



# ALI

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*Ofrendas: Offerings*

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New Works

Pucker Gallery

# ALI

(Alison Cann-Clift)

## Ofrendas: Offerings New Works

In 1991, Ali spent several weeks in Oaxaca, Mexico. During this time, she experienced the Mexican tradition of the "Day of the Dead," a festival that takes place on the Catholic feast day of All Souls' but which is celebrated much more elaborately than is usual in the Catholic calendar. Many of the works in the present exhibition reflect Ali's fascination with this festival, a fascination that will come as no surprise to those viewers familiar with her continuing exploration of the "festival" of the circus.

In their book *The Skeleton at the Feast*, Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer characterize the Day of the Dead as the most important festival in the yearly Mexican calendar. Although it is identified with the Catholic All Souls' or All Saints' Day, it has roots that reach into the pre-Hispanic heritage of Mexico and has meaning to the Mexican people that surpasses the traditional Catholic commemoration of the dead. The Day of the Dead is essentially a family reunion of both the living family and the members who are deceased. It is believed that on this day the dead return, not in anger but in peace. Death is thus not an impassable barrier, but rather a transition, a part of life rather than its terminus. The center of the celebration is the reception of the dead souls by the construction of an *ofrenda* or offering, which consists of a table decorated and filled with the offerings of the living in decorative cloths surmounted by arches of canes and leaves and piled with candles, flowers, food offerings, clothing, and portraits of the family's dead. The *ofrendas* are a source of great pride, and the preparations for the festival are begun months in advance and entered into by the entire family. The dead are attracted to these offerings, and partake of their "vapors," or spirit in which they were offered, as their needed sustenance. After the dead have had their fill, the living feast on the food and other offerings and the goods are distributed among the community.<sup>1</sup>

Ali has depicted many of these *ofrendas* in works such as *Ofrenda XV*, *Ofrenda XI*, and *Ofrenda V*. In the latter two works, we see descriptive renderings of ornate *ofrendas*, complete with cane and leaf arches, portraits of the dead, candles, sugar skulls, and *hojaldra*, or the bread of the dead. In *Ofrenda XV*, the pile of goods has been transformed and the composition simplified, emphasizing the artistic design of the *ofrenda* through a Cézanne-like attention to the selection, position and formal qualities of the individual offerings.

