh hahaha*, 2021, installation view in "Soy de Tejas," at the Cheech, Riverside California.
PHOTO MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

2025 has felt especially unrelenting. January brought devastating wildfires to Los Angeles, my hometown. Dozens of artists lost their homes and their work. Altadena, a creative hub of Black creativity for decades and, more recently, a home to many artists, was hit particularly hard.

The third Monday of January brought something much worse and more insidious the start of the second Trump administration, which has targeted both communities of color and the art world. ICE raids have intensified across the country, especially in predominantly Brown and Black communities, with the president emboldening immigration agents to abduct first and ask questions later. The toll this has taken on US citizens, legal residents, undocumented folks has been unconscionable, gut-wrenching, and quite frankly hard to put into words.

Amid this immediate crisis, it's understandable that some may overlook Trump's broader attack on arts and culture—most notably his targeting of the Smithsonian Institution. This would be a mistake. Fascist governments target the arts because they inspire the oppressed to imagine a different way of living. The arts offer hope. Without that, draconian policies can be implemented with ease.

Many artists have created poignant and moving responses to 2025's surge in ICE raids, as *ARTnews* contributor Tara Anne Dalbow **details in a year-in-review column (https://www.artnews.com/list/art-news/artists/artist-responses-2025-ice-raids-1234767352/)**. To Dalbow's list, I'll add a special project by **AMBOS** (short for "Art Made Between Opposite Sides") that was on view at Frieze Los Angeles in February. Founded by artist Tanya Aguiñiga, AMBOS's booth presented ceramics made by migrants awaiting asylum hearings in Mexico; many of their collaborators were trans women. The sale of these affordably priced pieces, along with posters and beanies, were made to benefit this community members and offer monetary support during these complex asylum proceedings, which by the time Frieze open had all been canceled by the Trump administration. AMBOS has been an important collective in thinking through how art can effectively address what happens in the borderlands and help those directly impacted by the rupture of the US-Mexico border.

Consuelo Jimenez Underwood sewing in her studio in Gualala, California.
PHOTO DAMON CASAREZ

The US-Mexico border, as both a literal and figurative division, has long loomed large in the work of Chicanx and Latinx artists, such as **Consuelo Jimenez Underwood**, whom I **profiled (https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/consuelo-jimenez-underwood-icons-2025-1234751557/)** in *Art in America*'s annual "Icons" issue. In it, Jimenez Underwood compared the wall to an oxymoron: "It's beautiful and positive, but there's this harshness over it," she said. "It's frightening to have your community affected by an arbitrary line. It damages a lot of people."

Prior to visiting Jimenez Underwood in April, I was in San Antonio, Texas, where she was the subject of a solo exhibition at **Artpace**. For her residency at Artpace, Jimenez Underwood created several works which considered the separation between the earth and the cosmos. For an artist who had dedicated her life to showing the world just how the border "has just eaten up the whole world," this body of work seemed like an out-of-character departure, but Jimenez Underwood stressed that the division between heaven and earth is just another border.

Those words came back to mind when I visited the **Americas Society** for a stunning two-person show by **Beatriz Cortez** and **rafa esparza**, which coincidentally took the title "Earth and Cosmos." The two artists presented works that aimed to defy time and space, like *Hyperspace: -100km* + ∞ (2025), a larger-than-life-size recreation of the Olmec head brought to New York from Mexico for the 1965 World Fair. esparza's tribute, however, appears distorted and warped as if fed through a wormhole transporting it from 1200–900 BCE to the 1960s and on to 2025.

“The Olmec head is a symbol of a moment when Latin American works of art were brought to New York to speak about Latin America, but as part of a past. And obviously that is not the case,” as esparza **told (https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/at-the-americas-society-a-show-honoring-olmec-art-challenges-museum-protocol-1234735274/)** my colleague Tessa Solomon earlier this year. The exhibition was meant to think through how the curation of cultural objects reflects, or exposes, the narratives Western institutions force on non-Western cultures. Cortez and esparza refuse these interlocutors and their othering interpretations.

rafa esparza, *Hyperspace -100 km + ∞is*, 2024, installation view, at Americas Society, New York.
CREDIT THE ARTIST AND AMERICAS SOCIETY /COUNCIL OF THE AMERICAS.

