

## Panel Discussion: “*Artistas del Pueblo: In Conversation with the History of New Mexican Chicax Art*”

### INTRODUCTION

The panel, held at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 3–6, 2019, was co-moderated by Ray Hernández Durán, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Irene Vásquez, Ph.D., Chair of the Department of Chicana/Chicano Studies and Director of the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, both, faculty members at the University of New Mexico. The panel’s objective was to address the seminal impact that *Nuevomexicano* artists, who formed part of the *Levantamiento Chicano* or “Chicano Uprising” had on the development of the Chicano movement in New Mexico and also, nationally.

The decade framed by the years, 1968 and 1978, marks a decisive period in the formative development of the Chicana/o movement in New Mexico, as evidenced by forms of community empowerment that brought about social change throughout the state. *Nuevomexicano* artists were central to the movement during this period. Artists from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Taos, Artesia, and other regions of New Mexico played a pivotal role in the developing political discourse, image production, and organized actions that influenced the tone and shape of the *movimiento* in the region. The diverse and vibrant forms of art they created not only spoke to, both, local and global conditions of the times, but also animated activism, social protest, and civil disobedience.

Although New Mexico is recognized in publications on Chicax history and the Chicax Movement, in Chicax art history, key artists and events in New Mexico continue to be left out or underplayed. This panel discussion aimed to redress this lacuna by focusing on a group of four *Nuevo Mexicano* Chicax artists who were active from the late 1960’s through the early 1980’s and contributed to social and political advocacy through their work with community-based organizations, art spaces, and educational centers. These artists were also part of extensive transborder networks that fostered dialogues, exchanges, and collaborative creative expressions with artists from California, Texas, and Mexico. Many of these individuals continue to work as artists, educators, journalists, social activists, and community organizers.

The four invited panelists—Juanita L. Jaramillo, Francisco LeFebre, Noël Márquez, and Adelita Medina—spoke on a range of issues impacting the development of their art practices, including their early college experiences, study abroad experiences in Mexico, social and human rights struggles, and the importance of the living environment in New Mexico. The roundtable was initially structured around five questions, which included the following: 1. Can you tell us about your background,

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where you grew up, and how you became an artist? 2. Can you talk about the development of the Chicano movement in New Mexico and how you got involved? 3. How did the movement inspire, change, or shape your art making and your ideas about art? 4. What is the relationship between art and social activism, and do you think art still has a place in the political movement? 5. What are your thoughts about the Chicana/o movement today and what advice would you have for young Chicana/o artists and activists? The moderators were able to pose three of the five questions in the allotted time for the roundtable session.<sup>1</sup>

**Subject Areas:** New Mexico Art History, Chicax Art History, Latinx Art History, U.S. Art History, Southwest Studies, Mexican American Studies, Chicax Studies, Feminist Studies, Queer Studies, Studio Art, Visual Culture, activism, education

## PANEL DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

**Ray Hernández-Durán:** Good morning and thank you for joining us today. My name is Ray Hernández-Durán and I am an Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Art at the University of New Mexico. My esteemed colleague, Irene Vásquez, Chair of the Department of Chicana/o Studies and Director of the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, and I are honored to have with us four artists who belong to the first generation of Chicana/o activists in New Mexico. We have generated a list of questions we will take turns posing to our panelists and Irene will start.

**Irene Vásquez:** Good morning to everyone and thank you for coming. Can you tell us about your background, where you grew up, and how you became an artist?

**Juanita L. Jaramillo:** I am from Taos in Northern New Mexico. My mother's side, the Trujillos, is from La Loma de Taos, just west of Taos Plaza. It's an old neighborhood where I grew up. On my father's side, I am from the other side of the gorge of the Río Grande, the family of the Jaquez-Chacón-Jaramillo ranchers. On my mother's side, there are five generations of teachers and six generations of weavers, including the Montoya family from El Valle with the Vallero star weavings.<sup>2</sup> My work is a bit of testimony to my land-based culture. My dad was my first teacher. He was a storyteller and also an educator. At the end of the school year, he gathered all of the discarded crayons. When I was about four or five, if it was raining outside, he would sit with me and we would cover the refrigerator with crayon drawings. I met my *compadrazco de artistas* at Highlands at the beginning of the Chicano movement with Pedro Rodríguez from San Antonio, Texas.<sup>3</sup> He introduced us to the concept of, not only

Chicano art but also, *muralismo*. Pedro provided us with opportunities to study in Mexico City with Ramiro Romo-Estrada.

After graduating, I went to Chicago and ended up at Casa Aztlán in the Pilsen neighborhood. I worked with Marcos Raya, an incredible artist, whose work is in the category of post-humanistic murals. I also worked with A.L.B.A., the Association of Latino Brotherhood of Artists, which was not only Chicano, but also Puerto Rican, Latino, and Latin American. In Chicago, we also worked a lot with publications, such as, *Chicano Burqueño*. I also worked with people from M.A.R.C.H., *Movimiento Artístico Chicano*, also in Chicago. *Anishinaabe Waki Aztlán* was one collaboration with Native Americans there. Once I left Chicago, I worked with *La Cofradía de Arte y Artesanía* in Santa Fe, New Mexico along Federico Vigil, Luis Tapia, Wilfredo Miera, Teresa Archuleta Sagel (now Spires), María Wilson, and Benjamin and Irene López. I also became active with *La Academia de la Nueva Raza*, with Tomás Atencio, E. A. Mares, Esteban Arellano, Alejandro López, and many other *paisanos*. I worked with oral history publications and with *La Academia* on publications, events, and ended up at the Rio Grande Institute, which was Native American and Chicanos from the New Mexico and the Rio Grande Valley connection. In Taos, I became involved with *Hembras de Colores*, with Enriqueta Vásquez, Tania Ocanas, Victoria Plata, Estrella Apolonia Delgado, and a number of other women. We sponsored the first fundraiser in Taos for the sanctuary movement. We brought and screened, *El Norte*.<sup>4</sup> We did a lot of things, including bringing *Danza Azteca* into Taos, and of course, my husband was Eduardo Lavadie, co-founder of The Taos Valley Acequia Association, a social advocate. He was a social artist, and through him and working with him, I became very active with the acequia movement, which centers around subsistence farming water rights. The tradition of the acequia, subsistence farming is really important because water is a critical part of the global political and survival scene.