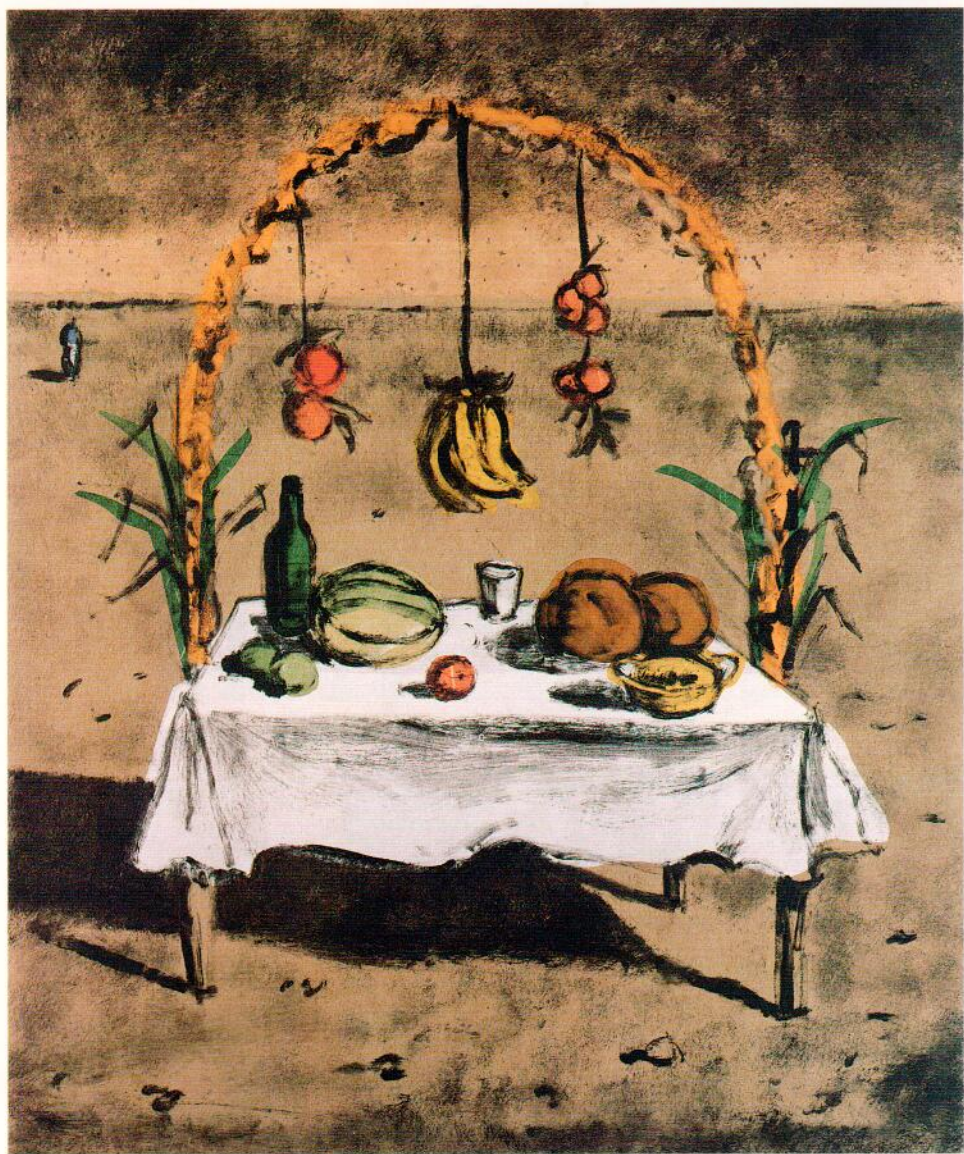
In *Juguete* (Toy) and *Los Tres Esqueletos*, Ali focuses on another, primarily urban, manifestation of the celebration—the skeletons that appear throughout the cities as sugar or paper mache figures who engage in all sorts of everyday behavior ranging from delivering newspapers to playing the guitar. These skeletons are not malevolent or frightening, rather they are cheerful symbols used to poke fun at the follies of the living and even, in modern times, for advertising. Ali's images of such skeletons emphasize their playful quality and their position as figures of fun by prominently featuring the sticks that support them, or the springs that serve as their "necks."

While all of Ali's works are infused with a spirit of partaking in rather than observing the festival, the fact that her interest in the festival is more than anthropological is most clearly evidenced in the three works *La Mesa I, II, and III*. In these three works Ali has situated the *ofrendas* in the vast inexplicable spaces that so often form the background for her circus imagery. The space that expands out to a flat horizon in the far distance and overwhelms the performers and their apparatus on *Afternoon Light* is a frequent feature of Ali's work, and one which serves to defamiliarize the familiar and create an eerily disturbing new context for the festivities of human life. Her use of a similar space in *La Mesa I, II, and III* suggests a similar theme—the recognition of the human festival as a rather curious and isolated event. However, the space does not invalidate or ridicule either of the "festivals," rather it gives them an unsettling in the face of the unknown.

In Ali's works the offerings of the living reach out through the uncertainty and vast distance as a testament of faith and continuity. Ali's images of the Mexican Day of the Dead are meaningful both as explorations of a unique cultural event and as representations of a common human urge towards celebration in the face of the unknowable.

