

# BeYOnD ART IS PAINTER VINCENT VALDEZ THE RECORDER OF OUR TURBULENT *TIMES*? BY CATHERINE D. ANSPON PHOTOGRAPHY ZEKE PEÑA

Every once in awhile, an artist comes along who is both mirror and chronicler of our times. In Depression-era and post-War America, it was Edward Hopper: his *Nighthawks*, 1942, speaks of alienation and the loneliness of the city while reflecting the fear surrounding World War II. Another example from the American art canon is the realist Reginald Marsh, whose teeming crowd scenes are emblematic of the shifting demographic of 1930s New York — especially his paintings and drawings of Coney Island's sultry, summertime pleasures. Then there's Andy Warhol, whose silkscreened paintings of Jackie Kennedy in her veil during

services for her assassinated husband and images torn from headlines such as *Race Riot*, 1964, summarize the turbulent '60s.

Who is the artist for the post-Iraq invasion/post-Wall Street meltdown? A worthy candidate is Texas-based Vincent Valdez, who rose to prominence as a teen prodigy with a gift for drawing that earned him a full scholarship to the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design. He soon garnered attention with the no-holds-barred activist painting *Kill the Pachuco Bastard!*, which commented on the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles. The socially aware canvas headlined the 2001 traveling exhibition "Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge," culled from the collection of Cheech Marin. It broke attendance

records during its 12-city museum tour from 2001 through 2007.

In 2004, at the age of 26, Valdez presented his iconic "Stations" at the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio — the youngest artist ever to solo there. The works shown conflated realist scenes of boxers, drawn with great detail and gravitas, with the Stations of the Cross. The narrative drew the viewer into the action, effectively making us a ringside spectator, while Valdez's black-and-white vignettes melded past and present. After closing at the McNay, "Stations" attracted attention on a multi-year national tour.

Valdez has continued to be a voice for his generation, and in 2014 was included in Crystal  
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The artist in his studio, with *The City I* in process, summer 2016