

SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

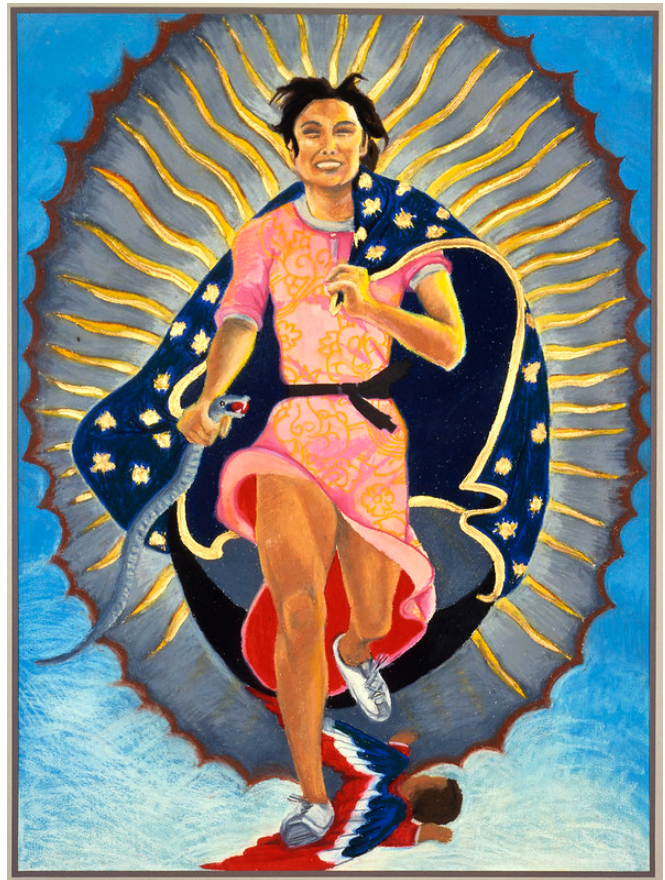
SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS YOLANDA LÓPEZ: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

The San José Museum of Art is the only Bay Area venue to display the artist's first solo museum exhibition.

For Immediate Release

San José, California (April 26, 2023) — From July 7 to October 29, 2023, the San José Museum of Art (SJMA) presents [*Yolanda López: Portrait of the Artist*](#), highlighting one of the most important Chicana artists working in California over the last half century. *Portrait of the Artist* brings long overdue recognition for Yolanda López (1942–2021), and SJMA is the sole Bay Area venue for the traveling exhibition.

Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, this is the artist's first solo exhibition in a museum. It brings together a compendium of 50 of the artist's most iconic works from the 70s and 80s in oil pastel, paint, charcoal, collage, and photography—including never-before-exhibited self-portraits—that highlight López's use of portraiture as a strategy for visualizing collective empowerment. The SJMA display includes additional works and archival materials that emphasize López's role as a Bay Area activist and cultural worker.



“I am delighted that SJMA will bring this exhibition to the Bay Area. López's role as an activist and cultural worker directly connects with our history as a museum founded by local artists and grassroots activists and helps highlight the stories we share through our collections,” says S. Sayre Batton, Oshman Executive Director. “López's presence is still deeply felt throughout the Bay Area. Her artwork is in local museums and many community members fondly remember working with her at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, or as an instructor at the University of California, Berkeley, Mills College, the California

College of the Arts, and other area colleges. We are thrilled to welcome her artworks home with this presentation.”

López was born and raised in the Barrio Logan neighborhood of San Diego. She spent most of the 1960s in San Francisco and was based there permanently after 1979. In the early years in San Francisco, López produced works of protest art that reinterpreted popular symbols to question the terms of belonging in American society, such as those she created as a founding member of Los Siete de la Raza (Seven of the People), the Black Panther-backed movement that galvanized San Francisco’s Latino/a/x community in response to one of the earliest high-profile police brutality cases. The presentation at SJMA will include an additional section of ephemera and recreated artworks organized with the artist’s son, Oakland-based artist Rio Yañez, which highlights the formative role the Bay Area played in López’s artistic output and activism. This area will include López’s works made both as a young undergraduate student at San Francisco State University (SFSU) and later in life in response to issues of racial justice, gentrification, and the housing crisis in the Bay Area.

“López’s practice was particularly groundbreaking at the intersection of art and activism. She was deeply influenced by the political environment in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s and the Chicano civil rights movement,” said Nidhi Gandhi, curatorial and programs associate, SJMA. “This exhibition is a significant reunion for the local community with Yolanda’s iconic work. San José institutions such as MACLA and Works/San José have previously supported Yolanda’s artistic career, and we are thrilled to join them by hosting this astounding tribute to her legacy.”

