



**KEN GONZALES-DAY**

*Luis De Jesus*

By Leah Perez | December 1, 2025



At Luis De Jesus Los Angeles, Ken Gonzales-Day: *Afterlife*, shows new digital collages furthering his body of “nevermades”; a term coined by the artist to describe his revisionist reimaginings of Western historical moments and figures bringing into question the long held museum practice of considering Western utilitarian objects “art” and everything else “artifact”.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is *Xipe Totec with Busts (2025)*, a large scale digital collage that features a tapestry background of Danish imperial ships and at the foreground are a number of decapitated heads including that of a Xipe Totec, the Mexica goddess of fertility, as well as the heads of slave-owners and

eugenicists, once celebrated figures of the Western world, and human skulls sourced from the Museum of Criminal Anthropology. In this work Gonzales-Day imagines subjects of fallen empires all smashed together as detritus of a collapsed world.

Featured in the other collages are subversive Frankensteined statues and sculptures, mixtures of Mesoamerican, ancient Roman and Greek figures, and depictions of the Buddha. One such collage, merges Laocoön and His Sons with that of Quetzalcoatl, the Mexica Feathered Serpent god, showcasing the Indigenous goddess overpowering Laocoön as opposed to the snakes originally depicted. Another collage poses the duality of the West and Mesoamerica depicting a dying Gaul peering into his reflection to see a Chac Mool mirroring his positioning. While the subjects are sometimes at clear odds with one another, others imply a certain equality and duality between the very strikingly different subjects. Latin American scholars have now moved away from the narrative that Spain “discovered” the Americas but rather a mutual (albeit imbalanced) cultural exchange took place between aesthetics, language, and cuisine. You can thank the Mexica for the avocado, the tomato, for chocolate; all words which derive from Nahuatl.

As we Americans inhabit a dying empire, I think of Donna Haraway’s posthumanist studies, of Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, of Octavia Butler’s predictions about Los Angeles in 2025, wildfires and fascist politicians making amplifications of “Making America Great Again”. While some museums, like MOMA, have made attempts to rearrange their collections and pivot away from the tradition of Eurocentricism, this effort is futile if we don’t address white supremacy for what it is, a myth.

Neonazis and MAGA alike, want the US to return to a period of white imperial greatness, often citing the Romans and Greeks as the peak of Western civilization, except for the gay shit of course. But if the Greeks and Romans were the pinnacle of Western civilization, why aren’t they around anymore? We can’t go back to that past, because it never existed.

Ken Gonzales-Day helps us confront the lie and think about what our stories could be if they weren’t shaped around the lie of white supremacy, or a timeline that revolves around Christ, and celebrates dead losers and please, don’t expect me to care when the Louvre gets robbed or the Notre Dame burns down when they as institutions were built on the exploitation and cultural extraction of the Americas, of the Caribbean, of Africa.