THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN POST-CHICANO ART

by

SARAH NICOLE HYMES

Bachelor of Arts, 2004
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas

Submitted to the Faculty
Graduate Division
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University

in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2007

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN POST-CHICANO ART

Thesis approved:

Major Professor, Dr. Frances Colpitt

Dr. Lori Boornazian Diel

Dr. Babette Bohn

Benito Huerta, Director, The Gallery at UTA

Graduate Studies Representative

For the College of Fine Arts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The late-twentieth-century emergence of the term "post-Chicano art" requires an evaluation of the term's meaning and implications for a generation of artists either self-designating or being designated as such by galleries, museums, and critics. This evaluation must also include an awareness of the relationship between Chicano and post-Chicano art. The issue of identity resonates in both Chicano and post-Chicano art, which therefore sets these forms of expression apart from many other contemporary artistic endeavors, much as feminist art sets itself apart from work by contemporary female artists. Yet the decision to categorize these artists on the basis of their ethnicity must be coupled with a consideration of how this ethnic heritage manifests itself in the content of the art. This essay seeks to explore the utility of the designations of "Chicano art" and "post-Chicano art," focusing specifically on an exploration of the emergence of post-Chicano art. To comprehend the difference between Chicano and post-Chicano art, the origins and development of Chicano art must first be elucidated. Only then does the materialization of the term "post-Chicano" gain relevance. Chicano art is particularly concerned with the identity of Mexican Americans engaged in the quest for visibility, equality, acceptance, and representation, while post-Chicano art is specifically tied to its practitioners' own contemporary social climate and personal aspirations, fundamentally different from those of Chicano artists yet still dedicated to the original goals of giving a voice to an underrepresented ethnic group and creating a positive narrative of Chicano history and culture. According to San Antonio artist Juan Miguel

Ramos, "Post-Chicano art can be related to, derived from, or inspired by Chicano art, but it isn't Chicano art because our social context has evolved."[1]

In order to comprehend the shift from Chicano to post-Chicano art, a brief discussion of Chicano art will be undertaken. This discussion will emphasize the powerful link between Chicano art and the Chicano movement, demonstrating that Chicano art was literally born to facilitate and support the activities of this civil rights endeavor. The utility of the term "Chicano art" becomes apparent when this work is considered in the context of the social and political climate that spurred its inception. This term facilitates our understanding of this art as not just work by Mexican Americans but work about being Mexican American and, initially, intimately tied to the goals and aspirations of the Chicano movement. Tracking this work out of the Chicano movement and into the later twentieth century and early twenty-first century allows for an understanding of the need for a designation of "post-Chicano art," as this art was no longer strictly informed by the Civil Rights movement. Rather than a voice of protest, post-Chicano art grants visual manifestation to a complex identity formed by a variety of experiences and operates under a temporal distance that permits a dialogue with Chicano art. Postcolonial and feminist theory provide a theoretical framework that elucidates the methods and goals of Chicano and post-Chicano artists, enabling an understanding of the stereotypes regarding Mexican Americans these artists were attempting to combat. These theoretical models also facilitate a reading of the contemporary pursuits of post-Chicano artists as concerned with offering alternative narratives to dominant conceptions, promoting a multiplicity of experience over a unifying narrative.

---

[1] Quoted in Suzanne Weaver, "Are You Experienced?" in *Come Forward: Emerging Art in Texas* by Suzanne Weaver and Lane Relyea (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2003), 19.

The term "post-Chicano" implies a temporal distance from Chicano art, an implication that will be endorsed in this essay because while Chicano art arose in the 1960s in response to a social and political movement, post-Chicano art follows in the wake of this social reform period and responds to its own unique social and political climate. This generational distinction therefore demonstrates both an historical and temporal distance between Chicano and post-Chicano art. But, could this distance be ideological as well? Postmodernism is not only historically and temporally removed from Modernism, but ideologically as well. This essay will argue that, while temporal distance provided the initial impetus to shift from Chicano to post-Chicano art, this temporal shift carried with it a new set of ideological concerns, concerns that then manifested themselves in post-Chicano art.

This essay will demonstrate that this temporal distance has affected the very content of Chicano art to such an extent that it becomes appropriate to introduce the term "post-Chicano art" to acknowledge this fundamental change. What exactly that change encompasses will be developed throughout this analysis, in which the unified front promoted during the Chicano movement (and reflected in early Chicano art) is seen giving way to a careful, meditated consideration of the identity being championed by the Chicano movement. This identity becomes more complex and multifaceted throughout the twentieth century. Postcolonial and feminist discourse is utilized in this essay to evidence the impetus for this increasingly dynamic depiction of identity. Originally born of resistance and affirmation, Chicano art responded to the changing social climate, altering its forms and expressions along the way to such an extent that it now becomes appropriate to speak of a "post-Chicano" sensibility that informs the newest generation of Mexican American artists making art about being Mexican American.

THE SOCIAL PROTEST ORIGINS OF CHICANO ART

Inextricably linked to politics and social reform, Chicano art arose to fulfill a specific need. Its origins can be traced to the Chicano movement, also known as *el Movimiento*, an outgrowth of the larger Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Whereas the Civil Rights movement enjoyed national visibility and impact, the Chicano movement was more specifically confined to parts of the country with large populations of Mexican Americans, particularly the American Southwest, including California and Texas.

The origin of the term Chicano is not precisely documented, but the most popular theory contends that it stems from the term for the founders of the Aztec empire, the Mexica. Adding *–ano* to the end of this word denotes "citizen of" in the Spanish language, forming the word Mexicano. The term Mexica is pronounced with an *–sh* sound for the letter x, thus producing the word Meshicano.[2] The term Chicano therefore originated as an homage to the indigenous population of Mexico, a trend that continued in Chicano art. The term is also a form of self-designation adopted during the Chicano movement, implying social and political consciousness, unlike the term Mexican American, which is a more general marker of ethnic heritage. Rubén Salazar, a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*, called the Chicano "a Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of himself."[3] This definition serves to underscore the activist nature of the term as inherently coupled with a self-awareness and self-promotion of identity. As a group, Mexican Americans were literally brought into existence through the resolution of the Mexican-American War. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in February 1848, granted to the United States the territories now known as

---

[2] Arnoldo Carlos Vento, *Mestizo: The History, Culture, and Politics of the Mexican and the Chicano* (Lanham, Maryland.: University Press of America, 1998), 221.

[3] Rubén Salazar, "What is a Chicano? And what is it the Chicanos Want?," *Los Angeles Times*, part 2, February 6, 1970, 7.

New Mexico, Arizona, California, and parts of Nevada, Utah, and Colorado, for the price of 15 million dollars.[4] Literally overnight, tens of thousands of Mexicans living in these territories awoke to discover themselves American citizens. The original Mexican Americans were not immigrants to this country, but inhabitants of Mexico who passively witnessed the transfer of their homes and lands from one nation to another.

These new American citizens did not always enjoy the rights initially afforded to them by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexican Americans were frequently forced off the land they owned prior to the signing of the treaty and were often the victims of ethnic violence as more and more Anglos moved into the newly acquired territories.[5] This legacy continued into the twentieth century, even as the Mexican American population grew exponentially, especially through continued immigration. In 1930, the U.S. Census Bureau designated Mexican Americans as "colored,"[6] thereby paving the way for their continued segregation, suffering the same marginalization as African Americans in the decades leading up to the Civil Rights movement. Events such as the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 made it evident that Mexican Americans were enduring the same racial injustices perpetrated against African Americans during this time period. Black civil rights successes in the 1950s and school desegregation efforts in the 1960s gave members of the Mexican American community a model of progress to emulate. Especially integral in the formalization of the Chicano movement was the United Farm Workers movement, led by César Chávez. This particular form of activism exerted a powerful influence due to the disproportionate number of Mexican Americans engaged in non-unionized migrant farm work. Attempts to secure fair

---

[4] F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996), 5.

[5] Ibid, 6–13.

[6] Ibid, 95.

wages and safe working conditions for Mexican Americans soon extended into the promotion of Mexican American rights in general. In fact, the most visible symbol of the United Farm Workers movement, a red flag with a black, geometrically simplified eagle, was adopted by the Chicano movement and its affiliated artistic propaganda. This act of appropriation would later become a hallmark of Chicano art.

The Chicano movement, concerned with securing rights for Mexican Americans, can be understood as the result of those land seizures and rights infringements inflicted on the original Mexican annexees to the United States. For instance, the Alianza Federal de las Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) was established in 1963 with the goal of returning lands owned by Mexicans in 1848 that were subsequently lost to Anglos and the United States federal government, often through aggressive or violent tactics.[7] The desire to reclaim their homeland ultimately became one of the most important aspects of the Chicano movement. This concept of a stolen homeland was reinforced by the Mexica migration myth, as illustrated in the Codex Boturini, which described the travels of the Mexica, the ethnic group that would later found the city of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire encountered by Hernán Cortés in 1519. According to an illustration in the Codex Boturini, the Mexica migrated from an island today thought by some to be located in the American Southwest, the very lands annexed into the United States territory by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Thus the reclamation of Mexican lands lost to Anglo hands becomes even more important as these lands comprise the mythical origins of the Mexica people, lands known as Aztlán. Upheld as a point of origin and a source of identity for Mexican

[7] Ibid, 154.

Americans, the invocation of Aztlán was prevalent in the Chicano movement.[8] Its first appearance in the movement is traceable to the document "El Pan Espiritual de Aztlán," drafted at the Chicano Youth Conference in March of 1969. The link between heritage and land reclamation can be read directly from this document:

> In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage, but also of the brutal "Gringo" invasion of our territories: We, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.[9]

As these ideals of reclaiming sites integral to the construction of Chicano identity coalesced with the desire to secure justice and equality for Mexican Americans, the Chicano movement was born. In 1967, Latino students in California began walking out of their schools and colleges in protest of the Vietnam War, inadequate educational opportunities, and racial oppression.[10] Rallies, protests, and marches became important and visible demonstrations of the expanding climate of political and social activism throughout the Chicano community, as public gatherings cropped up outside California. In Denver, Corky Gonzales led the Crusade for Justice, while Chicago witnessed rallies of the Chicano Moratorium Committee.[11] The public nature of the Chicano movement, which took place primarily in the streets of major metropolitan centers in California, Texas, and the Midwest, had important consequences for the nature of Chicano art. Public protest requires the dissemination of information to large groups of people and the systematic organization of these groups into recognizable entities visible at the national level. Thus Chicano art was

---

[8] Gloria Anzaldúa, "Borderlands," in *The Latino/a Condition*, ed. R. Delgado and J. Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 627–630.

[9] Quoted in Rafael Pérez-Torres, "Refiguring Aztlán," in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, ed. A. Singh and P. Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 108.

[10] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 175–179.

[11] Ibid, 179, 199.

born to fulfill this specific requirement of organization and dissemination. The poster became indispensable in communicating to the Chicano community. Posters were inexpensive to manufacture, could be mass-produced, and enabled widespread dissemination of information. Posters were utilized to publicize upcoming rallies and protests, as well as to advertise theatrical productions and concerts geared toward Chicano audiences.

One of the most effective tools of the United Farm Workers union was the boycott, launched repeatedly against grape and lettuce growers in the early 1970s. These boycotts were publicized and sustained through the poster, such as Xavier Viramontes's *Boycott Grapes* from 1973 (figure 1). This poster depicts an angry Indian face crowed by an elaborate headdress that recalls Aztec rulers. The indigenous man's hands clutch grapes with such force that they ooze blood, which streams down over the title text. Posters also promoted goals outside the United Farm Workers movement, espousing the broader aims of the Chicano civil rights movement. Malaquias Montoya's silkscreen *La Nueva Raza/Viva la Causa* of 1969 (figure 2) reflects the early emergence of posters echoing the rally cries of protest marchers and demonstrators as they took to the streets in the cities of the Southwest. These posters had specific functions inside the Chicano movement and operated *within* the context of social reform, rather than commenting on it from the outside. "These posters played crucial roles in constructing organic solidarity and in defining collective ideology," according to George Lipsitz.[12] They were not reified art objects but everyday ephemera that served as a call for community participation and Chicano self-awareness, integral components of the self-determination desired by the Civil Rights movement. One of the most prolific graphic artists of this time was Rupert Garcia, whose initiation into poster creation

[12] George Lipsitz, "Not just another Social movement: Poster Art and the Movimiento Chicano" in *Just Another Poster?: Chicano Graphic Arts in California*, ed. Chon Noriega, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 73.

was prompted by a 1968 student strike at San Francisco State College,[13] again evidencing the strong link between the emergence of a Chicano artistic sensibility and the political activism prevalent at the time. His 1975 silkscreen *El Grito de Rebelde* (figure 3) offers a visual account of the difficulty and frustration inherent in attempts to give a voice to an underrepresented community. It depicts a man blindfolded and bound, restraints that may bind him physically but cannot suppress his "grito de rebelde" or "cry of rebellion." The strong link between Mexican and Chicano models of resistance is evidenced in this work, as it echoes the "Grito de Dolores" of Father Miguel Hidalgo that served as the initial cry for Mexican independence in 1810.

According to George Lipsitz, the silkscreen process utilized in the production of many of these posters is often an entry point into the act of art-making, allowing the inexperienced the training and creative exploration that can then translate into endeavors with oil painting and other more institutionally acknowledged forms of artistic expression.[14] Chicano art can therefore be understood as an outgrowth of poster production, itself a process thoroughly linked to the social reform goals of the Chicano movement. That Chicano cultural expression is the literal product of *el Movimiento* is concretely demonstrated in the creation of theatre programming focused on the Mexican American condition, which began in the agricultural fields to entertain and support striking farm workers. Luis Valdez acknowledges that "El Teatro Campesino was born in the Huelga [strike]."[15] In other words, Chicano artistic expression was literally born to support those ideals of the Chicano movement. This stresses the nature of early Chicano art as connected to a social and political endeavor. What

[13] Shifra M. Goldman, "A Public Voice: Fifteen Years of Chicano Posters," *Art Journal* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 54.

[14] Ibid, 82.

[15] Luis Valdez, "El Teatro Campesino," in *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, ed. Luis Valdez and Stan Steiner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 359.

would become of Chicano art without this social reform movement? This essay will later demonstrate that Chicano art evolved as the goals of Chicanos themselves evolved, paving the way for a dynamically changing body of work by artists concerned with Mexican American identity.

As artistic support for the Chicano movement grew, the large scale mural began to replace the poster as the most visible symbol of the alignment between art and social reform. Chicano artist and social activist Judith Baca's *Great Wall of Los Angeles* (figure 4) remains one of the most enduring examples of the explosion of mural painting that began in Los Angeles in the 1970s. The *Great Wall of Los Angeles* covers six city blocks and depicts the history of California from prehistory to World War II. It was executed by Baca with a team of artists and over four hundred Los Angeles youths over the course of six summers, beginning in 1976.[16] This mural serves to highlight the contributions of Mexican Americans to the United States, specifically California, therefore endorsing those tenets of the Chicano movement that stressed the value and worth of this minority group. The mural aspired to offer an alternative narrative of history that made visible a previously ignored component of California society.

