

CARLOS
ALMARAZ

Pluse Jugo





Art Photographs by James Franklin

Talking to the Devil 1972

Ink on paper
22 x 28 inches

FRONTISPIECE

Goodbye Mr. Blue 1987

Pastel on paper
25 x 19 inches

CARLOS ALMARAZ

A SURVEY OF WORKS ON PAPER: 1967 THROUGH 1989

18 AUGUST THROUGH 15 SEPTEMBER, 1990

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ALMARAZ: THE ECHOES OF AESTHETIC CLAIRVOYANCE

"Sense loses itself in intuition"

—Hegel

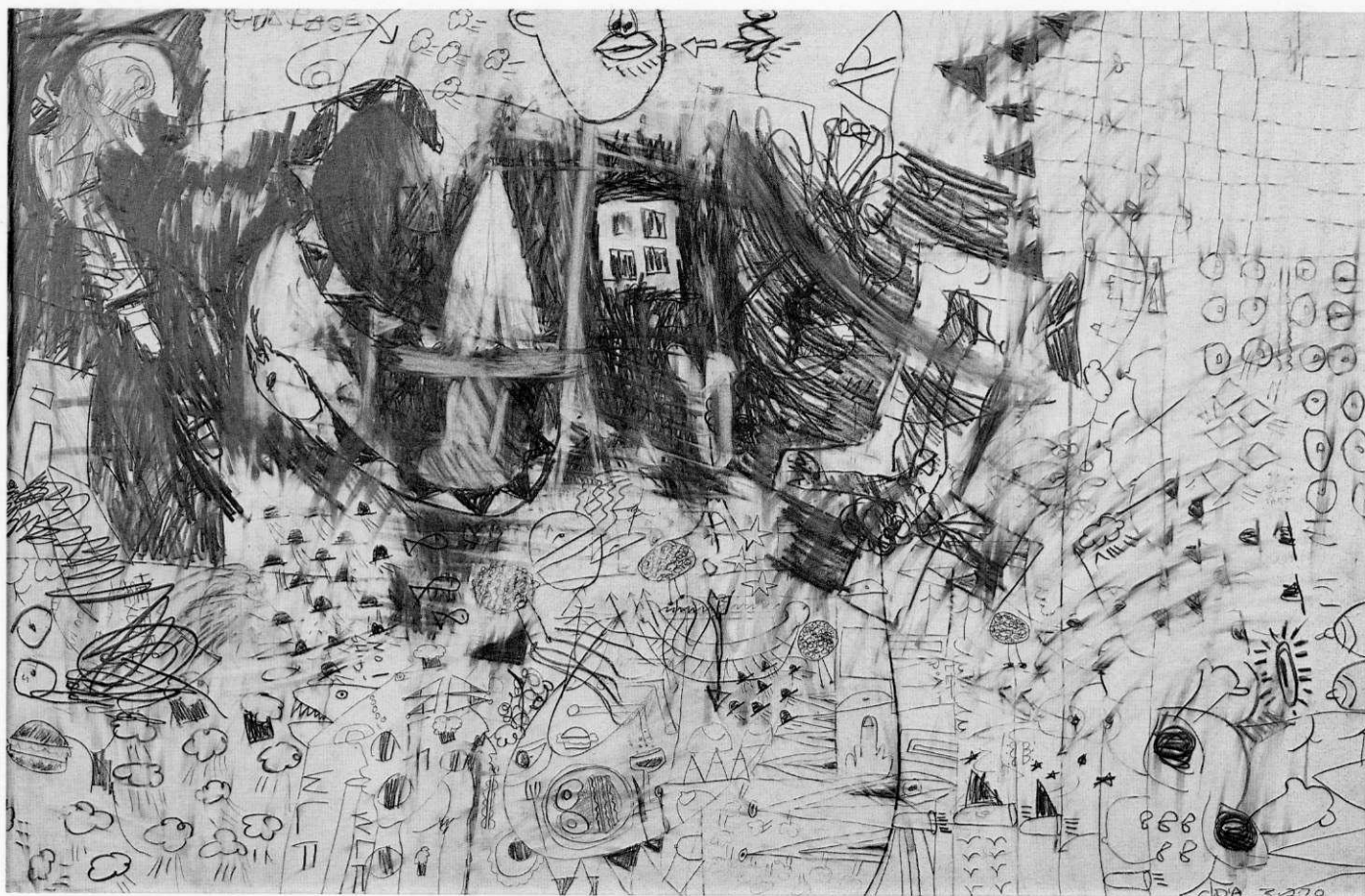
This 20-year survey of works on paper by Carlos Almaraz offers viewers an excursion into his universe: a carnival of sensual delight and psychic terror. Within its boundaries, angels sometimes find awkward intimacy with demons and fools often reign. The tangible is rendered a barely audible murmur of some deeper, more profound reality. The present is only an imperfect premonition of some climactic future.

