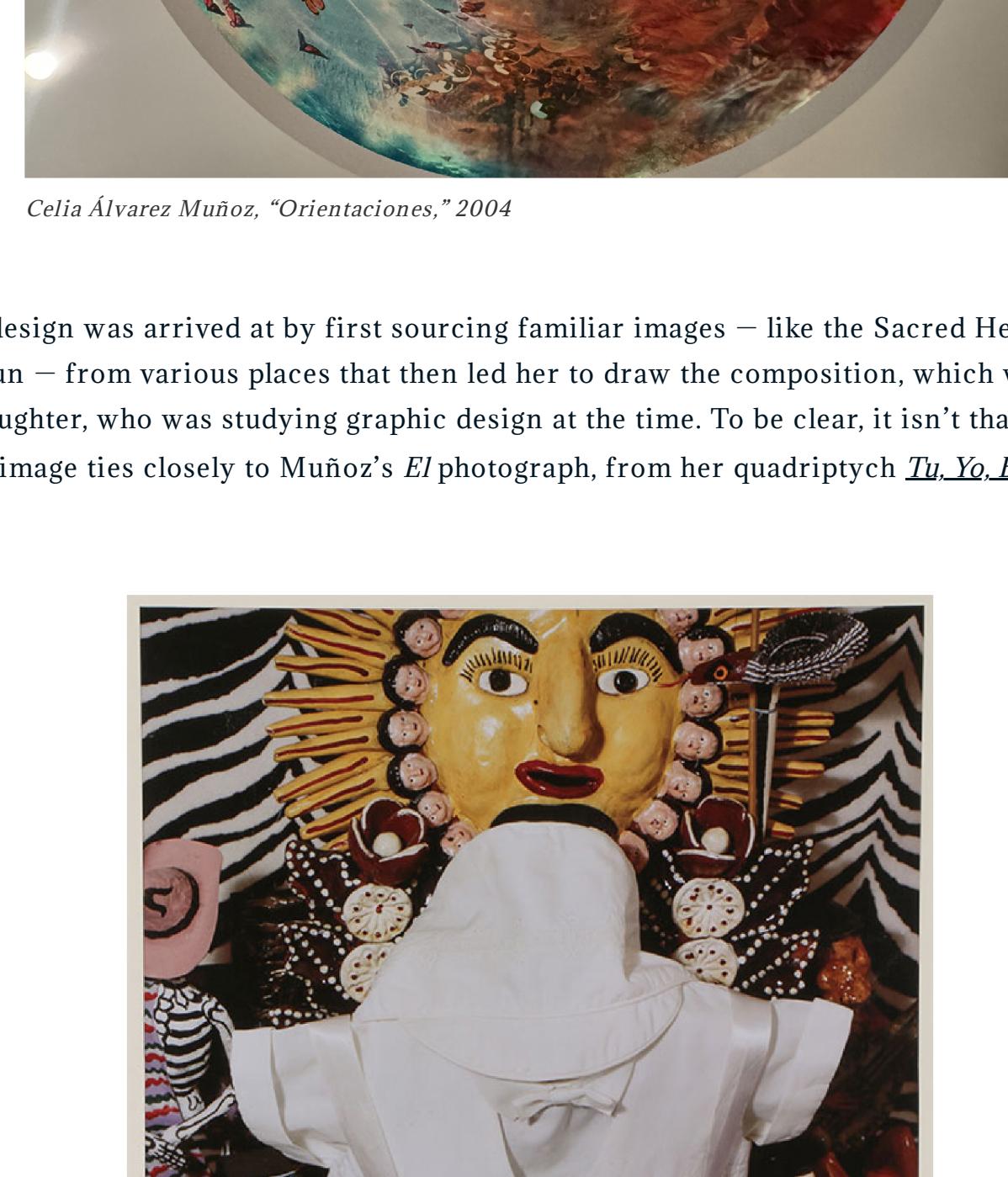


What Lies Beyond the Doorway You've Never Walked Through?