The public nature of this and other murals across Los Angeles provided accessible and legible messages to the community, much like those of the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, whose Social Realist style made the meaning in their murals abundantly clear. Because of their large scale and high visibility, murals functioned extremely well within the context of social reform and political activism. In addition to granting legitimacy and worth to the Chicano community, murals also

---

[16] Joyce Gregory Wyels, "Great Walls, Vibrant Voices," *Americas* 52 no. 1 (January/February 2000): 22–31.

encouraged the education and self-improvement endorsed by the Civil Rights movement. Josefina Quezada's mural *Read* (1978, figure 5) in East Los Angeles depicts Mexican American women poring over books and reading to children. Like the poster artists, muralists often then transitioned into other forms of artistic execution. Chicano painters Carlos Almaraz, Gronk, John Valadez, and Margaret García all began their careers as muralists.[17] The mural functioned to tell those stories of Chicano history and culture lacking in mainstream American depictions of the community. These were alternative narratives designed to combat negative stereotypes and promote a vision of the Chicano of which the community could be proud.

This connection between political activism and Chicano art is also evidenced by the large numbers of artists' collectives established in the early 1970s. These groups echoed the growing numbers of Chicano activist groups on college campuses across the country and espoused the similar goal of giving a voice to an underrepresented minority group in the United States. Groups like the Pintores de la Nueva Raza and Con Safos in San Antonio and the Mexican American Liberation Art Front (MALAF) in Oakland and Sacramento emphasized the power of the mural to teach Chicanos about their past, present, and future.[18] In Los Angeles, the artists' collective ASCO (which means "nausea" in Spanish) was founded in 1971 and practiced a form of "instant muralism," turning the painting of a mural into a public performance,[19] therefore stressing both the content of the wall painting and the act of a community coming together in the execution of an art object. The public and community aspects of the Chicano movement were echoed by contemporaneous Chicano art

---

[17] Max Benavidez, "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility," in *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*, ed. Cheech Marin (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 17.

[18] Jacinto Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), xx.

[19] Edward J. Sullivan, ed., *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 318.

endeavors. Speaking in 1970, MALAF member Esteban Villa said, "The main purpose of this group is to use Chicano artists to create new symbols and images for la nueva raza. It is an effort to present in visual form an artistic account of the Chicano movement."[20] Thus Chicano art and its artists' collectives operated under the same model of collaboration and engagement with the public that informed the Chicano movement, at least in these initial stages of an art appropriately labeled "Chicano." In response to a political and social movement, Chicano art took to the streets in support of rallies and protests and assisted in the promotion of emerging Mexican American cultural activities such as theatre productions and other performance initiatives. The public nature of this period of Chicano art requires special emphasis, as it demonstrates the powerful link between the goals of the social reform movement and the art that was born to support such a movement.

Chicano art cultivated a unique visual form and set of icons and symbols related specifically to the heritage of Mexican Americans. This was an endeavor of identity, an attempt to make visible a form of identity previously marginalized and underrepresented in the United States. Because of its affiliation with the civil rights endeavors of a specific segment of the American population, Chicano art promoted a cohesive and unified image of the Chicano community, stressing those cultural symbols that served to link the diaspora of Mexican Americans under a visual umbrella of similar social and cultural expressions. As a very consequence of the political climate that coincided with—and even caused—its inception, Chicano art endorsed an understanding of the Chicano community as united and unified by its shared history and heritage. Similarity rather than difference, and homogeneity rather than heterogeneity, are stressed in the service of creating a visible and identifiable group engaged in the pursuit of acceptance and equality. Mexican Americans were presented

[20] Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists*, 134.

as different—and valuable in their own right—from Anglo Americans, but not as different from one another, as such a tactic would undermine mainstream America's understanding this group and its goals. "In approaching the idea of self-determination, Chicano artists redefined their traditions and produced a new worldview that presented alternative mechanisms for affirming their history and experience," according to Philip Brookman.[21] This goal encouraged Chicano artists to strive to create a visual vocabulary that celebrated and made visible their specific identity, in regard to both history and heritage.

Of primary importance in the promotion of this Chicano history and heritage are both Mexican and pre-Columbian influences. The symbols of the Aztec culture, which flourished in Mexico prior to the arrival of the Spanish, dominate both Mexican and Chicano art. The utilization of these symbols connects contemporary Mexicans and Chicanos with their indigenous roots. This iconography serves Chicanos in three ways: first, it stresses those aspects of their ancestry that are non-European and unique from other Americans; second, it acts as a reminder that American lands first belonged to the indigenous ancestors of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, as the Aztecs existed in the Americas for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans; and third, it stresses the past glory and cultural richness of their ethnic heritage. This reference to pre-Columbian heritage initially arose to call attention to this second point and support Chicano attempts at land reclamation, but later evolved into an evocation of a unique Chicano heritage with histories and traditions that owe nothing to Europe. This helps strengthen bonds within the Chicano community, thereby creating an integrated and cohesive group much more likely to be successful at promoting change than a disjointed, fragmented, or individualistic one. Reiterating this point is integral in the

[21] Philip Brookman, "Looking for Alternatives: Notes on Chicano Art. 1960–1990," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985* (Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, University of California, 1991), 182.

construction of this argument as it attests to the changing forms of Chicano art in relation to the contemporary social climate.

Inspired by the Mexican muralists of the 1920s, the evocation of a shared Chicano history independent of Anglo history can be seen throughout early Chicano art, both during and immediately following the height of the Chicano movement. The representation of indigenous ancestry can be seen in painting as early as 1970. Mel Casas's *Humanscape 62 (Brownies of the Southwest)* (figure 6) includes an Indian male, whose shoulders are covered by an indigenous textile and whose dark skin is weathered and wrinkled. He stands complacent and with eyes closed behind a feathered serpent that dominates the foreground of the painting. This feathered serpent directly recalls the serpents that adorn the stairway of the Castillo, a Maya temple at Chichen Itzá, and references the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl. This kind of Aztec imagery has been common in Mexico for generations. Painter Leandro Izaguirre painted *The Torture of Cuauhtémoc* in 1893 (figure 7) for the Chicago World's Fair of that same year. This painting depicts the last of the Aztec rulers, Cuauhtémoc, standing defiant in the face of the torture inflicted upon him by Cortés in the latter's search for clues regarding the location of mass quantities of gold he believed hidden somewhere within the Aztec empire. This painting demonstrates the Mexicans' desire to endow their pre-Columbian past with pride and dignity, and to present their version of history to the globe-spanning guests of the World's Fair. The reification of pre-Columbian symbols and motifs functioned similarly in Chicano art of the 1970s. Painted by Las Mujeres Muralistas—whose members included Graciela Carrillo, Consuelo Mendez, Irene Perez, and Patricia Rodriquez—the mural *Panamerica* of 1974 (Los Angeles, destroyed, figure 8) was overflowing with evocations of pre-Columbian traditions and beliefs, including a field of

maize plants, a simplified temple, a ruler or priest in an extravagant, zoomorphic headdress, a sun calendar, and quetzal birds perched among the trees.

CHANGING DIRECTIONS IN CHICANO ART

Due to its origins in and concrete ties to *el Movimiento*, early Chicano art faced a turning point in the mid-1970s as the fervor of the Civil Rights movement began to wane. According to scholar Shifra M. Goldman,

> By 1975, or even earlier, the Chicano political movement was changing course, and rifts opened in the early alliance among students, urban workers, and farmworkers. The fraternal, unified community of the early period began to fragment as more Chicanos entered the middle class, attained professional or business status, and established a stake in the status quo.[22]

In other words, the very successes of the Chicano movement foretold a crisis for Chicano art. Born of a movement losing activists to goals attained and dedicated to a fight whose supporters began to diverge in level of commitment and desires, Chicano art responded to the changing social and political climate. The issue of Chicano identity, a concern independent of civil rights endeavors—though obviously initially spurred by them—was, however, a more enduring and constant concern. Less tied to political activism and social reform, a new focus in Chicano art began to emerge.

As previously discussed, the evocation of a shared Chicano experience was fostered during the Chicano movement in the service of promoting unity and an understanding of shared ideals. But following the end of the Civil Rights era, a more nuanced appreciation for the varieties of experience and multiplicity of individuals became appropriate. While the earliest Chicano art promoted a movement interested in giving a voice to a previously underrepresented community, this second generation of artists focused, in my opinion, on

---

[22] Goldman, *A Public Voice*, 56–57.

more precisely defining the identity of this community, exploring those elements of heritage and ancestry that combined to create contemporary Chicano culture.

The work of Yolanda M. López aptly illustrates this shift in Chicano art from a social and public form of protest to the exploration of ethnic identity. Her pastel on paper, *Nuestra Madre* from 1978 (figure 9), represents Mexican and Chicano identity as a blend of Aztec and European ancestry and belief systems. This is a shift from the previous discussion of an endorsement of a Chicano heritage (Aztec only) which owes nothing to Europe. *Nuestra Madre* represents the Aztec goddess Coatlicue surrounded by the mandorla of the Virgin of Guadalupe, herself a distinctly Mexican version of the Catholic Virgin Mary. In making this juxtaposition, López highlights the hybridity and mestizo qualities of Mexican ethnic identity, demonstrating the coexistence of pre-Columbian and European religious symbols, beliefs, and cultural heritage. Thus, while López's art is still concerned with articulating and representing Chicano identity, just like earlier art by Chicanos, her work demonstrates an emergent desire to investigate the make-up of identity, specifically through the acknowledgement of both Spanish and indigenous influences. Rather than simply arguing for an acknowledgement of Chicano identity—as art specifically tied to the Chicano movement needed to do—this next generation of artists explored the construction of Chicano identity, which introduced a more dynamic understanding of Mexican American heritage and culture.

This generation of artists following the height of the Chicano movement also demonstrates a shift away from public protest (murals, posters) to more intimate mediations on the Chicano experience in the form of easel paintings and, like *Nuestra Madre*, pastels on paper. The move away from the public to more private can be seen in the work of Texas artist Carmen Lomas Garza. Lomas Garza's paintings depict the rural and small-town

experiences of Mexican American families, a contrast to the art produced in large metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Antonio during the early 1970s that gave voice to the cries of protest from barrio youth and student activists. Lomas Garza's work, on the other hand, chronicles the day-to-day activities of families and children. For instance, the oil on linen *Camas para Sueños* (1985, figure 10) documents an evening ritual: two young girls lie on the rooftop of a modest house and gaze at the stars, while their mother is glimpsed through the window outfitting a bed with sheets in preparation for their approaching bedtime. Lomas Garza's modest depictions of Chicano life also often include references to Mexican ritual and heritage. The gouache work *Abuelitos Piscando Nopalitos* (1979–80, figure 11) chronicles a large Chicano family's ritual harvest of cacti, a plant rarely eaten in the U.S. but widely consumed by Mexican Americans and, historically, ancient Mesoamericans. This choice of subject matter demonstrates Lomas Garza's adherence to the representation of a distinctly Chicano sensibility, an act that aligns her with her urban contemporaries, yet brings this sensibility into the rural experience of Mexican Americans. In describing Lomas Garza, Amalia Mesa-Bains wrote, "In the most socio-political sense Lomas Garza's use of memory stands against the historical erasure of Chicano culture. She remembers what we can never forget and thereby subverts the dominance of an Anglo society."[23] Thus, although more intimate and domestic, the art of Lomas Garza is not entirely divorced from the original goals of Chicano art. While not active in public arenas and aimed at political protest, Lomas Garza's art, like that of other Chicano artists following the civil rights era, offers us a detailed glimpse into the private sphere, into the quiet, everyday experiences of Mexican Americans. Her work gives us another dimension of the Chicano

[23] Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Chicano Chronicle and Cosmology: The Works of Carmen Lomas Garza," *Piece of My Heart: The Art of Carmen Lomas Garza* (New York: New Press, 1994), 15.

identity and existence, helping to diversify and expand the visual depictions of a specific community. The unified and homogeneous community required of a group engaged in the pursuit of equality was beginning to erode in the art of this second generation of Chicano artists, as the temporal distance from the Chicano movement began to grow. Yet I want to stress that the art being produced in the 1980s was still appropriately categorized as Chicano art because, although less informed by social protest, the content of the work was still intimately connected to an exploration of the Chicano experience. This was art *about* a specific identity.

This new focus on identity is aptly illustrated in the work of César A. Martínez, who has created an entire series of painted portraits of Mexican Americans. *Hombre que le Gustan las Mujeres* (1986, figure 12) depicts "the man who likes the ladies," whose tattooed arms and chest reflect the broad spectrum of female figures who earn his affection: the Virgin of Guadalupe, a traditional Mexican señorita in braids and peasant-style shirt, and a provocative nude. In discussing this work and John Valadez's *La Butterfly* (1983, figure 13)—which depicts, in near photo-realistic detail, a slim Chicana with garish eye makeup, large earrings, and a butterfly tattoo over her sternum—Jane Livingston writes, "Both Valadez and Martínez have chosen primarily to depict people, often urban characters, in a manner so role-specific as to be satiric and verging on stereotype—but with an underlying spirit of compassion and a particularity that make their subjects come alive as portraits rather than caricatures."[24] This distinction between true individuals and stereotypes is an important one. The desire to undermine stereotypes is a crucial component of Chicano art. As will be discussed later, the difficult task for Chicano art will be challenging these stereotypes while

[24] Jane Livingston, "Recent Hispanic Art: Style and Influence," in *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, ed. John Beardsley and Jane Livingston (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 99–100.

simultaneously acknowledging the heterogeneous internal character of the Chicano community. This may not sound initially like a difficult task, but combating racial oppression through images aimed outside the Chicano community and exploring alternative narratives and experiences inside the Chicano community can potentially be seen as contradictory impulses, as will be specifically evidenced later in this analysis with regard to feminist theory. But important to note at this point is that as Chicano art moved further and further away from the time of the Chicano movement, its visual forms and implicit messages began to change. Postcolonial theory offers an excellent framework from which to comprehend the motivations for Chicano art following the Chicano movement.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Rodolfo Acuña has specifically addressed the unique colonial legacy of Chicanos, a community whose own history has been largely constructed by Anglo Americans. The war for Texas independence from Mexico in 1836 and the Mexican-American War from 1846–1848 set the stage for biased depictions of Mexicans both inside and outside the new American borders. Following the war in Texas and the battle at the Alamo, unpleasant depictions of Mexicans helped promote American distaste for and distrust of Mexico, paving the way for the Mexican-American War.