**Francisco LeFebre:** I am from Wagon Mound, New Mexico. I am half *Sierreño* (from the *Sangre de Cristo* mountains) and half *Llanero* (from *El cañon del Rio Colorado*). My father was from the Ocateh Valley. He was a *cuartero* and worked in the logging camps in the Ocateh Valley.<sup>5</sup> My mother was from *Cañon del Rio Colorado* in northeastern New Mexico. My grandfather owned a ranch and he raised cattle and dry farmed. My parents met halfway in Wagon Mound and that's where I grew up. Wagon Mound was a village made up mostly of *Raza* and a handful of White folks. When I grew up, I noticed forms of segregation, but the racism didn't sink in then. The White folk of Wagon Mound had their own churches, their own cemeteries, and they had their own gatherings. They sent their kids to schools outside of Wagon Mound. The *Raza*, we had our culture, which was different. We kept our distance, there was not that much mingling. There were times when we came together; for example, the once-a-year *fiesta* called "Bean Day," because, supposedly, at one time,

Wagon Mound was the bean capital of the world. On Bean Day, everybody would get together and participate in the parade, the rodeo, and the street events. There was always a western dance. I remember one time, Al Hurricane played at the hall, which was packed like if he were Elvis.

I was drafted into the U.S. army right after graduation. I was 19 years old. I was part of that generation that experienced going to South East Asia, what we referred to as the Orient at that time. I remember that, in Wagon Mound, I had never been around Black folk. When I was in the army, I was exposed to more people of color and observed racism. White soldiers referred to African Americans by the “N word.” They also used the word, “wetbacks” for Mexicans. In Vietnam, U.S. soldiers used words like “zips,” “gooks,” and “slant-eyed,” and we mistreated them. I wondered, “what are we doing here? Are we protecting these people from the communists?” I remember how badly we treated these people, and it always stayed in my mind, what was going on here. You know, why? The communists must be really, really bad folk, you know? They must eat children and we mistreat these people to get them ready for the communists, or what? After serving in the military, I attended New Mexico Highlands University in search of enlightenment and education.

I began to study art at Highlands with Elmer Schooley and Frank Walker, and others. They wanted us to be abstract artists, modern artists, conceptual artists, and that’s the direction they took us. I saw this and I dropped out. I went to Los Angeles, California and adventured here and there, and I came back. I came back to visit and was introduced to Pedro Rodríguez, a professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies, who was teaching *Arte Chicano* and Chicano Studies. He told me that I had a gift. He told me, “I want you to come back to college.” So, I did. I went back to New Mexico Highlands. I studied under Pedro. He sent us to Mexico City to study mural art. We spent a summer semester studying under Ramiro Romo Estrada. At the beginning, I had a problem accepting the concepts in Mesoamerican art. He introduced us to Mexican muralism. Prior to my studies in Mexico, I believed that the highest level of art was renaissance art, Michelangelo and those guys. I liked the Impressionists and European artists. He was coming from this other perspective and it was illuminating. I remember he finally told me, “You know what Francisco, if you’d like, why don’t you just sit in the back, don’t make too much noise, and just, you know, like, don’t worry about it, you know you’ll get a good grade.” I sat in the back and I was listening, and little by little, that little spark caught on fire. It finally hit me. I don’t think I slept for a couple of days, just thinking about all that he was saying. Eventually, I became a part the Chicana/o movement.

**Noél Márquez:** I am from southeast, New Mexico, which is so different from the north. I was born in Artesia, New Mexico in 1953. I went to Highlands University

when I was 18 years old. After high school graduation, I went to jail because I was at the wrong place at the wrong time trying to stop a fight. I remember my dad saying afterwards, “You’re going to go to school or you are going to be the local bum.” So, a bad thing turned to a good thing. I went to Highlands University to study Impressionism, like Francisco LeFebre. I didn’t know much about Mexican culture. I was just a skinny little kid from Artesia who liked to paint. I taught myself to paint at a young age. When I was 12 and 13, I would go to the *mercado* in Juárez, Mexico, where I would see the velveteen paintings. We didn’t go to museums. My mother had bought encyclopedias for us and I got to learn about Impressionism and the renaissance artists. They were my first heroes. So, I read a lot and I told my friends, “I am going to study with Elmer Schooley, he’s at Highlands.” But when I got there, I was intercepted by Chicano Studies and I never met Elmer Schooley. I met his son, maybe 30 or forty 40 years later. We became good friends. He lives in Roswell.

