

**Roberto
Gil de Montes
Reverence
in Blue**



Roberto Gil de Montes: Reverence in Blue

David Evans Frantz

In 1981, esteemed curator and writer Carla Stellweg invited then-Los Angeles-based artist Roberto Gil de Montes to work with her in Mexico City as a guest editor for a special issue of *Artes Visuales* on Chicana/o art. Born in Guadalajara, Gil de Montes immigrated to the US with his family when he was fifteen, arriving in East Los Angeles just before the 1968 Chicano blowouts erupted in protest of inequality in schools. Trained at Otis Art Institute, Gil de Montes came to identify with the Chicano movement and its artistic vanguard. He was part of a generation of Chicanx and queer artists that emerged in the 1970s, who experimented voraciously with artistic genres and forms, examined the intersections of identity and cultural histories through their practice, and conceived novel modes for presenting and distributing their work. Gil de Montes profiled many of his peers and friends in the resulting magazine, including Carlos Almaraz, Elsa Flores, John Valadez, Richard Valverde, and Jack Vargas, among others.

While returning to Mexico as a young artist to research Chicano art being produced in the US may sound counter-intuitive, as identified by Gil de Montes in the magazine's introduction, this move was beneficial:

My return to Mexico ... gave me a chance to critically review from a distance and wider perspective what they [Chicano artists] have produced, allowing a clearer objectivity. ... This is also a good time to analyze what Latin American artists throughout the world have in common and to open up channels of communication, seek out a dialogue, discussion and a better conceptualization of the role of art in politics and of politics in art. If to inform is to decolonize, with this issue of *Artes Visuales* we hope to contribute and, at the same time, try to open a new and vital dialogue."¹

Gil de Montes underscores both fluidity between, and commonality among, various perspectives and positionalities in conceiving the issue, an ethos of moving between categories—identity and artistic practice, to name only two—that would continue to inform his life and work.

[1] Roberto Gil de Montes, "Presentacion," *Artes Visuales*, no. 29 (June 1981): 9. I have made minor spelling corrections to the text.

In November of 1981, the artist returned to Southern California to refocus on painting. As his practice developed, Gil de Montes produced psychologically layered works that seethe with a mix of "danger, sensuality, death, and transformation," as critic Diane Mark-Walker astutely observed in 1991.² Since moving permanently in 2006 to the coastal town of La Peñita de Jaltemba in Nayarit, Mexico, Gil de Montes has produced lushly rendered scenes of tropical abundance and sensuality that tremble beneath the surface with unease about life, love, mortality, and the indeterminacy of the present. The decades he has spent rooted in La Peñita have both nurtured and renewed his artistic practice.

While queerness has been a throughline in Gil de Montes's work, it has only more recently been remarked upon as a longstanding facet of his paintings. The artist has long utilized the corporal—often, but not exclusively, the male body—as a contested site of fantasy, play, desire, and humor. This is on view in many of his new works: In *Peculiarly Intimacy* (2023), an ambiguously gendered couple, one partner in a jaguar bodysuit, lounge together in bed. In *Wrecked* (2023), a shirtless man reclines within the derelict remnants of a grounded boat, lost in revelry. In *Catch* (2023), two tan, fit young men pose together, holding a fish on the beach under a starry sky. The sky, the ocean, and the spaces between luxuriate in blue.

[2] Diane Mark-Walker, "Death's Broad Domain," *Artweek* 22, no. 34 (October 17, 1991).

We are living through a period of unrelenting backlash to the social visibility and legal gains queer people have achieved in many societies, part and parcel with the other dehumanizing assaults of the moment. In the US, this has been most prominently seen in restrictive legislation targeting and political scapegoating of trans, gender non-conforming, and gender transgressive individuals, including young people and children—a panic among a vocal minority seeking to strip people of autonomy over their bodies and personhood.

The paintings *Silvia* (2023) and *Ana* (2023) honor two transgender women whom Gil de Montes knew through friends and youthful nights out dancing during the 1970s in Los Angeles. In both works, the life-size figures gaze at the viewer from behind a loosely rendered veil of patterned flowers, recalling delicate lace that the artist has applied over the entire canvas. *Silvia* appears with a white band over her chest, perhaps a bandage from a gender-affirming surgery, while *Ana* is shown in a white corset. Gil de Montes does not know what became of these two individuals after youthful nights of finding oneself and community on the dance floor. For Chicana trans femmes of the 1970s, housing, healthcare, employment, and stability would have been difficult to achieve in the face of rampant discrimination—issues that continue to plague many trans women, and especially trans women of color. For Gil de Montes, these works highlight two individuals he knew during a pivotal moment when he was similarly coming to understand his own identity and, more broadly, the fragility of trans and queer existence.

The artist has utilized veiled motifs as a visual device since the 1990s. In many of his earliest veiled works, Gil de Montes applied this ceremonial shroud to register persistent loss and erasure during the early years of the AIDS epidemic in the US. Throughout history, rules and customs around veiling have held both celebratory and mournful ritual, ceremonial, and religious significance. Curator and critic Silvia Benedetti identified Gil de Montes's veils as a liminal space: “Not unlike water, curtains can be sites of transition, signifying shifts from public to private, known to unknown, life to death.”³ In *Silvia* and *Ana*, the play with anonymity, amplified by the veil, might protect the subjects from the discriminatory gaze of heightened visibility in our present (precarious) moment. Indeed, these works sat in the artist's studio for some time before the artist felt compelled to apply the lacey flower patterning, a shield of care and respect before the paintings left his custody.

A single flower appears behind the ear of the handsome sitter in *Tropical Man* (2023). Unlike the dreamy shades of blue found in most other recent works, this young man is shown before a striking background of red. The work is a homage to Marsden Hartley's *Adelard the Drowned, Master of the “Phantom”* (c. 1938–39), the artist's third invocation of this stunning painting by the early twentieth-century American artist—last year Gil de Montes also completed two similar paintings which he titled simply *Adelard* (2022) and *Said* (2022). Hartley's stocky portrait was of Alty Mason, a Nova Scotian fisherman known for wearing a flower behind his ear, who drowned with his brother and cousin in a fishing

[3] Silvia Benedetti, “Roberto Gil de Montes,” *Artforum*, February 2023, <https://www.artforum.com/events/roberto-gil-de-montes-250827>.

accident in 1936. Hartley lived with the Mason family on the island of Eastern Point, Nova Scotia, near the tiny fishing town of Blue Rocks between 1935 and 1936, during which he became close with all members of the family, especially Alty, whom he fell in love with. Adelard was a fictitious name Hartley gave Alty in his unpublished, allegorical manuscript *Cleophas and His Own: A North Atlantic Tragedy* (c. 1936). When Alty died, Hartley was devastated and painted multiple works about the family and his lost love. Longing, imagination, desire, and disaster converge for the painter who found refuge and inspiration in a small fishing town.