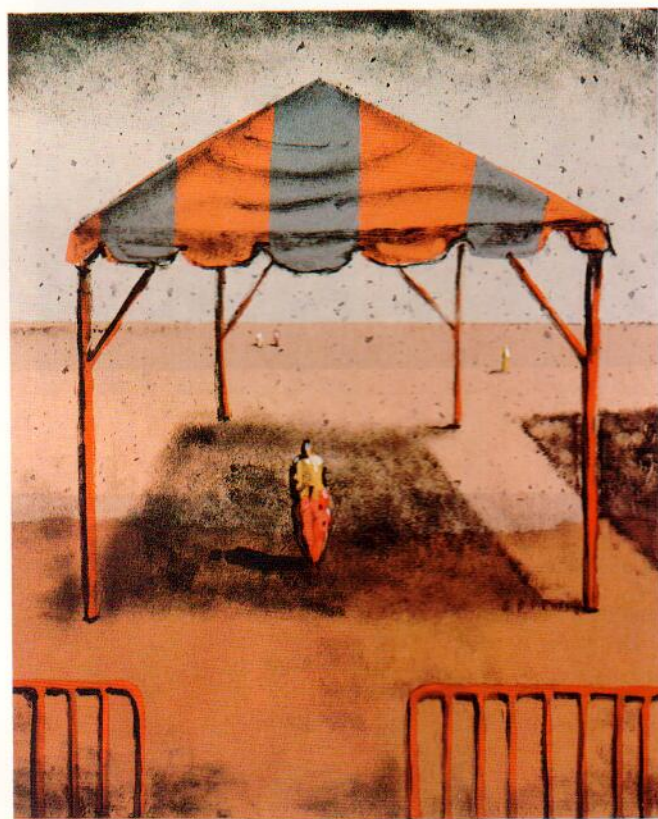
—Pamela Fletcher

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer, *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico* (London: The British Museum Press, 1991).



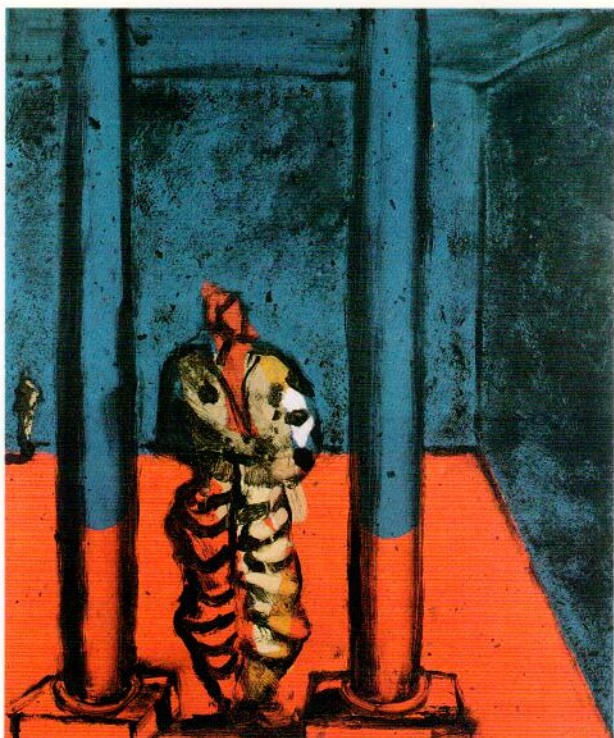
Cover  
*La Mesa*, Cloth, 62 × 47"

*Ofrenda Con Fruta*, Monotype, 20 × 16¾"

