

Press Release

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Exhibition

## *Vincent Valdez: Just a Dream...*

November 15, 2024–March 23, 2025



Vincent Valdez, *So Long, MaryAnn*, 2019. Oil on canvas. Private Collection. Photo: Paul Salvesson.

#VincentValdez  
#JustaDream...  
#TrustArtists

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HOUSTON, TX (September 10, 2024) – Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is excited to announce *Vincent Valdez: Just a Dream...*, the artist's first museum survey, and the first time CAMH has dedicated the entire museum to a single artist. Co-organized by CAMH and Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), the exhibition spans over two decades of his work, from early career drawings to recent monumental portraits. *Just a Dream...* cements Valdez as one of the most important American painters working today—imaging his country and its people, politics, pride, and foibles.

Born in San Antonio, Texas, Valdez began painting murals at age ten, catalyzing a lifelong commitment to 'create images about people, and for people'. He makes artwork to counter the social amnesia he sees recurring through history, encouraging us to find new paths forward by reckoning with the past. Valdez asserts that the unfolding American tale is an ever-expanding range of experiences which includes the historic contributions and legacy of Mexican-Americans. His work to the unspoken or forgotten reminds us of our agency in writing a more just future.

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Vincent Valdez, *Recuerdo*, 1999. Oil on board.  
Courtesy Joe A Diaz.



Vincent Valdez, *The Rope (After Marsden Hartley)*, 2018. Oil pastel on paper. Collection Lisa Rich and John McLaughlin. Photo: Peter Molick.

Valdez often works in series, and *Just a Dream...* unites 25 years of work for the first time, like chapters in a book chronicling the United States. One of Valdez's most significant ongoing series is *The Beginning is Near (An American Trilogy)*, consisting of *Chapter One: The City*; *Chapter Two: Dream Baby Dream*; and *Chapter Three: The New Americans*.

The trilogy's first chapter examines America's prevailing system of white supremacy in its various forms of overt and covert existence traced throughout the American landscape, past and present. *Chapter Two: Dream Baby Dream* presents a gridded portrait of a "New American Family". Instead, this gathering of mourners is from the televised eulogy for Muhammad Ali's funeral. The final act, *Chapter Three: The New Americans*, offers intimate examinations of everyday hope through portraits of impactful individuals, including artists, musicians, and activists, scattered across the country.

Valdez consistently coalesces momentary and collective observations on U.S. contemporary life, presenting American mythos, broadcasted live events, community, and family portraits all together in the same space. He channels the nation's realities across monumental works, harkening towards large-scale murals and cinematic formats, addressing storied injustices without ignoring individual humanity. The artist's work is grounded in the quote by writer Gore Vidal: "We are the United States of Amnesia, we learn nothing because we remember nothing" Valdez pushes against the distortive qualities of American history, and instead presents truths often overlooked. He reflects the current political landscape back to us, reiterating reality when fact and figment become blurred.

"Valdez's creative practice has the uncanny ability to speak to our present moment despite the years, and even decades, since the works' creation. Yet, its relevance extends beyond this slice of time by excavating buried facets of our country's past to incite avenues for more equitable futures," says the exhibition co-curator and CAMH Curator Patricia Restrepo. "Valdez demonstrates why we turn to artists in moments of precarity: he crystalizes our condition with layered symbolism, obsessive details, conceptual clarity, and acerbic wit."

"Vincent is fearless. He becomes our eyes when we are too exhausted or frightened to see, and most importantly, he provides truth", says MASS MoCA Chief Curator Denise Markonish. "This perspective was evident from the moment we met in 2016 in his studio, and we've been collaborating ever since beginning with *Suffering From Realness*

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Vincent Valdez, *People of the Sun (Grandma and Grandpa Santana)*, 2018. Oil on canvas. Collection Alexa Pooter Brundage. Photo: Peter Molick.

(2019) at MASS MoCA. *Just a Dream...* signifies a twenty-five year survey of the artist's work and calls on us to more deeply examine the inequitable history of America and invites new perspectives to prevail. I am truly honored to be able to present his vision both at MASS MoCA in North Adams and in Houston with my collaborator's at CAMH."

Valdez, though trained as a painter, works across drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and multimedia installation to weave together complex themes and interrogate the porousness of American identity. The American arena of struggle (in its vast forms) operates as a multifaceted metaphor and a powerful symbol that invites curiosity from each viewer. His color palette spans from the socio-political landscape of the American Southwest to the greyscale of newsprint media. So too do his subjects vary. His extensive body of work refuses categorization, iterating and expanding upon the definition of what "America" is. Valdez celebrates everyday people, like his own family and friends, as empowered, formidable, and resilient, while challenging traditional and historic symbols of power within contemporary society.