Our mentor/art teacher from Chicano Studies, Pedro Rodríguez, said, “You know, you should study a little bit about your own culture, where you come from.” Pedro was an amazing influence on us. After a while, we were on our way to Mexico City. We went to Teotihuacan, Palenque, and Veracruz, and we studied the art of the *Toltecas*, *Olmecas*, *Zapotecas*, and *Mayas*. Pre-Columbian culture was so important because that was part of our root culture and from there, we started flowering. They were putting fertilizer on us and we said, “wow, these are our ancestors.” It influenced our whole concept of why we would make art. I think not only being around my *Chicano/Mexicano* family but being around the ancestors, that whole sacred space, was an amazing inspiration. So, it gave us a purpose to make art, you know, to include our community. And so, when we came back from the first trip to Mexico in 1972, we painted a mural at Highlands University, and that was our first mural. And that was powerful; it reawakened our spirit and we just started thinking, “We’re community artists, we’re activists, and we’re going to use art to activate and inspire, and to connect to our community.” It’s not just about exclusion, inclusion, or racism; it’s also about our natural rights to a safe environment. This shirt I’m wearing today is about that. They’re trying to turn our lands into a radioactive dump.

Mainstream culture is about consuming; it is wasteful. We have to learn to value things and to recycle, just like keeping a friendship, not to throw everything away and not to devalue human life. That’s what we can do as muralists by addressing cultural and environmental issues. We are like weavers. We weave all this fabric together of people and a life that share love and concern. I’m connected not only to Chicano artists but also to people like Janet Greenwald, an anti-nuclear activist from the north. We have been working closely with the Navajo Nation. All of us together, we’re going to fight for this earth but it takes action and precious time. It takes all kinds of working-class backgrounds to make a strong resistance. It’s always been a struggle; I mean it didn’t start with one person. It’s been ongoing and seems to be getting tougher, but we have to continue to unite and be smarter in our actions so that

the next generation can thrive. Activism inspires me to paint and when I go into the studio, I feel like a radio receptor. Where all of the information in my art comes from, I don't know, but education is very important. It helps to get a degree and that's what I tell the youth. I like going into schools and working with children because they listen. They all want to be artists and the first thing they say is, "Well, are you famous?" I say, "No, I'm just an ordinary guy, who likes to draw and if you really like it nothing will stop you. Be creative, be respectful, and elevate, celebrate, but also think about everything you are doing. And get away from the damn T.V." I am lucky to have a 12-year old daughter who keeps me grounded; it is just amazing to be a dad. I didn't want to have a family because I'm an artist so I'm married to the brush but somewhere along the line everything worked out.

**Adelita Medina:** I was born in Española New Mexico, the land of the Low Riders. I grew up on a small farm that my grandfather and his sister had in a village named, *Ranchitos*, New Mexico. They are what they are, little strips of land, that go from the highway to the Río Grande. So, my *tía* Kika had part of the land and my grandpa had the other part, and they both cultivated it.<sup>6</sup> I grew up in a very Catholic family; everybody in *Ranchitos* was Catholic. We were more Catholic than the Pope, I say. I grew up drawing images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and different saints, and that's how I discovered my artistic direction. But then I went to New Mexico Highlands University and I double-majored in English and Art. I studied with Schooley, Leippe, Paul Volckening, and Bob Hill.<sup>7</sup> They are actually very well-known artists in their own right. Schooley was my least favorite because if you didn't paint like him and you didn't design like him then your art was not worth it. I took 3 years of art history and, of course, most of it was European history, right?

Unlike Juanita, Francisco, or Noël, I did not become a muralist. At that time, the Chicano movement hit Las Vegas, New Mexico. We formed, C.A.S.O., the Chicano Associated Student Organization and became involved in fighting discrimination at Highlands. We took photographs during the Chicano movement. I was introduced to *El Grito del Norte*, which was one of the major Chicano newspapers. I was trained in Journalism by "Betita" Martínez in 1968 in Española, New Mexico.<sup>8</sup> In those days, you got trained in proofreading, editing, writing, reporting, photographing, and typesetting. We did everything for *El Grito del Norte*. It was based in my hometown of Española. I learned how to do photography, how to develop photographs in the dark room; we did everything by hand, everything. We used to cut the galleys up and put glue on them to stick the paper. For the headlines, we used to have what was called a Golden Rule. You would put double-sided tape on all these letters and then you would stick them down; those were the newspapers. I recruited Sandra Solís from the Crusade for Justice and brought her to work with *El Grito del Norte*.<sup>9</sup> So, instead of going in the direction of the *muralistas*, like the other folks here, I went

into *periodismo*, or journalism. Then, after I graduated, I went into the non-profit world for 30 years.

I was involved in work around the country, in New Mexico and New York. During many of those years, I didn't have any time to do art work, so I just kind of let it go. A couple of years ago, when number forty-five was elected president, I started feeling anxiety, fear, and anger, all kinds of emotions. I said, I have to sit and write some articles and start producing anti-this and anti-that. I would sit at the computer and there was a blank screen. Nothing would come out, so I said, what the heck am I going to do? I was literally walking around with a weight on my shoulders and feeling frustrated, so, I got the idea to do collages. I did one called, "We the People" and decided that I was going to use the colors and the art and the messages. The second collage I did was for Mother Earth because I knew the administration was going to push back all the regulations against the corporations. You know that the corporations don't care about Mother Earth so that's what I did. I started showing them around to some people here in Albuquerque, and they said, "Oh, Adelita, you should create more and have an exhibit." I didn't want to do my own exhibit, you know? So, I invited several other artists, including Juanita Jaramillo, Francisco LeFebre, Roberta Márquez, and a couple of other people. I challenged them to come up with themes related to, "We the People, *El Pueblo Unido*, for Peace, Justice, and Mother Earth." We put together a nice exhibit at *El Chante*, here in Albuquerque. Later on, some people saw some of my work on Facebook. They invited me to go to New York City and have a little exhibit over there. They couldn't fly everybody else's work over, except mine. The first three pieces I did are more political in content, and then, I started doing more cultural themes, *también*. I am from northern New Mexico. [Pointing to one of her paintings on the wall, "Vatos at *El Santuario*"] So, here, we have the *cholos* and the Low Riders, and *El Santuario*.<sup>10</sup> Chimayó is a very important place in northern New Mexico. People from all over come on pilgrimages during Lent. And then the other one is Quetzalcoatl, showing Mexican influence. I am working with an organization now called, *Alianza Nacional de Campesinas*.<sup>11</sup> I'm doing fundraising for them.