To examine the works from 1969 through 1972 (for instance, *Noche de Los Pingos* and the 1970 *Untitled*), is to see that Almaraz found his themes and images early on. To study the later work is to realize the extent to which he selectively refined and expanded upon them. By the end of his life, he had consummated the union of content, medium and form. We can also see that from the start, he sought to mediate between objective fact and absolute truth. He takes us, again and again, between the two as into another dimension, to experience the simultaneous allure and dread of the unexpected.

Upon first glance, it's hard to explain the horror inherent in the apparently romantic tranquility of *Echo Park*. But when you know the environment in its real context, bordered on all sides by anxiety, poverty and oppression, the images become echoes of encroaching chaos, omens of momentary disaster. Within the aura of languid sanctuary, Almaraz foretells of a brutal fate lurking in the shadows and beneath the surface.



Red Chair 1980
Acrylic on paper
22 x 30 inches



Best Part 1970
Graphite on paper
26 x 40 inches

In a similar way, it seems odd to fear a clown, a jester, life's witless buffoon. Yet within the surreal terrain created by Almaraz, the fool can instantly become a sinister figure of mysterious power and knowledge. A bare-chested harlequin, eyes hidden behind black lenses, appears poised for violence. In all his incarnations (for example, *Bunny Boy* or *No Pointed Hats Here*) the dunce/devil embodies black humor and evil danger. The artist straddles the line that separates them with haunting finesse, and leaves us to tip the balance for ourselves.

Duality permeates this curious dream-world. Almaraz pushes to the furthest limit (and in the process blurs) the comfortable distinctions we make between male and female, sin and salvation, the obvious and the barely perceptible. In blood red, midnight blue, burnt orange and royal purple, he puts them face to face, like inverted reflections of one another. In the 1972 *Untitled* gouache, we see the suggestions of a soul divided against itself, driven by its compulsions but never satisfied.

In all the work, there is the unashamed rejection of rationality. Almaraz took his artistic impetus not from intellectual construct but from visual intuition. His genius was not in his ability to comment on reality but in his talent for depicting with utter clarity that which lies behind reality – the bliss as well as the dementia that come with unconscious urges, the pleasure and the torment that are born of forces prowling around us, uncontrollable and insistent.

Carlos Almaraz will undoubtedly be remembered as the artist synthesizer of these conflicting and omnipresent components of life. However, his highest achievement may well have been the brave attempt to take us along on his journey through the invisible, to awaken each of us from our own deep sleep of perilous reason.

Max Benavidez

Silver Lake, July 1990

CARLOS ALMARAZ: COMPOSING EXUBERANCE

In their immediacy and relative informality, an artist's drawings comprise a kind of ongoing autobiography – not quite so private as a personal diary, perhaps, but still intimately revelatory. Drawings may expose personal passions, or they may reveal simply how the artist modifies and even masks those passions in the process of translating them into art. We might not be able to "read" the intimate details of a life in a body of works on paper, but we can read the working, and the growth, of an inventive mind, hungry eye, and sensitive hand. As such, they are guides to the workings of the artist's mind – workings which form the voice with which his heart spoke.

Almaraz's earliest drawings, created during his extended stay in New York in the late 1960s, display the eager but unrefined response of a young, impressionable talent to the prevailing discourse. The most "serious" art at the time, according to influential commentators, was non-objective – not simply Minimal, but post-Minimal, oriented towards an exploration and elucidation of process. Almaraz responded to such dicta by drawing gridded armatures and filling in – or, more precisely, enlivening – the myriad boxes with nervous markings and odd, oft-repeated forms. With these forms, very often suggesting highly stylized renditions of body parts, Almaraz was able to retain at least a *soupçon* of figural reference even while apparently satisfying the critical proscriptions of the day. The lively and dynamic result foreshadowed Almaraz's own development somewhat less.