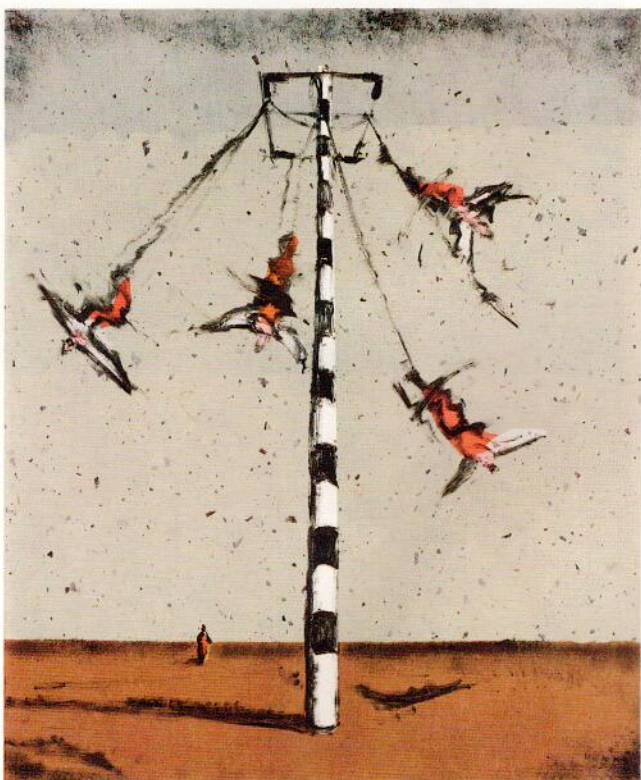


*Two Cyclists*  
Monotype, 16 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20"

*Red Railing*  
Monotype, 20 x 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



*Figure with Blue Pillars*  
Monotype, 20 × 16¾"



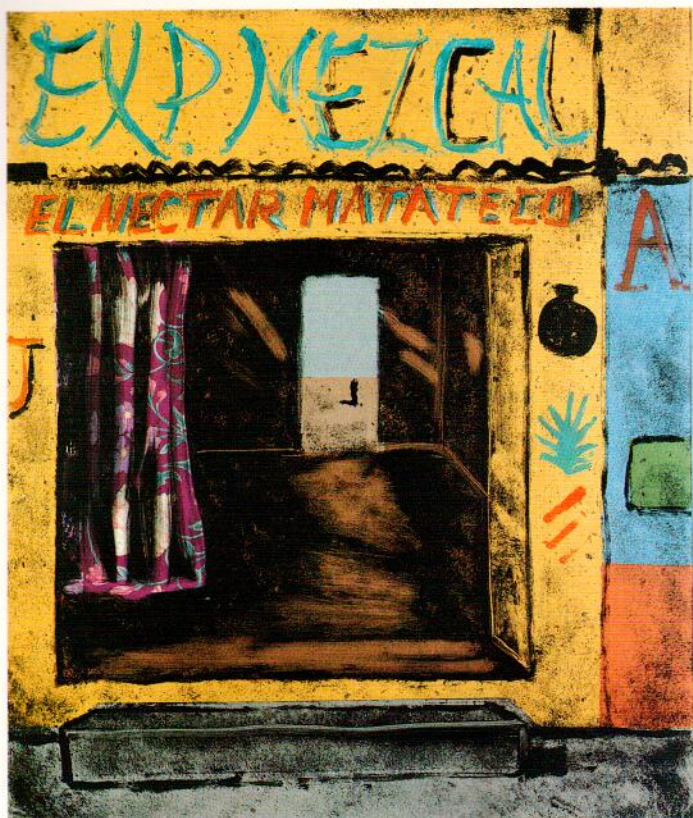
*Spinners*  
Monotype, 20 × 16¾"



Ofrenda XI, Monotype, 20 x 16 3/4"