For Houston's presentation of *Just a Dream...*, Valdez presents newly commissioned work in CAMH's lower level exploring the local undertold history of 23-year-old Joe Campos Torres, a victim of police brutality in 1977, the same year Valdez was born. A Houstonian and decorated military veteran, Torres was arrested after an altercation. His murder at the hands of police officers serves as one of the most notorious examples of police misconduct in Houston's history and ignited an intense period of protest over the next several years as Torres became a symbol of the Chicano movement and subsequent police reform. Valdez, in collaboration with artist Adriana Corral, has responded to this tragedy by creating a multi-part memorial within the exhibition. Valdez and Corral have worked to combine natural elements sourced from The Hole, a site located along Houston's Buffalo Bayou notorious for police beatings, interrogations, and Torres's death.

"This exhibition is a 25 year testament to my love and commitment for creating images as instruments that ignite public remembrance," says artist Vincent Valdez. "Presented for the very first time is a two-decade conversation that has persistently occurred between the world and my studio. A close examination of what I have chosen to confront as opposed to what I turn away from. This exhibition, in collaboration with CAMH and MASS MoCA, marks an important moment in my lifelong effort to create images about people, for

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Photo of Vincent Valdez.

people. I offer this work as a report. My visual testimony about an unfolding tale of hope, struggle, and survival in twenty-first century America.”

The exhibition will open at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts on May 24, 2025 and will remain on view until April 5, 2026.

Houston’s presentation will include CAMH’s first bilingual audio guide, with over fifteen art historians, community members, and activists speaking alongside the artist about personal reflections related to Valdez’s work. A bilingual publication accompanies the exhibition featuring writings and interviews addressing Valdez’s work by Evan Garza, Denise Markonish, Joyce Carol Oates, and Patricia Restrepo. It will be co-published by MASS MoCA, CAMH, and X Artists’ Books.

*Vincent Valdez: Just a Dream...* is co-organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) and Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA). The exhibition is co-curated by Patricia Restrepo, Curator at CAMH and Denise Markonish, Chief Curator at MASS MoCA.

### **About the Artist**

Vincent Valdez (b. 1977, San Antonio, TX) lives and works in Houston, TX and Los Angeles, CA. He received a full scholarship to the Rhode Island School of Design, earning his BFA in 2000. He was a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant for Painters and Sculptors (2016), as well as completing residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting (2005), the Vermont Studio Center (2011), the Kunstlerhaus Bethania Berlin Residency (2014), and Joan Mitchell Center (2018). Valdez was the 2019 Artadia awardee in Houston, TX, and a 2020 artist fellow at NXTHVN in New Haven. Recent exhibitions include *The Face of Battle: Americans at War, 9/11 to Now*, Smithsonian Museum of American Art and National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC; *So Different, So Appealing*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; *The City*, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; *Between Play and Grief: Selections from the Permanent Collection*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; *Suffering from Realness*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; and *ESTAMOS BIEN: LA TRIENAL 20/21*, El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY. The artist has been shortlisted as a finalist for the Smithsonian’s 2022 National Portrait Award. Valdez’s portrait of his grandparents was presented in *The Outwin 2022: American Portraiture Today*, a major exhibition premiering at the National

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Portrait Gallery from April 30, 2022 through Feb. 26, 2023, before traveling to other cities in the United States. He is represented by Matthew Brown Gallery in Los Angeles, CA.

### **About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH)**

Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH's mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH's programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists' essential role in society.

### **About Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA)**

MASS MoCA is celebrating its 25th Anniversary under Director Kristy Edmunds, not only as the largest, multidisciplinary, contemporary art museum in North America, but also as a creative campus with a regional, national, and global impact. MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art, and is an indispensable home for artists who stretch toward what has yet to be created. From its beginnings as the major textile mill Arnold Print Works in the mid-19th century, to its days as the Sprague Electric Company in the mid-20th century, to its current iteration as a globally renowned contemporary art museum and fabrication center, the 24-acre MASS MoCA campus has a rich history of serving as an economic engine of the city of North Adams and the surrounding region. With vast galleries and a stunning variety of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace art in all forms. For more information visit [www.massmoca.org](http://www.massmoca.org) or follow on Instagram at @massmoca.

### **Support**

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Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is funded in part by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

### CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

### General Information

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, in the heart of Houston's Museum District.

### Hours

Wed 11AM-6PM  
Thu 11AM-9PM  
Fri 11AM-6PM  
Sat 11AM-6PM  
Sun 11AM-6PM

Admission is always free. For more information, visit CAMH.ORG or call 713.284.8250.



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