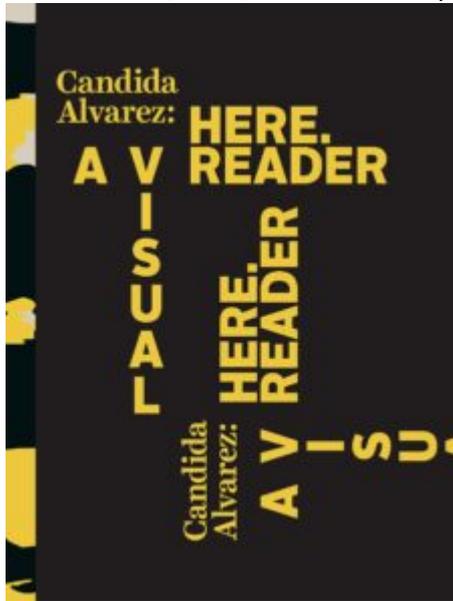


# A BOOK THAT DREAMS WITH ITS EYES OPEN: CANDIDA ALVAREZ: HERE. A VISUAL READER

written by August Evans | December 10, 2020



*Candida Alvarez: Here. A Visual Reader*  
eds. Fulla Abdul-Jabbar & Caroline Picard  
[Green Lantern Press](#), January 2020  
156 pages / [SPD](#) / [Bookshop](#) / [Amazon](#)

Dream-like is one way of describing Chicago's Green Lantern Press (GLP). Founded in 2005, artist-run and nonprofit, GLP calls itself "a roving operation without physical headquarters [that] produces experimental art exhibits, critical print publications, and cultural events that promote public discussion and community." In their commitment to funding artists in the commission and development of new work that brings forth ethical questions about how to ensure a more equitable and sustainable life for all, since its inception the GLP has organized over 250 events and exhibitions, while publishing more than 40 paperback editions in a range of genres from contemporary art, critical theory, fiction, and poetry.

In keeping with the spirit of GLP, the concept of *Candida Alvarez: Here. A Visual Reader* is rare based on cover alone. Inside is a book that is far more than a book, featuring full-color reproductions of individual artworks interwoven with photographs of the artist's first major institutional exhibition, reflecting 40 years of Alvarez's painting, work that is currently in the public collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, El Museo del Barrio, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. *Candida Alvarez: Here* was curated by Terry R. Myers, from April 29 – August 6, 2017, at the Chicago Cultural Center. In addition to images from this exhibition, the book contains visuals from Alvarez's Fall/Winter 2017 menswear collaboration with Rei Kawakubo for Comme

des Garçons.

The yellow and black pattern of the book cover is the same as the adhesive vinyl installed on baseboards throughout the Chicago Cultural Center museum space, a site-specific work Alvarez titled, *Comme des amigos forever*, 2017, the repetitive pattern mirroring an earlier painting, one of several selected for the *Comme des Garçons Homme Plus* and *Shirt* lines. In her essay, "When Painting Stepped Out to Lunch," Kellie Jones calls Alvarez's wrapping "ebullient vinyl...unconventional 'work' [that] held the room and her ideas together structurally and bound viewers into these spaces as well." In this way, it is as though Alvarez gives "roots" to her art system, expanding its dimension beyond walls and floors and down into the very earth.