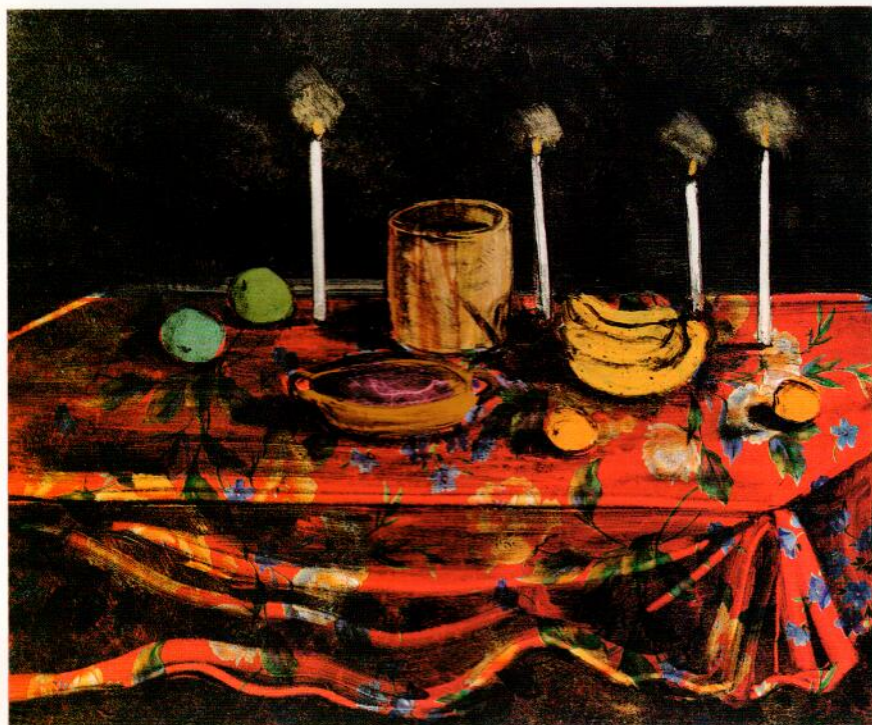


*Ofrenda V*, Monotype, 20 × 16¾"