While no tragedy has befallen Gil de Montes that parallels the drowning of Alty, the artist is quick to point to the affinities between Hartley and his own life as a painter in a remote coastal enclave, an added layer to the artist's loving homage to Hartley's *Adelard*. A white flower above one's ear may be an especially apt reminder to carry tenderness during turbulent times. Eliding distinctions between memory and fantasy, Gil de Montes's various invocations of memory, connection, and loss reverberate through the sumptuous details, delicate veils, and manifold blues of his recent paintings.



Checklist



Farewell, 2023
Oil on linen
77.17 × 101.57 in. (196 × 258 cm)



Interview with the Blue Deer II, 2023
Oil on linen
77.17 × 101.57 in. (196 × 258 cm)



Ana, 2023
Oil on linen
70.87 × 62.99 in. (180 × 160 cm)



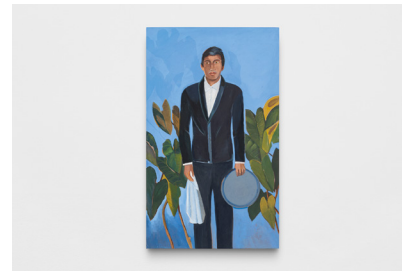
Silvia, 2023
Oil on linen
70.87 × 62.99 in. (180 × 160 cm)



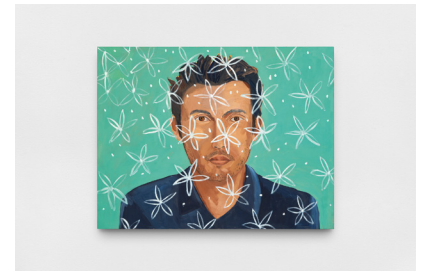
Peculiar Intimacy, 2023
Oil on linen
78.74 × 70.87 in. (200 × 180 cm)



Catch, 2023
Oil on linen
70.87 × 78.74 in. (180 × 200 cm)



Tenoch, 2023
Oil on canvas
47.24 × 47.24 in. (120 × 120 cm)



Sammy, 2023
Oil on canvas
43.31 × 33.46 in. (110 × 85 cm)



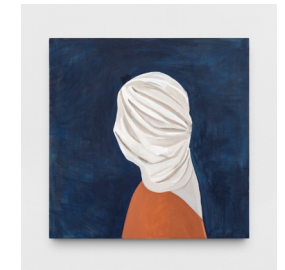
Wrecked, 2023
Oil on canvas
61.02 × 78.74 in. (155 × 200 cm)

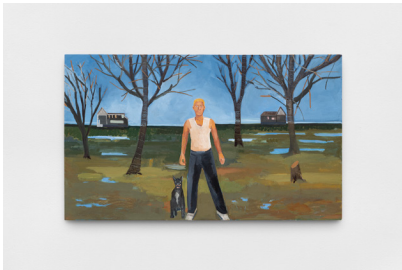


El discípulo (The Disciple), 2023
Oil on linen
62.99 × 70.87 in. (160 × 180 cm)

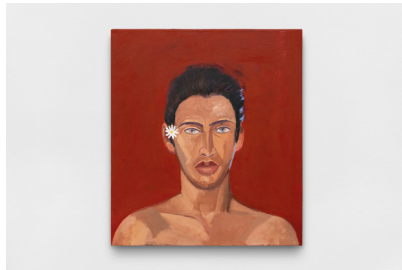


La verdad (The Truth), 2023
Oil on canvas
31.89 × 31.89 in. (81 × 81 cm) each

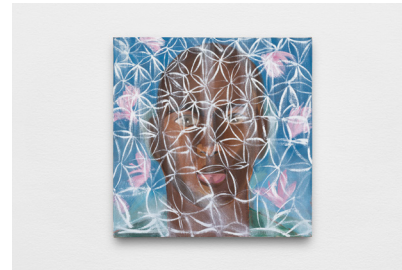




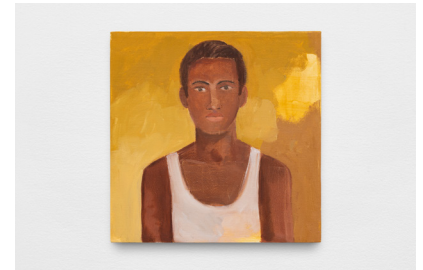
Americana, 2023
Oil on canvas
30.08 × 50.39 in. (76.4 × 128 cm)



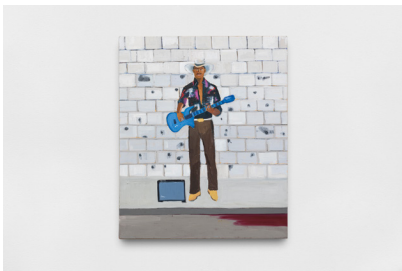
Tropical Man, 2023
Oil on canvas
26.77 × 23.62 in. (68 × 60 cm)



Obscure, 2023
Oil on canvas
12.68 × 12.68 in. (32.2 × 32.2 cm)



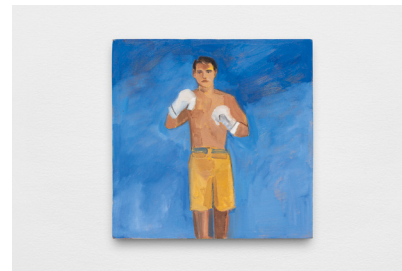
Small Boy, 2023
Oil on canvas
12.68 × 12.68 in. (32.2 × 32.2 cm)



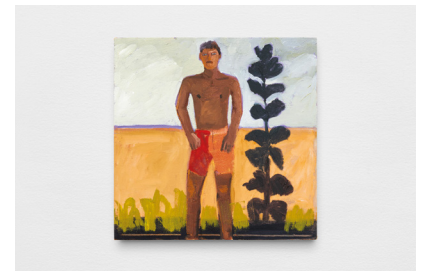
Música de fondo
(Background Music), 2023
Oil on canvas
23.62 × 19.69 in. (60 × 50 cm)



