

RAUL GUERRERO

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF THE AMERICAS

July 08 – September 16, 2018

Drawn both from the early 1970s and from the past decade or so, these paintings, objects and photographs make for a little bookend survey. The show might just as easily have been called *An Abbreviated History of Raul Guerrero*, not unfitting for an artist who, over the course of nearly five decades, has returned frequently to the intersections of place, self and history—and the sense that each is always contingent and so, by necessity, abbreviated. Fragments of body also link these works—hands and heads and faces (and a disembodied breath)—as does Guerrero’s idiosyncratic sense of humor, another constant throughout his career.

Graduating from the Chouinard Art Institute in 1970, Guerrero worked among a group of artists in Los Angeles, including Jack Goldstein, Allen Ruppersberg, and William Leavitt, each in their way interested in the idea of California. Informed by his experiences as a Mexican-American, raised minutes from the border, Guerrero examined the vagaries of mediation and signification, how images and objects travel. *Bird Bone Whistles* is part of a series of works from the early 1970s in which Guerrero mechanized indigenous American artefacts, although it is unique among those works in that the simple seagull bone flutes are not, strictly speaking, *found*, but rather recreated based on photos he encountered in a book on early California—handmade readymades animated by an air compressor. The photograms that make up *Four Obscene Hand Gestures with Spanish Translations* similarly deal with shifts and limits of meaning. As the title makes clear, it’s an act of translation—from a gestural to a spoken vernacular—though pointedly, from the perspective of an anglophone audience, the messages are left “half-translated”.

The Battle of Cajamarca and the diptych comprised of *Hotdog: The Wienerschnitzel* and *Chorizo Combo* are elements from a sprawling project undertaken by Guerrero over the past thirty years. Under the heading of *The Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies*—a name borrowed from Juan de Cárdenas’s vast 1591 study of the New World—Guerrero has sought to depict nothing less than the history of the Americas from the conquest to the present through a sequence of prismatic, often-dreamlike imagery. With cartoonish violence, *the Battle of Cajamarca* stages the 1532 ambush of Inca ruler Atahualpa by Francisco Pizarro and a gang of conquistadors, the key event in the conquest of Peru. The glinting dead gaze of the coconut heads plays off against the crazed fast food faces—another pair of bookends: 500 years of violence and cultural hybridity to arrive at a smiling chorizo plate.