> The Mexican was pictured as cruel, treacherous, tyrannical, and as an enemy who could not be trusted. These stereotypes lingered long after the war and can still be detected in Anglo attitudes toward the Chicano. The Texas War left a legacy of hate and determined the status of the Mexicans left behind as that of a conquered people.[25]

Unfortunately, scholars and historians have often perpetuated these myths in contemporary accounts of Southwest history. According to Félix D. Almaraz, "All too often, Texas

---

[25] Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972), 19.

specialists have interpreted the war as the defeat of a culturally inferior people by a culturally superior class of Anglo frontiersmen."[26] This is aptly illustrated in Justin F. Smith's Pulitzer prize-winning two volume work, *The War with Mexico*, of 1919.

> At the beginning of her independent existence, our people felt earnestly and enthusiastically anxious to maintain cordial relations with our sister republic and many crossed the line of absurd sentimentality in the cause. Friction was inevitable, however. The Americans were direct, positive, brusque, angular and pushing; and they would not understand their neighbors on the south. The Mexicans were equally unable to fathom our goodwill, sincerity, patriotism, resoluteness and courage; and certain features of their character and national condition made it far from easy to get on with them.[27]

Thus, this history of the Chicano is altered in two important moments: the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico in the sixteenth century and their colonizing of the indigenous peoples, and the arrival of Anglo Americans in Mexican territory in the nineteenth century and their subsequent stereotypical depictions of the Mexicans already living in the later annexed territories.

Postcolonial theory stresses the undermining of those myths and perspectives handed down from colonizing forces. The recreation of history is especially prudent regarding European activity in Mesoamerica or New Spain. The burning of books by Spanish conquistadors and friars effectively destroyed the documentation of pre-Columbian civilization. The majority of our primary sources concerning Aztec history and culture were either written or commissioned by Spanish conquistadors and friars for consumption by a European audience. It becomes difficult, therefore, to discover a truly independent Aztec account of Aztec history. The power of the colonizer to dictate history and narratives of the colonized is compounded in the case of Mesoamerica, as those accounts that existed to

---

[26] Félix D. Almaraz, "The Historical Heritage of the Mexican American in 19th Century Texas," *The Role of the Mexican American in the History of the Southwest* (Edinburg, Tex.: Inter-American Institute, Pan American College, 1969), 20–21.

[27] Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico*, vol. 2 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith Publisher, 1963), 310.

counteract European constructions and fabrications have been largely ignored. As Edward Said infamously elucidated, knowledge of the colonized (or "Orient") is so thoroughly constructed by the colonizers (or "Occident") that even the Orient begins to believe what the Occident tells them about themselves. This results from the position of power from which the construction of the Orient originates. "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world."[28] As a direct result of the domination of the colonizing force, the means by which that force comprehends the subjected peoples will begin to permeate the local population. And this construction will inevitably do a disservice to the colonized peoples, because it is not, as one might expect, constructed through close encounters and careful meditation. In fact, the construction of the colonized usually exists prior to colonization, conveniently offering justification for the actions of the imperialist nation. "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact."[29]

This construction is also discussed by Olu Oguibe with regard to the colonization of Africa, and Oguibe's discussion has relevance for Latin America. Oguibe deftly highlights the fact that in constructing a history for someone else, the writer possesses the opportunity to grant or deny power, prestige, and autonomy. The choice to grant or deny power will be influenced by the needs and desires of those in control of the narrative. As Oguibe explains, due to the tendency of a Western perspective to privilege their world as the source of standards by which all others are compared, the peoples on the outside become a foil against which the success and importance of the West can be measured. What better method to

[28] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 40.
[29] Ibid, 39.

demonstrate the achievement of one's world than to offer examples of those less advanced? Although Oguibe's argument is made in the context of Africa's own postcolonial crisis, the method he describes is a historically popular one, also utilized by Europeans in the New World to justify their extermination of native peoples and enslavement of Africans. Dominance is easy to excuse when those conquered are depicted as savage, godless people. The Other is touted as an example of all that is to be feared and distrusted in the outside world.

Key to construction of the Other is a coherent whole, a group whose identity is easily defined and within which lies no variation. The construction of an easily identifiable whole in Africa leads to the Western tendency to understand the "real" Africa as sub-Saharan Africa (minus white South Africans). Northern Africa's dense Arab population, and South Africa's white, European population distract from an easily recognizable, culturally uniform "Africa." Thus, they are excluded. Once these ethnic groups have been nominally removed, the remainder of the continent looks similar enough to Western eyes to be easily assimilated. All cultural, ethnic, religious, and tribal discrepancies become irrelevant to the task of constructing a Western understanding of Africa's people. Oguibe argues that a Pan-African movement is necessary to understand the continent Africa as a whole, which in turn must be recognized as being made up of widely disparate peoples. In constructing Africa in this way, the readily accessible definition of the continent as an easily understood Other is called into question. Yet as Oguibe illustrates, the West is not quick to give up its definition of Africa, even after the end of colonialism. "Unless there is a singular Africanity, distinct and doomed, how else do we justify the pity which must put us ahead and on top? If the Other has no

form, the One ceases to exist."[30] The same holds true for the persistence of the colonial legacy of Chicanos.

As previously discussed, the Chicano movement and its early affiliated art stressed homogeneity and unity, rather than heterogeneity and individualism. This was understandable, considering the need to promote unity in a group engaged in the pursuit of racial equality. Unfortunately, this construction of the Chicano community as bound by the same goals and united by history, culture, and ancestry thus reinforces the concept of an easily recognizable Other discussed by Oguibe and Said, rather than subverting it. And as writer Tomas Rivera has argued, the task of the Chicano artist should be to "destroy the invention by others of his own life."[31] How, thus, to destroy this invention? One strategy described by Peter Beardsell is "returning the gaze." "Returning the gaze is a cultural expression of reversing the colonial relationship, so that the colonized people assume the role of subject or Self and the colonizers are converted into object or Other."[32] Thus, history is recast, written from the perspective of the colonized, rather than the colonizer, and informed in no way by the extant, inaccurate constructions of the Other. This returning of the gaze is demonstrated in the work of Enrique Chagoya, an artist born in Mexico but living and teaching in the United States. "Among Chagoya's most provocative ideas . . . is the application of the idea of a 'reverse anthropology,' an imaginary history of the Americas and Europe in which Mexico conquered Europe rather than the other way around."[33] Thus Chagoya's *Uprising of the Spirit* (1994, figure 14) is modeled after the codices produced in

---

[30] Olu Oguibe, "In the 'Heart of Darkness,'" in *Art History and its Methods: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Fernie (London: Phiadon Press, 1995), 319.

[31] Tomas Rivera, *Into the Labyrinth: The Chicano in Literature* (Edinburg, Tex.: Pan American University, 1971), 13.

[32] Peter Beardsell, *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 173.

[33] Paul J. Karlstrom, "Regional Reports: West Coast," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 41 no. 1/4 (2001): 83.

Mexico immediately following the conquest, but is generated from the perspective of an outside culture bearing witness to the symbols and customs of the United States.

The prolific influence of colonial narratives and perspectives on subjected peoples raises an important point regarding the potential Chicano idealization of pre-Columbian history, heritage, and ancestry. The romanticization of the pre-Columbian past as somehow more natural and untouched than Europe by contemporary Mexicans and Mexican Americans could be seen to parallel European-generated depictions of New Spain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This romantic sensibility is documented in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of the noble savage.[34] The image of the noble savage was persistent in Europe during the nineteenth century. Writing in 1802, the Frenchman François-René de Chateaubriand stated:

> Europeans, endlessly anxious, are compelled to construct solitudes for themselves. The more our hearts are filled with noise and tumult, the more we are attracted by silence and tranquility. Oh happy savages! If only I could enjoy the peace that is always with you! . . . you, quietly sitting beneath your oak trees, and letting the days flow by without counting them![35]

For Europeans, the naturalism of the New World was inevitably equated with the uncivilized and savage (hence offering the justification for European domination and colonization). For Mexicans and their American descendents, naturalism meant purity of blood and allegiance to rightful culture and custom. But were Mexican Americans were unintentionally modeling their understanding of their heritage on a European construction, potentially romanticizing and simplifying the past, just as the colonizers had done generations before and just as Said

---

[34] Maurice William Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754–1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[35] Translated by Beardsell, *Returning the Gaze*, 176.

demonstrated when he wrote, "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world."[36]

This potential is highlighted in Luis Camnitzer's assessment of the difficulties inherent in a Latin American artist's attempts to integrate into the mainstream art world. He sees three options for an artist in this position. "The artist can actively disregard the colonizing values and focus on the local audience; produce for the international market in spite of the handicap; or emigrate to the cultural centre."[37] Although Camnitzer is specifically discussing the condition of the Latin American artist living in Latin America, his analysis can be extended to Americans of Mexican descent, themselves simultaneously living in the mainstream but existing on the periphery. The first option, focusing on the local audience, can be understood as the option chosen by Chicano artists, who created works early in the Chicano movement meant especially for the Chicano community (posters and murals) and later focused on works about Chicano identity. This emphasis on the local audience is reflected in the 1990 exhibition *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, whose catalogue preface reads, ". . . most of the art in the show was created by Chicanos for other Chicanos."[38] Camnitzer, however, sees the choice of this option to serve the local audience as coupled with an inevitable result:

> In the first case, even when focusing on the local audience, the artist will tend to produce in reaction to colonization. A direct link to the past is broken, interrupted or deflected by the presence of a filter that becomes a factor in the values promoted by imperial culture. As Albert Memmi observes in his *Portrait of the Colonized*, a loss of history takes place, with the effect that "the colonized are kept out of the objective conditions of contemporary

---

[36] Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

[37] Luis Camnitzer, "Wonder Bread and Spanglish Art" in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. G. Mosquera (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), 157.

[38] CARA Executive Committee and Wright Art Gallery Staff, "Preface: The CARA Exhibition," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985* (Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, University of California, 1991), 31.

> nationality." Gramsci was reflecting on the same condition when he noted that "remembering takes the place of thinking" in the production of culture. Identity, under these conditions, easily becomes confused with an artificial folklore. Fossil memories, bleached and dry, usurp reality.[39]

According to Camnitzer, the colonial legacy in Latin America is so persistent that an artist creating work *about* Latin America unintentionally bases their understanding of his or her own culture and heritage on the model promoted by the earlier colonizing force. In other words, the mythology of the past becomes duly constructed, both by the colonized and the colonizer. A truly postcolonial approach in Chicano art would require a recognizable break from European romanticization and the exoticism of Mexican history.

Combating the legacy of colonialism is the also the focus of Gerardo Mosquera's consideration of Latin American art. The attempted assimilation of Latin American art into the international scene presents a particular crisis for Latin American artists, as previously addressed by Camnitzer. According to Mosquera, international expectations for Latin American art often dictate the creative output of those practicing in South and Central America. Responding to expectations often results in the perpetuation of those colonial myths and stereotypes generated in the Occident and therefore anticipated by the Occident.

> The new fascination of the centres for alterity, specific to the "global" fad has permitted greater circulation and legitimation of art from the peripheries. But all too often only those works that explicitly manifest difference or satisfy expectations of exoticism are legitimated. As a result, some artists are inclined towards otherizing themselves, in a paradox of self-exoticism.[40]

In other words, the Occidental stereotype becomes perpetuated in this art, because the Occident's power to confer or deny value to "art from the peripheries" forces Latin American artists to meet Occidental expectations, even when these expectations are informed by colonization. The tendency toward self-exoticism is nowhere more aptly parodied than in the

---

[39] Camnitzer, *Wonder Bread*, 157.
[40] Gerardo Mosquera, "Good-bye Identity, Welcome Difference," *Third Text* 56 (Autumn 2001): 26.

performance work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Mexican-born resident of San Francisco. Gómez-Peña and frequent-collaborator Roberto Sifuentes stage performances that feature characters such as "El pre-Columbian Vato" (a character covered in pre-Columbian tattoos and wearing a tank-top spattered with blood and punctured by bullet holes), "San Pocho Aztlaneca" (who sits on a toilet or wheelchair surrounded by live crickets, tribal musical instruments, and artifacts meant to suggest witchcraft), and a "chola/nun" (a female collaborator dressed as pregnant nun with tears tattooed on her face, one fore each murder she has committed).[41] The performances feature these and other characters encased in Plexiglas as mock-museum dioramas, or led around Ellis Island and art museums on leashes (figure 15). Gómez-Peña's hybrid stereotypes are thus reduced to the status of evolutionary specimens or domesticated pets, both of which reflect traditional colonial attitudes toward colonized communities and ethnic groups. Negative impressions of Mexicans, Chicanos, and even all Latinos are brought to the forefront in Gómez-Peña's performances, as myths and labels are made physically present in an effort to demonstrate the ridiculous nature of outside perceptions of these groups. Yet in the process, Gómez-Peña continues to cast himself in the role of the Other, endowing racist perceptions with physical form. In the act of mocking stereotypes, Gómez-Peña must parade these constructed personalities out into public.

According to Mosquera, this act of "otherizing" has dangerous consequences for Latin America, especially because it undermines postcolonial attempts to rewrite history and grant value to colonized cultures. As Mosquera elucidates, international pressure to propagate constructed colonial narratives in art often leads to the romanticized association with the past previously highlighted by Camnitzer. The solution, for Mosquera, "is an

[41] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back* (London: Routledge, 2000), 36–38.

identity disinterested in 'identity.' An identity through action, not through representation."[42] Yet Mosquera's discussion centers on art that does not *intend* to be about identity; instead, he is concerned with the tendency of contemporary Latin American art to reveal its maker's country of origin, or to represent itself as somehow derivative of Western practice. Chicano art, on the other hand, *is* about identity, and is intended to illustrate, augment, and deconstruct the unique experience of the Chicano. For Mosquera's contemporary Latin American artist, truly postcolonial creative production should be so immersed in contemporary artistic practice that the passport of the creator has no relevance. While this cannot be the case of Chicano art, as the term Chicano art must, as is argued by this essay, strictly connote an identity concern in the content of the art, Mosquera's analysis does possess some relevance to the condition of Chicano art.

> I refer to nationalist mythologies where a traditionalist cult of "the roots" is expressed, supposedly protecting against foreign interferences, and the romantic idealisation of conventions about history and the values of the nation. Frequently nationalistic folklorism is to a large extent used or manipulated by power to rhetoricise a so-called integrated, participative nation. . . . This situation thus circumscribes art within ghettoized parameters of circulation, publication and consumption, which immediately limit its possibilities of diffusion and legitimation, reducing it to predetermined fields.[43]

This limited diffusion is especially relevant to Chicano art, as its audience is irrevocably determined by its content and message, intended to be read by the Chicano community. The purpose of the application of these theoretical perspectives is not to disparage the work of Chicano artists who address history and heritage, artists who may choose to depict types or even stereotypes. These postcolonial scholars are discussed in the service of addressing potential alternative avenues Chicano artists may choose to explore. This discussion acts as a

---

[42] Mosquera, "Goodbye Identity," 28.
[43] Ibid, 27.

foundation for the possibilities addressed by post-Chicano artists, in which old models endorsed by the Chicano movement are questioned and revised

THE RELEVANCE OF FEMINISM

Feminist theory serves to augment this discussion in two ways. First, it can function as an analogy between one minority group's struggle for equality and another's (women to Mexican Americans/feminists to Chicanos). Second, a detailed inquiry into the rise of feminism inside the Mexican American community allows for a more thorough understanding of the dynamics and contentions extant *within* the Chicano community, offering an alternative narrative to the story of unity and accord told by the Chicano movement to the rest of the United States. The purpose of such an examination is not to condemn the ideals of the Chicano movement, but to offer an explanation of the changing forms of artistic expression within the Chicano community, as the specific, varied make-up of the community gained relevance and attention.