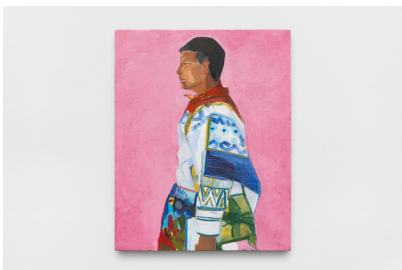
Quinceañero, 2023
Oil on canvas
19.88 × 23.62 in. (50.5 × 60 cm)



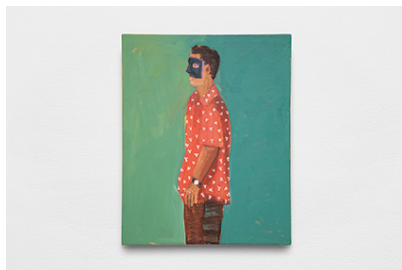
Bull-Boxer, 2023
Oil on canvas
12.68 × 12.68 in. (32.2 × 32.2 cm)



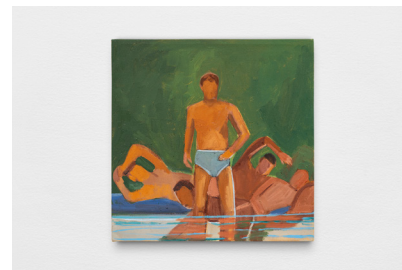
Mardsen, 2023
Oil on canvas
12.68 × 12.68 in. (32.2 × 32.2 cm)



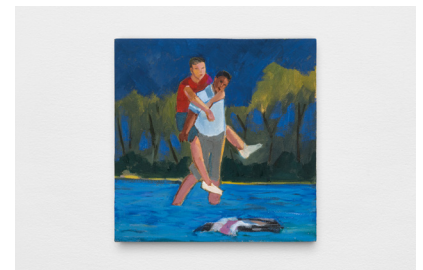
Marcelo, 2023
Oil on canvas
19.69 × 19.69 in. (50 × 50 cm)



The Red Shirt, 2023
Oil on canvas
19.69 × 15.75 in. (50 × 40 cm)



Festín (Feast), 2023
Oil on canvas
12.68 × 12.68 in. (32.2 × 32.2 cm)



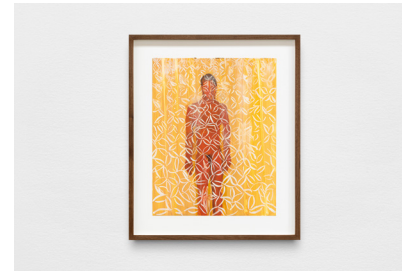
Cruzando el arroyo
(Crossing the Stream), 2023
Oil on canvas
12.68 × 12.68 in. (32.2 × 32.2 cm)



Boy Deer, 2023
Oil on canvas
10.83 × 14.02 in. (27.5 × 35.6 cm)



Black Mask, 2023
Oil on canvas
8.66 × 11.97 in. (22 × 30.4 cm)



Study for Ana, 2023
Gouache on paper
14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 27.9 cm) sheet



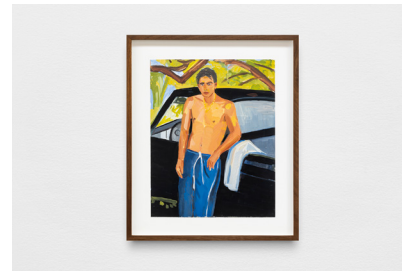
Study for Silvia, 2023
Gouache on paper
14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 27.9 cm) sheet



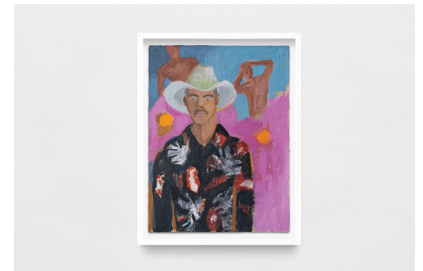
Study for "Sin Arcoiris", 2023
Oil on canvas
8.74 × 11.97 in. (22.2 × 30.4 cm)



Interview with the Blue Deer I, 2023
Oil on canvas
10.63 × 13.78 in. (27 × 35 cm)



Godson, 2023
Gouache on paper
14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 27.9 cm) sheet



Ranchero (Rancher), 2023
Oil on wooden board
12.4 × 9.17 in. (31.5 × 23.3 cm)

Chronology

Roberto Gil de Montes

b. 1950, Guadalajara, Mexico
lives and works in La Peñita de Jaltemba, Nayarit, Mexico



Gil de Montes, Guadalajara, Mexico, 1958

1950

Roberto Gil de Montes is born in Guadalajara, Mexico, where he lives for the first 15 years of his life.

He is raised in a Catholic household and attends a Catholic elementary school taught by nuns.

In Guadalajara, he is influenced by the murals of José Clemente Orozco and the celebrations surrounding Día de Muertos.

1957

Gil de Montes's parents leave Guadalajara for Chicago, Illinois, to find work in the United States. Their five children remain in Mexico under the care of their grandparents.

1965

Gil de Montes and his siblings relocate to the United States to reunite with their parents. The family settles in East Los Angeles, and Gil de Montes becomes aware of the emerging Chicano Movement.

He enrolls in Roosevelt High School and enjoys painting and photography. His education is enriched through visiting lectures by Noah Purifoy and Betye Saar. Years later, Jan Baum Gallery in Los Angeles represents both Gil de Montes and Saar, and they participate in many group exhibitions together.

Takes Saturday drawing classes at Chouinard Art Institute, the leading professional art school that later merged into CalArts. Additionally, he attends classes at ArtCenter College of Design.

1968

Graduates from Roosevelt High School.

Spends two years taking classes in philosophy and the history of religion at East Los Angeles College and studying photography at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College. For a class assignment, he makes *Self-Portrait, East Los Angeles* (1968), which begins the ongoing use of masks in his work, and illustrates early questioning around his cultural identity as a Mexican living in the United States.



Gil de Montes listening to a lecture by Noah Purifoy, Roosevelt High School, Los Angeles, 1968



Self-Portrait, East Los Angeles, 1968
Gelatin silver print
11.02 x 8.39 in. (28 x 21.3 cm)

1970

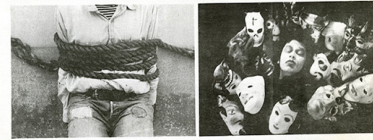
Enrolls in Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, with a focus in painting and drawing. He receives traditional training from Joseph Mugnaini and Charles White.