I am inspired by how all of these women, the *campesinas*, who work in the fields, train as organizers and meet and lobby elected officials. The organizers meet with women and they work on women's issues, and also against the use of pesticides. I was inspired so I created a painting for them, and I'm going to donate it to them so that they can raise money and bring visibility to their work. About two weeks ago, the painting was used as a poster for this global event called, "Campesinas Rising," put together by this woman named, Eve Ensler, an activist, author, and artist from New York City. So, that's what I am doing now. I've decided to come out of retirement and become an artist. I have also written several articles and still write for a little newsletter in northern New Mexico.

**Ray Hernández-Durán: Thank you for your thoughtful responses. Could you tell us a bit about the development of the Chicano Movement in New Mexico and how you got involved?**

**Juanita L. Jaramillo:** I got involved at Highlands University with murals. I have been an educator in the classroom for 22 years. My experience as a muralist influenced my understanding of Visual Literacy. I taught 3rd grade, which to me, I love, because the children come in out of primary school still very child-like. When they leave, they are going to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, which is another monumental age because something profound is happening to their brains. My involvement in advocating for the Chicana/o Movement and its impact was through education with children, and also, oral history. I did a lot of oral history and collections. This digressed a little from Chicano graphic art, but it also connected to the Chicana/o Movement because it involved recognizing voices that were not being heard at the time. I was collecting stories from the elders and sharing them with the children.

This trans-generational experience was an important part of our *movimiento*. Some of the people who I interviewed were already in their 90's, including my *tía* Romancita, *que descance en paz*.<sup>12</sup> She broke her hip and being in her late 90s, the doctors didn't want to give her anesthesia because they weren't sure what would happen. She actually went through surgery with minimal anesthesia and, of course, she was really pissed and expressed how she felt in her own language. I mean the doctor's walked into the room and tip-toed. What was interesting, when I was visiting with her and she was talking to me, she would say, "Juanita, Juanita, Juanita." Pretty soon, I'm having a whole conversation. I'm sure this has happened to a lot of caretakers where you are having a conversation and somebody with your name three generations before suddenly becomes part of the conversation. There is a kind of mystical part to this and the research involved in this endeavor influenced my work.

I worked with a lot of people. Enriqueta Vásquez was one of the people who has been a major, major, influence in my life. I consider her more than an older sister, a soul sister. I mean she has just done so much and she, at this moment, is on the other side of this complex with a session that is honoring her. Basically, what I became involved in more was working with women artists, creating voices, and recognizing elders, who are still living and embodying what Tomás Atencio referred to as, "*el oro del barrio*."<sup>13</sup> Here in northern New Mexico, I would say that the biggest collaborative influence for me was *La Academia* and reconnecting with the past but also moving toward the future and being a part of developing a philosophy, you know, "*el oro de barrio*," through the *resolana* and getting involved in capturing the world around us while we could, the gems that were still accessible.<sup>14</sup> So here I am now. I am the elder in my family and I really appreciate being able to get together with these artists

on the panel today because it was such an inspiration.

The first time I went to Mexico to study—I still have sketches from when we first went down to Mexico—I made this one sketch of this head with a volcano. It was recognition of our indigenous *raíces*, something that was always there.<sup>15</sup> But everything was very hush, hush. An example of that kind of thing was when I was asked in 2015—it was the centennial of the Taos revolt—to write an article about that event because I am also a writer. I had to think about it. I couldn't remember the stories, I don't remember the stories, but I remember a lot of influences. With the stories that I pieced together, one of the things that I realized was that when New Mexico became a territory of the United States and the military came in and there was the uprising, the stories were pretty heavy once you started digging for them. The Pueblo people lost a lot of lives and so did the *nuevomexicano* communities, especially in Mora and in Santa Cruz. The military went in and if there was any rumor that anybody had some kind of subversive saying or just saying something that didn't quite fit in, the military went in and they got the men and the young men that were capable of carrying arms and they lynched them. The thing was that you didn't say anything that would put your family in danger and that was something that I kind of grew up with. I think that was part of the thing of the *vergüenza* that Facundo Valdez would talk about.<sup>16</sup> You know, the *vergüenza* that had this influence of submerging our history. I think it was also related by the motivation to preserve your family and so, a lot of people just didn't say things. There was a lot of denial but the denial was based on preserving the family. So, I did write an article but there wasn't much about specific events that I could actually say except ask to focus on why there was such a conspiracy of silence. There are voices and there are subterranean voices, but they were not coming out and speaking. That was one of the things with the Chicano Movement. It was just opening up like a dam, just coming out and saying, "Hey, you know what, historical trauma is a real thing and we're still suffering from it." We just move on from there and not only say or point to a cause but work with children, work with a cure, and that's how I see the Chicano Movement, the *movimiento* and how it influenced me.