As an analogous demand for self-determination, feminism's evolution can serve as a model for this analysis of the Chicano movement. The originators of feminist thought most distinctly concerned themselves with articulating those differences between men and women, in the pursuit of those decidedly feminine characteristics worthy of respect and attention. This is apparent in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, where the author sets up a dichotomy between men and women, represented as the Self and the Other.[44] Thus, women become the Other, just as the colonized do in postcolonial theory, demonstrating the shared concerns of women and Mexican Americans as minority groups. The parallels between the rhetoric surrounding this version of the Other and the one articulated by Said are illustrated in Marilyn Frye's analysis of feminist theory. "It is through posing the Other—woman—that the subject

[44] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), 130.

constructs *him*self as One and sovereign, secure and safe. Becoming a woman *is* becoming an 'absolute' other. One cannot be a woman and a subject."[45] Thus, just as postcolonial theory stressed the construction of the colonized as the Other, feminist theory stressed the construction of women as the Other. To investigate a feminine Other is to identify those characteristics assumed shared by women, or at least to outline the characteristics assigned to women by men. Early feminism saw women as essentially different from men, separate but equal, resulting in an essentialist analysis that was recognized by later scholars. In her discussion of the essentialist discourse on the experience and subjugation of women, Diana Fuss writes:

> Essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence—that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing. . . . Most obviously, essentialism can be located in appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order. It can also be read in the accounts of universal female oppression, the assumption of a totalizing symbolic system which subjugates all women everywhere, throughout history and across cultures. . . . Essentialism emerges perhaps most strongly within the very discourse of feminism, a discourse which presumes upon the unity of its object of inquiry (women). . . .[46]

In the attempt to designate and validate the feminine, feminist discourse began by positioning themselves as the Other, because this served as a means to unite women, to make them visible and apparent, and to articulate their unique merits and worth. In much the same way, the origins of the Chicano movement can be seen to endorse a unified vision of the Mexican American community, as previously argued. But, as feminist theory developed and the scope of its analyses grew, scholars began to question this essentialist designation of women as simply not-men. One could predict, then, a similar move away from essentialism in the

---

[45] Marilyn Frye, "The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women," *Signs* 21 no. 4 (Summer 1996): 993.

[46] Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York, London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

Chicano movement, one that would no longer endorse a strictly not-Anglo identity for Mexican Americans. Recall in 1970 Los Angeles Times journalist Rubén Salazar called the Chicano "a Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of *him*self."[47] Thus, Mexican Americans were essentially non-Anglo, just as women were essentially non-male. The similarities between the initial development of both civil rights initiatives is striking, and appears to illustrate a trend in equality movements, one that invariably begins with the identification of the community in question as different from the dominant culture yet with sufficient similarity within the community to unite its members in their struggle. But as I said, this conception quickly fell out of favor in feminist theory. As scholar Audre Lourde wrote, "There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word 'sisterhood' that does not in fact exist."[48] So here we find the source of the richness of art following the Chicano movement, as this myth of a homogeneity of experience is dispelled and replaced by a multitude of experiences. This multiplicity is stressed by postcolonial theory, and within the Mexican American community it was accomplished in great part by the introduction of Chicana feminism.

Integral to the postcolonial endeavor is the undermining of unilateral conceptions of the Mexican American community. The feminist perspective offers one such approach in its efforts to call attention to the merits and contributions of women. As Alma M. Garcia demonstrates, the larger Chicano movement served as the stimulus for the creation of the Chicana feminist movement. "As the Chicano movement developed during the 1970s, Chicana feminists began to draw their own political agenda and raised a series of questions to assess their role within the Chicano movement. They entered into a dialogue with each other

---

[47] Salazar, "What is a Chicano?" 7.

[48] Quoted in Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 1.

that explicitly reflected their struggles to secure a room of their own within the Chicano movement."[49] This outgrowth of a specifically feminist viewpoint within the Mexican American community is therefore the direct result of the Chicano movement, much like Chicano art itself. As Garcia argues, Chicana feminists supported the Chicano movement's attack on racial oppression, but disapproved of its lack of attention directed toward sexism within the Chicano community.[50] This is an important point, one previously raised in this discussion but worthy of reiteration. There appears to be a distinction between art and activism aimed *outside* the Chicano community and *inside* the community. The Chicano movement's social and political aspirations included increased visibility and recognizability outside of the Chicano community. This has been previously alluded to in the assessment of the promotion of a unified and homogeneous Chicano community. But issues will still arise within that community, and the consideration of these issues can often be viewed as potentially detrimental to the larger cause. "Feminism was, above all, believed to be an individualistic search for identity that detracted from the Chicano movement's 'real' issues, such as racism."[51] Thus, to be true to the goals of postcolonialism, many may view the goals of feminism as counterproductive. This is not to say that all practitioners within the Chicano movement wanted to ignore the issues raised by feminist discourse. Rather, this assessment of the origins of Chicana feminism serves to demonstrate the potential for similarity rather than difference to be stressed in the pursuit of racial equality. One could predict that the rise of Chicana art would most likely have taken place following the height of the Chicano movement in the 1960s and seventies. As previously discussed, artists such as Yolanda M.

---

[49] Alma M. Garcia, "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970–1980," *Gender and Society* 3, no. 2 (June 1989): 219.

[50] Ibid, 224.

[51] Ibid, 225.

López and Carmen Lomas Garza demonstrate this impact of feminist theory on art immediately following the Chicano movement. Both focus on the roles of women, their identities, and their strengths. In much the same way, art following the Chicano movement appears to endorse this complicated and multifaceted investigation of identity.

This incorporation of alternative perspectives impacts not only the creation of art objects, but, as Karen Mary Davalos explains, their exhibition as well. Davalos tracks alternative approaches in her analysis of Chicano art exhibition. Born in the streets and concerned with widespread communication, Chicano art and its artists' collectives established alternative venues for the display of their products, including the exterior wall and social outreach organizations such as El Centro Chicano Cultural in Oregon, which functioned primarily to organize the agricultural workers in the area.[52] Most Chicano artists functioned under the model of resistance that frowned upon the practice of exhibiting in the previously exclusionist art museum. "Blending an anti-imperialist position with Chicano cultural affirmation, they implied that Chicano artists work, live, and create in Chicano barrios and reject the art market, avoid mediums inaccessible to barrio residents, survive without funds from government agencies and private corporations, and avoid unclear or apolitical messages."[53] In her deconstruction of such assumptions, Davalos highlights the tendency for such constructions of the Chicano artistic community to disregard differences such as gender and sexuality. As previously discussed, the exclusionary rhetoric of the Chicano movement tended to promote an image of the Chicano community as homogeneous and united in aspirations. Davalos sees this conception of the Chicano community as simplified and romanticized, in danger of promoting those very stereotypes attached to Mexican Americans

[52] Karen Mary Davalos, *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 62.

[53] Ibid, 80.

by the dominant—Anglo—power, something previously alluded to by postcolonial scholars Camnitzer and Mosquera

For the purposes of her argument, Davalos explores this perpetuation of dominant myths within the context of female and homosexual members of the Chicano community, but her criticisms can be useful in a consideration of the representation of the entire community, as all varieties of Chicano experience, even those male and heterosexual, still cannot be adequately characterized by a Chicano nationalist discourse that emphasizes similarity over difference. In much the same way that Chicana feminist and lesbian scholarship attempts to undermine the "idealistic discourse [that] imagines binary and mutually exclusive relations between Mexican Americans (particularly Chicanas and Chicanos) and the dominant society,"[54] Chicano art following the Civil Rights era posits a more fluid interchange between Chicanos and mainstream American society. In the vision of the post-Chicano artist, the Mexican American community is inextricably linked to and bound up in the dominant culture, often indistinguishable from it. It is this concept of fluidity that characterizes post-Chicano art, both with regard to the dominant culture and with regard to identity. And Chicano identity is varied and complex, changing from one individual to the next, from one community to the next. It is through post-Chicano art that this point becomes most utterly apparent and most clearly elucidated.

THE EMERGENCE OF POST-CHICANO ART

Postcolonial theory posits a theoretical perspective from which Chicano art can then depart. It allows for an understanding of Chicano art as engaged in the dismantling of stereotypes, combating racial prejudice, and offering a new depiction of the Mexican American community that counteracts dominant, colonial-inspired narratives. Yet it also

[54] Ibid, 88.

illustrates the powerful legacy of colonialism and highlights the difficulties inherent in overcoming colonially constructed depictions of minority groups. Feminist theory offers insight into the capacity for oppression to exist beyond simple race distinctions. It offers a model of internal resistance and heterogeneity that operates beneath the surface of a wider civil rights endeavor. Feminist theory supplements postcolonial theory to explain the variety of visual manifestations that can still be contained under the umbrella term "Chicano art" and assists in understanding the homogenized, colonial depiction of Mexican Americans that Chicana feminists were helpful in displacing. Where then, would a break between Chicano and post-Chicano fall? Could it be understood as occurring solely after the height of the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and seventies? Or would its inception instead be traceable to this integration of multiple perspectives whose endorsement is due, at least in part, to Chicana feminism? I posit that the art immediately following the height of the Chicano movement functions as a bridge to post-Chicano art. The exploration of identity in the art of Yolanda López, Carmen Lomas Garza, César Martínez, and other Chicano artists of the 1980s and nineties facilitated the move from social activism to identity awareness, a move that included a shift from public protest to self-assessment. Post-Chicano art picks up where these artists left off, incorporating more completely the Chicano experience into the American experience. This is an approach to identity that reflects a changing social climate, where the model of resistance and affirmation is exchanged for one of synthesis, assimilation, and complementary influence. The Mexican American experience is examined through the interface of Chicano identity and American culture, as both components are critically examined and appropriated in the service of accurately reflecting the contemporary social

climate. There is no single narrative of Chicano identity in post-Chicano art, instead it is fragmented, critically examined, and altered in each individual instance

Many writers have used the term to designate the time period following the Mexican American civil rights era, as in the form "post-Chicano movement."[55] But its documented use as a description for a generation of artists or a style of art is virtually non-existent. The earliest evidence of the term "post-Chicano" that does not strictly tie the term to a specific time period comes from a character in one of Guillermo Gomez-Pena's performance works from 1990. The performance was executed at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco and featured a character named "Post-Chicano Aesthetician and Curator," portrayed by exhibition curator Rene Yañez.[56] Although I am unable to discern any performance role for Yañez that would clarify the meaning of this label, it is significant in that it attaches the term to an individual, rather than a time period. Ambiguity regarding the label continues in Rita González's article "Post-Chicano," from 1999.[57] The actual term, although emphasized by its placement in the title of the article, appears only once in the body of the text:

> In his discussion of the Pachuco aesthetics of several Chicano/Latino artists, Michael Cohen used the term "meta-ambivalence" to characterize the artists' stylistic and political stance. The term serves well Chicano—or post-Chicano—artists, as they interrogate the previous tropes of Chicano art: historical revisionism, the naming and illustration of regional identities, and the presentation of both powerful and positive images.[58]

This statement provides insight into this investigation of the terms "Chicano" and "post-Chicano." Regarding the artists González has chosen to discuss in her article (Salomon

---

[55] See Denise A. Segura, "Challenging the Chicano Text: Toward a More Inclusive Contemporary Causa," *Signs* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 545; Crystal Parikh, "Ethnic America Undercover: The Intellectual and Minority Discourse," *Contemporary Literature* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 269; Sylvia Rodriguez, "Art, Tourism, and Race Relations in Taos: Toward a Sociology of the Art Colony," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 92.

[56] Andrew Connors, "Review: *Norte/Sur* at the Mexican Museum," *The Journal of American Folklore* 104, no. 413 (Summer 1991): 355.

[57] Rita González, "Post-Chicano," *Poliester* (Spring/Summer 1999): 40–47.

[58] Ibid, 47.

Huerta and Victor Estrada), the author recognizes an awareness of the previous generation, a generation that included initial investigators of identity such as López and Martínez. A straightforward break following the Chicano movement is lacking here, as Chicano artists are labeled to include those engaged in the visual representation of varied experiences previously discussed.

While the term "post-Chicano" may not have been explicitly used, exhibitions featuring Chicano art began to articulate a changing focus for identity art in the late twentieth century. For instance, the exhibition *Latino Redux: A New Collection of Stories, Lies and Embellishments* at the University of North Texas Art Gallery in 2000 featured Anglo artist Anne Wallace, dubbed by curator Franco Mondini-Ruiz "an honorary Latina."[59] This designation symbolizes a fluidity of identity, one not strictly constrained by race but informed by artistic content. The title *Latino Redux* also hints at a reevaluation and alteration of previous identity themes in art. An exhibition at the University of Texas at San Antonio in 1996 proves similarly interesting. The title *Synthesis and Subversion: A Latino Direction in San Antonio Art* endorses a similar comprehension of a shifting attitude regarding the artistic depiction of identity.

The first exhibition to be surrounded by literature actually using the term "post-Chicano" took place in the spring of 2005 at the Colorado Center for the Visual Arts. It was titled *Leaving Aztlán: Rethinking Contemporary Latino and Chicano Art*. Like the previously mentioned exhibitions, this one posits a new direction for Chicano and Latino art. In describing the exhibition, curator Kaytie Johnson wrote:

> These artists do not completely divorce themselves from the visual legacy created by Latina/o and Chicana/o artists from previous generations. Instead,

[59] Franco Mondini-Ruiz, *Latino Redux: A New Collection of Stories, Lies and Embellishments* (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas, 2000), 7.

> they produce work that signals a significant paradigmatic shift in that it resists a culturally essentialist reading. They accomplish this through the use of hybridity as a formal and conceptual strategy; by adopting formal approaches and subject matter that thwart attempts to align their work with a specific ethnicity; and by appropriating forms and aspects of both "high" and popular culture in order to challenge cultural and aesthetic standards.[60]

Emphasizing new approaches and techniques, this statement is illuminating, yet still recognizes some degree of continuity with the previous generations of Chicano artists. Although it signals a departure from the Chicano art that emerged from the civil rights movement, this art still concerns itself with the Mexican American experience. Later in the essay, Johnson states, "The post-identity practitioners represented in this exhibition create work that represents the wide range of expression found in the Latina/o and Chicana/o diaspora."[61] The words "post-identity" are of paramount importance in this analysis. Like Rita González, Johnson is endorsing a shift to post-Chicano (and post-Latino) art that occurred after the identity-based works of the 1980s.