JESSICA FUENTES | JANUARY 16, 2026

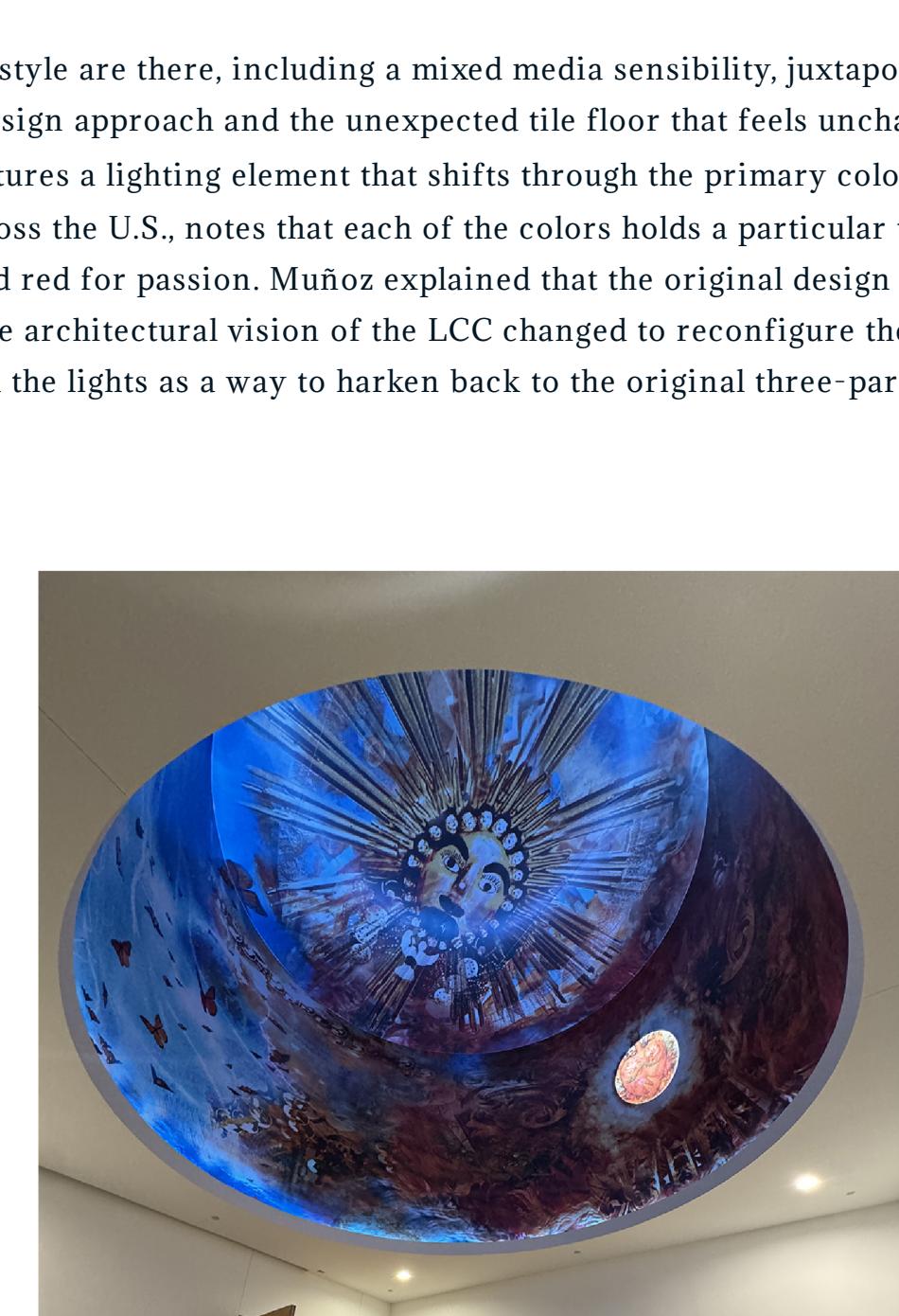
Over the last decade, I've visited the City of Dallas' Latino Cultural Center (LCC) numerous times. Designed by renowned and prolific Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta and his son Victor, the building's dramatic geometric lines are accentuated by its bright orange facade and deep purple stepped tower. In an otherwise dreary city, the LCC is a beacon. Inside its galleries, I have exhibited work, curated a show, moderated an artist talk, and seen various artists' exhibitions that have transformed the space time and again. On a recent visit, I was surprised to find that the LCC is home to two commissioned works by iconic Latina artists. How had I never seen these before? I'm ashamed to admit it's because I've never attended a performance in the institution's theater, which is home to resident theater companies Cara Mia and Teatro Dallas.

