

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

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**JOHN M. VALADEZ: *A Two Second Gaze —
Street Photography from the 1970s and 80s***

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November 8 – December 20, 2025

Opening Reception: Saturday, November 8, 4:00–7:00 P.M.

“To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle. One thing that helps towards it is to keep a diary...” – George Orwell

Luis De Jesus Los Angeles is pleased to announce **John M. Valadez: *A Two Second Gaze—Street Photography from the 1970s and 80s***. The exhibition will be on view in Gallery 3 from November 8 through December 20, 2025. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, November 8 from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

A Two Second Gaze—Photography from the 1970s and 80s presents a selection of rarely and never exhibited photographs by John M. Valadez from his seminal body of work, the *East Los Angeles Urban Portrait Portfolio*. The series is a visual archive of portraits of neighbors, friends, and everyday people he encountered on walks through his neighborhood in East Los Angeles to and from his studio in Downtown L.A.'s theater district. By situating this work in these Asian, Black, Brown, and immigrant communities, Valadez activated the Chicano movement's concerns: visibility, space, and pride. The photographs become documents of a moment, capturing culture, street fashion, public spaces, but also a lived Chicano reality in L.A.

During the late 1970s, the Chicano movement in California was active with artists seeking ways to assert Mexican American identity, and respond to institutional neglect, discrimination, and underrepresentation. Valadez's photographic work captures this generational moment: the disenfranchised who lived in East L.A., who are connected both to Mexican heritage and American urban life; influenced by popular culture but also grounded in barrio realities.

As Valadez sought to push realism beyond aesthetics, he instituted a practice of walking with his camera and 36-exposure rolls of Kodachrome color slide film, documenting a cast of characters spotlighted amidst the drama of everyday life. His intention was to seek the heroic figures of daily life that would later develop into his iconic pastels and oil paintings. In this way, the practice of taking photographs on the fly became a form of notetaking and sketching, with the camera's lens able to keep pace with the fast-moving nature of city life. It helped define a visual vocabulary for Chicanos that was not based on caricature or pathologizing, but on presence, style, and individuality.

What emerges is a living sketchbook, with Valadez engaging directly with his subjects. At a time when portraits were often staged events—scheduled in a studio, dressed for, and posed picture-perfect—Valadez captures the interruption of routine, a respite from the monotony of walking, waiting, working. Valadez's genuine and humorous presence is palpable from the other side of the lens bringing forth something noble: an exchange, and an appreciation for simply being seen. His photos capture a sense of identity being performed—how the subjects present themselves, how they navigate between expectations, popular culture, ethnic identity, and personal style. There is a tension, but also a richness, in being visible, seen, and seen on one's own terms.

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Valadez started the *East Los Angeles Urban Portrait Portfolio* around 1978, and while some may recognize familiar faces from Valadez's pastels and paintings—figures often lifted from their original scenes—these photographs emphasize Los Angeles itself as a supporting character. Looking back at that time in Downtown L.A., we see familiar architectural settings alongside many urban changes: Brooklyn Ave. becoming Cesar Chavez Ave., the bold fashion styles of late 1970s and early 80s, and sights still familiar today, such as the unhoused sleeping on the street. Alongside this visual backdrop was the psychological and socio-political context of the time: the AIDS epidemic, the struggles of underserved Vietnam veterans, class and racial discrimination, the emergence of new drugs, and Reagan-era cuts to social services that deeply affected the dynamics and character of Downtown L.A.

Valadez remembers that despite these many issues, however unprecedented or enduring, there was a prevailing sense of optimism, especially in the working-class, multicultural neighborhood of Downtown L.A., brimming with industry, exchange, community, and hope. Valadez elevates portraits of his neighbors, community, and city beyond documentary, allegory, or staged drama. His emphasis on their humanity transcends narrative conventions, offering a form of social commentary that confronts the overlooked realities of urban life—both then and now.

John M. Valadez (b.1951, Los Angeles, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. A trailblazer of the Chicano Art Movement in the 1970s and 80s, Valadez was active in formative collectives such as Los Four and Centro de Arte Público, and he continues to pursue politically engaged work in a career spanning over 50 years, championing Chicano and Latinx communities. Valadez studied at East Los Angeles Junior College from 1970-72 and earned his BFA at California State University, Long Beach in 1976. His works are included in numerous notable collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, NY; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian, Washington, DC; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, La Jolla, CA; The Cheech Marin Collection, Riverside, CA; The Mexican Museum, San Francisco, CA; The Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, FL; National Mexican Museum, Chicago, IL; Centre d'Art, Santa Monica, Barcelona, ES; El Centro Cultural Tijuana, BC, MX; Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, FR, amongst others.

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For further information, including images and previews, please call 213-395-0762, or email: gallery@luisdejesus.com. Follow us on Instagram [@luisdejesuslosangeles](https://www.instagram.com/luisdejesuslosangeles).