

MARCH 4, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

LORENA OCHOA

RUEGOS Y DESIERTOS

961 CHUNG KING ROAD

MARCH 9, 2024 – APRIL 13, 2024

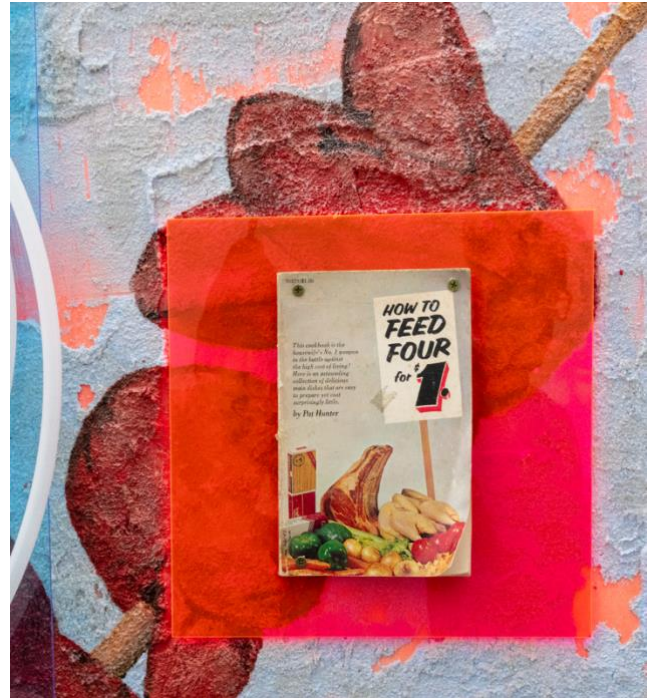
ARTIST'S RECEPTION:

MARCH 9th, 6-9pm

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Lorena Ochoa, Salchipulpos (detail), 2024

Charlie James Gallery is pleased to present

Lorena Ochoa: Ruegos y Desiertos, a multimedia

exhibition that explores parallels between the romanticization of bygone cowboy culture and present-day realities of migration, segregation, and immigration. Ochoa brings the stuff of everyday life into the work, and through that summons both the unique spirit of the immigrant neighborhood and the heavy weight of history. Found-object combines and sculptural assemblages juxtapose the familiar and the fantastic – deserts and dreams – in works that incisively critique the mythos of the American west through the lens of the Chicanx experience.

The cowboy epitomizes a certain American self-conception, one of self-sufficiency, ruggedness, and strength in the face of the vastness of nature and perceived threats both animal and human. Ochoa riffs on the visual signifiers of cowboy culture, reminding us that the first vaqueros hailed from Mexico. *En la frente | frontera* can be read as a manifestation of this historical erasure. A potted paddle cactus has been covered in Vantablack paint, rendering it “invisible” – like the vaqueros, a desert history hidden in plain sight. Meanwhile, *Burros hablando de orejas* rejects this assimilation, reclaiming and modernizing the idea of the “ride” by transforming a sawhorse and saddle into a slick lowrider. By merging the cowboy’s most essential tools with a style synonymous with Mexican-American car culture, Ochoa simultaneously explores the exclusionary erasure and the celebratory visibility of immigrant communities.

The dream of migration undergirds the culture that birthed the American cowboy. Westward movement fulfilled a great manifest destiny, yet when that dream takes root below the southern border and spurs migration north it is vilified and criminalized. Ochoa calls out this hypocrisy in works such as *Evaporations*. On one side of the piece, monarch butterfly migration patterns are etched into a rich blue plexiglass panel. This sits behind a white iron window covering, on which a horseshoe hangs for luck. The monarchs spend their winters in Mexico, and their annual journey northward is a highly anticipated entomological marvel. Abutting this tableau is a vintage Toyota truck tailgate, the sort that might be used by migrants on their own arduous trek north. Sinister reminders of what may meet them at the border dot the exhibition: zip ties and traffic cones, and the cheery yet ominous appropriated signage for “ICE Bait and Tackle.”

The ice freezer is a staple of the liquor store and mini mart, the proliferation of which contribute to impoverished food landscapes in marginalized communities, including the artist’s hometown of Santa Ana. Surrounded by the affluence of Orange County, Santa Ana is bounded on all sides by concrete: hemmed in by intersecting multi-laned highways and the channelized basin of the Santa Ana river. Ochoa’s wall-based assemblage works such as *House of Spirits* reference real-life locations while also evoking the more ephemeral and accumulative nature of *rasquache*. These works are also rooted in art history, with foundations in Robert Rauschenberg’s Combines, 20th century assemblage, and minimalist painting.

Si te queda el Saco embodies the *domesticana* spirit of finding beauty in the everyday. At the work’s core is a white plastic patio chair, a common and unremarkable object. Yet the chair aspires to be something more – more comfortable, more elegant, more beautiful. To that end it has been dressed up in strawberry-dotted vinyl upholstered in the manner of a plush armchair. This aspirational embellishment is at the heart of *domesticana* aesthetics, which is characterized by abundance despite an environment of scarcity. This body of work holds close the dreams necessary to set out in search of a better life, as well as the hard-won pride, pain, and beauty that come from living between two cultures.

Lorena Ochoa’s (b. 1983, Santa Ana, Ca) practice is an act of defiance—defiance of binary thinking, of art-historical hierarchies, of political borders that separate cultures and families. Ochoa received their BA in Visual Arts with a minor in Chicana/o Studies at the University of California Los Angeles and their MFA from the University of California San Diego. Ochoa has been awarded the Cota Robles Fellowship, the Oceanids Fellowship, UCLA Undergraduate Award in 2018 and 2019, the Hoyt Memorial Scholarship, the Weissman Travel Fund and the Michael Coomes Memorial Award. Lorena Ochoa was also an Artist in Residence at the Guapamacataro Hacienda in Michoacan in 2022. Ochoa’s work was recently included in ICA San Diego’s NextGen 2023 exhibition.