These artists present just some ways to think about the US-Mexico border and all it entails. At **Performance Space New York**, composer, musician, and performance artist **San Cha** staged an experimental opera, titled *Inebria Me* (2025), based on the 2019 album *La Luz de la Esperanza*. Set in the borderlands, the opera tells the story of Dolores, a woman married to a wealthy yet abusive husband, as she navigates her queer desires for the genderless Esperanza. Mixing influences from telenovelas, Catholicism, and the artist’s own upbringing in the queer scenes of the Bay Area and Los Angeles, San Cha presents a story that transcends time, giving a haunting yet ultimately beautiful tale in which longing and hope for a different life prevail against pain and violence.

The perilousness of the border also appears in the work of **Studio Lenca**, who migrated as a child from El Salvador during the country’s civil war to the Bay Area and is now based in Margate, UK. Over the summer, he organized a group exhibition at **Kates-Ferri Projects** in New York featuring contemporary Salvadoran artists whose work looks at the complicated history and present of El Salvador.

For the past several years, Studio Lenca has been collaborating with migrants to the US in workshops to create postcard-size artworks that depict their own migration stories, in whatever way they might interpret that prompt. I first saw this pointed body of work, titled “Rutas” (Routes), at El Museo del Barrio’s La Trienal 2024. Some of them discernably recall circuitous journeys across the border; others are abstract, like faded memories from a time too painful to remember. This year, the artist staged these workshops twice over, ahead of his solo show at **David Castillo Gallery** in Miami and as part of the artist-run platform La Escuela’s takeover of **MoMA PS1**’s Homeroom space, with the workshop at the latter venue conducted earlier this month. The David Castillo exhibition also featured Studio Lenca’s own paintings, fantastical tableaux of the artist gliding, as if he were dancing, through the landscape. At PS1, the artist painted a rendition of these self-portraits directly onto one of the museum’s walls, about a month into the exhibition’s run. Taken together, Studio Lenca shows us a kaleidoscopic tapestry of migration stories.

Works from Studio Lenca’s collaborative “Rutas” series, installation view at David Castillo Gallery, Miami.
PHOTO MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

Recognition for the Elders

Over the past decade, long under-recognized artists, primarily of color, have finally been receiving their due in the art world—a trend that continued into 2025, especially on the institutional front. That was also true at El **Museo del Barrio** this year, which staged two important surveys for **Candida Alvarez** and **Coco Fusco**.

Alvarez has become known for her swirling, color-rich abstractions, and El Museo illuminated how her early work anticipated them. This welcome insight into Alvarez's practice could have been deepened by a more extensive exploration of her recent abstractions. I would have appreciated a deeper dive into her innovative "Air Paintings," made in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, one of which lent its name to El Museo's 2020/21 triennial. In a further extension of the artist's prowess and importance, **Gray** staged a two-person exhibition at its New York gallery space between Alvarez and **Bob Thompson**, pairing new works by the former with historic pieces from 1960–65 by the latter. The exhibition, Alvarez's first in a New York gallery in roughly three decades, highlighted the two artists' unique yet complementary approaches to color.

Coco Fusco, *A Room of Own's One* (still), 2006–08.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MENDES WOOD DM

This fall, El Museo turned its lens to Fusco, gathering three decades' worth of her work. For many, Fusco is likely best known for her collaborative performance with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The Couple in the Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–93). On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's first contact with the Americas, the two artists took on the personas of once-isolated Indigenous people, creating a series of traveling performances that toured the world, a nod to the human zoos that once subjugated Indigenous and African people. More recently, Fusco received renewed acclaim for *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word* (2021), a moving film that processes the immense loss of Covid-19 and its unclaimed victims who were sent to New York's Hart Island, now the largest mass grave in the United States. Fusco's survey, titled "Tomorrow, I Will Become an Island," features both *The Couple in the Cage* and *Your Eyes Will Be an Empty World*, as well as work made in the interim period, shedding new light on the breadth and prescience of Fusco's practice.