Salomon Huerta, one of the artists chronicled in González's "Post-Chicano" article, offers a fitting example of this new approach to identity, one inherently different from, yet still tied to, that of Chicano art. Huerta's paintings include a large number of portraits. Yet these are not portraits in the traditional sense; they do not offer viewers insight into the personality of the sitter through facial expressions, personalized attributes, or articles of clothing that hint at the occupation or socio-economic status of the sitter. All the portraits feature an individual shown from behind with closely-shorn hair and, if the portrait depicts the body, non-descript and unremarkable clothing. For instance, *untitled* (2000, figure 16) represents the back of a figure seated in a metal folding chair. The figure has close-cropped hair and wears plain black shoes, a pink, short-sleeved shirt, and white slacks. The figure

---

[60] Kaytie Johnston, "Challenging Stereotypes," *Southwest Art* 34, no. 11 (April 2005): 107.
[61] Ibid, 109.

appears to be male, based on body type and clothing. Beyond these morsels of information, we can presume nothing about the subject of the painting. This stands in marked contrast to the paintings of Yolanda López and César Martínez, where identity is laid out before the viewer, made apparent and unmistakable in the effort to combat the legacy of mis- and under-representation. Huerta's portraits evidence an awareness of his predecessors and an interest in reevaluating their methods and goals. His work is tied to the generation that preceded him, yet also functions as a commentary on this earlier work, appropriating and altering the tradition. While Chicano artists appropriated symbols of Aztec culture and mythology, post-Chicano artists can now begin appropriating from Chicano art's legacy.

The title of Johnson's exhibition, *Leaving Aztlán*, imparts the sense that the included artists have left the mythical homeland of the Aztecs and immersed themselves in mainstream society. Such a reading would most likely be endorsed by Juan Miguel Ramos, a San Antonio artist included in *Leaving Aztlán* who refers to himself as post-Chicano. In a September 2005 interview, Ramos speaks of a childhood lacking home immersion in the Spanish language (which, one suspects, most previous generations of Chicanos would have experienced) and integrated into American popular culture. "There were lots of us that our parents spoke Spanish to, but we didn't bother to learn it on our own, and they didn't really push it on us. We were really into the mainstream kind of popular culture as far as music, TV, and movies."[62]

This notion of integration over separatism can again be discussed in the context of exhibition practices. As Davalos argued, exclusionary exhibition techniques were promoted during the Chicano movement, as Chicano art was created with the goal of consumption and

[62] Cultural Arts Center, Interview with Irma Mayorga, September 2005, accessed online http://www.guadalupeculturalarts.org/loteria/intro.html, October 13, 2006.

dissemination with the Mexican American community. But the exploration and articulation of Mexican American identity in the service of accurate representation and erasing stereotypes requires that this art reach outside the community as well. As time has passed, contemporary concerns now focus on the integration of Chicano (or post-Chicano) art into collections and exhibitions defined by more than just race or ethnicity. This desire is expressed by Joe A. Diaz, a Texas collector of contemporary art, the majority of which is Chicano. "I do think that there should be Chicano shows, but Chicano art should also be incorporated into shows organized on the basis of theme, style, time period, etc. Somehow Chicano artists tend to be excluded from shows that are not race-specific."[63] Thus, contemporary Chicano art may still be about identity, but that identity is so visible in twenty-first century America that it no longer requires the particularized audience and message it previously utilized. This changing contemporary climate is acknowledged by South Texas Institute for the Arts director William G. Otton on the occasion of an exhibition of Diaz's collection:

> It is within the context of a pluralistic period in American art that the current exhibit is presented. The impact of Mexican and other Latin American cultures have on regional society in which the Art Museum of South Texas is located; and the rapid "mainstreaming" of Hispanic beliefs and life styles into contemporary American society, contribute to the timeliness of organizing this exhibit for museum audiences.[64]

While Chicano art accomplished the task of defining, representing, and giving a voice to the Mexican American community, post-Chicano art can now enter into a dialogue with the mainstream and consider the interface between Chicano identity and American culture, both in terms of assimilation and transculturation. Post-Chicano artists create a space in which this

---

[63] Ruben C. Cordova, "Interview with Joe A. Diaz," in *Arte Caliente! Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi, Tex.: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004), 15.

[64] William G. Otton, "Introduction," in *Arte Caliente!: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection*, 9.

process of transculturation—the mutual influence of two cultures on one another, rather than the one-way-street of influence attempted by colonialism—can be explored.[65] The term "post-Chicano" therefore becomes useful in its ability to connote this ideological, rather than simply temporal, shift in art concerned with Mexican American identity and experience.

This notion of changing directions in Chicano art is not without controversy and strife. The mounting of *Leaving Aztlán* sparked a counteractive exhibition titled *Never Leaving Aztlán* at the Museo de las Americas, also in Denver. Conceived of by George Rivera, an artist and professor at the University of Colorado, and curated by Museo director Patty Ortiz, *Never Leaving Aztlán* was designed to dispute the presumed implication in the previous exhibition that the newest generation of Chicano art (not explicitly named post-Chicano art) possessed more contemporary relevance than its predecessor, Chicano art.[66] As previously mentioned, Kaytie Johnson's essay for *Leaving Aztlán* does not include the term "post-Chicano." According to Johnson:

> I prefer to not use the term "post-Chicano," and made a conscious decision to not utilize it in the essay and other texts related to *Leaving Aztlan*, as I felt doing so would only serve to place the artists in the show in yet another aesthetically categorical "box." I refer to the artists in the show as "artists," to avoid imposing any sort of one-dimensional reading of their work, particularly one that frames it within the context of cultural or ethnic identity.[67]

The essay for *Never Leaving Aztlán* similarly leaves out the term. Interestingly, Denver columnist Michael Paglia used the label consistently throughout his articles reviewing both exhibitions,[68] although Museo director Patty Ortiz recalls no use of the term in any material

---

[65] Beardsell, *Returning the Gaze*, 173.

[66] Michael Paglia, "Turf Wars: Old-school Chicano Art gets it on with post-Chicano new-school at the Museo," *Denver Westword*, March 2, 2006, http://www.westword.com/2006-03-02/culture/turf-wars.

[67] Kaytie Johnson, Email communication with the author, March 19, 2007

[68] Paglia, "Turf-Wars," 2006; Michael Paglia, "Nuevo and Improved," *Denver Westword*, April 14, 2005, http://www.westword.com/2005-04-14/culture/nuevo-and-improved. At the time of this printing, Paglia had yet to be reached for comment.

related to *Never Leaving Aztlán*.[69] Three years earlier, in 2003, Dallas Museum of Art curator Suzanne Weaver described the art of Juan Miguel Ramos in the catalogue of the exhibition *Come Forward: Emerging Art in Texas*. "Non-linear, undidactic, his work portrays a Post-Chicano world in which Mexican and American cultures meet and mix; it's a world where a sense of identity, location, and place, of reality itself, is being transformed."[70] In her footnote for this statement, Weaver cites Ramos as the source of this post-Chicano designation, quoting him as saying:

> It's a theory term . . . César Martínez told me that "back in the day, Chicano art was about commitment to the cause. Nowadays everybody uses whatever term is convenient to serve their career." Post-Chicano can mean after-Chicano; not Chicano . . . Post-Chicano art can be related to, derived from, or inspired by Chicano art, but it isn't Chicano art because our societal context has evolved.[71]

Ramos has been using the term "post-Chicano" to describe his work since the late 1990s.[72] In an interview with Irma Mayorga, director of Galería Guadalupe at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, Ramos further elucidated his conceptualization of his relationship to the preceding generation of Chicano artists:

> Well, I'm not making Chicano art anymore. What I'm doing is I'm dealing with this idea of this subculture of San Antonio and these people. It's just documentary really. I'm not trying to impose a political stance here. I'm just drawing people that I know basically. Holding a mirror up to what's around me. . . . By the end of graduate school . . . I thought I was doing post-Chicano art. It wasn't Chicano art. It was something derivative or influenced by. It was a generation after.[73]

Not only does Ramos highlight a generational difference between himself and Chicano artists, but he demonstrates a shift in motivation. Chicano art was initially driven by social reform

---

[69] Patty Ortiz, Email communication with the author, March 18, 2007.
[70] Weaver, "Are You Experienced?," 15.
[71] Ibid, 19.
[72] Juan Miguel Ramos, personal communication, March 11, 2007.
[73] Ramos, interview with Mayorga, September 2005.

and political protest. It then evolved into a struggle to define identity and recover lost, mis-, and underrepresented history and culture. The contemporary motivation of artists of Mexican descent appears to have shifted into an engagement with the reality of the day-to-day encounters of a Mexican American in the United States. Ramos argues that he is simply "holding a mirror up to what's around him," which is exactly what Mosquera was endorsing when he promoted "an identity disinterested in 'identity.' An identity through action, not through representation." The American landscape is evolving, and part of that evolution includes a growing population of Chicanos and Latinos who therefore alter American culture. Formerly colonized occupants of the United States now exert their own influence on the dominant culture. This mutual exchange of customs, values, and traditions is described, as previously mentioned, as a process of transculturation, where cultures are mutually transformed, rather than unilaterally by the dominant, colonizing force.[74] This postcolonial model of transculturation provides a backdrop against which the artistic endeavors of contemporary Chicano artists can be investigated. In his practice of documenting his community, Ramos is engaging with a Latino population whose identity requires no articulation and whose concerns diverge from those of resistance and affirmation.

For instance, Ramos's *Westside Lotería* series (2004) features 54 inkjet prints representing people and items he associated with the Westside neighborhood of San Antonio. Thus this series represents an attempt to document a community, not a specific Chicano identity. However, the utilization of the lotería game format with its deck of 54 cards links this undertaking to a particular Mexican or Chicano sensibility because the game is a Mexican version of bingo. Each card in a lotería deck usually features a different labeled image, such as a spider ("la araña"), a mermaid ("la sirena"), or a skeleton ("la muerte"),

[74] Beardsell, *Returning the Gaze*, 173.

among others. In Ramos's series, these traditional labels are maintained and their images supplied by photographs taken by Ramos in the Westside neighborhood and then digitally manipulated. *La Muerte* (figure 17) becomes a photograph of a shoulder bearing a tattoo of the grim reaper. *La Sirena* (figure 18) depicts Rosemary Walker, an attorney (and Ramos's wife) originally from Laredo, standing in front of the San Antonio Natatorium. *La Araña* (figure 19) is no longer a spider, but Becky Cortez, a San Antonio native whose web is represented by the chain link fence and iron bars protecting the modest Westside home in the background. These portraits stand in contrast to those of César Martínez, whose paintings could be more accurately interpreted as depicting "types" within the Chicano community: *El Guero* (1987, figure 20), "the light skinned one," or *Bato con Cruz* (1993, figure 21), "dude with cross." His characters usually lack names, and instead seem to stand in for other members of their communities whose appearance, dress, and attitude they share. Ramos's *Westside Lotería*, on the other hand, surveys the landscape of a particular San Antonio neighborhood and selects individuals from within the community, reflecting the diversity and range embodied within a single subsection of an urban metropolis, rather than allowing any one individual to stand in for anyone besides themselves. Martínez offers us representatives of a community, while Ramos simply represents his community.

This documentation of nuance and variety also informs Ramos's *Ghost Story* (figure 22) series of 2001. These digital prints feature portraits much like those in the *Lotería* series, but the images are overlaid with handwritten text that relates various first-hand accounts of a Texas ghost story, one that tells of children's ghosts that will push a stalled car off the train tracks in a San Antonio neighborhood. According to Suzanne Weaver, "As each person retells the story, changing it to fit his or her experience, the series becomes a metaphor for collective

memory and changing identity."[75] In other words, Ramos's narrators are granted the power to tell their own stories, to construct their own narrative. A recognizable myth is altered and manipulated from one individual to the next, undermining any previous assumptions about the consistent nature of Chicano folklore.

A nod to the changing cultural climate in the U.S. can also be found in the philosophy of Cruz Ortiz, another San Antonio artist who, like Ramos, recognizes a break with Chicano art that is reflected in his work, which is more accurately defined as post-Chicano than Chicano. "I think the world is really different now than it was when issues of identity were inherently political. It just doesn't make sense to address ethnic or political issues in the same way people did in the sixties and seventies anymore."[76] Ortiz turns a critical eye to the Chicano movement in his work, demonstrating the insufficiency of a dated model in the early twenty-first century. His films feature a character named Spaztek, whom Ortiz uses to embody the intense machismo he (and other scholars, particularly Chicana feminists) associates with the Chicano movement. (Recall again *Los Angeles Times* journalist Rubén Salazar definition of the Chicano as "a Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of *him*self."[77]) A recurring feature of Ortiz's work is his utilization of Spanglish, a form of language blending English and Spanish and spoken in one form or another within most Latino communities in the United States. For instance, the screenprint *darling* (2002, figure 23) is occupied by a motorcycle helmet and aviator sunglasses-clad man holding a scrap of paper that reads "Te quiero darling—till I die." This melding of language acts as a marker of the increased integration of the Chicano community into mainstream America.

---

[75] Weaver, "Are you Experienced?" 15.

[76] Anjali Gupta, "Spaztek Goes Global: A Conversation with Cruz Ortiz," *ArtL!es* 45 (Winter 2005) http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=85&issue=45&s=0.

[77] Salazar, "What is a Chicano?" 7.

The utilization of Spanglish continued in Ortiz's 2005 residency installation *but still I'd leap in front of a flyin' bullet for you* at Artpace, San Antonio (figure 24). The character Spaztek returns in this exhibition, in video form as well as screenprints affixed to the gallery walls and surrounded by text such as "Yo soy un boring lover."[78] Throughout the exhibition Ortiz alters the narrative of the Chicano experience as previously told by Chicano artists, melding languages and turning characters in caricatures. As curator Kate Green described, "Through Spaztek, Ortiz approaches fundamental questions about what we live for—love or the chase, action or effort—all the while exploring what 'Chicano' art is in the contemporary moment."[79] Through this character, Ortiz facilitates a dialogue with previous Chicano artists, using humor and exaggeration to appropriate and alter popular motifs in the service of complicating our understanding of Chicano identity.

However, this embracing of assimilation, integration, and dialogue with the mainstream I am positing as characteristic of post-Chicano art should not be understood as the singular mentality of contemporary Chicano artists. As San Antonio columnist Elaine Wolff highlights, the art that emerged from the Chicano movement championed "the struggle to maintain a unique culture against the forces of assimilation."[80] This mentality is echoed in the title of the largest Chicano exhibition to date, *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*. A move from resistance to that of assimilation is not the hallmark of all identity art being created by Mexican Americans. For instance, Vincent Valdez, a San Antonio artist of the same generation as Ramos and Ortiz, creates art that resists easy categorization as either Chicano or post-Chicano art, reflecting the variety and nuance of identity art being created by

[78] Kate Green, "International Artist-in-Residence: Cruz Ortiz," Artpace, San Antonio, March 2005, http://www.artpace.org/aboutTheExhibition.php?axid=152&sort=artist.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Elaine Wolff, "Post-identity and pre-revolution," *San Antonio Current*, March 24, 2005, 10–12.

