

LINDA VALLEJO
ARTIST STATEMENT

The Brown Dot Project

After creating the “Make ‘Em All Mexican” series of sculptures, handmade books, and manipulated aluminum sublimation prints, I was still interested in “keepin’ it brown.” The original MEAM series was realized on repurposed antique objects, photos, and book pages. That work tended to be detailed, complex, gaudy, and over-the-top, and, going forth, I wanted to produce a cleaner, simple image. For the next series I decided to focus on simpler, entirely abstract works on canvas and paper.

The first question was, “How do I translate the MEAM message to a two dimensional painted surface?” I went through several experiments, with unhappy results. Some of these experiments were based on personal memory and catharsis. But all the while in the back of my head I was ruminating about “brown electric portraits,” using small squares of different shades of brown, harking back to my earlier series, “The Electrics.”

In another part of my head I was thinking about data. The Los Angeles Latino community is always talking about Latino numbers and how the population is growing by leaps and bounds. The consensus is that the growing numbers should equal growing prosperity and influence. MEAM had been based on the politics of color and class. So “The Brown Dot Project” continues this question by asking if the growing numbers are changing our attitudes about color and class.

I finally realized “The Brown Dot Project” by bringing together the painting style employed in “The Electrics” (small squares of color) with Latino statistics and thinking about how abstract painted works could talk about these numbers and their influence on our perception of race and class. Then I thought of doing grids of color based on Latino data – little painted squares. But I wasn’t eager to take this approach; honestly, the thought of painting a zillion tiny squares was going to be a boring and exhausting process.

I needed to find a surface with the squares already in place. One day, as I was shopping for art supplies, the idea of architectural-grid vellum suddenly came to mind. The idea of small squares with painted dots based on numerical value was the resulting image.

The “Brown Dot” abstract image of these Latino data numbers emerged after several trials and errors. Once I had the grids and began dividing them into quadrants I realized that a pattern was appearing. This was what clinched “The Brown Dot Project.” Experimenting with formal variations based on Latino percentages and numbers happened more or less automatically, coming out of my experiences with indigenous weaving. The first images recalled American Indian and Mesoamerican blankets and weavings and ancient ceremonial sites. The abstract images appeared because I was forced to create new variations. Mondrian, Chuck Close, Agnes Martin, Charles Gaines, and other grid-oriented modernists came to mind.

I describe “The Brown Dot Project” as an elegant solution to a series of complex questions about simple facts, that is, data about Latino life in the United States. I am literally counting one Latino at a time, brown dot by brown dot! The process is exhaustive, and often exhausting, taking several hours to design and complete.

I find myself studying a variety of sets of data, including topics such as the number of Latinos in any given city or state, the national number of Latino executives, the number of Latinos involved in the American Civil war. The amount and kinds of data are inexhaustible! The works have gone from 7 square inches to 24 square inches to 40 square inches. The Los Angeles (48.3% Latino population) 24 square-inch images entail 48,400 total squares (100% of the field), with 23,377 dots (48.3%), or 467 sets of 50 dots + 27 additional. Counting squares and dots, completing the corresponding mathematics, and “dotting” the page takes hours of concentration on both topic and execution.