Some of these works are hard to watch. *Operation Atropos* (2006), for example, depicts Fusco and six other women in a simulation as prisoners of war and the interrogation methods used on them, many of which border on torture. Other works, including *A Room of One's Own* (2006–08), examine how women might gain power by participating in the military industrial complex, particularly through torture methods. The exhibition's final room brings together several video works that reflect on Cuba, the country her mother fled as an exile, and what happens to a culture during a lengthy repressive government. El Museo has extended the exhibition through March 1—it is a must-see exhibition.

Installation view of "Ofelia Esparza: A Retrospective," 2025–26, at Vincent Price Art Museum, Monterey Park, California.
PHOTO MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

A solo exhibition of Los Angeles–based artist **Ofelia Esparza** at the **Vincent Price Art Museum** in Monterey Park, California, however, ranks among the year's best offerings. For decades, Esparza has been the matriarch of LA's Eastside arts community, a fixture of Self-Help Graphics and Día de los Muertos celebrations across the city. Each year, Esparza would take the lead in organizing Self-Help's community ofrenda for the celebration, but her printmaking experiments at Self-Help, largely unknown to her community, were surprise hits of the exhibition.

The VPAM exhibition highlights Esparza's strength in traditional altar-making, opening with a stunning one dedicated to her family and including a touching one dedicated to Sister Karen Boccalero, Self-Help's founder and director until her death in 1997. But the exhibition also showed how the artist has innovated in the medium, presenting a bedroom installation from decades earlier that shows how Chicanas like Esparza live with these

altars—how they animate a domestic space while honoring dearly departed loved ones. The exhibition's best example, however, shows how these maximalist interventions are forms of generational knowledge passed from mother to daughter to granddaughter. Working with her children and grandchildren, Esparza, a sixth-generation altar marker re-created the decades-worth of *nacimientos* (nativity scenes) created by her mother, Mama Lupe. These elaborate scenes are just as private as a family's home altar but given that they are up for only the Christmas season are even less seen when visiting a person's home. In Esparza's hands, these private moments of devotion become high art.

Luis Jiménez, *Blond TV Image*, 1967, installation view in "Surreal Sixties," 2025–26, at Whitney Museum, New York.
PHOTO MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

Gatherings

While these solo exhibitions, in many cases long overdue, are essential, so too is the inclusion of Latinx artists in major group exhibitions. This is typically where I would mention the Hammer Museum's **Made in L.A.** biennial, which, over the past few editions, has foregrounded Latinx artists. That wasn't the case this year, and the themeless, 28-artist edition didn't quite meet the moment, saying little about the state of art production in Los Angeles. It seemed like the show's curators, **Essence Harden** and **Paulina Pobocha**, were unable to make sense of the meaning of art in a year like 2025. Still, the highlights included a new mixed-media painting by **Gabriela Ruiz** and **Patrick Martinez**'s large-scale outdoor installation and display of neon signs like *Hold the Ice* (2020), showing a jug of water with the words: "AGUA IS LIFE; NO ICE."

One museum that has made an effort to center **Latinx art (https://www.artnews.com/t/latinx-art/)** within the discourse of American art over the past decade is the **Whitney Museum**. "**Surreal Sixties**," the museum's main exhibition this fall, featured works by the likes of Luis Jiménez, Rupert García, Mel Casas, Luchita Hurtado, Marisol, and Eduardo Carrillo, alongside their more famous contemporaries like James Rosenquist, Lee Bontecou, Louise Bourgeois, Karl Wirsum, Martha Rosler, and Ed Ruscha. Jiménez's *Blond TV Image* (1967), a recent acquisition by the Whitney, is among the exhibition's best works. While the artists in the former group have had different levels of acceptance within the mainstream art world, the fact that a show of this magnitude would even explore how artists of Latino backgrounds interpreted the tumult of the 1960s is particularly notable.