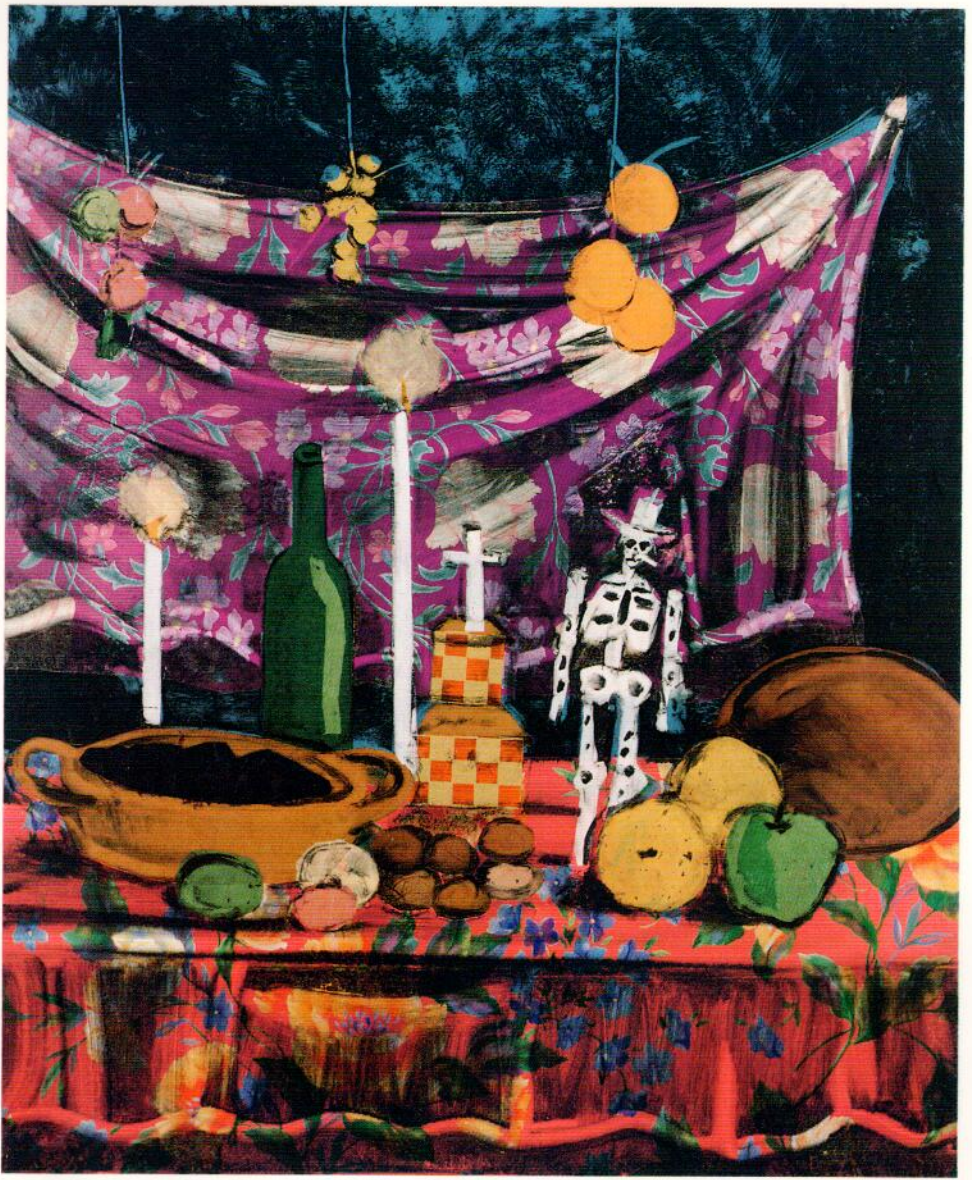


*El Nectar Matateco*  
Monotype, 20 × 16¾"

*Ofrenda XV*  
Monotype, 16¾ × 20"