A key highlight of the exhibition will be *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1978), one of López’s most iconic works. The vibrant oil pastel offers a striking revision of Guadalupe, divested of her colonial and patriarchal origins and transformed into an image of radical feminist optimism. With her superheroic self-portrait in running shoes, López produced one of the earliest feminist transformations of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which, in the following decades, became a dominant theme in Chicana/x art and literature and a genre in its own right.

Also featured are López’s large-scale portraits of herself and her family matriarchs, which have become icons of feminist and working-class empowerment. López frequently used herself, her mother, and her grandmother as models and “prototypes” in her conceptual drawing projects of the 1970s, bringing visibility to women of distinct roles and life stages through heroic, often larger-than-life portraits. These works are situated within a corpus of López’s breakthrough paintings, drawings, collages, and photographs in which she investigates and reimagines representations of women within the Chicano/a/x culture and society at large. This includes her series “¿A Dónde Vas, Chicana? Getting through College” (1977) depicting herself running through the UC San Diego campus as well as photographs taken after returning to San Francisco of the all-woman car club Las Santas Locas, from the series “Life in the Mission” (1979).

Yolanda López: Portrait of the Artist is organized by MCASD Senior Curator Jill Dawsey, PhD. The presentation at SJMA is organized by Nidhi Gandhi, curatorial and programs associate, SJMA.

YOLANDA LÓPEZ

Yolanda López (1942–2021) was born in San Diego in 1942 and became one of the most important Chicana artists and activists of her generation. Her formation can be traced to her student activism as an undergraduate at San Francisco State University in the 1960s and her ongoing role as a cultural worker within the Chicano civil rights movement. She was a founding member of Los Siete de la Raza, a Black Panther-backed movement that galvanized San Francisco's Latino/a/x community and produced works of protest art. She later played a significant role in the San Francisco Bay Area working as the educational director for the Mission District Cultural Center and as an instructor at the University of California, Berkeley, Mills College, the California College of the Arts, and other Bay Area colleges. López received the National Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008, and a Latinx Artist Fellowship from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2021. *Yolanda López: Portrait of the Artist* is her first solo museum exhibition.

PROGRAMMING

[*Yolanda López: Portrait of the Artist* | Opening Celebration](#)

Friday, July 7, 2023

5–6pm: Member Preview

6–9pm: Opening Celebration

SUPPORT

Yolanda López: Portrait of the Artist is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and made possible with support from California Humanities, a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The San José Museum of Art's presentation of *Yolanda López: Portrait of the Artist* is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the SJMA Exhibitions Fund, with generous contributions from First Tech Federal Credit Union, McManis Faulkner, and Brook Hartzell and Tad Freese.

Operations and programs at the San José Museum of Art are made possible by generous support from SJMA's Board of Trustees, a Cultural Affairs Grant from the City of San José, the Lipman Family Foundation, the Adobe Foundation, the Richard A. Karp Charitable Foundation, Sally Lucas, Yvonne and Mike Nevens, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Yellow Chair Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Brook Hartzell and Tad Freese, the SJMA Director's Council and Council of 100, the San José Museum of Art Endowment Fund established by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

The San José Museum of Art (SJMA) is a contemporary art museum dedicated to inclusivity, new thinking, and visionary ideas. Founded in 1969 by artists and community leaders, its dynamic exhibitions, collection, and programs resonate with defining characteristics of San José and the Silicon Valley—from its rich diversity to its hallmark innovative ethos. The Museum offers lifelong learning for school children and their educators, multigenerational families, creative adults, university students and faculty, and community groups. SJMA is committed to being a borderless museum, essential to creative life throughout the diverse communities of San José and beyond.

SJMA is located at 110 South Market Street in downtown San José, California. The Museum is open Thursday 4–9pm; Friday 11am–9pm; and Saturday–Sunday 11am–6pm. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and free to members, college students, youth and children ages 17 and under, and school teachers (with valid ID). Admission is free from 6–9pm on the first Friday of every month. For up-to-date information, call 408.271.6840 or visit SanJoseMuseumofArt.org.

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Press Images:

[flickr.com/gp/sjma/5xTPM35890](https://www.flickr.com/gp/sjma/5xTPM35890)

Image Credit: Yolanda López, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*, from the series "Guadalupe," 1978. Oil pastel and paint on paper, 30 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the Yolanda López Legacy Trust.