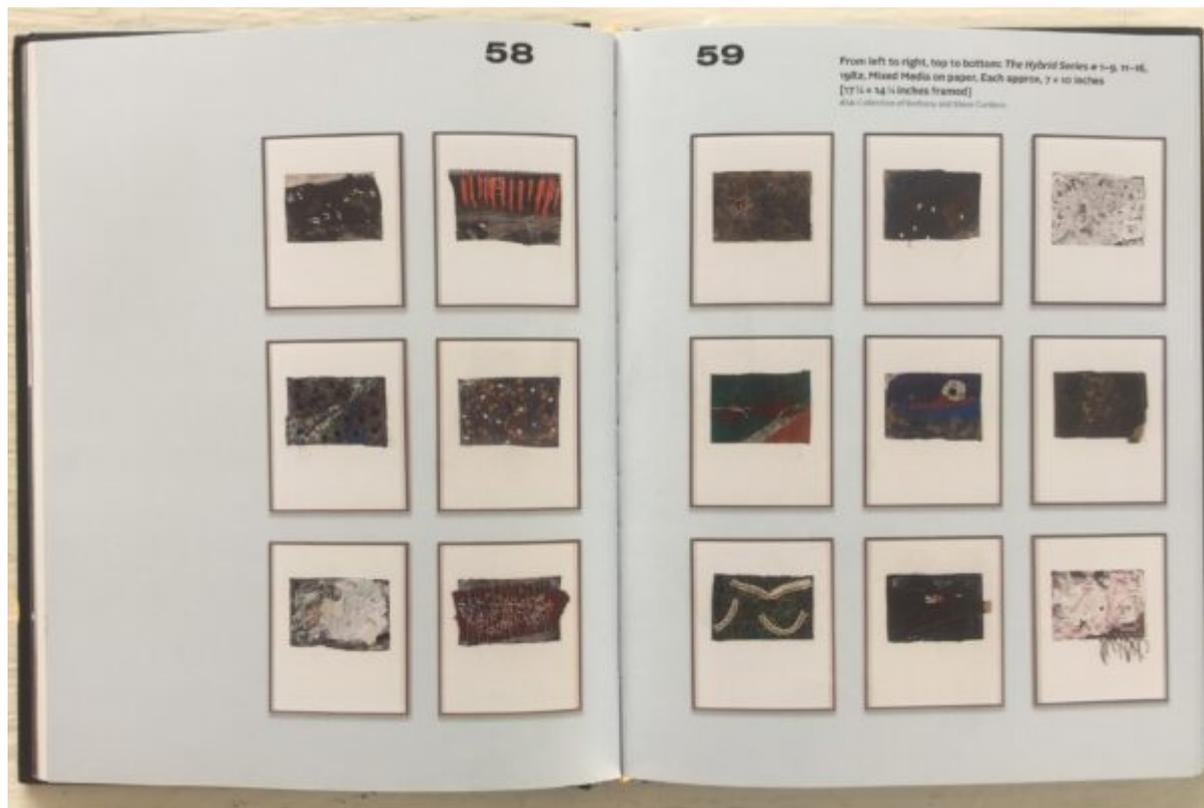
Alvarez describes her painterly process as spurred by intuition in merging the "painted" and "cosmic" universes. In the same way, the *Here* exhibition straddles the world of wall and floor, as here the 2015 painting "dar luz" ("to give birth"), literally births into the gallery space:



In the Introduction, editors Fulla Abdul-Jabbar and Caroline Picard write that the book begins with an exhibition, “transposing a three-dimensional gallery space into an arrangement of two-dimensional pages. But,” they continue, “this book aspires beyond a literal translation of one exhibition.” Such multi-dimensionality is certainly felt in *Here’s* selection of articles from 1983 to the present; conversations between Alvarez and Dawoud Bey, Kay Rosen, Daniel Schulman, and Rebecca Walker; newly commissioned texts, including a prose response by Elizabeth Alexander; and essays by the exhibition’s curator, Terry R. Myers, and art historians Kellie Jones and Daniel R. Quiles.

This layering approach, of commentary and conversations on Alvarez’s work from various points throughout her career, add to the diamond-like dimension of the complex book, creating the experience of witnessing not just the apex of a great artist’s long career in an excellently curated exhibition, but the myriad experiences that led to it. The book itself does seem to mirror a quality of Alvarez herself, evidenced by *The Hybrid Series* of 1982, where, as Quiles writes, “abstract compositions clash with their highly recognizable

