



# The Madonnas of Echo Park: A Novel

By Brando Skyhorse

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Reminiscent of Luis Alberto Urrea and Dinaw Mengestu, *The Madonnas of Echo Park* is a brilliant and genuinely fresh view of American life.

*The Madonnas of Echo Park* is both a grand mural of a Los Angeles neighborhood and an intimate glimpse into the lives of the men and women who struggle to lose their ethnic identity in the pursuit of the American dream. Each chapter summons a different voice—poetic, fierce, comic. We meet Hector, a day laborer who trolls the streets for work and witnesses a murder that pits his morality against his illegal status; his ex-wife Felicia, who narrowly survives a shooting and lands a cleaning job in a Hollywood Hills house as desolate as its owner; and young Aurora, who journeys through her now gentrified childhood neighborhood to discover her own history and her place in the land that all Mexican-Americans dream of, “the land that belongs to us again.”

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## The Madonnas of Echo Park: A Novel By Brando Skyhorse Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Skyhorse maps in his vivid debut the spirit of L.A.'s Echo Park, where Mexican-Americans define themselves either in alignment with or in opposition to their barrio. Each story-like chapter tells the tale of a character who has grown up in, moved to, or fled Echo Park, such as an itinerant construction worker hired to dispose of a murder weapon, a woman who converses with the Virgin Mary, and a hustler who swears he's going to stay out of prison this time. These lives coalesce around a random shooting that claims the life of a young girl. Family epics also emerge, notably the story of Aurora Esperanza, whose absent father narrates the opening story and whose mother was at the center of a tragedy. Aurora herself closes out the book, drawing together threads of homecoming that weave throughout the novel. Though a few of the narrators' voices aren't distinct enough, Skyhorse excels at building a vibrant community and presenting several perspectives on what it means to be Mexican in America, from those who wonder how can you lose something that never belonged to you? to those who miraculously find it. (*June*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Echo Park, the Los Angeles neighborhood down the hill from Chavez Ravine, is the setting for this novel-in-stories—a vivid portrayal of the lives of Mexican Americans who live and work there. Skyhorse (Mexican himself, but given his stepfather's last name) weaves his characters—migrant farm workers, gardeners, dishwashers, bus drivers, house cleaners, gang members—in and out of his stories in various time frames. These are the people we pass every day and never give much thought. Now Skyhorse demands our attention as he deftly humanizes their stories. We meet Felicia, the cleaning woman for a wealthy couple who becomes the wife's only real friend, and Felicia's mother, who sent Felicia away when she was four. And Efren, a bus driver whose strict adherence to the rules of the Los Angeles MTA insulates him from feeling remorse over a preventable tragedy, and his brother Juan, a gang member who escapes by joining the army. Each is trying to make a life where "everything is paid for in cash and sweat." Eye-opening and haunting, Skyhorse's novel will jolt readers out of their complacency. --Deborah Donovan

Review

### **Winner of the Pen/Hemingway Award and the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction**

"Skyhorse is at his best when exploring the changing world of Echo Park...His careful attention to detail, to a rich past of a place that served as home to Mexican Americans already once displaced from Chavez Ravine, is thoroughly researched and executed-- no easy feat while juggling multiple characters and timeframes...the focus on Mexican American characters is admirable." (*The Los Angeles Times*)

"To embrace a community, to capture its fabric, to syncopate its rhythms, lives, views and experiences is a difficult feat. But Brando Skyhorse manages to do just that with his breathtaking and, at times, soul-churning novel...Skyhorse [finds] breadth and diversity in Echo Park...Stories zigzag through the book, introducing lives unique and full, bisecting one another at times, standing at solitary edges at others...we are carried away by this intricately crafted tale. Taken together, the tales spin around the axis of a few streets yet splinter off into infinite dimensions." (*Chattanooga Times Free Press*)

"A revelation...the summer's most original read...extraordinary...The novel is richly detailed, offering varying perspectives that collide into a singular narrative from an evolving neighborhood in the shadow of downtown L.A. (Think Gabriel García Márquez fused with Junot Díaz)...The immigrant experience may

very well be the defining narrative of the United States in the 21st century. When juxtaposed against its literary rival, the self-confession, the results can be breathtaking as exhibited by Skyhorse's startling author's note at the start of the book...powerful." (*Examiner.com*)

"Rich and textured...As the intricate tale unwinds, we're offered glimpses of...eight residents, whose ordinary, working-class lives intersect under often extraordinary circumstances...Skyhorse propels the reader through the novel at a breakneck pace. And in each section, readers are rewarded with a deeper layer, and a new connection, that enriches the plot...Skyhorse uses elegant prose and vivid storytelling to tackle questions surrounding culture, belonging, and identity that haunt every immigrant community." (*The Christian Science Monitor*)

"If timeliness and social relevance don't sell you on the book, then read it for its beautifully imperfect characters, the wise certainty of its prose, its satisfying emotional heft...Elegantly written...The book cleverly expresses the tangled nature of multicultural identity and the physical geography of off-the-grid Echo Park." (*The Brooklyn Rail*)

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Nola Schroeder:**

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**James Turco:**

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