1972

At Otis, he befriends other artists, including Carlos Almaraz and Judithe Hernández, and becomes increasingly involved in Chicano culture and politics.

1974

Participates with Dean Pappas in the show *Twelve and Nine* at Otis Student Gallery. Gil de Montes exhibits a twelve-part installation that features wooden cutouts painted on both sides. The cutouts depict mythic figures wearing masks and surrounded by entwined serpents, all suspended from wires.



Dean Pappas Gil de Montes
"Twelve and Nine"
opening wednesday 7:30-10:00 PM
April 27, 1974
Otis Student Gallery
2401 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, California

Invitation for *Twelve and Nine*,
Otis Student Gallery, 1974



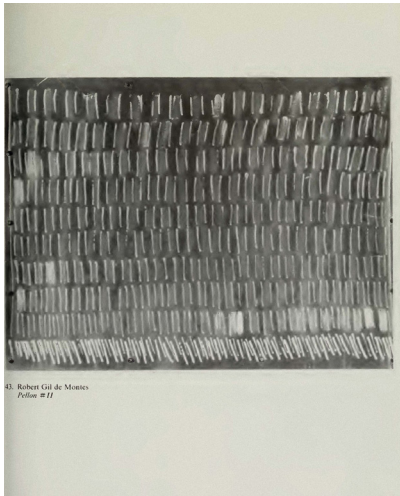
Painted wood cutouts from *Twelve and Nine*, 1974

Receives a BA from Otis and enrolls in the school's graduate program.

The conceptual art movement in Los Angeles is also burgeoning. Otis hires a number of conceptual artists, and Gil de Montes's practice draws inspiration from the teachings of Lynda Benglis, Guy de Cointet, and Joan Jonas. He experiments with minimalist painting, employing materials such as wax and encaustic, as well as delving into performance and photography.

1975

Pellon #11 (1975) is included in *Chicanismo en el Arte*, organized by the Vincent Price Art Gallery at East Los Angeles College and restaged at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) later that year. The juried exhibition features thirty-one young artists responding to the growing Chicano Art Movement.



Black-and-white reproduction of *Pellon #11*, 1975, *Chicanismo en el Arte* (1975)



Gil de Montes and Gronk, "Señora with a Gun," 1976, El Monte, CA

1976

Receives an MFA from Otis. From 1976–8, he studies Latin American politics at California State University, Los Angeles.

In the summer, he teaches a photography course to teenagers at the Community Center in El Monte, a city east of Los Angeles.

Gil de Montes and Gronk paint a mural on the side of a shoe store in the Valley Mall of El Monte. The mural depicts a *soldadera*, an armed peasant woman of the Mexican Revolution. The mural, known as "Señora with a Gun," incites controversy among civic leaders, leading to the imposition of a city-wide four-month emergency moratorium on murals.

1977

Unable to display public art, Gil de Montes, Gronk, and other artists establish a storefront gallery in El Monte.

Joins a group of Chicana and Latin American photographers that gather to discuss current topics in photography and participate in workshops. Group members include Laura Aguilar and Ricardo Valverde. The group is affiliated with the Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía in Mexico City.

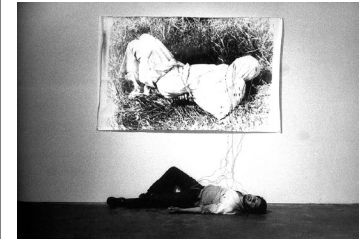


(left to right) Teddy Sandoval, Alonso Pando, Gronk, Gil de Montes, and Harry Gamboa Jr., LACE, 1978

1978

The gallery in El Monte moves to a larger space above a bridal shop in Downtown Los Angeles and is renamed LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions).

LACE is devoted to experimental art, providing a platform for artists who were considered radical, including those creating performance and video art.

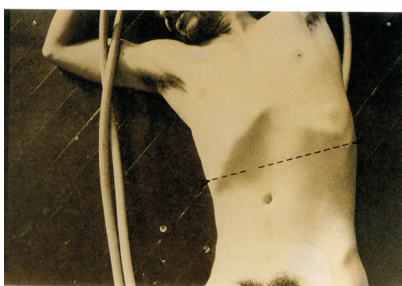


Harry Gamboa Jr., Roberto Gil de Montes, 1978. Gil de Montes photographed with *Tongue Tied*, 1978

He participates in several exhibitions at LACE, including one of Asco's *No Movie* exhibitions. Gil de Montes displays *Tongue Tied* (1978), a three-by-four-foot gelatin silver print depicting a figure bound in a white sheet in a field. Electrical wires emerge from the figure's face and are connected to a pile of goats' tongues that rest on the floor.



Asco, *No Movie*, LACE, 1978; invitation sent to Zach Trenholm by Teddy Sandoval, postmarked April 1978



Eddie Domínguez and Hose, 1978
Gelatin silver prints
Top: 8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm)
Bottom: 3 × 4.5 in. (7.6 × 10.8 cm)

Makes *Eddie Domínguez and Hose* (1978). Domínguez is Gil de Montes's partner who features in many of his early photographic works.

1979

At LACE, he curates *LA Themes*, a show of Latin American photography, and *Testimonios de Latinoamérica*, with Felipe Ehrenberg, an exhibition that showcases the communication methods of Latin American artists. This exhibition was originally presented at Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City.

Meets art historian and curator Carla Stellweg, who invites him to move to Mexico City to work at Museo de Arte Moderno and help her publish a special issue of the museum's prestigious art journal, *Artes Visuales*, devoted to Chicano/a artists. *Artes Visuales* is the first contemporary art magazine in Mexico.



Gil de Montes with the staff of *Artes Visuales*, Museo de Arte Moderno Mexico City, 1980



(left to right) Rogelio Villarreal, Domínguez, Carla Rippey, Gil de Montes, and others, Colonia Roma, Mexico City, 1980

1980

Relocates to Mexico City with Domínguez for 18 months. There, he continues to experiment with photography and begins to paint on large scale black-and-white photographs, which he refers to as "sporadic photomurals." *Mexico City* (1981) is an example that combines photography and painting to expose the pollution in the city.