However lively and dynamic these grid drawings may have been, it is clear that they still did not sit well with Almaraz. Likewise, the New York milieu, was not hospitable to his outlook



The Return 1971
Pastel on paper
22½ x 35 inches



Los Hombres 1972

Ink on paper

22 1/2 x 28 1/2 inches

as an artist nor to his identity as a product of the California *barrio*. By the time he returned to Los Angeles, Almaraz's approach had opened up, blooming with jaunty color, bumptious shapes, and referential, even narrative incident. Almaraz left behind the formal strategies of New York and adopted those prevalent in the West. He was clearly most responsive to the knowingly informal Funk manners with which artists around the country, not least in California, were wont to declare their independence of New York.

Almaraz also wanted to capture the spontaneity and unadorned expressiveness of street culture. He emulated the drawing of children – and the graffiti of adolescents – to connect with the charm and power of the urban folk art with which he grew up. Almaraz loved "high" art no less; however, the sureness, even elegance of line and the intricacy of composition in his dense, playful early - '70s drawings bespeak an adoring conversance with the masters of Modernist (and pre-Modernist) painting. In fact, concurrent with these effulgent, unlikely landscapes crammed with childlike doodles and crude, truncated narratives, Almaraz realized a series of more focused and virtuosic fantasies, part mythologic and part comedic, derived from European traditions of figure drawing and evincing the models of Goya, Matisse, and above all Picasso.

A third direction emerged around this time in Almaraz's drawn work. More reliant on color than the other styles, but exuding a Matissean calmness and intimacy, this approach proved the basis for Almaraz's mature painting style. In these renditions of interiors, often with figures, Almaraz applies color in a luminous, expansive manner. Large pockets of darkness make the color seem more vivid. The effect is one of "brilliant gloom," an accentuated light-dark contrast typical of sun and shade patterns in the southern California desert climate.

The paintings for which Almaraz is best known combine his emphatic coloration with

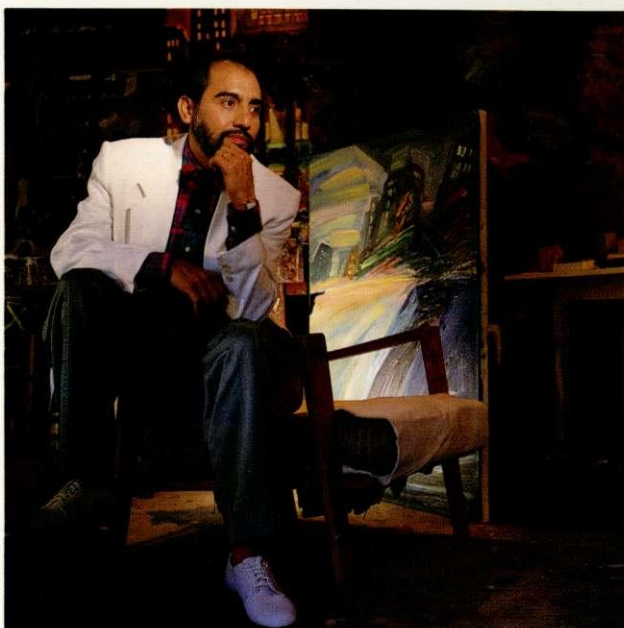
a loopy inversion of the chiaroscuro. Pockets of intense light and murky gloaming envelope one another giving each picture an incandescent, hallucinatory aura. This holds, if anything, doubly true for the works on paper thus created; the drawing media allowed Almaraz a greater fluidity and tactility. Almaraz's imaginative and sensuously painted canvases clearly derive their daring and vivacity from the spontaneity with which he recorded and ordered his visions on paper.

Many such works also make manifest the powerful pictorial architecture underlying Almaraz's mature painting style. The armature of his approach, very mildly sensed as a pervasive play of polyrhythms in a painting of two lovers' embrace, boats on Echo Park Lake, or a freeway car crash, usually lies exposed like an exoskeleton in the drawings. If Almaraz never warmed to the purely formal modes he was trying to emulate in New York, he never lost appreciation for their visual appeal. That appreciation, in fact, heightened the sense – again, most obviously in the drawings – of raw decorativeness found in the popular arts of the *barrio*.