Mexican Americans. *Remembering* from 1999 (figure 25) was executed while the artist was studying in Rhode Island and feeling homesick for San Antonio. In the painting, the artist has fast-forwarded his identity, depicting himself as an older Chicano in a cowboy hat, western shirt, with a time-worn and weary visage. He holds an accordion, a cigarette dangles from his lips, and the yard behind him is populated by candles, a cross, and a laundry line full of blankets and clothing. According to Ruben Cordova, "During his time away from San Antonio, Valdez developed an awareness of his Chicano identity. It finds expression in the traditional elements in this painting, such as the man's clothing and his accordion."[81] This painting, in its choice of traditional media and a common, even stereotypical, depiction of Chicano identity, would not qualify as post-Chicano art in spite of its being created by a member of the youngest generation of Chicano artists.

However, the weaknesses of a strict categorization become apparent when Valdez's later works are taken into consideration. For example, *With a Little Luck, Faith, God and Six Pack* (2000, figure 26) applies the same humor regarding identity that we saw in the art of Cruz Ortiz. The pencil on paper work of a Mexican American boxer was actually adapted from an earlier painting of an African American boxer, adorned with gold teeth and surrounded by stereotypical emblems such as a sports jersey and dice. For the Mexican American version, Valdez has included a six pack of beer, a cock fight, and a heart encircled by barbed wire. Valdez intended to create an entire series of stereotypical visions of every ethnic group in the United States.[82] Although never executed, these examples and Valdez's intention evidence a more dynamic and critical approach to identity, one that uses the humor and exaggeration of Ortiz and Gómez-Peña to critique and reconsider identity in the United

[81] Ruben C. Cordova, "Vincent Valdez," in *Arte Caliente! Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection,* 40.

[82] Ibid, 43.

States. This demonstrates again the utility of the terms "Chicano" and "post-Chicano," signaling the varied approaches of practicing artists. However these designations, just like the identity they serve to mark, are fluid and complex, and any simplification of these issues is to be avoided. As the concerns of Joe A. Diaz and Kaytie Johnson demonstrate, an art historical desire to categorize can have the unfortunate consequence of restricting those artists subsumed by the term. However, Chicano and post-Chicano art *is* art about something specific, and the act of categoriziation calls attention to those very issues and concerns being expressed by both Chicano and post-Chicano artist. The goal of this analysis is not to stake a claim regarding the higher validity or relevance of either endeavor, merely to attempt to more concretely identify these divergent concerns.

The issue of assimilation and integration also raises another question regarding our designation of Chicano artists. If a dialogue with the mainstream, with regard to both culture and the international art market, is now integrated into Chicano art, how are we to differentiate between a Chicano artist and an American artist of Mexican descent? A Latino last name should prove insufficient, as this fails to consider artistic content. Yet the model promoted by those few exhibitions dedicated to the changing tide in Chicano art further complicates the issue. In his review of *Never Leaving Aztlán*, Denver columnist Michael Paglia noted that the majority of those artists displayed in what he termed the post-Chicano section of the exhibition seemed to only qualify on the basis of their Spanish surnames.[83] This is a curatorial disservice to both Chicano and post-Chicano art, which should not be designated solely on the basis of the ethnic background of the artist in question. All women artists cannot be included in an exhibition of feminist art; the content of the art must be taken into consideration. To lump all Chicano, Latino, or Latin American artists into their own

[83] Paglia, "Turf-Wars," 2006.

distinct categories represents a racist and colonial perception of these practitioners, as if their works cannot be included in the international contemporary art scene on the basis of their country of origin. This is the very colonial legacy scholars such as Gerardo Mosquera are seeking to combat. Only an artist actively engaged in exploring these conditions and constrictions of identity is suitably designated on the basis of their work, but not on the basis of their parents' ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

The term "post-Chicano art" forces a dialogue regarding art historical designations and turns a critical eye toward the Chicano movement and its artistic messages. The contemporary relevance of a stance of resistance and affirmation is brought into question. The term post-Chicano implies a level of introspection and self-awareness regarding not just identity, but the means by which we construct and understand identity. Post-Chicano art initiates a dialogue with its Chicano predecessors, a critical undertaking that could not be accomplished without the significant gains made by earlier Chicano artists, who facilitated national recognition for the Mexican American community. It is the very success of the Chicano movement that enables post-Chicano artists to consider this new and dynamic interface between dominant Anglo-America and Americans of Mexican descent. This tendency is also reflected in the emergent artistic attention devoted to the U.S/Mexican border, itself a tangible marker of the interface between two cultures. In post-Chicano art the essential Mexican American has been abandoned, as the united community required of the Chicano movement has fractured and split, in the best sense of the terms. Through humor, exaggeration, critical appropriation, and studied reflection, post-Chicano artists have cracked open the Chicano community, allowing all varieties of experience to spill out before us. Post-

Chicano art undermines our conception of the Chicano identity, forcing a more dynamic and varied understanding of Americans of Mexican descent, where both these components of identity (Mexican and American) exert influence and inform sensibilities.

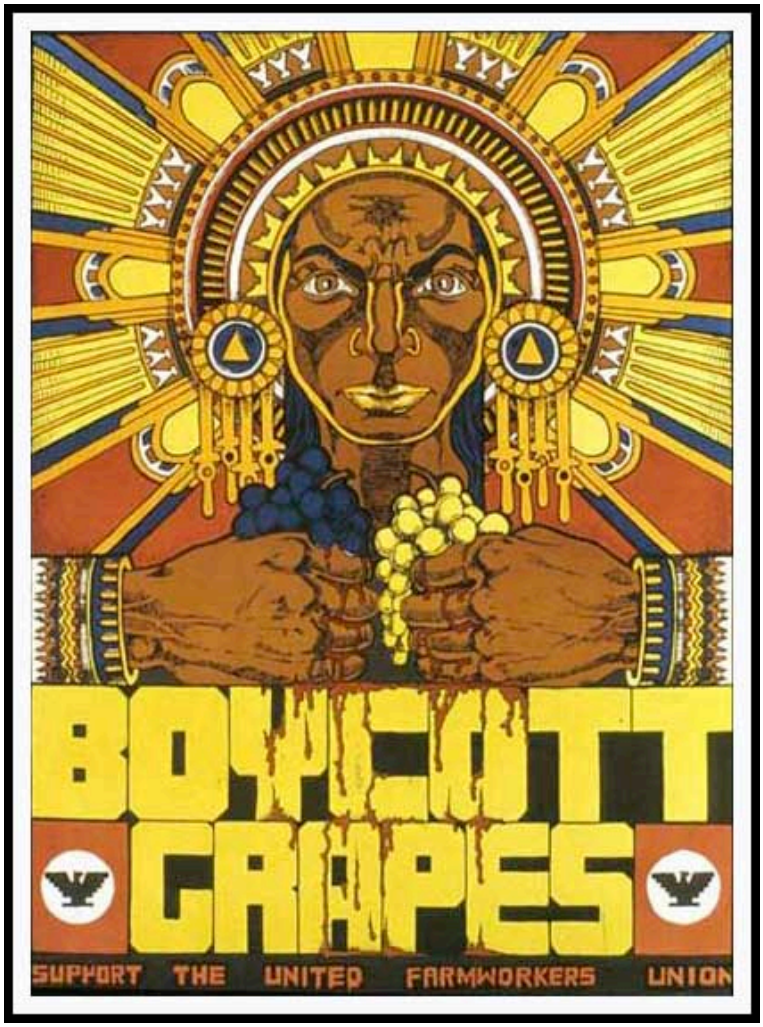

Figure 1

Xavier Viramontes, *Boycott Grapes*, 1973, offset lithograph

Image reproduced in *Just Another Poster: Chicano Graphic Arts in California*, p. 43

Figure 2

Malaquias Montoya, *La Nueva Raza, Viva la Causa*, silkscreen, 1969

Reproduced in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, p. 250

Figure 3

Rupert García, *El Grito de Rebelde*, silkscreen, 1975

Image reproduced in “A Public Voice: Fifteen Years of Chicano Art”

Figure 4

Judith Baca, *Great Wall of Los Angeles*, mural, Los Angeles

Image taken from http://www.sparcmurals.org/

Figure 5

Josefina Quezada, *Read*, 1978, mural, East Los Angeles

Reproduced in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, p. 149

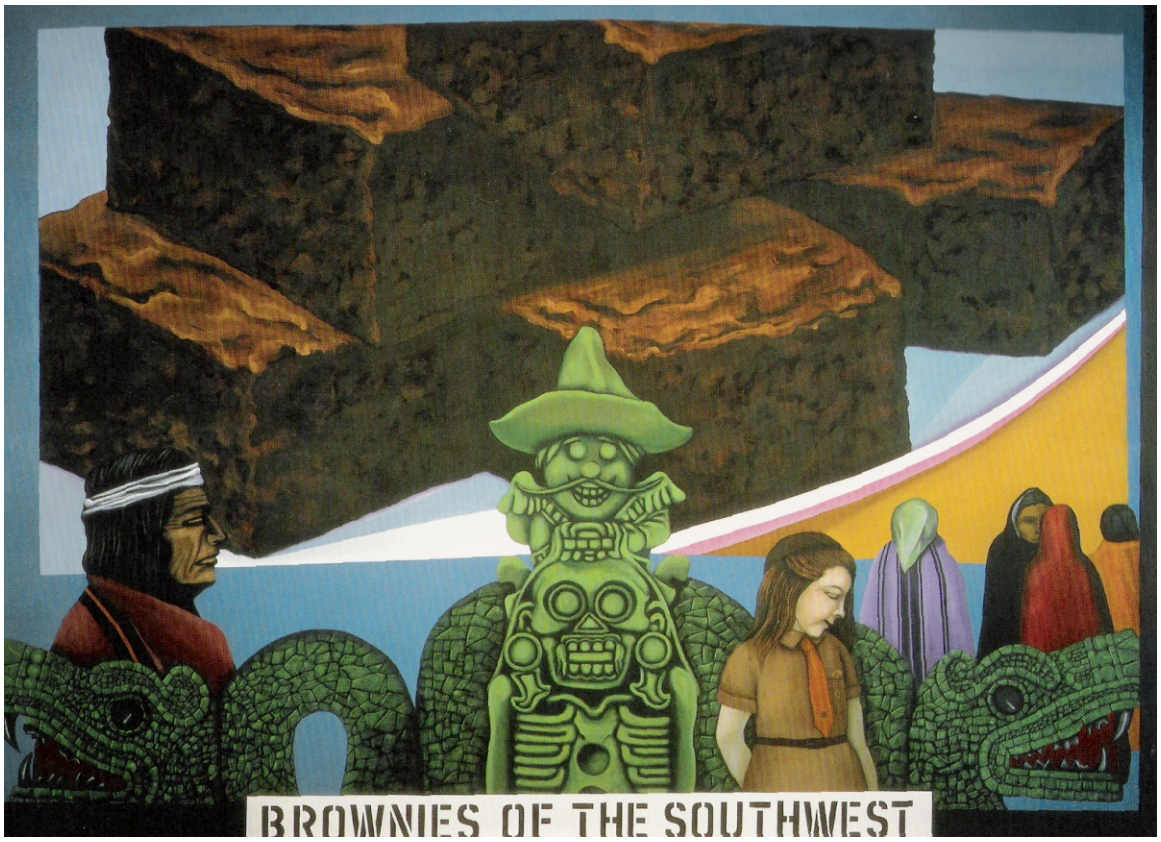

Figure 6

Mel Casas, *Humanscape 62 (Brownies of the Southwest)*, 1970, oil on canvas

Reproduced in *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*, p. 58

Figure 7

Leandro Izaguirre, *The Torture of Cuauhtémoc*, 1893, oil on canvas

Reproduced in *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze*, cover

Figure 8

Las Mujeres Muralistas, *Panamerica*, 1974, mural (destroyed), Los Angeles

Image reproduced in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, p. 45

Figure 9

Yolanda M. López, *Nuestra Madre*, 1978, pastel on paper

Image reproduced at http://campus.udayton.edu/mary//gallery/exhibits/chicana/works.html

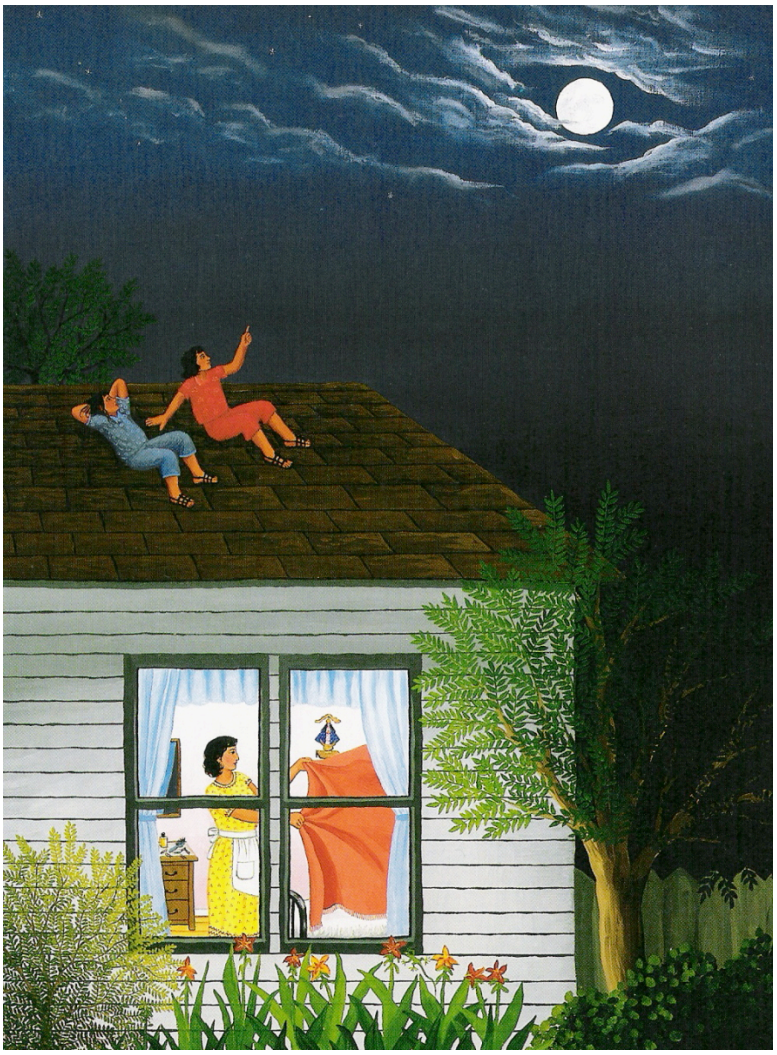

Figure 10

Carmen Lomas Garza, *Camas para Sueños*, 1989, oil on linen

Reproduced in *Piece of My Heart: The Art of Camen Lomas Garza*, p. 25

Figure 11

Carmen Lomas Garza, *Abuelitos Piscando Nopalitos*, 1979–80, gouache

Reproduced in *Piece of My Heart: The Art of Camen Lomas Garza*, p. 41

Figure 12

César A. Martínez, *Hombre que le Gustan las Mujeres*, 1986, acrylic on canvas

Reproduced in *Hispanic Art in the United States*, p. 98

Figure 13

John Valadez, *La Butterfly*, 1983, pastel on paper

Reproduced in *Hispanic Art in the United States*, p. 99

Figure 14

Enrique Chagoya, *Uprising of the Spirit*, 1994, mixed media

Image reproduced at http://www.bluecorncomics.com/pics/chagoya.jpg

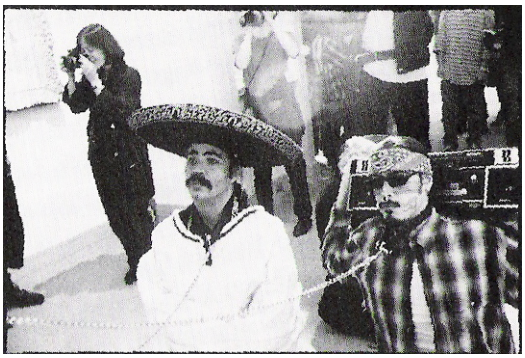

Figure 15

Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes kneeling before a Van Gogh painting in the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1995, performance still