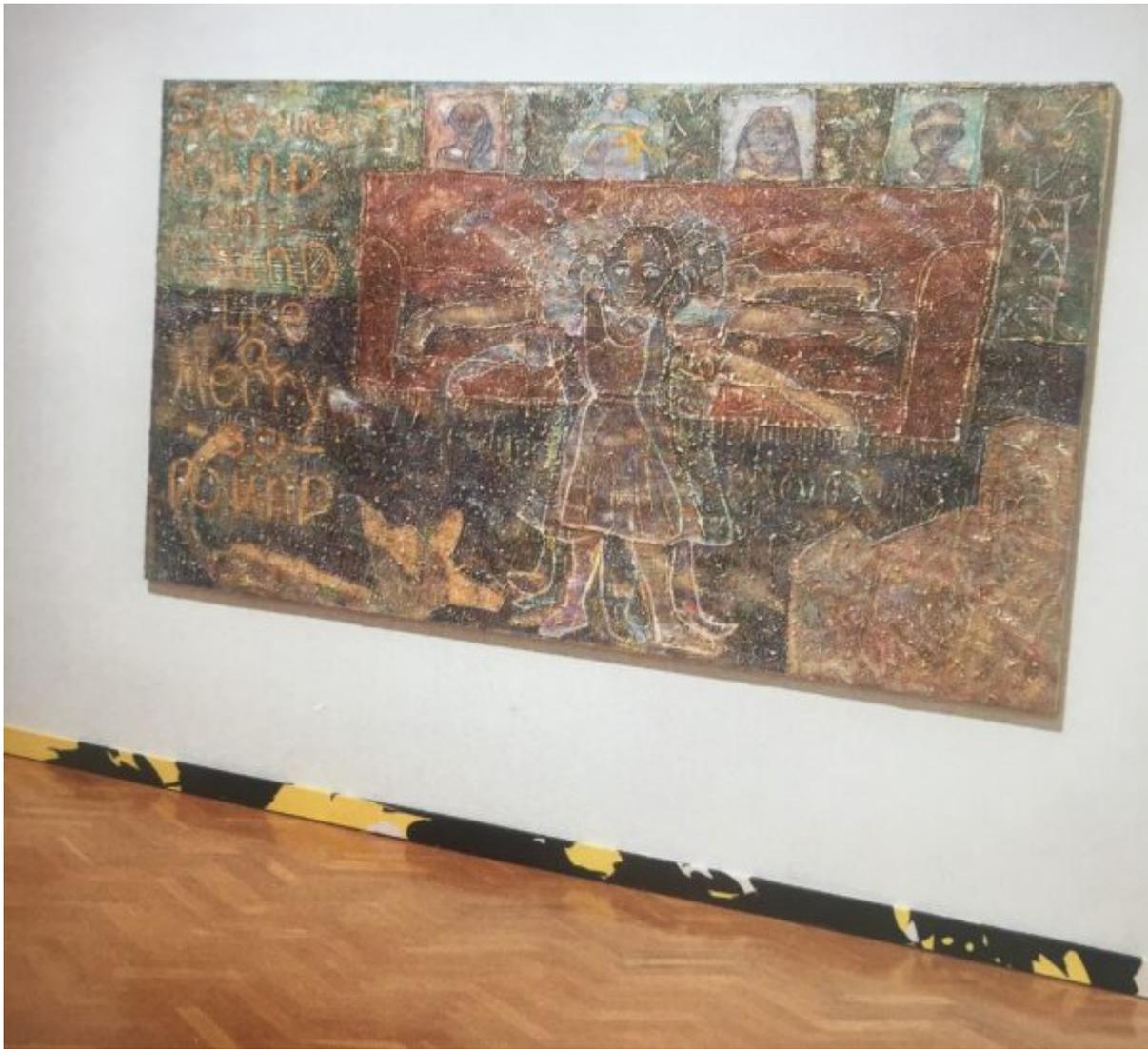
materials." In the exhibition pamphlet for the series, Quiles cites Alvarez, who says she has sought to create "a third reality created by the bringing together of two separate entities, painting and collage":



This hybrid reality is a quality of Alvarez's art referred to by most every author in *Here*. In her 1989 essay, "Paintings and Drawings," written for New York's June Kelly Gallery, Elizabeth Murray notes that Alvarez's paintings "evolve, like a dream, in many convoluted layers, in an evanescent atmosphere." This dream space is also referred to by *Here* curator, Terry R. Myers, who writes in "Recognize": "Alvarez interweaves the actual chronology of her work with a perpetual rearrangement of its various components to merge past, present, and future over and over again in painting after painting," lending her works a "kaleidoscopic" and "telescopic" nature:



Alongside memory versus reality, at play within Alvarez's work is a self that wants to be accepted within a climate of racism. In Coco Fusco's 1988 *Village Voice* article, "'Hispanic Artist' and Other Slurs," she refers to Alvarez's "richly layered diptychs" as "small windowlike openings with tiny people caught in mid-gesture," which she connects to "the suspended geometric forms that also populate her canvases, that recall a view of the works as seen from high-rises, not unlike the Brooklyn projects where she was raised." Later in the article, Fusco quotes Puerto Rican artist and Exit Art cofounder Papo Colo: "'We're not the 'other.' We're talking about artists who've been living here for years, or who were raised here. They're hybrids. I am a hybrid. North America is a paradise for hybrids.'" But Alvarez's work seems to transcend hybridity, and certainly racist ideologies. At the same time as it is firmly planted on earth, her painted universe reaches for her ancestors:



Daniel R. Quiles describes Alvarez's childhood as a "Nuyorican" community of people born in the New York metropolitan area to a generation of Puerto Rican parents. Quiles recounts how Alvarez's mother and father met: they "fell in love on the plane where her father was serving as her mother's escort during her migration to New York." And so Alvarez herself contains a geopolitical and geosocietal duality, a hybrid landscape borne in her dreaming father:



*He Loved To Dream*, 1985, Acrylic and modeling paste on canvas,  
60 x 60 inches



"I remember feeling like I was part of all these worlds," Quiles quotes Alvarez. And the feeling *Here* gongs the clearest is multi-dimensionality, a book as rich and varied as all the people—past, present, and future—Alvarez contains. Gracing the bottom of the book's final page is the voice of Alvarez: "I dedicate this book to my son Ramon, who is here with me always." *Here*: a book as complex as the times we are in. A book that lifts us into the beautiful oblivion of art, reminding us that there is always somewhere else, hovering just beyond our reach, but still there. In the land of dreams, maybe. Or just some other, better world. In times like these, it is good to be *Here*.