Visitors to the LCC's theater enter the building through the rotunda doors (rather than the side doors that lead to the galleries). Benches made of wood and stone curve around the circular space. The white walls are bare, but look up and you are transported by a color-changing digitally composed mural by [Celia Alvarez Muñoz](#). The floor below your feet, a simple earth-toned compass, is also part of the installation. Despite being familiar with Muñoz's expansive oeuvre, which includes photographs, writing, book arts, and sculptural and mixed media installations, *Orientaciones* (2004) took me by surprise as it is unlike any of the artist's work I have seen.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, "Orientaciones," 2004

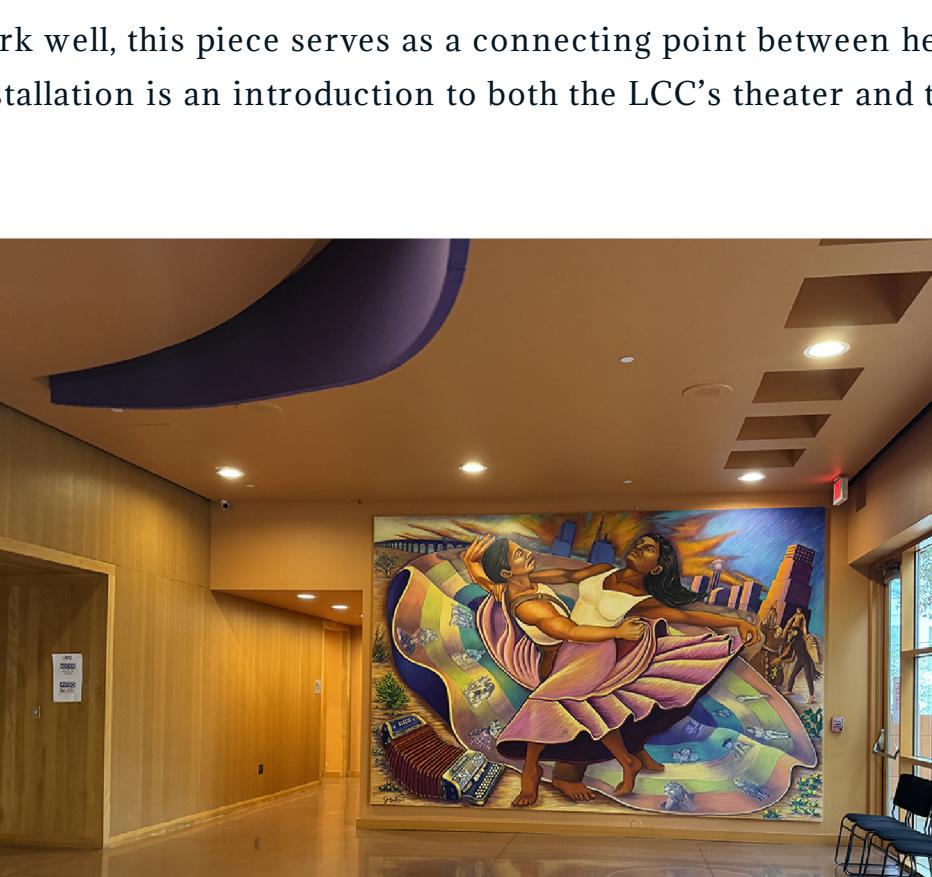
Muñoz told me that the design was arrived at by first sourcing familiar images — like the Sacred Heart, monarch butterflies, and a central deitylike sun — from various places that then led her to draw the composition, which was then turned into a digital graphic by her daughter, who was studying graphic design at the time. To be clear, it isn't that the imagery is unfamiliar; on the contrary, the sun image ties closely to Muñoz's *El* photograph, from her quadriptych *Tu, Yo, Ella, El* (1987).



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, "El" from "Tu, Yo, Ella, El," 1987, Cibachrome, 56 1/2 x 47 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches. Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, gift of the Kathryn C. Wanlass Foundation

Many of the components of her style are there, including a mixed media sensibility, juxtaposition of imagery, and a dreamlike quality. Rather it is the digital design approach and the unexpected tile floor that feels uncharacteristic of Muñoz's work.

Additionally, the installation features a lighting element that shifts through the primary colors. The [Public Art Archive](#), an online database detailing public art across the U.S., notes that each of the colors holds a particular thematic meaning — yellow for permanence, blue for poetry, and red for passion. Muñoz explained that the original design was presented as three images, to fill a cubelike space; however, the architectural vision of the LCC changed to reconfigure the entry as a rotunda, and Muñoz's design evolved accordingly, with the lights as a way to harken back to the original three-part concept of permanence, poetry, and passion.