**Francisco LeFebre:** I got involved in the Chicana and Chicano Movement because I suppose that after coming back from the war, I still had that element of wanting to be patriotic. I still had that element of wanting to be a G.I. and I wanted to develop and make my name in society. When I came to Highlands, I met people like David Montoya, who had another language and another perspective on life. As I met other people, everything slowly but surely started sinking in. Being an artist, I had something to contribute to the movement. Once I started developing my own philosophy of art, I began to see art as more than just pretty pictures, more than just a decoration. For me, art has to have meaning, it should to speak for those who have been silenced, for the children who are in cages, for the people who live under the bridge, for the

people who don't have access to the big decisions that impact their life. I acquired this philosophy of art from having studied in Mexico and also spending time in Cuba.

Once, I was at a conference against the U.S. blockade and they were looking to paint a mural outside the Karl Marx theater and they were asking for artists. I stepped up and pitched in to the effort. I also met people from Chile and artists from all over the world. It was very interesting because, when they asked, "Where are you from?" and I said I was from the U.S., they said, "Well, you're not a *gringo*, what are you?" So, the only thing I could identify with was being a Chicano because it gave me an identity and a set of politics about international solidarity. Now, I work with the students and faculty at Chicana/Chicano Studies at the University of New Mexico. I work with young people who have given me the title, artist-in-residence. I learn so much from the students all the time, about the struggle in Palestine, in Venezuela, and here, in the U.S., like the struggle that Noël speaks out against, environmental injustice.

I see myself as a Chicano artist who does more than paint pretty decorative pictures, more as somebody who can use their voice for those who have been unjustly treated. I have also gone to the prison to talk to people and I ask them, "Well, what is the problem?" They say, "Poverty is the problem, We are in here because of poverty. We don't have a job and you do what you have to do to eat and have a place to sleep. If I have to sell drugs and get caught, well, there is a prison bed. This is why I'm here, because of poverty." As an artist, I want to speak out against poverty and injustice, and that's what I'm all about. I've been working in the trenches for 50 years as an artist advocating for public art. When I was in Cuba, I met some friends who took me on a tour and I said, "What's this all about?" He said, "Well, we're expecting an invasion from the U.S." I said, "Oh, really? Well, count me in if anything should happen."

**Noél Márquez:** Well, the thing about Chicanismo in New Mexico, it's about passing the baton. This was always the case, if you think about the veterans, there, up ahead of us, and how they passed the baton to us. At the age of 18, we were innocent. We thought we were grown up, but we were children. So, Pedro Rodríguez from Highlands University adopted us and all he had to do was guide us; from there, we read and we researched. He brought Tortilla artists from California who were making prints and tortillas.<sup>17</sup> They also brought *Teatro Campesino* and you know that was so important because they connected the rural with the urban and the fight in the fields.<sup>18</sup> At the time, the local hero was Reies Tijerina López, and he came and gave a talk at Highlands. I had a conversation with him and he signed my draft card, and I just felt empowered. Those kinds of heroes only come at a certain time in your life and they were there to pass the baton so you can keep the fight going.

When I was at U.C.S.D., we got together with other artists, like Mario Torrero and

Victor Ochoa.<sup>19</sup> One of my advisors at U.C.S.D. was Jorge Huerta. He was connected to Luis Valdez, so we studied his plays. His is one of my favorite *teatros* that I've seen; it really is so ridiculous and hilarious. A Mexican American and a Chicano are giving lectures trying to win the audience and each one is an authority on Chicano or Mexican-American culture and then they start competing with each other and before you know it, one has a dagger and the other one pulls a gun out. The scene later escalates with machine guns until they were shooting bazookas and military hardware at each other. There's always gotta be a little controversy when you get people thinking and wanting to activate, you know it is gonna happen like I heard maybe a few days ago with M.E.C.H.A.<sup>20</sup> All that is a healthy discussion, like *Teatro Chicano*. You know the older generation, we had to fight to name ourselves because they called us so many other names. I've heard so many derogatory names, even Hispanic. One of my friends from Venezuela, José Rodríguez, a lithographer, says Hispanic is like scrambled eggs; they put everybody together into a monoculture, as part of an assimilation process. I'm so proud to be Chicano where. along that route, I met Luis Jiménez in Hondo, who later would become my mentor, a teacher, and a big brother. All these people I've mentioned in Chicano History, I'm so glad to have known them because they would give me their blessing. These people passed the baton on to me.

**Adelita Medina:** I have an interesting anecdote to tell about how I became involved in and was introduced to the Chicano Movement. As an art student at New Mexico Highlands, I hung out with art students, known jokingly, as the artsy-fartsy crowd. Many of us were into marijuana, psychedelics, and tripping out. I happened to have an apartment in old town Las Vegas, New Mexico. In my first year, I lived in the dorms and then I moved to Old Town, where it was the in thing to do, to have your own apartment. One day, I heard a lot of racket outside my window in the park, and I looked out the blinds and saw all of these people marching around Old Town Plaza. I said, "What the hell is going on?" And then I looked and saw my brother, my older brother, Benji and Fred Trujillo. I said to myself, "Well, there's Fred and Benji. I wonder what they are doing." So, I got up, I put on my shoes, and I went out and asked what the heck was going on and Benji said, "We are fighting against the discrimination by the *gringos* over there at the university and for other rights." I was an English major and an Art Major, so I wasn't really involved in the struggle until then. That is how I became involved, through my family and friends.