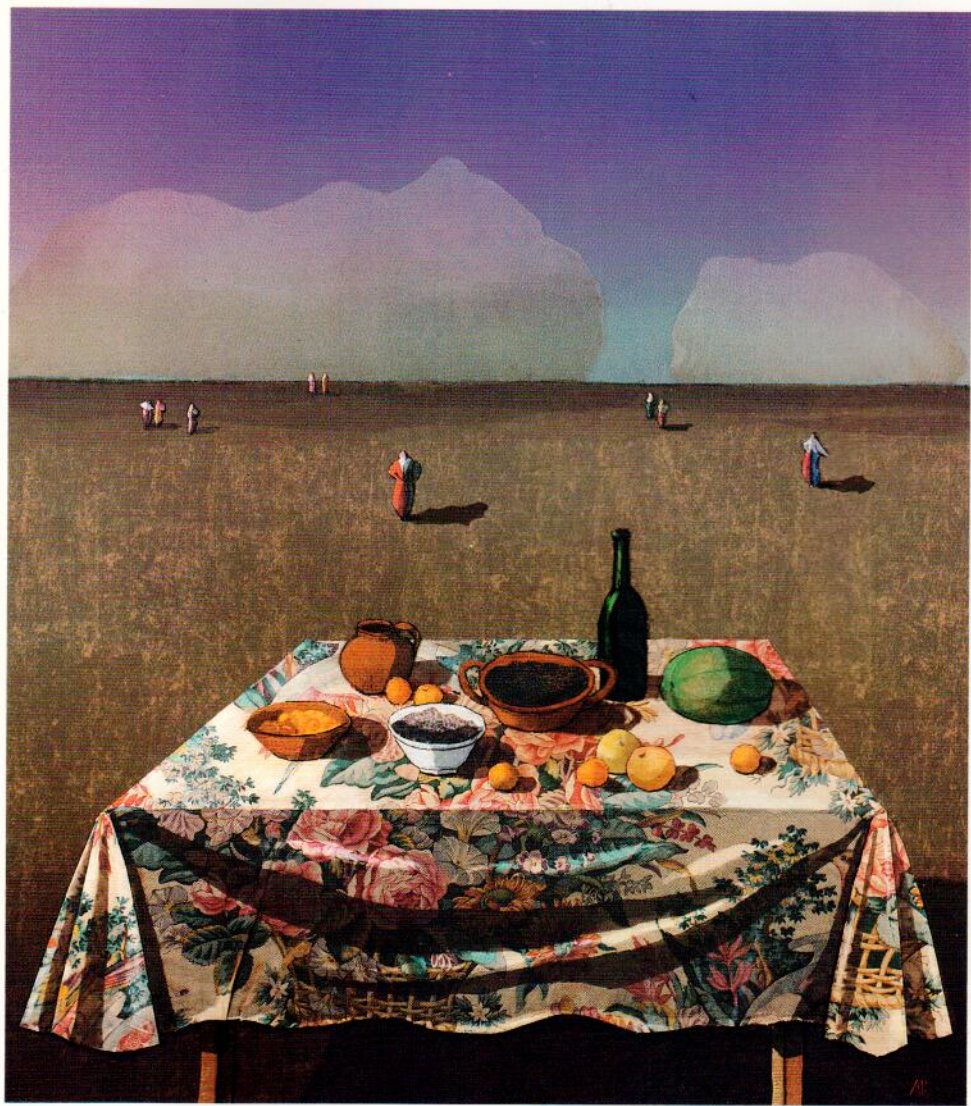


*Ofrenda IX*, Monotype, 20 x 16¾"

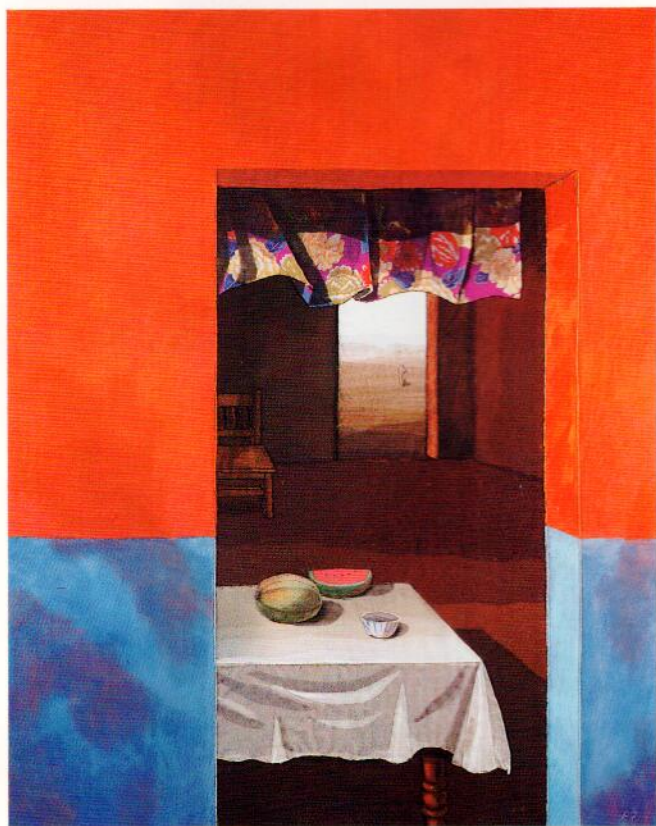
"Collection of the Rose Museum, Brandeis University  
Presented in honor of Pucker Gallery, Boston 25th Anniversary"



*La Mesa II, Cloth, 36¼ × 35¼"*



*La Mesa III*, Cloth, 34½ × 33"



*Stands II*, Serigraph,  
Edition 90, 29½ × 36¼"

