

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

FRANK ROMERO: CALIFORNIA DREAMING

September 13 – October 25, 2025

Opening Reception:

Saturday, September 13, 4:00–7:00 p.m.

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Luis De Jesus Los Angeles is proud to present ***Frank Romero: California Dreaming***, a solo exhibition featuring new paintings alongside seminal works, including painted and neon sculptures—a new milestone in the celebrated Chicano artist's over-six-decade career. The exhibition will span Galleries 1 and 2 and run from September 13 to October 25, 2025, with an opening reception on Saturday, September 13, from 4:00-7:00 p.m.

Dreams are fertile ground for myths, icons, and symbols. They chart surreal journeys through hope and fear, past and future—an emotional terrain we're left to interpret upon waking. California itself, a storied land of dreamers from across the globe, continues to inspire Chicano art pioneer Frank Romero. Throughout his prolific career, Romero has cultivated a visual vocabulary that embodies shared experiences, pride, notions of identity, home, belonging, and the many complexities and joys of Chicana life, resonating with Angelenos and beyond.

Frank Romero: California Dreaming invites viewers to a nighttime drive—from the glimmering boulevards of Hollywood to the vast openness of the Sonoran Desert, which straddles both the Northwest of Mexico and the American Southwest. Through abstracted nightscapes illuminated by Romero's signature expressionist color palette, galvanized by bold brushstrokes, iconic vintage cars cruise beneath starry skies and glowing neon, driving past palm trees, saguaros, and landmark symbols of Los Angeles' cinematic golden age—the Brown Derby, the Cinerama Dome, and the Chinese Theater.

Romero's new work introduces playful flying saucers, a departure from his classic LA freeway motifs. These UFOs, soaring from Hollywood to Roswell, are both nostalgic and futuristic, nodding to vintage Hollywood props and holding a cheeky resemblance to sombreros. They hold space for humor, social critique, and the complex emotional layers of collective memory and Chicana experience. As Romero explains:

"In the 50s, there was a phenomena about flying saucers in the news. I look back at that era with humor because I think it's kind of funny. It harkens back to a time in my life when things seemed less serious, although at the time, I did not hear about Eisenhower deporting Mexican nationals. It was not discussed in the news. [...] When I was growing up, the UFO wasn't just related to science fiction, it was symbolic of a primordial fear of something coming. I thought it was rather silly. And these paintings are tongue-in-cheek, they're supposed to be jokes. They are jokes. But really, though, the government has labeled the Mexican American this and others like us similarly before."

In the main gallery, amidst the painted nightscapes, Romero parks *LA Lowrider* (1991, 2025), a near life-sized painted sculpture of a classic Pachuco-era Chevy Fleetline, its underbody aglow with neon. Adjacent to it two relief wall sculptures of lowriders tricked out with beaming neon icons of Romero's recurring visual motifs: radiant *corazones* (hearts), flaming rockets, and fearless street dogs cruising through the night.

An installation of cut-out painted sculptures lends a nod to props in film and theater sets, while also inviting deeper engagement with the artist's world. Shaped by Los Angeles and its magnificent diversity of culture, industry, and terrain, Romero has maintained an expansive appreciation of visual culture—one informed by old Hollywood movies, pop culture, art history, current events, and the socio-political dynamics of the multicultural metropolis.

In Gallery 2, the exhibition shifts inward with a reflective still life series, featuring collected objects from Romero's years of travels. Carefully composed tableaux blend handmade ceramics, woven textiles, and sculptures across cultures—from indigenous artifacts to syncretic forms like Mexican *talavera*. These intimate arrangements are enriched by *vanitas*-inspired elements: *calavera* skulls, wooden trunks, cowboy boots and hats, and Western

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pistols. Romero orchestrates these objects in a vibrant dialogue, tracing a shared history of cultural exchange and transformation.

Beyond frenetic freeways, chromatic hillsides, and the overall aesthetic of California cool embodied by his uncompromising championing of Los Angeles, Romero continues to celebrate the value of the city's multicultural community and gathering of dreamers. *Frank Romero: California Dreaming* marks a significant moment, weighing the past with the future as he fervently continues his vivid storytelling. As ever, Frank is still dreaming—and invites us all along for the ride.

Frank Romero (b.1941, Los Angeles, CA) is among the most influential pioneers of the Chicano Art Movement. Romero employs various media—including painting, neon, sculpture, and murals—to explore narratives related to the Chicana experience, Latin American heritage, and American Pop culture. Pulling together a diverse cast of signs and symbols to invent a visual language reflective of the multiculturalism at the core of the Chicana community, Romero's works provide insight into his life as both an artist and a Mexican American from East LA. Romero has spent his life traveling, living, and working between Los Angeles, New York, New Mexico, and France, which has expanded his ideas of identity and *Chicanidad* beyond urban settings or the complexities of a single city.

His visual explorations of *Chicanidad* (Chicana identity) stand as cornerstones of this period that arose from *El Movimiento*, the Mexican American social and political civil rights movement that began in the early 1970s. Romero, along with fellow artists Carlos Almaraz, Gilbert "Magu" Lujan, and Roberto de la Rocha, co-founded the artist collective *Los Four*, whose 1974 exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was the country's first Chicano exhibition at a major arts institution.

Romero's works are included in such prominent collections as the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art Library, New York, NY; The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture, Riverside, CA; The Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego, CA; The Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA; the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX, and others. He has completed over 15 murals throughout Los Angeles and was a key contributor to the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival with *Going to the Olympics*, a large-scale mural painted along one of Los Angeles' busiest freeways, the Hollywood Freeway (U.S. Highway 101) in Downtown Los Angeles, a scene loved by millions throughout the decades.

For further information, including images and previews, please call 213-395-0762, or email: gallery@luisdejesus.com.