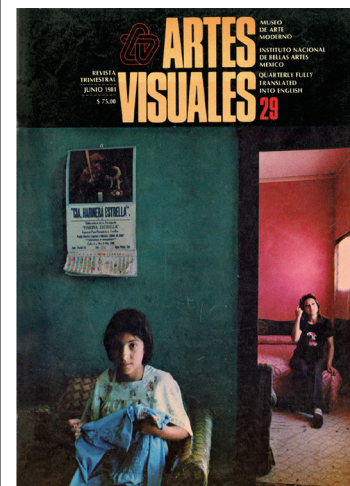


Mexico City, 1981
Oil on gelatin silver print
47 × 57 in. (119.4 × 144.8 cm)

1981

Participates in the important group exhibition *Hecho en Latinoamérica* at Museo de Palacio del Bellas Artes, Mexico City. Exhibits a series of photographs including *Eddie Domínguez and Hose* (1978).

Back in California, Galería Santa Ana exhibits his photographs taken in Mexico City in the group exhibition, *The Last Chicano Art Show*. The exhibition also included works by Teddy Sandoval and Joey Terrill, friends of Gil de Montes from Los Angeles.



Cover of *Artes Visuales*, issue #29, 1981

Artes Visuales, issue #29, is published, and features Carlos Almaraz, Elsa Flores, Ricardo Valverde, Jack Vargas, among others.

1982

Returns with Domínguez to Los Angeles and eventually settles in Echo Park.

He teaches drawing and Mexican art history in the art department at California State University, Los Angeles.

In Mexico City, Gil de Montes developed deeper connections with Mexican culture, specifically folk art, and is inspired to return to painting.



Cowboy vs. Myth, 1984
Oil on metal sheet, mixed-media frame
9.45 × 11.42 in. (24 × 29 cm)

1984

Participates in his first group show at Jan Baum Gallery, *Small Wonder*. The painting *Cowboy vs. Myth* (1984) is included. Gil de Montes continues to show with Jan Baum until the gallery closes in 2007.



LA Airplanes (Castigo a la ciudad), 1982
Oil on gelatin silver print
49 × 54 in. (124.45 × 134.6 cm)

His photomurals, such as *LA Airplanes (Castigo a la ciudad)* (1982), are included in the group exhibition *Aquí: 27 Latin American Artists Living and Working in the United States*, organized by the USC Fisher Gallery, Los Angeles, and USC Atelier Gallery, Santa Monica.

1985

Has his first solo show at Jan Baum Gallery. Receives the first of many positive reviews from *Los Angeles Times* for his small-scale canvases, painted with rich colors in a loose, gestural style, and surrounded by decorative wooden frames. His figures, such the one represented in *Salsa Man* (1984), appear to float in space and exude references to Mexico and Los Angeles.

Gil de Montes and Domínguez first visit La Peñita, a fishing town on the Pacific Coast of Nayarit, Mexico. They immediately fall in love with the town, which would later become their home and a main inspiration in Gil de Montes's work.



Salsa Man, 1984
Oil on wood
16.5 × 20.5 in. (41.9 × 52.1 cm)

1986

Participates in the group show *Chicano Expressions: A New View in American Art* at Intar Latin American Gallery, New York. His painting *El Auto Cinema* (1985) is featured on the front page of a review of the show published in *High Performance* magazine.

Art With A Chicano Accent

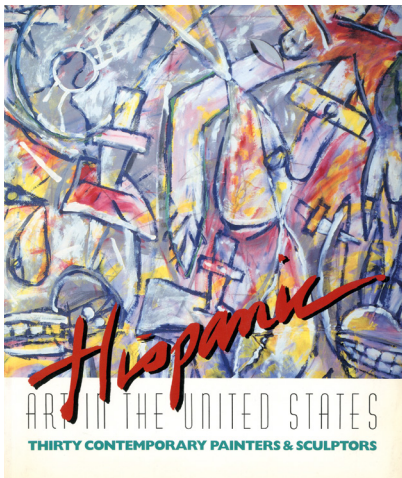
When you're coming from a different culture you have to go through "cultural negotiations." What you keep, what you don't keep. That's everyday life. For a Chicano it's everyday realism.



Cover page of Linda Burnham and Steven Durland, "Art With a Chicano Accent," *High Performance*, vol. 35, 1986

1987

Ten works by Gil de Montes are exhibited in the formative group show and accompanying catalogue, *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, organized by Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. John Beardsley and Jane Livingston curate the exhibition, and Octavio Paz, whom Gil de Montes had met a few years prior, writes the catalogue essay. The show traveled to the Brooklyn Museum and LACMA, among other institutions across the United States.



Cover of *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* (1987)

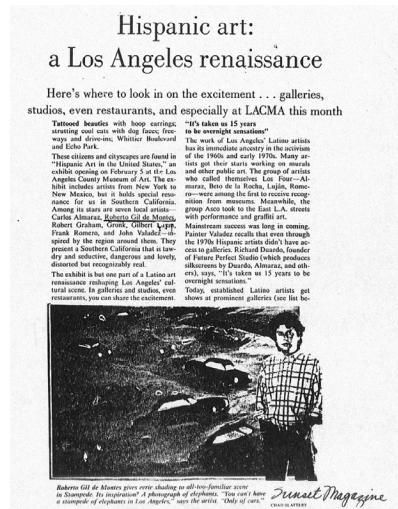
1988

Participates in the group shows *10 Latino Artists* at Jack Tilton Gallery, New York; *Hispanic Show* at Marilyn Butler Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM; and *¡Mira! The Canadian Club Hispanic Art Tour III* at City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park.

1989

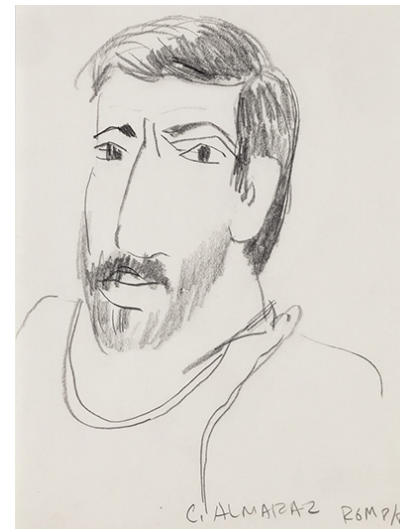
Hispanic Art in the United States opens at LACMA. Chad Slattery publishes a preview of the show in *Sunset Magazine*, titled “Hispanic Art: a Los Angeles renaissance,” and features Gil de Montes next to his painting *Stampede* (1986) on the article’s front page.

