

# vincent price ART MUSEUM

PRESS RELEASE

April 23, 2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Karen Rapp

[rappk@elac.edu](mailto:rappk@elac.edu)

*Ricardo Valverde: Experimental Sights, 1971-1996*

May 17 to July 26, 2014

Large Gallery

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 17, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

The late Los Angeles-based photographer and artist Ricardo Valverde (1946-1998) will be featured in a career retrospective at the Vincent Price Art Museum (VPAM) in May 2014. The exhibition, *Ricardo Valverde: Experimental Sights, 1971-1996*, is guest-curated by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and highlights more than one hundred artworks spanning a twenty-five-year period of production. *Ricardo Valverde: Experimental Sights, 1971-1996* opens on May 17 and continues through July 26, 2014. The opening reception will take place on Saturday, May 17, 4:00-6:00 p.m., and is free to all.

VPAM's exhibition is the first survey of Valverde's extensive body of work, and it is undertaken in partnership with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), which recently published *Ricardo Valverde*, a new monograph in its award-winning A Ver: Revisioning Art History series. Valverde's artwork is included in collections in the U.S., Mexico, and Cuba, and his photographs are currently featured in *Asco and Friends: Exiled Portraits* at Triangle France in Marseille, France, co-organized by CSRC. Works by Valverde also appeared in the Getty Foundation's 2011-12 initiative *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945-1980*, with multiple pieces in two exhibitions: *Asco: Elite of the Obscure* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and *MEX/LA: Mexican Modernisms in Los Angeles, 1930-1985* at the Museum of Latin American Art.

Valverde was born in 1946 in Phoenix, Arizona, and moved to Los Angeles in 1958-59. After receiving an honorable discharge from the Air Force, he attended Los Angeles City College and Cal State Los Angeles before transferring to UCLA, where he earned a BA in art history in 1974, and an MFA in graphic design in 1976.

During his graduate studies, Valverde began what became a through line of his career: the documentation of visual subjects with which and with whom he, the artist, could identify. His 1976 master's thesis, *Changes in the Family*, was a photographic documentation of the cultural and historical transformations of Mexican and Chicano families, a subversively political theme at the time.

Valverde's earliest subjects were his immediate family members – his wife, Espie; his son, Jude; his sister, Maya – and friends and acquaintances from local neighborhoods. Valverde used the camera to express his own affiliations to others, those closest to him. Although his work has mostly been considered within the documentary, modernist vein, Valverde's gaze exceeded the singular impulse to record.

"Ricardo Valverde explored both the aesthetic and political potential of documentary photography," explains VPAM director Karen Rapp. "His work fills in a gap in our understanding of Chicano contributions to photography."

Valverde dedicated himself to photographing what was familiar to him yet disregarded or oversimplified by the news and entertainment media; in this way, he was determined to disrupt the history of image-making. He understood that his community and its inhabitants had been, as *Ricardo Valverde* author Ramón García notes, either overlooked or romanticized – or feared. Thus, while Valverde had witnessed the 1965 Watts Riots as well as the East L.A. walkouts, he decided not to photograph these tumultuous events. Instead, Valverde's street photography and portraiture, work done primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, offered a counter-narrative to the seemingly "unbiased" depiction of documentary photography.

The exhibition includes more than one hundred works in a wide range of media, from black-and-white and color photographs, to solarized and intervened gelatin silver prints, to painterly collages that incorporate photographs and are mounted on canvas. The exhibition includes several videos; slide projections from Valverde's photographs of lowriders, Day of the Dead celebrations, commercial signage; a light box with experimental slides treated as sculptural objects; and ceramic sculptures that resonate with his photography. Ephemeral works such as Polaroids, sketches, and postcards, are featured in vitrines.

The exhibition is organized thematically, grouping work by subject matter (from self-portraiture to family and urban portraits), locations (Los Angeles, and Mexico/Los Angeles), and approaches (superimpositions, mixed media). Themes are not segregated: they are integrated and overlap to reflect Valverde's own work style. Indeed, the artist's practice was to engage simultaneously different bodies of work, as well as to re-work images to produce different versions. Even with "finished" works, the artist was constantly creating anew.

While Valverde was deeply invested for several decades in making images of subjects familiar to him, in the last decade of his life he made a dramatic choice to *defamiliarize* many of these same works. In the 1990s, the artist altered his earlier photographic prints by marking, painting, and scratching them. The results are enigmatic, playful, and frequently disturbing. Some prints are embellished with sinuous lines; others are almost completely obliterated and convey a decidedly contemporary, expressionistic aesthetic. Using materials like adhesive stickers, gold foil, and ink, Valverde added *grafitto* – old Italian slang for "little mark" – to indelibly transform images he produced nearly twenty years prior.

This exhibition is part of an ongoing partnership between the Vincent Price Art Museum at East L.A. College and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC). During 2013–14, VPAM and CSRC have exchanged programs, providing opportunities for artists to present their work to audiences in East L.A. and West L.A. "With *Ricardo Valverde: Experimental Sights, 1971–1996*, we are working together in order to develop and present a comprehensive exhibition on a major L.A. artist who has been overlooked for too long," explains CSRC director Chon A. Noriega. "Valverde was highly influenced by the New York School of street photographers and yet his photographs were never simply documents. They are works of art, visual artifacts of urban modern life in East L.A. during his lifetime, and a very personal expression unlike that of any other celebrated art photographer from Los Angeles."

About the Curator:

Cecilia Fajardo-Hill is an independent curator specializing in modern and contemporary Latin American art. She has served as chief curator at the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, California, and as director and chief curator for the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation and the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection. She is currently a visiting scholar at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Publications:

*Ricardo Valverde* by Ramón García (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013) is available through the distributor, the University of Minnesota Press ([www.upress.umn.edu](http://www.upress.umn.edu)), and the CSRC ([www.chicano.ucla.edu](http://www.chicano.ucla.edu)).

An e-catalog featuring a curatorial essay and contributions from Jesse Lerner and Armando Cristeto will be posted online: <http://vincentpriceartmuseum.org>

Public Programming:

**Saturday, June 14, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. Panel Discussion**

Join Chon Noriega in conversation with the exhibition's curator Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, author Ramón García, and artist Rubén Ortiz Torres.

**Saturday, June 21, 2:00 p.m. Curator's Walk Through**

Walk through of the exhibition with guest curator Cecilia Fajardo-Hill

Contact:

Vincent Price Art Museum | East Los Angeles College

Hours: Tue. Wed. Fri. Sat. 12:00 – 4:00 p.m., Thu. 12:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Tel: (323) 265-8841 | Fax: (323) 260-8173 | Email: [vincentpriceartmuseum@elac.edu](mailto:vincentpriceartmuseum@elac.edu)

Web: <http://vincentpriceartmuseum.org>

Admission and events are free and open to the public. Guided tours can be arranged by appointment.