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Mission artist Yolanda López puts eviction on display

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In May, longtime Mission artist [Yolanda M. López](#) held an "eviction garage sale" with her son [Rio Yañez](#), complete with comic books and housewares. To passersby, it was a sale like any other - except that it was in a gallery and each object bore a label transforming it to found artwork.

To anyone paying attention, this sale at Galería de la Raza was a conceptual performance about López's Ellis Act eviction from her home of 40 years. It also offered commentary on the city's paramount struggle today, as rampant evictions displace many longtime San Franciscans.

Writer [Lucy Lippard](#), who wrote about López in her book "Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America," asked recently, "What is wrong with the city that it evicts Yolanda López, one of its most important artists?"

The story of López's eviction - along with her neighbors, Rio Yañez's father, artist [Rene Yañez](#), and partner, [Cynthia Wallis](#), both suffering terminal cancer - speaks volumes about how the city values, or doesn't value, its cultural figures.

'A sharp observer'

López, 71, was a leading feminist and pioneer of the Chicana art movement in the '60s and '70s. After high school in San Diego, she came to the city and was active in the [San Francisco State College](#) strike that established the [School of Ethnic Studies](#), as well as a group of Latinos and Latinas who advocated for Los Siete de la Raza.

She later earned a bachelor's from [San Diego State University](#) and a master's from UC San Diego, where she studied with [Allan Sekula](#) and [Martha Rosler](#). López's eviction garage sales are inspired by friend and mentor Rosler's 1973 artwork "Monumental Garage Sale."

In a Facebook message, Rosler says López "was, and remains, a fierce and wonderful artist and person, and a sharp observer of what makes and breaks communities with the will to help organize them so as to keep them strong."

Her work has been a reflection of her experience as a politically aware Mexican American woman. "I make art in response to whatever I am going through," she said by telephone. "Women must exercise citizenship; it's all molded together politically, emotionally, intellectually and artistically."

Historian [Moir Roth](#), who co-wrote with López an essay for the book "The [Power of Feminist Art](#)," said, "Since the 1970s, I have known [Yolanda Lopez](#) as a friend, an ardent activist, a devoted feminist, and one of the most original and interesting contemporary artists in this country."

López, who at one time was director of education at [Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts](#), taught for decades at UC Berkeley, [Mills College](#) and Stanford, among other schools. Her art spans drawing, painting, printmaking, installation and filmmaking. Her work is in the collections of the [de Young Museum](#), [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) and [Oakland Museum of California](#); her papers are in UC Santa Barbara's Archive of California. A monograph on her work was published in 2008.

Decades of influence

Many cite her influence. [Ana Teresa Fernandez](#), who shows with [Gallery Wendi Norris](#), calls her "a truly historical figure" and, in a recent message, wrote about being stirred by López's series "Our Lady of Guadalupe 1978," which depict women-cum-saints in active work. As with her larger body of work, López's images defy clichéd and bigoted media depictions of Mexicans, such as the sombrero-wearing worker dozing against a cactus. "Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe 1978" depicts the artist rushing toward the viewer triumphantly, clasping a hissing snake while treading on a red, white and blue-winged cherub. It was and remains a thrilling "yes" in a society, and an art world, that kept saying "no."

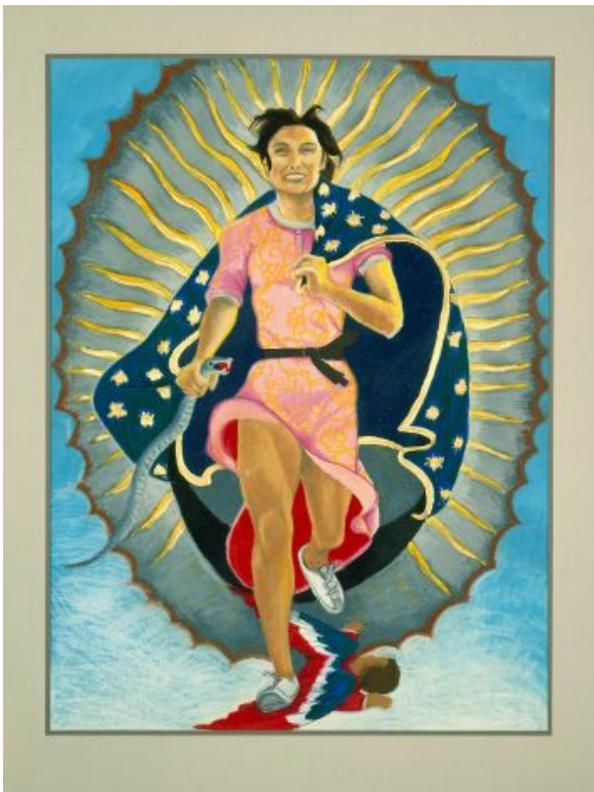
With her recent housing difficulties, "no" still feels like the dominant message. Like many seniors, López survives on [Social Security](#) - which, she says, is too little to be eligible for low-income housing. She will be evicted July 12 and, as yet, has nowhere to go. Ideally, she would like to stay in the Mission District.

Recently an area near her home was designated a "cultural corridor." Ani Rivera, executive director of Galería de la Raza, where López held her first eviction garage sale, says. "There was a whole generation behind making this area what it is today. Where is the city making its investment in the people who made this area a commodity? The mayor needs to consider these

artists in redevelopment plans. Additional money to support artists and create affordable housing needs to be raised."

On June 29, López will host another eviction garage sale at [Red Poppy Art House](#). She will sell accessories she loves but can't keep when she has to move. López has titled the event "Accessories to an Eviction." As with her last performance, it will implicate everyone who passes on the city's streets, whether they take interest or not.

Yolanda M. López: Accessories to an Eviction: 1-4 p.m. Sunday. Red Poppy Art House, 2698 Folsom St., S.F. (650) 731-5383. www.redpoppyarthouse.org.



"Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe 1978" depicts a "yes" in a society that says "no." Photo: Yolanda M. Lopez, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Ct

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