Installation view of "Diana Eusebio: Field of Dreams," 2025–26, at Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami.
PHOTO MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

Notes on the Miscellaneous

Miami was home to several significant shows this year. At the **Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami**, **Diana Eusebio** draws connections between her Afro-Dominican heritage on her father's side and Indigenous Quechua Peruvian heritage on her mother's side. Her art is rooted in the natural dyes that both cultures use in their cultural production, showing how the two have more in common than one might immediately think. Across town, the **Pérez Art Museum Miami** has an exhibition of twin brothers and artist duo **Elliot & Erick Jiménez**. For the exhibition, the brothers present work inspired by the Afro-Caribbean religion of Lucumí, depicting its deities in a distinctive black silhouette style. But

just as Lucumí combines Yoruba, Catholicism, and Spiritism, the Jiménez brothers' art is its own form of syncretism, drawing together art historical sources as disparate as Greco-Roman mythology, Peter Paul Rubens, 19th-century French church architecture, and Belkis Ayón. It's a compelling reminder of how the imagery we think of as fixed tropes and genres within art history are, in fact, just an artist's synthesis of various source material.

Installation view of "Vaginal Davis: Magnificent Product," 2025–26, at MoMA PS1, New York.
PHOTO MAXIMILÍANO DURÓN/ARTNEWS

Another artist who explores the convergence of different cultures is **Vaginal Davis**, the subject of a traveling retrospective currently on view at MoMA PS1. Born and raised in Los Angeles and now based in Berlin, Ms. Davis has long been known for her iconic and iconoclastic interdisciplinary work that delves into Blackness, queerness, and the subaltern. But for a brief period, she was also deeply immersed in LA's Chicano underground scene, forming her own band, ¡Cholita!, with the likes of Alice Bag in the mid-1980s. The Female Menudo, the first time the artist explored her Mexican heritage on her father's side. "I think our goals with Cholita were to present our politics humorously without being dogmatic, to show that women's humor is playful and whimsical," Ms. Davis told the art historian Rose G. Salseda in a **series of emailed interviews (https://pastelegram.org/y/kegels-for-hegel/canto-infantil)**in 2015. The video of her riotously singing "CHINGA TU, CHINGA TU, CHINGA TU MADRE!" will be stuck in your head for days.

This year also saw ambitious group exhibitions exploring the varied facets of Latinx life. The **Huntington Museum** presented "**Radical Histories**," borrowing 60 works from the Smithsonian American Art Museum's deep holdings of Chicano prints; the exhibition looks

at how artists have used printmaking for both political and aesthetic ends. The **Cheech** presented an updated iteration of "**Soy de Tejas: A Statewide Survey of Latinx Art**," featuring disparate aesthetic approaches to art-making by Texan artists. And the **McNay Art Museum** had on view "**Rasquachismo: 35 Years of a Chicano Sensibility**," organized by Mia Lopez, the museum's first curator of Latinx art. **That exhibition (https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/rasquachismo-exhibition-mcnay-art-museum-1234742520/)** traced how generations of artists have remixed the aesthetic sensibility first coined by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto in 1989. Taken together, these exhibitions argue that there is no single aesthetic or theme to Latinx art.

Installation view of "Rasquachismo: 35 Years of a Chicano Sensibility," 2024–25, at McNay Art Museum, San Antonio.
PHOTO JACKLYN VELEZ/COURTESY THE MCNAY ART MUSEUM

Finally, 2025 also saw the publication of two important anthologies: *Nuyorican and Diasporican Visual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by **Arlene Dávila** and **Yasmin Ramirez** and *A Handbook of Latinx Art*, edited by **Rocío Aranda-Alvarado** and **Deborah Cullen-Morales**. Comprised of important texts by artists and scholars—including Tanía Caragol, Elizabeth Ferrer, Judith F. Baca, and Juan Sánchez—these two tomes join 2019's *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology* in providing a scholarly foundation for Latinx art that is now relatively accessible. As Aranda-Alvarado and Cullen-Morales write in their introduction, "the historic and continued erasure of Latinx artistic and cultural contributions within the USA … coupled with a rising visibility for Latinx art, makes the need for anthologies such as this one urgent."

Meanwhile, **Jessica Lopez Lyman**'s *Place-Keepers: Latina/x Art, Performance, and Organizing in the Twin Cities* offers an important snapshot of Latinx art and community in Minneapolis and St. Paul, two cities whose Latinx communities have been overlooked.