Reproduced in *Dangerous Border Crossers*, p. 63

Figure 16

Salomon Huerta, *untitled*, 2000, oil on panel

Image reproduced at www.mcasd.org/spanish/exposicion/exposicion.asp

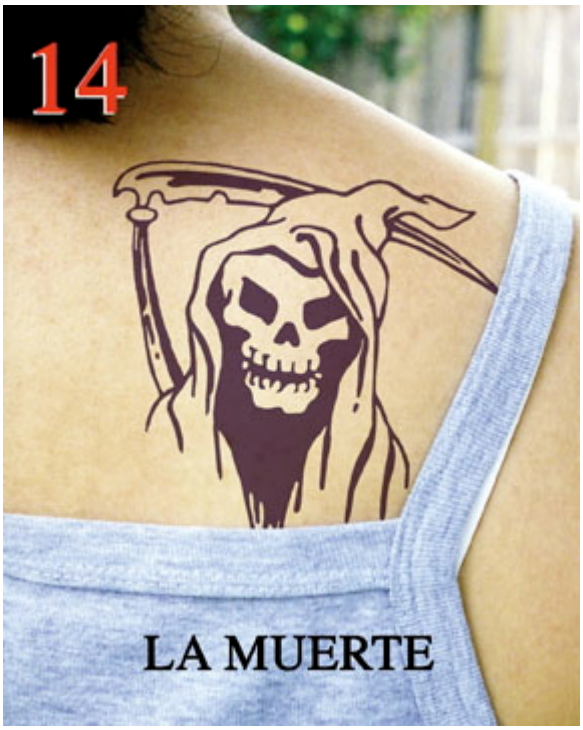

Figure 17

Juan Miguel Ramos, *La Muerte, Westside Lotería*, 2004, inkjet print

Image reproduced at http://www.guadalupeculturalarts.org/loteria/plates/source/card14.html

Figure 18

Juan Miguel Ramos, *La Sirena, Westside Lotería*, 2004, inkjet print

Image reproduced at http://www.guadalupeculturalarts.org/loteria/plates/source/card06.html

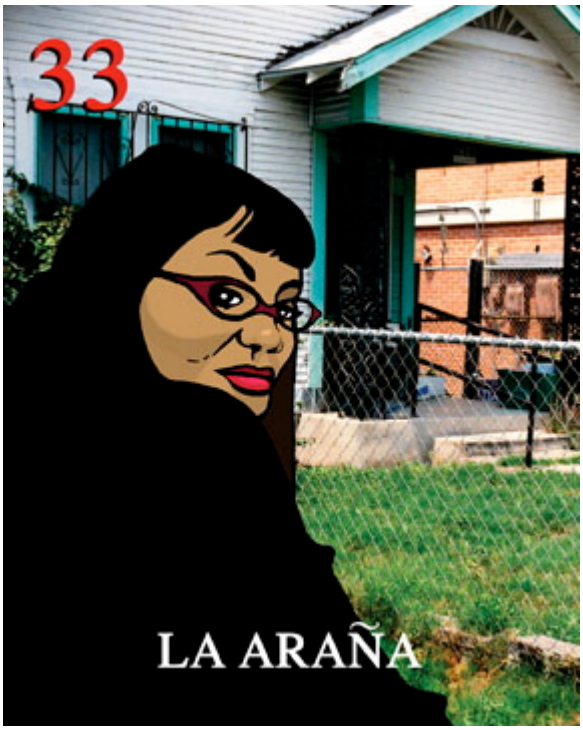

Figure 19

Juan Miguel Ramos, *La Araña, Westside Lotería*, 2004, inkjet print

Image reproduced at http://www.guadalupeculturalarts.org/loteria/plates/source/card33.html

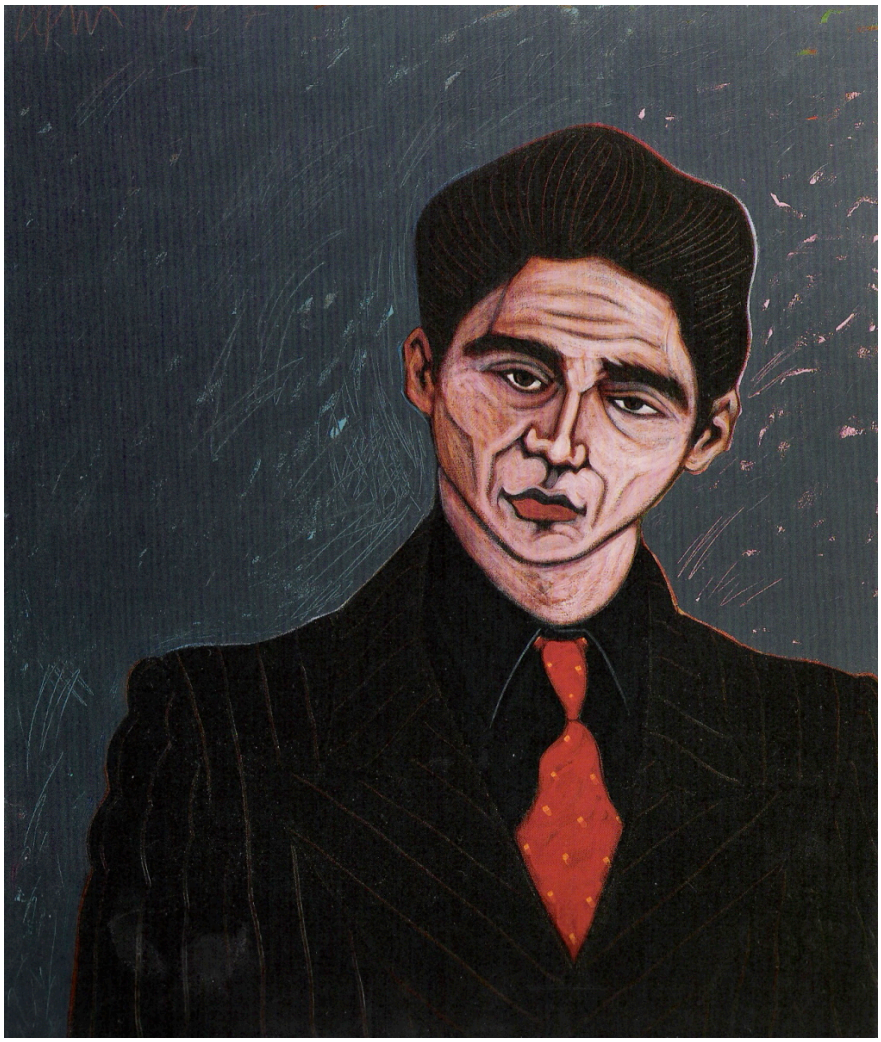

Figure 20

César A. Martínez, *El Guero*, 1987, oil on canvas

Reproduced in *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*, p. 103

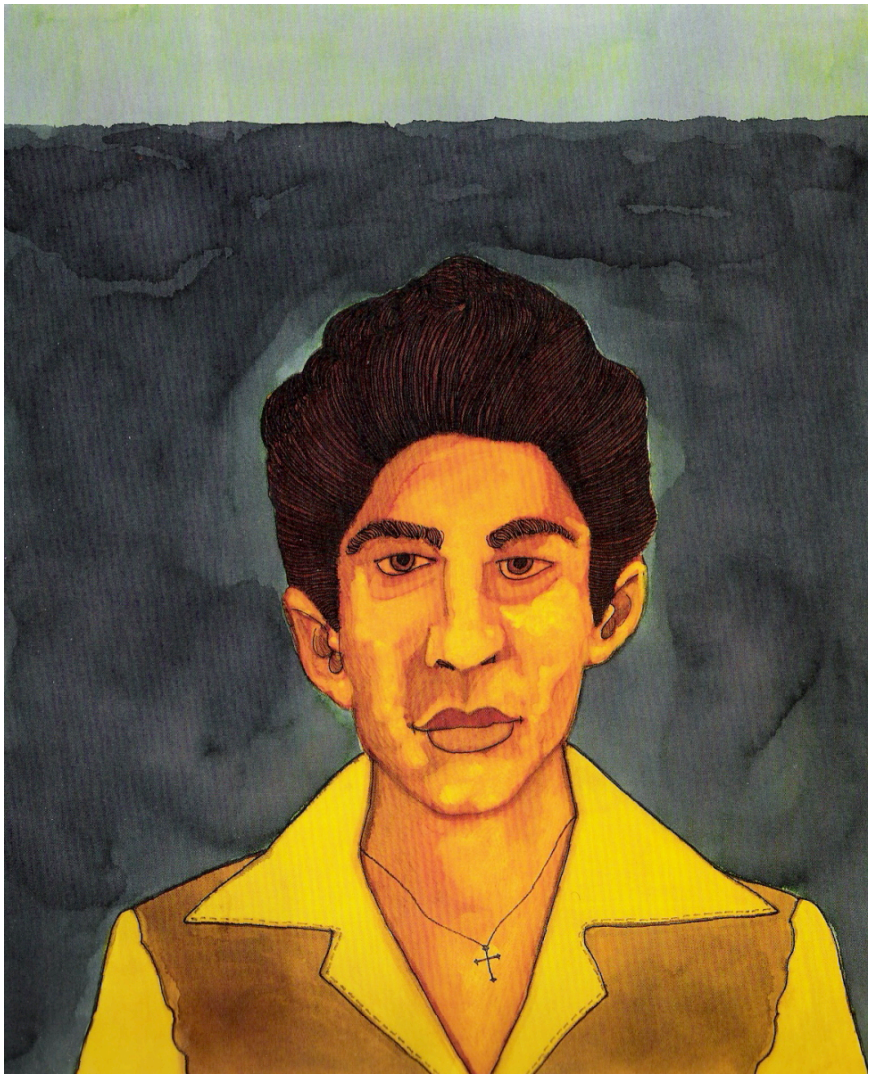

Figure 21

César A. Martínez, *Bato con Cruz*, 1993, watercolor on paper

Reproduced in *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*, p. 105

Figure 22

Juan Miguel Ramos, *Ghost Story #5*, 2001, digital print

Reproduced in *Come Forward: Emerging Art in Texas*, p. 65

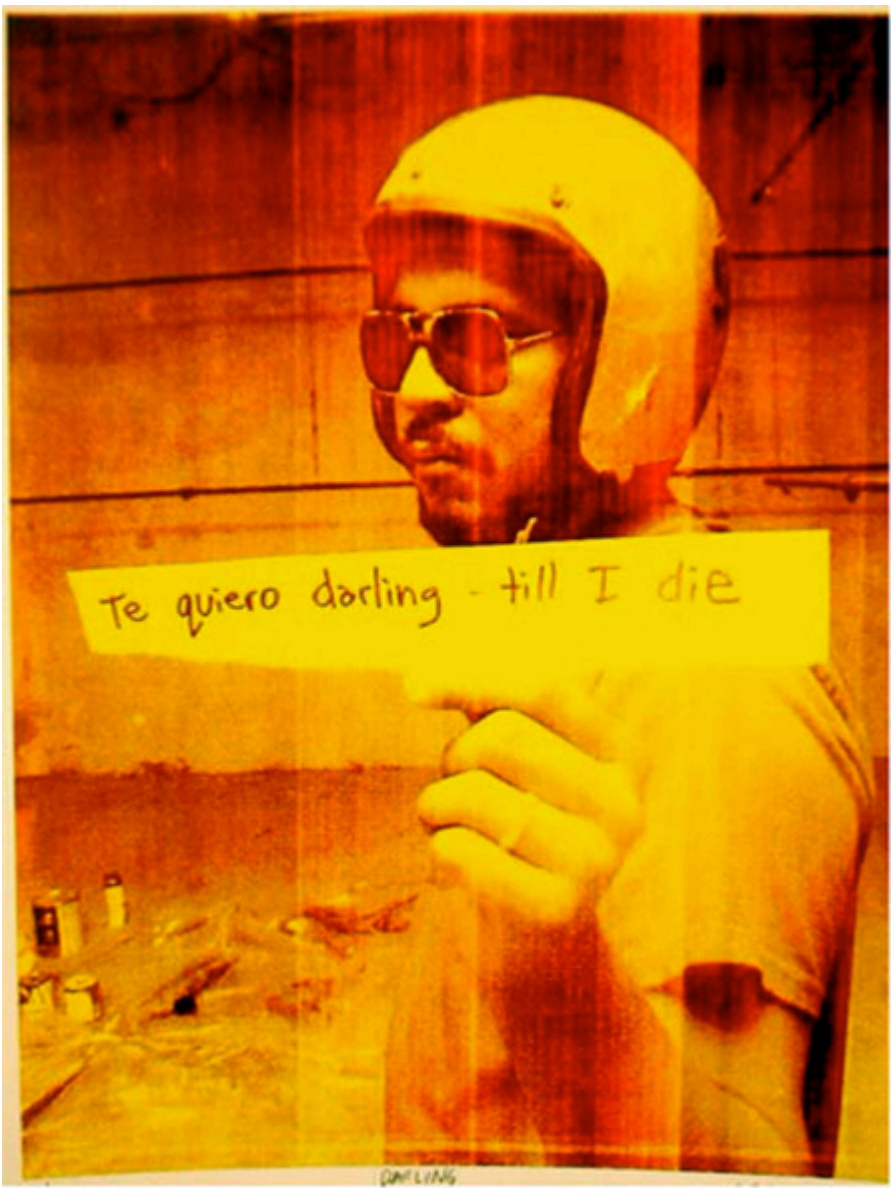

Figure 23

Cruz Ortiz, *darling*, 2002, screenprint

Image reproduced at http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=85&issue=45&s=0

