



ALBERTO VALDÉS  
(1918-1998)



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While some artists naturally embrace the attention their fame brings them, there are other artists that shy away from the spotlight, and at the extreme, choose privacy and solitude in the studio. Without the constant examination of the public eye, the recluse artist is left to his own devices. Ironically, this insular environment only encourages speculation about their inspirations, reasoning, and artistic choices. Alberto Valdés (1918-1998) is such an artist and we have no choice but to conjecture about his artwork as it is now slowly emerging into the light of the public sphere.

Alberto Moreno Valdés was born in El Paso, Texas, March 28, 1918, the eldest son of Alberto Valdés, Sr., a celebrated Mexican composer and conductor of the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra. The Valdés family relocated to east Los Angeles, California in 1925, specifically to the Boyle Heights neighborhood that was predominantly inhabited by Mexican and Italian families. At a young age, Valdés exhibited a natural ability for the plastic arts and he blossomed eventually into a commercial artist

and illustrator, a career choice that not only paid the bills but also afforded him the means to study and purchase art books and magazines. He never physically traveled but, his countless art subscriptions whisked him away to the far corners of the international art world.

It was the early 20th Century Modernists, among them Pablo Picasso, Paul Gauguin, Wassily Kandinsky, and most importantly, Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo, that particularly appealed to Valdés and, years later, he stated that “through the years of study, they have given me the necessary foundation that I needed.” It cannot be discounted that, in addition to his interests in these fine European and Latin American Modernist artists, his own neighborhood of Boyle Heights had a profound influence on him: East L.A. was a hotbed for the Mexican-American, or Chicano, Civil Rights Movement (el Movimiento), which began in the 1940s and culminated in the 1970s. The ideology of the era celebrated a Pre-Columbian cultural origin and many artists embraced a hybridized heritage with indigenous iconography like





ancient glyphs and figures. In looking over the body of paintings that Valdés created, we find figurative abstraction with a heavy emphasis on contour and color. The strength and quality of his lines determine the underlying structure of his subjects, while simultaneously heightening the sensuous experience of the shape. Like Tamayo, Valdés adopted a sober approach to his use of color, choosing to focus on brightly saturated colors in limited number – Tamayo was noted for adopting the attitude of “less is more” with color. Adding in a touch of Fauvist color influence, Valdés used color to translate a range of spiritual emotions. In speaking of his artwork, Valdés claimed to be spiritually moved by the mere execution of his work; each painting was an epiphany of subconscious thought and idea. He frequently said, “Mi vida es mi arte” (My art is my life).

Valdés painted in the same studio in the Silverlake area of Los Angeles for over 55 years, steadfastly refusing to exhibit or sell any of his artwork. He passed away on May 10, 1998 in the home that he painted in

for six decades. Before now, the only people to ever witness him working or see the completed paintings and drawings were his immediate family and a few friends. His artwork first met with public attention in 2011–2012 when it was chosen for inclusion in the Autry National Center’s exhibition, *Art Along the Hyphen: The Mexican-American Generation*. This important presentation was actually part of a larger prestigious, multi-year initiative by the Getty Foundation, entitled *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980*, which included feature art exhibitions, concerts, and performances focused on celebrating those who helped to put Southern California on the cultural map after World War II.

Blue Rain Gallery is proud to continue to shed light and attention on Alberto Valdés, as the vibrancy of his paintings stand the test of time. At the very least, we propose that his artwork is certainly worthy of in-depth aesthetic examination, and in following suit, the artwork should elicit and demand further appreciation.

ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



*Self Portrait* (circa 1995), pastels on Arches paper, 24" h x 20" w





*Inner Sanctum* (1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 26" h x 21" w

ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



Untitled (circa 1994), acrylic on Arches paper, 16" h x 12" w



*Doña Azul de la Cruz* (circa 1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 21" h x 24.5" w



ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



*Self Portrait* (circa 1995), pastels on Arches paper, 17.5" h x 13.5" w



Untitled (1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 28" h x 21" w

ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



Untitled (1994), acrylic on Arches paper, 13.5" h x 17.5" w





Untitled (1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 26" h x 21" w

ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



Untitled (circa 1995), acrylic on Arches paper, 12" h x 16" w



Untitled (circa 1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 21" h x 28" w



ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



Untitled (circa 1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 24" h x 18" w



Untitled (1994), acrylic on Arches paper, 16" h x 12" w

ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



*Señorita Churchill* (circa 1997), acrylic on Arches paper, 28" h x 19.5" w





Untitled (1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 28" h x 21" w

ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



*Pregnant Lady* (1998), acrylic on Arches paper, 28" h x 21" w



Untitled (circa 1994), acrylic on Arches paper, 17" h x 13" w



ALBERTO VALDÉS (1918-1998)



Untitled (1995), acrylic on Arches paper, 24" h x 20" w



Untitled (circa 1995), acrylic on Arches paper, 12" h x 16" w



**Blue Rain Gallery**

130 Lincoln Avenue, Suite C  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501  
505.954.9902

**Blue Rain Contemporary**

7137 East Main Street  
Scottsdale, Arizona 85251  
480.874.8110

[www.blueraingallery.com](http://www.blueraingallery.com)