You know within a couple of weeks, I became one of the more radical Chicanas on campus. Students were involved in S.A.S.O., the Spanish American Student Organization because in New Mexico, we grew up thinking we were Spanish American, right? Somebody had finally gone to another campus and said, "Well, they are calling themselves Chicanos now, they're not calling themselves Spanish

American.” Right? So, we changed the name S.A.S.O. to C.A.S.O., the Chicano Associated Student Organization. In those days, there were I think three Chicano professors in the whole university and this was a university that was like 75% or 80% Chicano, about 13% Native American, and a sprinkling of Blacks, but it was in a state that is about 80% Chicano, right? All of the administrators at the university were white and had been from the beginning. We had just a couple of people so that’s what we were fighting against, the exclusion and the discrimination. David and I, Juanita’s sister, and a couple of other students used to put out an underground newspaper called, *El Machete*, and we used to do it with a mimeograph machine.<sup>21</sup> I used to love the smell of that mimeograph. *El Machete* was my first introduction to Journalism and then, I met Betita Martínez and Enriqueta Vásquez, who had a column in *El Grito del Norte*. They were kind of like our mentors and that’s how I became involved in the Chicano Movement.

Like I said, the Chicano organizations were mostly run by the guys. They had what they called the “Triumvirate.” It was three guys, Francisco González, I think, and Al Ortega; I forget who the third one was. I remember telling my friend, Sylvia, who was called, Milli, short for militant, because we used to dress in Army fatigues with our Army jackets and boots up to here. I mean, we were like that image of what we thought then a Chicana activist should be. So, it was my friend Sylvia and I, maybe a few others, a sprinkling of other women who were involved. I told her, if they ask you if you know how to type, say no, because they are going to want us to sit over there in a corner to do all the typing. Our *movimiento* in Las Vegas was very unique because we had a district attorney, believe it or not, in Las Vegas, who was a very proud *Mexicano*, and he actually sued the university for discrimination. His name was Donaldo “Tiny” Martínez, and he and some of the other democratic *políticos* were raised in Vegas and had gone to school at Highlands back in the 1940s, so they were kind of our mentors, *también*. I remember the guys used to make the decisions and relegate us to handing out flyers and typing up the stuff. So, we were in with the *políticos* in the town because my apartment was next to the democratic headquarters for San Miguel County. We got to be friends with them, so they would tell us when they were holding these secret meetings in the community. Before the guys, David Montoya and so, got there, me and Sylvia were already sitting there with the *políticos* where they would be strategizing.

We took over the buildings at Highlands and were pushing for a Chicano president, the first Chicano president of any state university in the country, and our candidate was John Aragon, from here, Albuquerque. Instead, they brought in this guy, Charles Graham, from Wisconsin, and so the demonstrations got really heavy. I don’t know but some people say that they even sent Graham bullets in the mail and stuff like that. I don’t know about that but anyway, he resigned quickly. I think he had just come on campus and saw how unfriendly we were, so he took off. Then they brought in kind of like a compromise candidate, Frank Ángel. He was from there, his family was from

Las Vegas, but he was, as far as we were concerned, kind of wishy washy. He was not really supporting Chicano Studies. There were no Chicano Studies at the time and we were pushing for that so we demonstrated against him, too. We took over the administration building and had sit outs and stuff like that. But we had the *políticos* on our side so even when people were arrested, the charges were dropped. At one point, they wanted to bring in the National Guard.

I later moved to New York and I became involved in the Puerto Rican independence movement and worked for the Center for Constitutional Rights, which was started by Jewish activist lawyers, William Kunstler, Morty Stavis, and others. I also worked for the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. In 1990, my son joined the military. Knowing how much I was opposed to all of this stuff, he goes and signs up for the military and within three months, they had the first so-called Persian Gulf war and there goes my son on the U.S.S. Missouri. I was, back in New Mexico at the time and he joined and went off to the military. I went back to New York City and became the head of a national anti-war movement made up of parents, relatives, and military people. We opposed the war and there he was fighting in the war. I've always maintained my activism, not necessarily in the Chicano Movement because I became an honorary Puerto Rican over there. I was involved and produced newsletters for them. I worked for a radical news weekly called, the *Guardian News Weekly*; I think it was a Maoist paper, but I knew nothing about Maoism. All I know is that it was an opportunity to do journalism and so I came back to New Mexico in 2004 and have been here ever since.

**Irene Vásquez: Okay, we have time for one more question. All of you have been speaking to the relationship between art and social activism, and so, following up on that, do you think that art has a place in social movements moving forward and if so, how do you see that?**

**Juanita L. Jaramillo:** I work a lot with children and I try to nurture children to be able to trust their intuitions and their observation. They know more than they're given credit for. For me, the best application I have is working with children. I mentioned visual literacy but multisensory literacy because you read, you read what's going on, you're in this new environment, a strange environment. You use every cue possible to kind of get yourself grounded. I really believe this as a teacher of children that it is critical for a society, in order to continue to grow, to nurture that kind of capacity with the children and that means creativity, exploration, and cooperation. This is something that children need to be exposed to since toddlerhood. They need to know how to interact with each other and be able to cooperate to troubleshoot and invent

because these are our future leaders. These are our future leaders! They have to know, they have to be familiar with, their internal acknowledgment of the world. Also, there's a familial awareness and then from there, it's a community and the cultural. But if this is not nurtured through art, and by art I'm talking about music, all of it, theater, dance, if this isn't part of their existence as children, then I really believe a society stagnates, it's not going to grow and that, to me, is the critical element of art. It permeates everything.