Figure 24

Cruz Ortiz, *but still I'd leap in front of a flying bullet for you*, 2005, installation view, Artpace, San Antonio

Image reproduced at http://www.artpace.org/aboutTheExhibition.php?axid=152&sort=artist

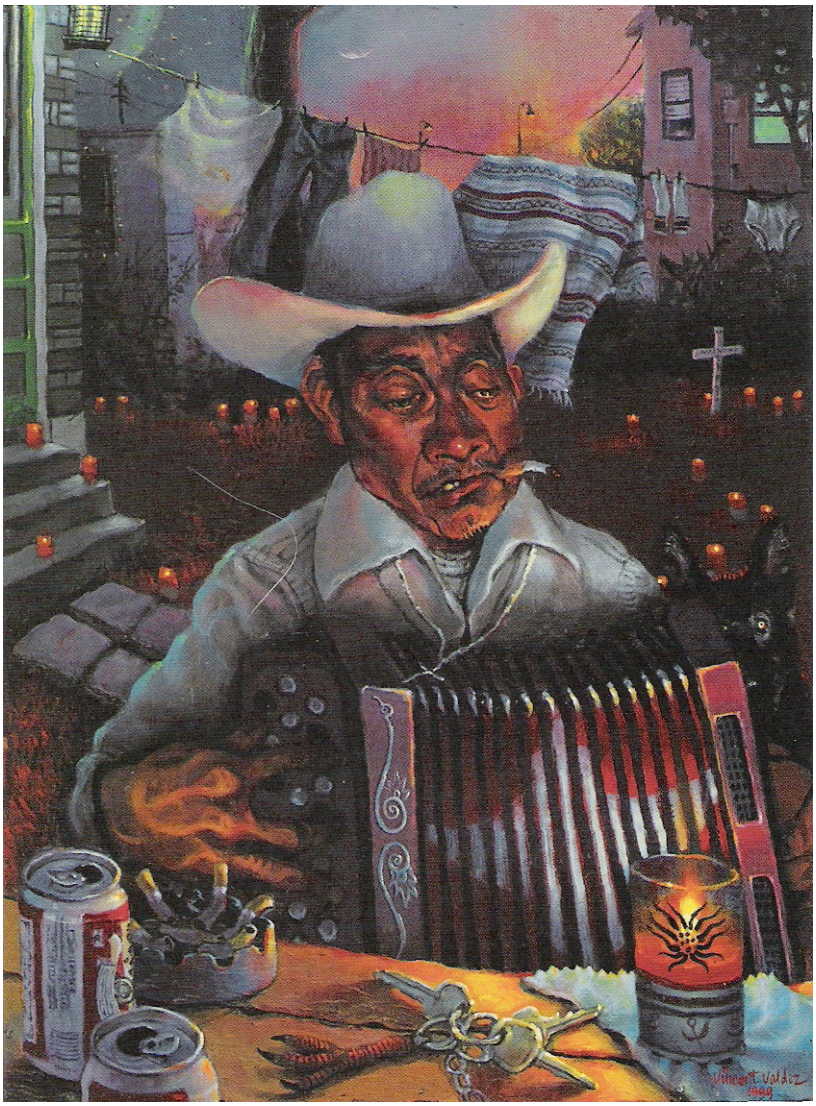

Figure 25

Vincent Valdez, *Remembering*, 1999, oil on board

Reproduced in *Arte Caliente!: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection*, p. 40

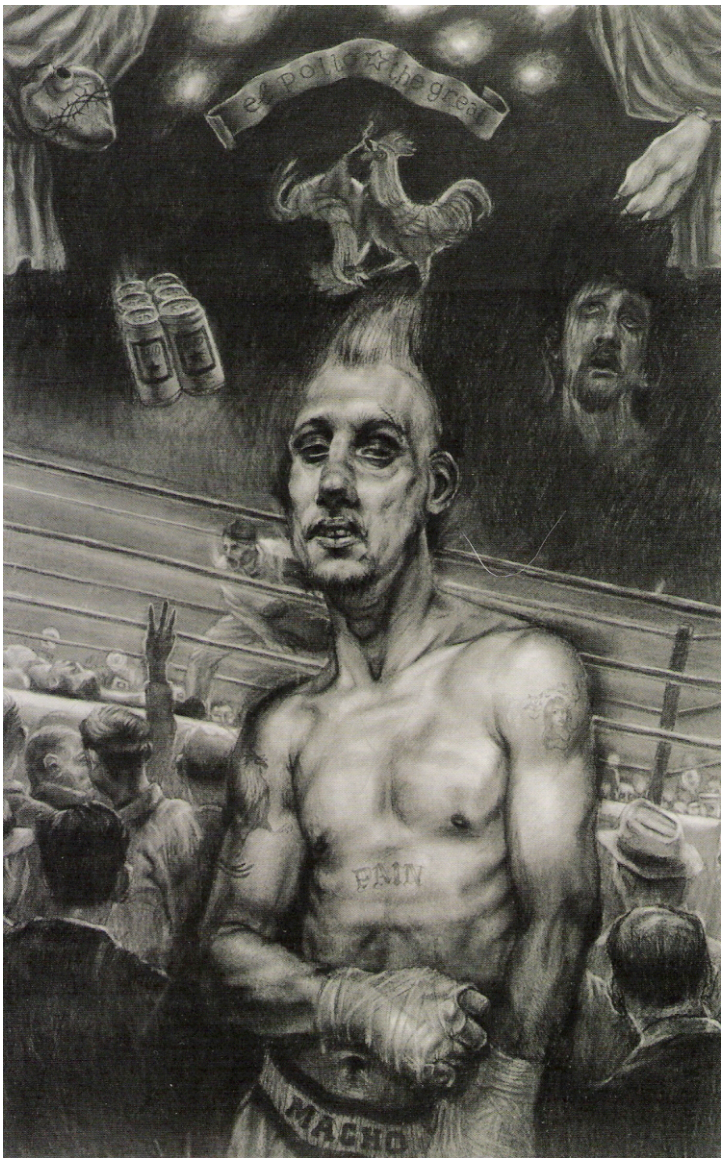

Figure 26

Vincent Valdez, *With a Little Luck, Faith, God, and a Six Pack*, 2000, graphite on paper

Reproduced in *Arte Caliente!: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection*, p. 42

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation*. San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972.

Almaraz, Félix D. "The Historical Heritage of the Mexican American in 19th Century Texas." *The Role of the Mexican American in the History of the Southwest*. Edinburg, Tex.: Inter-American Institute, Pan American College, 1969.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Borderlands." In *The Latino/a Condition*, ed. R. Delgado and J. Stefancic, New York: New York University Press, 1998, 627–630.

Beardsell, Peter. *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953.

Benavidez, Max. "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility." In *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*, ed. Cheech Marin. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002, 11–21.

Brookman, Philip. "Looking for Alternatives: Notes on Chicano Art. 1960–1990." In *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985.* Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, University of California, 1991, 181–191.

Camnitzer, Luis. "Wonder Bread and Spanglish Art." In *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. G. Mosquera. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996, 154–164.

CARA Executive Committee and Wright Art Gallery Staff, "Preface: The CARA Exhibition." In *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*. Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, University of California, 1991, 27–32.

Connors, Andrew. "Review: *Norte/Sur* at the Mexican Museum," *The Journal of American Folklore* 104, no. 413 (Summer 1991): 354–360.

Cordova, Ruben C. "Interview with Joe A. Diaz." In *Arte Caliente!: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection*. Corpus Christi, Tex.: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004, 12–19.

_____. "Vincent Valdez." In *Arte Caliente!: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection.* Corpus Christi, Tex.: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004, 40–43.

Cranston, Maurice William. *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754–1762*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Davalos, Karen Mary. *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001.

Frye, Marilyn. "The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women," *Signs* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 991–1010.

Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Garcia, Alma M. "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970–1980," *Gender and Society* 3, no. 2 (June 1989): 217–238.

Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, Interview with Irma Mayorga, September 2005, accessed online, http://www.guadalupeculturalarts.org/loteria/intro.html, October 13, 2006.

Goldman, Shifra M. "A Public Voice: Fifteen Years of Chicano Posters," *Art Journal* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 50–57.

Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back*. London, New York: Routledge, 2000.

González, Rita. "Post-Chicano," *Poliester* (Spring/Summer 1999): 40–47.

Green, Kate. "International Artist-in-Residence: Cruz Ortiz," Artpace, San Antonio, March 2005, accessed online, http://www.artpace.org/aboutTheExhibition.php?axid=152&sort=artist, March 3, 2007.

Gupta, Anjali. "Spaztek Goes Global: A Conversation with Cruz Ortiz," *ArtL!es* 45 (Winter 2005), accessed online, http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=85&issue=45&s=0, February 5, 2007.

Johnston, Kaytie. "Challenging Stereotypes," *Southwest Art* 34, no. 11 (April 2005): 106–9.

Karlstrom, Paul J. "Regional Reports: West Coast," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 41, no. 1/4 (2001): 59–84.

Lipsitz, George. "Not just another Social Movement: Poster Art and the Movimiento Chicano." In *Just Another Poster?: Chicano Graphic Arts in California*, ed. Chon Noriega. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001, 71–89.

Livingston, Jane. "Recent Hispanic Art: Style and Influence." In *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, ed. John Beardsley and Jane Livingston. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987, 85–131.

Mesa-Bains, Amalia. “Chicano Chronicle and Cosmology: The Works of Carmen Lomas Garza.” *Piece of My Heart: The Art of Carmen Lomas Garza*, New York: New Press, 1994.

Mondini-Ruiz, Franco. *Latino Redux: A New Collection of Stories, Lies and Embellishments*. Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas, 2000.

Mosquera, Gerardo. “Good-bye Identity, Welcome Difference,” *Third Text* 56 (Autumn 2001): 25–32.

Oguibe, Olu. “In the ‘Heart of Darkness.’” In *Art History and its Methods: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Fernie. London: Phaidon Press, 1995, 317–22.

Otton, William G. “Introduction,” *Arte Caliente!: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection*, ed. Ruben C. Cordova. Corpus Christi, Tex.: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004, 9.

Paglia, Michael. “Nuevo and Improved,” *Denver Westword*, April 14, 2005, accessed online http://www.westword.com/2005-04-14/culture/nuevo-and-improved, January 29, 2007.

_____. “Turf Wars: Old-school Chicano Art gets it on with post-Chicano new-school at the Museo,” *Denver Westword*, March 2, 2006, accessed online http://www.westword.com/2006-03-02/culture/turf-wars, January, 29, 2007.

Parikh, Crystal. “Ethnic America Undercover: The Intellectual and Minority Discourse,” *Contemporary Literature* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2002) 249–284.

Pérez-Torres, Rafael. “Refiguring Aztlán.” In *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, ed. A. Singh and P. Schmidt. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000, 103–121.

Quirarte, Jacinto. *Mexican American Artists*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973.

Rivera, Tomas. *Into the Labyrinth: The Chicano in Literature*. Edinburg, Tex.: Pan American University, 1971.

Rodriguez, Sylvia. “Art, Tourism, and Race Relations in Taos: Toward a Sociology of the Art Colony,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 77–99.

Rosales, F. Arturo. *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement.* Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Salazar, Rubén. “What is a Chicano? And what is it the Chicanos Want?” *Los Angeles Times*, part 2, February 6, 1970, 7.

Segura, Denise A. “Challenging the Chicano Text: Toward a More Inclusive Contemporary Causa,” *Signs* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 541–550.

Smith, Justin H. *The War with Mexico*, vol. 2. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith Publisher, 1963.

Spelman, Elizabeth V. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

Sullivan, Edward J. ed. *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*. London: Phaidon Press, 1996.

Valdez, Luis. “El Teatro Campesino.” In *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, ed. Luis Valdez and Stan Steiner. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972, 359–361.

Vento, Arnoldo Carlos. *Mestizo: The History, Culture, and Politics of the Mexican and the Chicano*. Lanham, Mary.: University Press of America, 1998.

Weaver, Suzanne. “Are You Experienced?” In *Come Forward: Emerging Art in* Texas, by Suzanne Weaver, Lane Relyea. Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2003, 14–20.

Wolff, Elaine. “Post-identity and pre-revolution,” *San Antonio Current*, March 24, 2005, 10–12.

Wyels, Joyce Gregory. “Great Walls, Vibrant Voices,” *Americas* 52, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 22–31.

VITAE

Sarah Nicole Hymes was born on July 14, 1980 in Austin, Texas to Nicholas Wilson Hymes and Kathleen Mary Anne Farley. She grew up in Austin and Strathaven, Scotland, with her parents and sister, Laura Elizabeth. She graduated from Jack C. Hays High School in Buda, Texas in 1998 and attended The University of Texas at Austin as a National Merit Scholar, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in May, 2002 and a Bachelor of Arts in Art History in December, 2004. She then attended Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, where she is anticipating a Master of Arts in Art History in May, 2007.

Sarah Hymes has worked at The University of Texas at Austin, Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the non-profit organization Humanities Texas in Austin. She received a Tuition Fellowship and Kimbell Fellowship during her graduate work at TCU, as well as a Mary Jane and Robert Sunkel Travel Endowment award. During this time she also interned with the editor at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the registrar at the Kimbell Art Museum. She also served as a teaching and research assistant to the faculty of TCU, and as a research assistant to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, compiling the exhibition history and selected bibliography for a forthcoming monograph on the Dallas artist David Bates.

ABSTRACT

The late-twentieth-century emergence of the term “post-Chicano art” requires an evaluation of the term’s meaning and implications. This essay seeks to explore the utility of the designations of “Chicano art” and “post-Chicano art,” focusing specifically on an exploration of post-Chicano art. Chicano art is specifically concerned with the identity of Mexican Americans engaged in the quest for visibility, equality, acceptance, and representation, while post-Chicano art is specifically tied to its practitioners’ own contemporary social climate and personal aspirations, fundamentally different from those of Chicano artists yet still dedicated to the original goals of giving a voice to an underrepresented ethnic group and creating a positive narrative of Chicano history and culture.

Post-Chicano art initiates a dialogue with its Chicano predecessors, a critical undertaking that could not be accomplished without the significant gains made by earlier Chicano artists, who facilitated national recognition for the Mexican American community. In post-Chicano art the essential Mexican American has been abandoned, as the united community required of the Chicano movement has fractured and split, in the best sense of the terms. Through humor, exaggeration, critical appropriation, and studied reflection, post-Chicano artists have cracked open the Chicano community, allowing all varieties of experience to spill out before us. Post-Chicano art undermines our conception of the Chicano identity, forcing a more dynamic and varied understanding of Americans of Mexican descent, where both these components of identity (Mexican and American) exert influence and inform sensibilities.