

ON THE COVER

A Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose by Maria de Los Angeles

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on June 27, 2024.

The title is Gertrude Stein's famous truism, declaring that roses, and therefore all other things, "are what they are." Hard to argue with that. But what a rose Maria de Los Angeles has conjured up, in acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, to belie the point. Its petals unfold like a slow lava fountain, frosted, paradoxically, with silver. They open to what could almost be an eye staring up at something high and far away, but at what? Things are what they are, but what is that? Many things, apparently, partly formed, and partly hidden in an exuberance of line and color, cool mixed with warm, surrounding the rose. Look closely and see a face just below, a bird in the upper left, hints of skulls and skeletons and yes, a Virgin Mary, and here and there, leaves and stars. Asked to comment on the imagery, de Los Angeles says only that she had a dream space in mind, a kind of contemplation, with the rose, a symbol of love and passion, dominating the center. Winged animals and humans are there to be "emotive" but were kept deliberately small, embedded, and ambiguous. She wanted to create "an open-ended narrative" for everyone to read in their own ways.

This month's cover artist was born in Mexico where, she maintains, visual art is an active presence in local culture and daily life. One of eight children, de Los Angeles always enjoyed drawing and painting, especially plants and flowers and horses. She came to northern California with her family as a child, discovering a different culture in a land of vineyards, mountains, redwoods, and roses. Her favored motifs expanded over time with the integration of figurative and symbolic elements. Formal education included studies in fine art at Santa Rosa Junior College, followed by a Bachelor of Fine Art at the Pratt Institute in New York and a Master's in painting and printmaking from Yale University. She built a successful career in visual art, no easy matter for anyone, let alone an undocumented newcomer in this country. Awards and solo and group shows across the nation and now a teaching appointment at Yale reflect her achievement. Perhaps because she arrived as a "dreamer," political and social issues, the immigration experience, hers and others, and the lives of women and refugees have animated her creativity. Moreover, de Los Angeles has known and surmounted adversity.

Her portfolio of work at Pratt, required for the degree and subsequent application to Yale, was destroyed in a campus fire. Unbowed, she created a whole new body of work that provided the degree requirement and helped her gain entrance to Yale's competitive program.

There are several strands of past and present that come together in de Los Angeles's paintings, prints, and murals. There is her Mexican heritage, augmented by American experience, political and social awareness, and extensive schooling in artistic studio practice. Another strand is the influence of different artists and teachers. She mentioned Marc Chagall more than once but also Gustav Klimt, Käthe Kollwitz, and Richard Diebenkorn among many others. What is so compelling about Chagall? It is his "compositional structure" or "abstract space, connecting sky and ground" and also his sense of color. Chagall was a Belorussian Jew living in a dangerous Europe, who escaped to freedom. He was already free artistically, playfully arranging people, animals, and artifacts from his village into pictures that glowed with color and imagination, ignoring gravity and skirting the edge of surrealism. Klimt was an artist in Vienna at the turn of the 20th century, another difficult time and place. Many will know his *The Kiss*, a still-common poster in college dorms. But Klimt was also a brilliant and novel compositionist, embedding soft human figures within patterns of fabric and hard metal, gold, and jewelry and making it all work. Kollwitz was a German artist and printmaker in yet another time of turbulence—is there a connection? Her poignant prints and drawings laid bare the loss and suffering of economic depression and war, felt especially by women and children. Finally, Richard Diebenkorn, a fellow Californian, is known for his abstract expressionist painting but later adding the human figure in a compelling blend. These are rich and powerful influences.

Maria de Los Angeles hopes that the *American Psychologist* the readership will enjoy her *Rose*, with its tension between representation and abstraction, passion and reflection. Yes, things are what they are, and what that is she leaves it up to us.

 R. Walter Heinrichs
Art Editor