**Francisco Lefebvre:** Art and social activism are interdependent. I see that now at the University of New Mexico, where Chicana and Chicano Studies is growing and part of that is based on the importance the department places on the Humanities and the Arts. I participate by helping plan events and programs for high school students. I gather a lot of information from the students. I also participate in their classes and give talks. I tell them my story about having been involved in the Chicano Movement. The Chicana and Chicano Movement had connections with other social movements. I remember in 1976 when Angela Davis came to Albuquerque and I had a chance to meet her. She invited a few of us from Albuquerque to go to Oakland and we stayed with her. I remember that was in 1976 during the U.S. presidential election. The communist party had a candidate named Gus Hall and he visited Oakland. We were networking with activists and artists in the Bay Area. The Black Panthers were doing security for Gus Hall and so all these different people were coming in and out. The people from A.I.M., the American Indigenous Movement, came and talked about the "Trail of Broken Treaties." The people from the Philippines were speaking about the tyranny of Fernando Marcos. Having been drafted and oriented toward being critical of socialism and communism, these interactions expanded my political consciousness within the realm of the Left.

I participated in these discussions in my 20s and it opened my eyes to what the struggle of the people is in different parts of the world and in the U.S. I remember walking into a Longshoreman's Union with the Black Berets. The Black Panthers led the march into the hall. People were chanting and affirming each other. I have vivid memories of these experiences that were part of being involved in the Chicano Movement. In a sense, I felt I was part of a pageantry of the people, not in the sense of a church but the kind of pageantry, like being wrapped up in something that is very moving, and very heart felt. I'll never forget when I had the opportunity to talk to Bob Marley. Angela Davis invited us to hear a musician performing in San Francisco. His name was Bob Marley. I didn't even know Bob Marley and she said, "He wants to go have breakfast in San Francisco. Would you guys wanna go?" I said, "Sure." So, the next day, everybody was getting ready to go to San Francisco and then the phone rings. Angela Davis said, "Francisco, can you get the phone?" I said, "Hello?" He says, "This is Bob Marley and I just want to say that last night we went out and I caught a

cold and I'm gonna have to cancel on breakfast." So, I said, "Okay, thank you. I'll give the message to Angela." I hung up and said, "Angela, that guy that we were supposed to go have breakfast with canceled." I didn't even know how to talk to Bob Marley. Being involved in the movement, being part of it for me was like a pageantry and that's why I believe art is instrumental in social movements. For me, it's being able to portray that beautiful human dream of dignity and solidarity on a wall or canvas to broadcast a message and a vision. My hope is to create a visual dialogue so that the next generations can understand the past and where they came from and what blood flows through their veins. That's what I have to share about activism.

**Noél Márquez:** I went to a school in Skowhegan, Maine, where everything is basically old architecture. They have these Thomas Jefferson libraries that don't even have room for books anymore, but the architecture is so important that they limit the knowledge. There is an architecture that's designed to keep us in place. When we went to Mexico, what we saw was that Cortés was not celebrated as a hero. Mexico is an indigenous nation and they depict Cortés as a social disease. Cortés brought more death and destruction and a lack of respect for cultures in Mexico. Every society has its strengths and its weaknesses. What we have to think as New Mexicans is instead of celebrating Oñate, we need more critical thinking. How can we put him in a different context, in art, and in our communities? If you go to the El Paso airport, he's out there, 32 feet high, on a horse, being Mr. Man. And he's in Española. Probably the best thing that happened there was when they cut his leg off. I thought that should be featured as a main piece of art, you know? That's what social activism is all about. If a library, in darkness, there in *gringolandia*, can have Orozco, with powerful murals of indigenous people and the history of America as a capitalistic country, why can't U.N.M. have something like that at Zimmerman Library, instead of you know, that controversial mural that limits our dreams?<sup>22</sup> Does activism have a place in our state? You're damn right! We need to start making avenues and talking to people to change this whole culture so that we're more than just quaint and folkloric. We have a strong culture behind us. That's what I'd like to put in everyone's mind, that there's a lot more to do.

**Adelita Medina:** I don't see anything wrong with using art to portray beautiful landscapes and beautiful people and animals and stuff like that. I do a few landscapes, myself, but I have always been of the belief that we should use our God-given talents and gifts to create a better world. People have been doing this all along like our Native American ancestors here and down in Mexico. They used art way back then on cups, on the walls, and in their tombs. In Europe, we have Picasso and Goya, who were already using their talents. Yes, they painted all kinds of famous pictures but they felt

obliged to make social commentary on what they saw was wrong in society. I think we need to continue to do that. Now, I use a lot of bright colors in my artwork and that attracts people but then I throw in little messages in there. At one of my exhibits, there was this man from Argentina, who wasn't really interested in art, but his wife took him there to the exhibit and I saw he was really looking at the pieces really up close. So, I asked him, "Que te gusta?" and he said, "Los colores, los colores," and then he said, "Y los mensajes." The colors had drawn him in to see the messages. Like I said, we need to use our skills and talents to create a better world.

**Ray Hernández-Durán: I'm afraid we are out of time. I wish we had another hour to continue our conversation. I feel we could keep going and I've already learned so much. I'd like to thank you all for taking the time to participate in this roundtable and for so generously sharing your life and work with us. Please join me in thanking our special guests.**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The panel discussion transcription was edited by Ray Hernández-Durán and Irene Vásquez for clarity and flow.