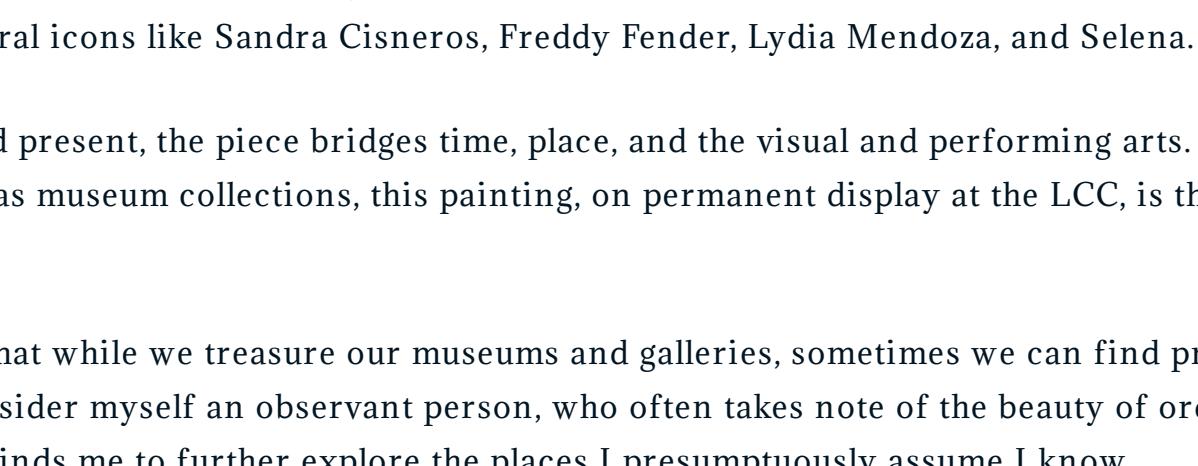


Celia Alvarez Muñoz, "Orientaciones," 2004

The unexpectedness of the piece makes it all the more endearing. As the light changes, viewers are provoked to look more closely and consider the details, which are recognizable, cultural symbols presented in an untraditional format. Typically, in an entryway the goal is to keep the crowd moving forward. Muñoz's installation acts as an intervention; as people enter the rotunda, they pause to look up and down, considering the imagery and the physical place they are in.

As Muñoz stated, "A cultural center orients people... it brings a more in depth awareness of who you are, your culture... We are trying to find our true selves in the cultural district."

For those who know Muñoz's work well, this piece serves as a connecting point between her various artistic methods. For those unfamiliar with her work, the installation is an introduction to both the LCC's theater and to Muñoz's art.



Judy Baca, "Danza de la Tierra," 2009

Once through the entryway, the LCC's theater lobby is home to Judy Baca's *Danza de la Tierra* (2009), a large-scale painting honoring dance, music, and culture. Based in Los Angeles, Baca is a significant figure as both an artist and educator. Not only did she establish the city's first mural program in 1974, which later became the nonprofit arts organization Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), but she is also a University of California, Los Angeles Professor Emeritus, having served as a Senior Professor of Chicana/o Studies and World Art & Cultures for nearly 40 years.

The dynamic painting features a swirling, barefoot duo dancing on desertlike land, with an accordion at their feet. In the background, the Dallas skyline at sunset mimics the orange and purple of the LCC's exterior, which features prominently among the iconic buildings. Between the foregrounded dancers depicted in modern clothing and the background, an undulating rainbow fabric, reminiscent of the traditional Jalisco ribbon dress associated with ballet folklórico, highlights images of important Chicana/o cultural icons like Sandra Cisneros, Freddy Fender, Lydia Mendoza, and Selena.

A celebration of past and present, the piece bridges time, place, and the visual and performing arts. Because Baca does not have any pieces in North Texas museum collections, this painting, on permanent display at the LCC, is the only local opportunity to see the artist's work.

The LCC is a reminder that while we treasure our museums and galleries, sometimes we can find prominent works of art in unexpected places. I consider myself an observant person, who often takes note of the beauty of ordinary environments, but this experience also reminds me to further explore the places I presume to know. It is important and worthwhile to question our assumed knowledge and to look closer, not just at art but also at our surroundings.