When visual art wasn't enough to get me through 2025, I turned to "Dragvestigations", a series by **Lushious Massacr**, a drag queen who hails from Brownsville, Texas. It follows Lushious—dressed like your tía out for day of *compras*—to Marshalls, Spirit Halloween, Macy's, and beyond, to see what wares they carry for "big girls," as she describes herself. The **first Lushious video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGoOUDG97AE)** I came across was her visit to Corpus Christi, Texas, where she visits the monument dedicated to **Selena**, the Queen of Tejano Music. And while Lushious is, of course, a Selena fan, she dedicates the video to Selena's sister Suzette and all the Suzettes of the world: "la que nunca fuera bonita" (the one who was never pretty). It's that riotous, unserious type of cultural criticism—high camp mixed with the chisme you get at a *tamalada*—we need sometimes. (Lushious, if you ever want to "dragvestigate" an art museum—let me know!) But as the year progressed, Lushious made it a point to dedicate her videos to undocumented folks, to child migrants, and the trans community. Though she may never take herself too seriously, Lushious knows just how serious things are and what is at stake.

Photo documentation of Lotty Rosenfeld, *Una Milla de Cruces Sobre el Pavimento* (One mile of crosses on the pavement), 1979. Art action in front of the Moneda Palace, Santiago de Chile, 1979.
COURTESY FUNDACIÓN LOTTY ROSENFELD

Looking Forward

I've been asked on a few panels this year what's the worth of art during a political crisis like Trump. One answer I've ventured is inspired by an exhibition I saw several years back: "**Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985**" at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. It was a sweeping survey of women artists working in different countries and contexts. What united many of these women is that they were making art under repressive

dictatorships and responded accordingly, with sly, wry art that evaded government censors are creating new and innovative approaches to art-making.

One of these “Radical Women” artists is **Lotty Rosenfeld**, who lived and made art under Chile’s Pinochet dictatorship. Her work is currently the subject of an instructive survey at the **Wallach Art Gallery** at Columbia University, which has itself been at the center for the ongoing repression of free speech of student activists. During the dictatorship, Rosenfeld said she was making art devoid of politics and concerned only with aesthetics. Her 1979 performance, *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (A mile of crosses on the pavement), in which she made crosses out of the highway lane markers, could conceivably be about that. But the Wallach exhibition shows the totality of her work and just how subversive she was, from impromptu votes asking if people wanted democracy to dropping leaflets of poetry from airplanes. It’s amazing what she got away with. Curated by art historians **Julia Bryan-Wilson** and **Natalia Brizuela**, Rosenfeld’s retrospective, titled “Disobedient Spaces,” offers a guide on how to live and make art under an oppressive regime.

Carmen de Monteflores, *Four Women*, 1969.
PHOTO PHILIP MAISEL/©CARMEN DE MONTEFLORES/COURTESY THE ARTIST/COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

While the clarity of hindsight makes Rosenfeld’s art seem prescient, it can be difficult to locate hope at a time like this. For this reason, it is necessary, if not healing to turn to art. There are things to look forward to in 2026.

One promising exhibition on the horizon is “**Let Us Gather in a Flourishing Way**,” which will open at the **Buffalo AKG Art Museum** in March, before heading on a national tour with stops in Des Moines, Phoenix, and Seattle. Organized by the museum’s associate

curator **Andrea Alvarez**, the exhibition will present nearly 60 Latinx artists who are redefining painting.

The **upcoming edition (https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/whitney-biennial-2026-artist-list-1234766723/)** of the **Whitney Biennial** will be co-curated by **Marcela Guerrero**, who joined the Whitney nearly a decade ago and has been a driving force in its acquisitions and presentations of Latinx artists. While some commentators have already formed opinions about the exhibition without having seen it, I, for one, am interested to see how Guerrero and her co-curator Drew Sawyer will take on this storied and often divisive exhibition. Closely watched artists like Martine Gutierrez, Gabriela Ruiz, Sula Bermudez-Silverman, and Taína H. Cruz will feature alongside an under-known artist like Carmen de Monteflores, who just so happens to be the mother of Andrea Fraser, who will also be included in the exhibition. Plus, a slew of familiar and new names. What else 2026 will bring is anyone's guess.