<sup>2</sup> These elaborate tapestry *fresadas* (blankets), found in many Southwest museum collections, are based on a 4–5, eight-pointed star design with detailed geometric embellishments that include, *palmas*, *culbreías*, *calabrotos* and large concentric diamonds of different colors.

<sup>3</sup> Highlands is a reference to New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Pedro Rodríguez was the first director of Chicano Studies at NMHU, where he taught Chicano art. He was a professor of Chicano Studies at Washington State University and also director of the Guadalupe Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas. See, "Pedro Rodriguez oral history, 2013," *Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries*, Pullman, Washington (2013).

<sup>4</sup> *El Norte* is a 1983 British-American film directed by Gregory Nava and based on a screenplay by Nava and Anna Thomas about Maya siblings who escape the massacre of their village in Guatemala and find their way to Los Angeles where they face numerous challenges and obstacles.

<sup>5</sup> 'Cuartonero' is Spanish for, 'logger.'

<sup>6</sup> 'Tía' is Spanish for, 'aunt.'

<sup>7</sup> Elmer Schooley, Harry Leippe, Paul Volckening, and Bob Hill were all members of the Art faculty at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico in the 1970s.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Martínez was the co-founder of *El Grito del Norte* newspaper.

<sup>9</sup> 'Crusade for Justice' was a civil rights and educational organization founded in 1966 in Denver, Colorado to address the needs of the city's Chicano youth, among other things. For more information, please see, "The Crusade for Justice" at: <http://www.the1960sbloggu.wordpress.com>.

PANEL DISCUSSION: ARTISTAS DEL PUEBLO

<sup>10</sup> This is a reference to the sanctuary in Chimayó, New Mexico known as, *El Santuario de Chimayó*. Founded in 1816 by Bernardo Abeyta and other residents of *El Portero*, the site is an important pilgrimage destination and is known for its miraculous, healing soil. The sanctuary was later acquired by the Spanish Colonial Arts Society in 1929 and donated to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Santa Fe. See Irene S. Levine, "A Little Church in New Mexico with Some Big Healing Power," *The Washington Post*, April 10, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the *Alianza Nacional de Campesinas*, please visit: <https://www.alianzanasionaldecampesinas.org/>

<sup>12</sup> 'Que descance en paz' is Spanish for, 'may she rest in peace.'

<sup>13</sup> 'El oro del barrio' is Spanish for, 'the gold of the community,' or 'the gold of the neighborhood.'

<sup>14</sup> 'Resolana' is Spanish for, 'a sunny spot,' also understood, colloquially, as a place where members of the community come together to talk, share stories, and bond.

<sup>15</sup> 'Raíces' is Spanish for, 'roots.'

<sup>16</sup> 'Vergüenza' is Spanish for, 'shame' or 'embarrassment.' Facundo Valdez was a professor of Social Work at New Mexico Highlands University and also the founder of *La Academia de la Nueva Raza* in Dixon, New Mexico.

<sup>17</sup> Tortilla artists were artists affiliated with a group known as *The Great Tortilla Conspiracy* based in the Mission District in San Francisco, California. Members of this group—Jos Sances, René Yañez, Río Yañez, and Art Hazlewood—used tortillas as their material or canvas. The use of tortillas as a fine art medium was meant to reflect the cultural roots of the artists and the cultural significance of the tortilla. For more information, please see: "Tortilla Art," *Joe Bravo* at: <http://joebravo.net/sample-page/tortilla-art/>

<sup>18</sup> *Teatro Campesino* is a Chicano theatre company founded by Luis Valdez and Agustín Lira in California in 1965 as a cultural branch of the United Farm Workers and Chicano Movements. Originally based in Delano, California, it is currently based in San Juan Bautista, California. Early performances were based on such traditions as, *commedia dell'arte*, colonial mission religious plays, and Mexican folk humor, among other sources. For more information, please see the official site for *Teatro Campesino* at: <http://www.elteatrocampesino.com>.

<sup>19</sup> U.C.S.D., University of California in San Diego

<sup>20</sup> M.E.C.H.A., *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*, is a student organization founded by students from 12 universities in 1969 in Santa Barbara, California and since then, found at U.S. universities around the nation. The organization has been in the news due to a controversial proposal by current group leadership to remove 'Aztlán' from the name. Additionally, the organization opted to change 'Chicano' to 'Chicanx' to promote broader inclusivity and is currently identified as, *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán*. For more information on this ongoing discussion, please see, "From 'Chicano Blowout' to Blowup: Turmoil over MEChA Name Change," *LATimes* (June 3, 2019) at: <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-mecha-chicano-controversy-20190603-story.html>

<sup>21</sup> The Las Vegas, New Mexico periodical, *El Machete* shared the activist inclinations of a socialist newspaper of the same name, which was produced in Mexico City from 1924 to 1929 and included editorials and art by prominent artists and labor union organizers, such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Xavier Guerrero. The paper was officially launched in 1924 by the *Sindicato de Obreros Tecnicos, Pintores y Escultores* (SOPTE).

## HEMISPHERE

Similarly, political cartoonist and artist, Eric J. García, originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico but currently based in Chicago, openly states that with an interest in continuing the activist legacies of both newspapers, he chose to title his popular cartoon series, *El Machete* after the Mexico City and Las Vegas publications. For more information on the Mexico City periodical, please see: <http://www.elmachete.com>. See also, Eric J. Garcia, *Drawing on Anger: Portraits of U.S. Hypocrisy* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> U.N.M., University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.