

**LINDA VALLEJO**  
***Brown Baroque: Objects of Opulence***

*Brown Baroque: Objects of Opulence* examines and interprets the politics of color, class, and privilege. I appropriate and alter American antiques and pop objects to invite the viewer to consider socio-political, socio-culture issues in a space where history and data interact with pop culture.

*Brown Baroque: Objects of Opulence* includes life-size Victorian interiors painted in milk-chocolate brown to ask: How are Latinos seen, how do we see ourselves, what is our status in American history? And what are our contributions to American culture and economy?

This new installation project depicts Victorian interiors in all their opulence and finery. Every object is painted in semi-gloss milk chocolate acrylic enamel and includes painted antique and contemporary furniture and collectibles, beautiful brown floral arrangements, and brown polka-dot wallpaper.

Additionally chairs, mixed media sculpture and wall-hanging data-based works are inspired by US Latino data will focus on US Latinos Gross National Product, health, education, immigration status, and income gathered from the Pew Charitable Trust Latino Initiative.

**Project Genesis – *Make’ Em All Mexican* and *The Brown Dot Project***

In 2010 I began a series of sculptures, paintings, and works on paper entitled *Make ‘Em All Mexican*. I purchased pricey antiques (plaster and porcelain figurines and statues, magazines, and postcards) and painted their skin brown. There is a “brown” Elvis Presley, Fred Flintstone & Barney Rubble, Marie Antoinette & Louis Auguste, the Rose Parade Queen, Queen Mother, Greek and Roman gods. This process has become an obsession and I continue to hunt through antique malls for more images to repurpose.

In 2015 I continued “keepin it brown” with *The Brown Dot Project*, a series of data pictographs, images on gridded architectural vellum where brown dots represented actual data. These works portrayed various data sets including US Latino populations; professional numbers in health, education, and business sectors; and Latino contribution to the US Gross National Product. The brown dots resemble designs in ancient weaving and architecture; others mirror computer-generated images or are reminiscent of grid- oriented works by Piet Mondrian, Chuck Close, Agnes Martin, and Charles Gaines. I followed this series with the data-based *Datos Sagrados*, mandala-like circular drawings based on contemporary US Latino data.

***Research Findings***

I have read several books about the Victorian age in the US. The phrase "Gilded Age" satirized an era of serious social problems masked by a thin gold gilding. During the late 19th century this era saw rapid economic growth, especially in the Northern and Western US. The era saw an influx of European and Mexican immigrants, as well as new Mexican American citizens with the annexation of Texas.

While American families of European ancestry built large fortunes from coal and steel industries, the Gilded Age was also an era of abject poverty and inequality, as millions of immigrants—many from impoverished regions—poured into the United States, including Mexican and Mexican Americans living in Texas and the Southwest.

At the end of Mexican American War in 1848, US citizenship was given to 65,000 Mexicans living in the Southwest. Much like Chinese immigrants, these new Mexican Americans were relegated to the worst-paying jobs under the worst working conditions as peóns (manual laborers on the railroads and mines), vaqueros (cattle herders), and cartmen (transporting food and supplies).

Railroads were the major growth industry employing 70,000 – 100,000 Mexican and Mexican American workers annually. Immigration from Europe and Mexico led to the growth of the West, with the building of the railroads, farming, ranching, and mining.

The dominant issues of the political landscape were prohibition, education, and ethnic or racial groups, and tariffs and money supply. Political machines took control of urban politics and in business, powerful nationwide trusts formed. Where did this leave the immigrant working class in the history of building our nation?

### ***Why Milk Chocolate?***

Over the past decade, during countless panels and discussions regarding this work I have been asked, "Why do you make them so dark?" In early works I used varying types of brown to illustrate that Latinos come in "all shades." But, the politics of color and class exist everywhere, even within Latino communities, both working and middle-class.

Many viewers, Latino and non-Latino, objected to the depiction of very dark skin. After years of trial and error I found the "acceptable" color of milk chocolate brown. This illustrates the realities of access and equity for dark skinned individuals of all cultures and classes in American society.