Carlos Almaraz brought together disparate sources and attitudes in his oeuvre, marrying the discourses of high art and low, structure and narration, rational form and spontaneous gesture, Western and Third World aesthetic values (paralleled in "world music"). That these factors are not contradictory, that in fact their interaction can yield logical, natural, and workable syntheses, is a basic tenet of the much-ballyhooed spirit of our times, post-Modernism. A child of his time as well as place, Almaraz was a post-Modernist – and a "world-artist" – both before and during the fact. He would have been one after the fact, too.

Peter Frank

Los Angeles – Oakland, July 1990



Photograph by Peter Darley Miller

"At some point in our lives, each of us realizes how really finite we are. For me this realization has been a driving force in my creativity and in my life in general. I paint with a new abandonment almost trying to deny the fact that I too will someday pass on and the only thing remaining will be the images that I leave behind.

To me, a painting is like a time capsule. You put your heart in it – trying to reflect the truth – and hope that someone in the future doesn't paint over it or toss it in the fire. If it's good art, they won't.

If it's not so good, they might.

Carlos David Almaraz, 1983

BIOGRAPHY

CARLOS ALMARAZ

1941-1989, Born, Mexico City, Mexico

EDUCATION

- 1964 University of California, Los Angeles
- 1969 New School of Social Research, New York
- 1974 MFA, Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles
- 1975 Graduate work in Psychology,
Cal State Los Angeles

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 "Moonlight Theater: Prints and Related Works by Carlos Almaraz" U.C.L.A. Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Los Angeles
- 1990 "Carlos Almaraz, A Survey of Works on Paper: 1967-1989", Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1989 Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1987 Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1986 Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1985 Fuller Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco
- 1984 Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
Janus Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1983 Jeremy Stone Gallery, San Francisco
La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla
- 1982 "Urban Myths: Paintings", ARCO Center For Visual Art, Los Angeles
Janus Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1981 "Pastel Drawings," Malibu Art and Design, Malibu
"Pastel Drawings 1969-1981," Adrienne Simard Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1972 Mechicano Art Gallery, E. Los Angeles
Rasjad Hopkins Gallery, Beverly Hills

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 "Painting of the Eighties in the Americas", Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Monterrey, Mexico
- 1990 "Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation", Travelling exhibition (through 1993); Wight Art

Gallery, UCLA, National Museum of American Art, Washington D.C., Denver Art Museum, Albuquerque Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Tucson Art Museum

"Carlos Almaraz and Elsa Flores", Persons and Liddell Gallery, Helsinki, Finland

"Raging at the Visible: Aids in the City of Angels", Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

- 1989-90 "Le Démon des Anges/Chicanos of Los Angeles", Travelling exhibition; Nantes, France, Barcelona, Spain, Lund, Sweden and Lyons, France

- 1989 "Celebracion Hispanica", Didactic Gallery, Plano
"Five Contemporary Painters", La Agencia, New York

- 1988 "Landscape Painting in Los Angeles", The Transamerica Galleries, Los Angeles

"New Visions/Nuevas Visiones", Gloria Luria Gallery, Bay Harbor Islands

"Three Hispanic Painters", Channing Dale Throckmorton, Santa Fe

"10 Latino Artists", Jack Tilton Gallery, New York

- 1987-89 "Hispanic Art in the United States", Travelling exhibition; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Corcoran Gallery, Washington D.C., Museum of Art, Santa Fe, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and The Brooklyn Museum, New York

- 1987 Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles

"Contemporary Hispanic Art", Marilyn Butler Fine Art, Scottsdale

- 1985 Struve Gallery, Chicago

- 1984 "Aqui", USC Fisher Gallery, Los Angeles

"Automobile and Culture", MOCA, Los Angeles

"Content: A Contemporary Focus, 1974-1984", Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC.