Participates in the group show *Spirit of Our Time* at Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, which focuses on contemporary art in Southern California. Among the artists included were John Baldessari, Sam Francis, Mike Kelley, Ed Ruscha, and Bill Viola.



Cover page of Chad Slattery, “Hispanic Art: a Los Angeles renaissance,” *Sunset Magazine*, February 1989

Visits Carlos Almaraz and draws his portrait shortly before his friend and mentor passes away from AIDS. Almaraz continues to exert a profound influence on his artistic practice.



C. Almaraz, 1989
Graphite on paper
10.63 × 8.07 in. (27 × 20.5 cm)

1991

Gil de Montes’s work begins to reflect the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on him and his community, as seen in *Behind the Eight Ball* (1991), which is on view in a solo show at Carla Stellweg Latin American and Contemporary Art, New York.



Behind the Eight Ball, 1991
Oil on linen
60 × 80 in. (152.4 × 203.2 cm)

Themes of death continue to occupy his solo shows that year. At Jan Baum Gallery, he presents works made on old mexican *retablos*, such as *Retablo del Diablo* (1991), in which a figure blows air at a disembodied heart. His exhibition at the Junior Arts Center Gallery, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park receives a positive review titled “Death’s Broad Domain” by Diane Mark-Walker in *Artweek*.

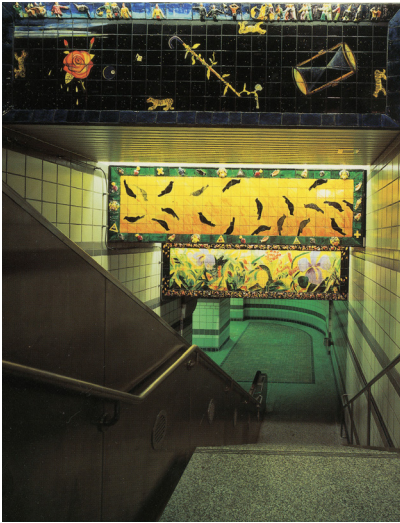


Retablo del Diablo, 1991
Oil on wood
19.5 × 22.5 in. (49.5 × 56.5 cm)

1993

Creates the ceramic triptych *Heaven to Earth* (1993) for the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission at Metro Rail at the 7th and Hope Street entrance. The work, depicting a mystic night sky, birds, and lush flora, imagines the stairway into the subway station as a descent from heaven to earth. Although less known, ceramics continue to be a significant part of his practice.

Gil de Montes and Domínguez buy a house in La Peñita and begin to spend extended periods of time there.



Heaven to Earth, 1993
Ceramic triptych Metro Rail, 7th and Hope Street entrance



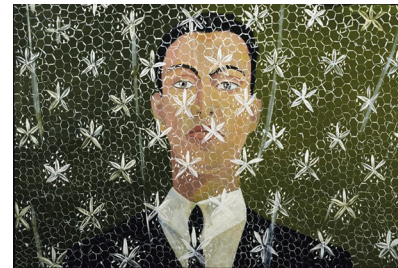
Gil de Montes's contribution to *Paseo César Chavez*, 1995; ceramic fountain Metro Rail Park, Gateway Transit Center

1995

Gil de Montes, along with Elsa Flores and Peter Shire, produce the outdoor sculpture park, *Paseo César Chavez* (1995), as part of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Catellus Development Corporation Commission at the Gateway Transit Center. Gil de Montes contributes a ceramic tiled fountain.

1996

Has a solo show of new paintings at Jan Baum Gallery. The HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to impact his work, seen in *Screen* (1996), where a man is veiled behind white lace. The screen symbolizes the physical and emotional distancing that his community experienced as a result of the epidemic. *Screen* is acquired by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C., and goes on view in the traveling exhibition *Arte Latino: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum* from 2000 to 2002.



Screen, 1996
Oil on canvas
72 × 108 in. (182.9 × 274.3 cm)



Under Venus, 1999
Oil on canvas
24 × 18 in. (61 × 45.7 cm)

2000

Gil de Montes has another solo show at Jan Baum Gallery. The coastal landscape of La Peñita is depicted more frequently in his work. Coral Island, which the artist can see from outside the window of his home, becomes a common motif, represented in *Under Venus* (1999). David Pagel writes a positive review of the exhibition in *Los Angeles Times*.

Gil de Montes and Domínguez relocate to San Francisco for five years. They live in the Mission District, and Gil de Montes has a studio in China Basin. He primarily produces work on paper during his time in San Francisco.

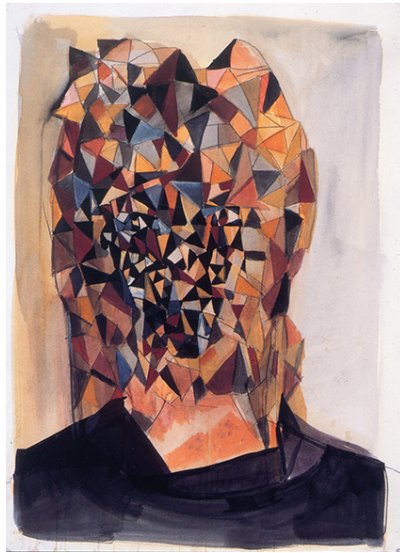
2001

Participates in the major exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *The Road to Aztlan: Art from a Mythic Homeland*, organized by LACMA. The exhibition explores the interactions and cultural exchanges between the American Southwest and Mexico over 2,000 years.

2005

Has his final solo show at Jan Baum Gallery. The majority of the works are influenced by Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and the photographs of members of the United States Army and CIA committing war crimes against detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. These images incite Gil de Montes to create a series of works of fractured faces depicting evil, seen in *Capricho* (2004). Leah Ollman writes a positive review of the exhibition for *Los Angeles Times*, titled "Awe mixes with fear and disgust."

The solo show *Works Inspired by India* opens at Lisa Coscino Gallery, Pacific Grove, CA. Gil de Montes traveled to India three times between 1997 and 2004, and was inspired to



Capricho, 2004
Watercolor and pencil on paper
22 × 30 in. (55.9 × 76.2 cm)

create a series of works based on his travels, including *Desert* (2005).

2006

Gil de Montes and Domínguez officially make La Peñita their permanent residence. After moving back to Mexico, questions of identity that preoccupied Gil de Montes's work when living in the United States dissipate. The people, landscape, and culture of La Peñita become the main source of inspiration in his work.