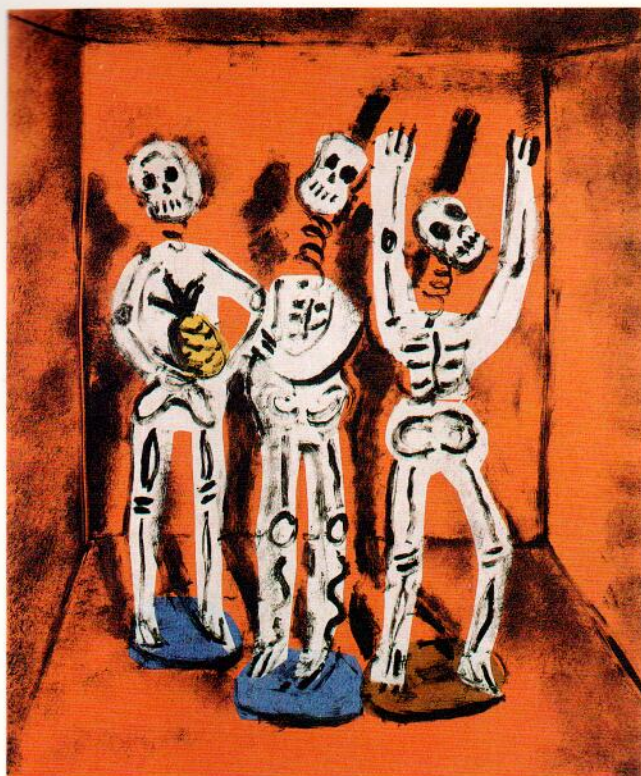
*La Entrada*, Cloth, 37 × 29½"



*Performing*, Serigraph,  
Edition 100, 32 × 24"



*Afternoon Light*, Serigraph,  
Edition 100, 20 × 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ "



*Los Tres Esqueletos*  
Monotype, 20 × 16¾"



*Juguete*, Monotype, 20 × 16¾"

Photography: Laird Van Riper Elting  
and Kim Kenney  
Design: Donna Bodell  
Preparation: Karin E. Isaacson



*La Cerrajería II*  
Monotype, 16¾ x 20"

## EDUCATION

- 1967-1972 Boston Museum School  
1968-1971 Tufts University (B.F.A.)  
1979 Artists Foundation Fellowship

## EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 "Ali: Performance Spaces," Pucker Gallery, Boston MA.  
1988 "Ali: Circus, Sand and Sea," Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.  
1986 "Beyond the Center Ring," Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.  
1985 Boston Arts Festival Invitational, Boston, MA.  
1984 Solo: "Ali Monotypes," Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.  
Miami International Print Biennial, Coral Gables, FL.  
1982 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.  
Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA.  
1981-82 "Center Ring: The Artist (Two Centuries of Circus Art)," Traveling Exhibition:  
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI.  
Ohio Art Museum, Columbus, OH.  
New York State Museum, Albany, NY.  
Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
1981 25th Annual Print Exhibition, Hunterdon Art Center, Clinton, NJ.  
12th National Art Exhibit, Second Crossing Gallery, Valley City, ND.  
Audubon Artists 39th Annual Exhibition, National Arts Club, New York, NY.  
"Views and Viewpoints, Landscapes of the 20th Century," Pucker Safrai Gallery,  
Boston, MA.  
1980 Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.  
"Art of the State," Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.  
1979 Provincetown Art Association, Provincetown, MA.  
1978 "Ali's Circus," Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.  
1977 "Six Artists," Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.  
Centennial Exhibition, Museum School, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.  
"Beyond the Center Ring," Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston, MA.

## COLLECTIONS

- Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia, Canada.  
Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.  
Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH.  
DeCordova and Dana Museum and Park, Lincoln, MA.  
Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA.  
Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.  
Johnson Art Gallery, Middlebury College, VT.  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.  
Neka Museum, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia.  
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT.  
Rose Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.  
Schick Gallery, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY.  
Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel.  
The Art Gallery, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.  
Wellesley Art Museum, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.  
William Rockhill Nelson Museum, Kansas City, MO.  
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA.



*Solo*, Monotype, 16¾ x 20"

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171 Newbury Street  
Boston, MA 02116-2897  
(617) 267-9473 FAX# (617) 424-9759

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New Works

February 27, – April 1, 1993

## RECEPTION

Saturday

February 27, 1993

3:00-7:00 p.m.

The public is invited to attend.  
The artist will be present.

Member of the Boston Art Dealers Association.  
One hour free validated parking available.