- 1983 "L.A. Seen", USC Galleries, Los Angeles

"California Current, Part II", L.A. Louver, Venice

"Painters", Janus Gallery, Los Angeles, California

"Miles Above", Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles

- 1980 "Ancient Roots, New Visions", UNAM Mexico City

"New Talent", Alan Stone Gallery, New York

Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery

- 1979 "L.A. Parks and Wrecks: Reflections on Urban Life", Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles
- 1978 "The Aesthetic of Graffiti", San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
- 1977 "Chicanarte", Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
- 1973-76 "Los Four", Cal State Los Angeles, Oakland Museum, Self Help Graphics, Los Angeles, UC Santa Barbara, Cal State Sacramento, L.A. County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, UC Irvine
- 1973 Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1972 Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1971 "Group Exhibition", Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
- "Four Chicano Artists", Cal State L.A.
- Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1968 Terrain Gallery, New York
- 1967 "Group Exhibition:", Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles
- "Mixed Media Show", University of Iowa Art Gallery, Iowa City
- REVIEWS
- 1990 Max Benavidez, "In Remembrance, Carlos Almaraz 1941-1989", *L.A. Style*, March pg. 84.
- Cathy Curtis, "Laguna Exhibit of Couple's Works Shows Expressions of 2 Singular Imaginations", *L.A. Times*, October 2, p.10
- 1989 Tim Wall, "Hispanic Art in the United States", *ARTnews*, December, pg. 170
- Carla Stellweg, "The Latin American Art Market", *Latin American Art*, Spring, pg. 29-34
- Elizabeth Venant, "On-the-Wall Latino Art at LACMA", *L.A. Times*, February 4, pg. 1
- Marlena Donohue, "Galleries", *L.A. Times*, February 17
- Michael Kimmelman, "30 Hispanic Artists at Brooklyn Museum", *N.Y. Times*, June 9, pg. C21
- "Hispanic Art in the U.S.", *Angeles Magazine*, February, pg. 32
- Betty Ann Brown, "Review", *Artweek*, October 28
- Max Benavidez, "Carlos Almaraz: The Color of Passion", *Angeles Magazine*, September
- 1988 Magdalena Hoffman, "Southern California's Cultural Traditions", *Southern California Home and Garden*, August
- 1987 Peter Applebome, "The Varied Palette of Hispanic Art", *N.Y. Times*, June 21
- Mark Stevens, "Devotees of the Fantastic", *Newsweek*, September 7
- 1986 Lawrence Gipe, "Scratching the Surface", *Artweek*, August 23
- Suzanne Muchnic, *L.A. Times*, August 8
- Constanza Montana, "From Barrio to Big Time", *Wall Street Journal*, October 17
- 1985 Mark Bahr, *California Homes*
- Kenneth Baker, "Freeway Landscapes - Painting at Speed", *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 23
- 1984 Christopher Knight, "The Absolute World of Carlos Almaraz", *The Herald Examiner*, August 1
- Tony Bizjak, "Art with Impact", *The Sacramento Union*, April 15
- William Wilson, "California Ceramics: Shape of Things to Come", *L.A. Times*, August 9
- Reader*, June 1, "Art: Carlos Almaraz"
- Suzanne Muchnic, "Nine Southern Californians Who Are Making an Arts Festival", *L.A. Times*, August 10
- Wolf Von Eckardt, "Auto-Intoxication in Los Angeles", *Time Magazine*, September 10
- Los Angeles Times Olympic Games Magazine, "A Splash of Color"
- 1983 Melinda Wortz, *ARTnews*, January, pp. 117-8
- Victor Valle, "Chicano Artists, Writers: An Emerging Generation", *L.A. Times*, Calender, August 7, pp. 4-6
- 1982 Peter Clothier, *Art In America*, March, p.56
- Suzanne Muchnic, "Carlos Almaraz's Latino L.A.", *L.A. Times*, October 18
- Betty Brown, "Almaraz's Urban Myths is a Really Bang-Up Show", *LA Reader*, October 22
- Kathi Norklun "Pick of the Week", *LA Weekly*, October 22
- Colin Gardner, "Seductive Excesses", *Artweek*, November 6
- 1981 Aimee Brown Price, "Raucous Ideograms of the Urban Environment", *Artweek*
- 1979 Octavio Costa, "Instantaneas", *LA Opinion*, July 32
- Suzanne Muchnic, "Damaged Goods in the Big City", *L.A. Times*, July 23
- 1977 Shifra Goldman, *Artes Visuales*, Mexico
- 1974 William Wilson, *L.A. Times*, March



Time Piece / Recuerdos De Ti 1972

Pastel on paper

19 x 25 inches

Art would be an easy matter if it were simply about "taste".

Thank goodness it is not but represents a myriad of expressions and emotions.

*What I learned from Carlos over a seven year friendship was to remain open to seeing
and to understanding not only his very personal expression but all subjects which
he loved from ancient myths to space ships, Tarot readings to the human spirit.*

He was prepared to share openly his beliefs and life with the world.

These highly personal works on paper reveal the life of Carlos Almaraz.

Jan Turner

JAN TURNER GALLERY