Desert, 2005
Oil on canvas
18.03 × 24.02 in. (45.8 × 61 cm)

Meets writer and performer Lucy Foster in La Peñita. Images of mermaids in Gil de Montes's paintings are references to Foster and her mermaid performances, seen in *Boy with Mermaids* (2012). Foster eventually writes extensively on Gil de Montes's practice.



Boy with Mermaids, 2012
Oil on canvas
15.94 × 19.92 in. (40.5 × 50.6 cm)

2007

Above Domínguez's new bar and restaurant in La Peñita, Gil de Montes opens Xaltemba Gallery with Foster. Every Día de Muertos, the gallery hosts a party, and Gil de Montes creates an altar for those who passed away in the town that year. The gallery also hosts other events, including mermaid festivals, Cabaret Sundays, and Martini Wednesdays, which feature poetry readings.



Installation view of Día de Muertos altar, Xaltemba, La Peñita, 2007

Participates in Jan Baum Gallery's *30th Anniversary Exhibition*; his final show at the gallery. The gallery closes at the end of the year.

2011

Participates in the group show and accompanying catalogue *MEX/LA: "Mexican" Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930–1985* at Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA.



Cover of *MEX/LA: "Mexican" Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930–1985* (2011)

2013

Makes *Island* (2013), a pastel on paper that recalls Paul Gauguin's *Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch* (1892). Gauguin's reclining woman is replaced with a man wearing patterned shorts, lying on a bed with a white skull keeping watch.



Island, 2013
Pastel on paper
19.49 x 25.39 in. (49.5 x 64.5 cm)

2014

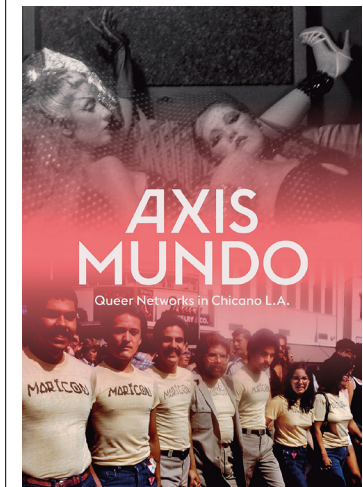
The Wixárika, also known as the Huicholes, is an indigenous group with a strong presence in La Peñita. Gil de Montes begins to merge Wixárika iconography with his own visual motifs, seen in *Turtle* (2014). *Turtle* and *Island* are exhibited in his solo show *Hecho en Mexico* at Lora Schlesinger Gallery, Santa Monica, CA. The exhibition is his first solo show in ten years and is previewed with an interview by Deborah Vankin for *Los Angeles Times*.



Turtle, 2014
Oil on canvas
31.1 x 47.24 in. (79 x 120 cm)

2017

Participates in the traveling exhibition *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, organized by ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The show is presented in the context of the citywide event *Pacific Standard Time LA/LA* and maps the intersections and collaborations between a network of queer Chicano artists and their artistic collaborators from the late 1960s to the early 1990s.



Cover of *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (2017)



Boy from Chiapas, 2017
Oil on linen
27.56 × 27.56 in. (70 × 70 cm)

Gil de Montes exhibits the twelve-part installation of wooden cutouts from the 1974 exhibition *Twelve and Nine* at Otis Student Gallery, and a recreation of *Tongue Tied* (1978).

Has another solo show, *Moments*, at Lora Schlesinger Gallery. *Boy from Chiapas* (2017) is among the many works on view. The painting depicts a boy veiled behind a mass of woven bracelets.

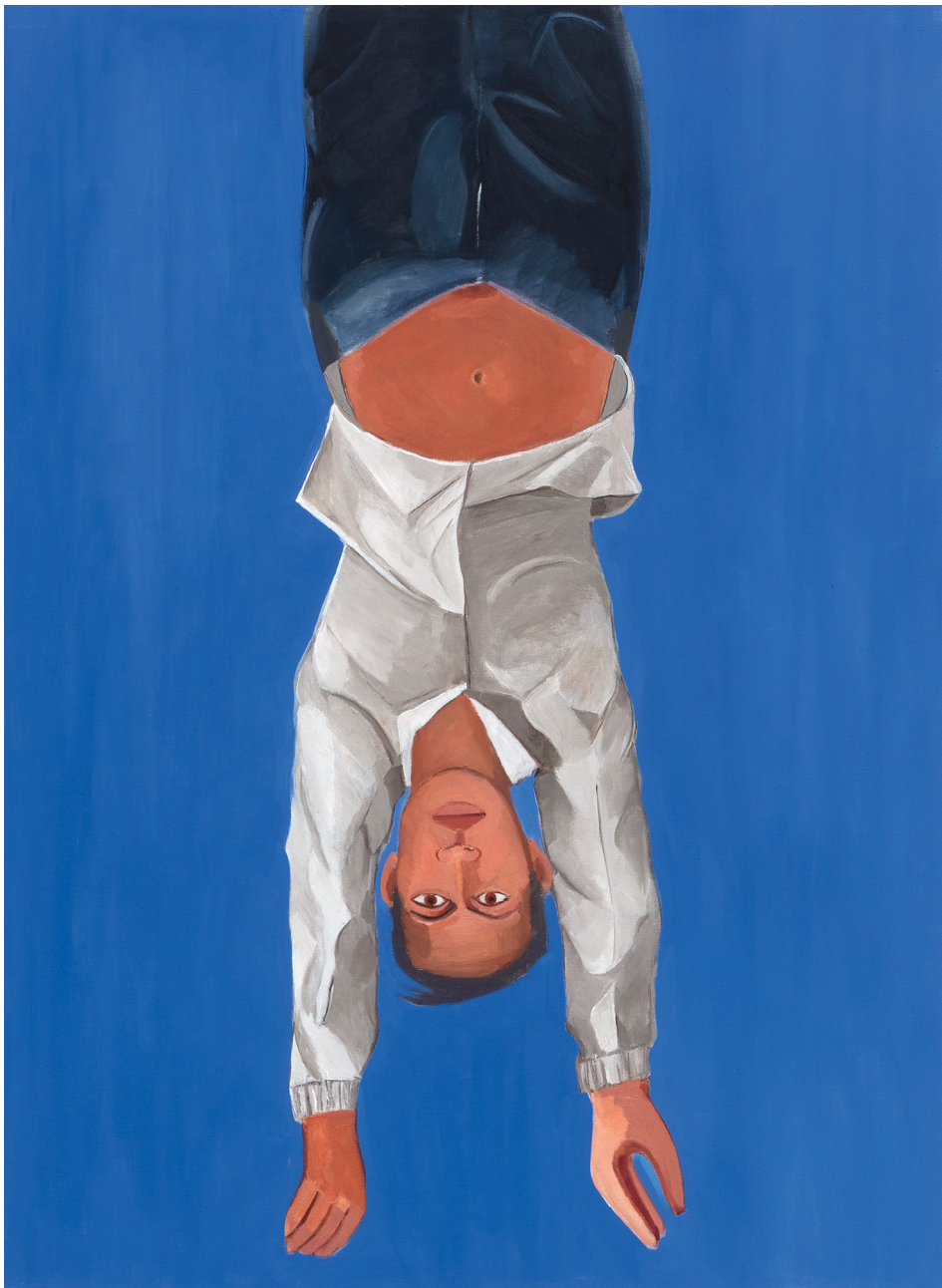


El Pescador, 2020
Oil on linen
77.17 × 101.18 in. (196 × 257 cm)

2020

Has his first solo presentation at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, titled *Misfits*, as part of the exhibition *Siembra*. The painting *El Pescador* (2020) is on view, which depicts a reclining young fisherman who queers Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1484–6).

Eight paintings by Gil de Montes are on view in his solo show at Park View/Paul Soto, Los Angeles, including *UP* (2021). This painting is part of a series depicting suspended and inverted figures.



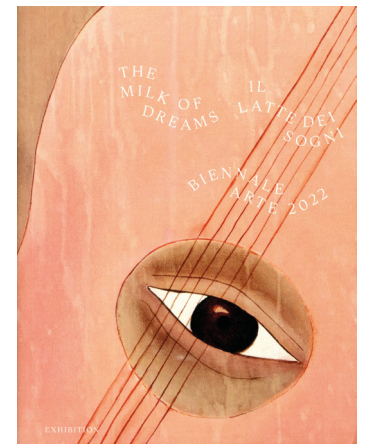
UP, 2021
Oil on canvas
45.87 × 33.66 in. (116.5 × 85.5 cm)



Installation view of *The Milk of Dreams*, 59th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, 2022

2022

Participates in *The Milk of Dreams*, 59th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale. Works on view include *El Pescador* (2020), *El Monje* (2021), and *Los poetas en el mar* (2021).



Cover of *The Milk of Dreams* (2022)



Boca Chica, 2022
Oil on linen
70.87 × 98.43 in. (180 × 250 cm)

Has his first solo exhibition in Mexico, *Temporada de lluvias*, at kurimanzutto, Mexico City. The exhibition features a series of oil paintings depicting high summer in La Peñita.

His screen paintings resurface, seen in *Cocotero* (2022), this time referencing social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Cocotero, 2022
Oil on linen
70.87 × 62.99 in. (180 × 160 cm)

2023

New York Times publishes a profile on Gil de Montes titled “How the Art World Finally Caught Up With a Mexican Artist,” written by Ray Mark Rinaldi.

His solo show, *Reverence in Blue*, opens at kurimanzutto, New York. It is his first solo exhibition in New York in over three decades.

Biographies

Roberto Gil de Montes

Roberto Gil de Montes explores hidden images and forgotten or imagined stories within his everyday life through his figurative paintings. He paints fragmented narratives with vibrant color palettes to craft worlds filled with references to Pre-Hispanic and Wixárika iconography alongside quotidian and dreamlike experiences. Gil de Montes uses the canvas as fertile terrain to realign real and imaginary spaces, grappling with his shifting environments and cultural identity as an artist connected to both Mexico and the United States.

Gil de Montes, born in 1950 in Guadalajara, Mexico, moved to East Los Angeles with his family during his teenage years. He later earned a BFA and MFA from Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles. In the 1970s, he actively participated in the Chicano Art Movement in Los Angeles and was one of the founders of the experimental art space, LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions). From 1979 to 1981, he relocated to Mexico City to serve as guest editor for an issue of *Artes Visuales*, which was the first contemporary art magazine in Mexico. Upon completing the magazine, he returned to Los Angeles and began showing with Jan Baum Gallery, where he continued to exhibit his work until the gallery's closure in 2007. From 2000 to 2005, Gil de Montes resided in San Francisco before ultimately settling in La Peñita, a small fishing town along the Pacific Coast of Nayarit, Mexico. Gil de Montes continues to live in La Peñita with his partner Eddie Domínguez and paint in a studio with a direct view of the town plaza, located just a block away from the coastline.

Gil de Montes was part of many solo and group exhibitions in the late 1980s, including the touring exhibition *Le Demon des Anges* organized by C.R.C.D., Nantes, France, and Centre D'Art Santa Monica, Barcelona, and the influential *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*. Touring venues included the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Brooklyn Museum, among others. More recently, in 2017, Gil de Montes was featured in the traveling exhibition, *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, organized by ONE Archives at the USC Libraries and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The exhibition, presented in the context of the citywide event *Pacific Standard Time LA/LA*, mapped the intersections and collaborations between a network of queer Chicano artists and their artistic collaborators from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. In 2017, his personal archive was acquired by ONE Archives. In 2022, he presented his first solo exhibition in Mexico, *Temporada de lluvias*, at kurimanzutto, Mexico City. His work has also been included in *The Milk of Dreams*, 59th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (2022); *Raphael Montañez Ortiz: A Contextual Retrospective* at El Museo del Barrio in New York and Museo Tamayo in Mexico City (2022); and most recently in *In Your Face (En Tu Cara)*, Museo Casa Rul, Guanajuato, Mexico (2023).

Gil de Montes's work is part of various public collections, such as the Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Denver Art Museum, CO; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), CA; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, Mexico; Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA; Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; Sifang Art Museum, China; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; USC Fisher Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; and X Museum, Beijing, China.

David Evans Frantz

David Evans Frantz is a curator based in Los Angeles. He recently co-curated with C. Ondine Chavoya the exhibition *Teddy Sandoval and the Butch Gardens School of Art*, which opened at the Vincent Price Art Museum in Los Angeles and will travel to the Williams College Museum of Art and future venues in an exhibition tour organized by Independent Curators International (ICI). He is also co-editor with Christina Linden and Chris E. Vargas of the new book *Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects*, a publication of the Museum of Trans Hirstory & Art (MOTHA).



From the Archive



kurimanzutto
516 w 20th street
new york

