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# Virgin of Guadalupe: The Evolution of Mexico's Mother Image Into a Cultural Icon

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VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE: THE EVOLUTION OF  
MEXICO'S MOTHER IMAGE INTO A  
CULTURAL ICON

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts in Humanities

by

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San Rafael, California  
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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Humanities. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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## ABSTRACT

Since its time of creation, the Virgin of Guadalupe image has been used in various political, social, and humanitarian struggles throughout Mexico and the United States. This remarkable image is responsible for unifying the people during post-conquest Mexico when discriminatory treatment and slavery of the indigenous people was common. The image is a symbol of Mexican nationalism embedded with Catholic and Aztec religious beliefs that has evolved into a popular cultural icon. This progression of her popularity can be seen in artistic expression from Mexican artists in the sixteenth century to the Chicano art movement in the twentieth century United States. This thesis is an analysis of the evolution of the Virgin of Guadalupe image through visual art.

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## Introduction

The Virgin of Guadalupe is a distinct, immediately recognizable, and highly significant image of the Virgin Mary in Mexican art. This iconic representation of Mexican nationalism has appeared in various media from the sixteenth century to the present day. This thesis explores the icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe in visual art and examines the historical use of her image during political, social, and humanitarian struggles. I will discuss how three significant events contributed to the evolution of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe into a distinct icon of Mexican culture.

In 1531 the Virgin of Guadalupe's miraculous apparition to an indigenous man, Juan Diego was quickly seen as highly symbolic and was especially celebrated and cherished by the native population of Mexico. Yet the apparition tradition is similar to the story of the Spanish statuette, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Extremadura, Spain, and the location of the apparition in Mexico was home to an Aztec mother deity. The mixture of Spanish, Catholic, and Aztec influence was responsible for the conversion of the indigenous people aided by the apparition story. This mixture ultimately led to Guadalupe's political career on September 16, 1810 when Father Miguel Hidalgo ignited the Mexican War of Independence, assisted by the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on a banner. This important event is the beginning of the gradual evolution of her image. Father Hidalgo's use of the image of Guadalupe during the war against the Spanish Colonial government in Mexico was later influential to another, Cesar Chavez, who in 1966 used her image on a banner while marching to Sacramento, California for farm worker rights. Both events show the progression of her image from mother goddess, to protector of the people.

The exposure of her image during the later part of the twentieth century in the United States inspired Chicano/a artists to analyze the indigenous history of Mexico and artistically explore new concepts of the mother image Guadalupe. The Chicano Art movement gave the Virgin of Guadalupe diverse interpretations that were personal representations to the artists. The exposure of the image in Chicano art in the United States spread the popularity of the Guadalupe by sharing her with communities unaware of her history and can be seen in forms of public art in California and the Southwest United States. These portrayals of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe contribute to her gradual progression into popular culture.

This thesis will also address modern examples of her transformation such as Alma López's 1999 controversial photograph, *Our Lady*. The photo-based digital print was included in the 2001 "Cyber Arte" exhibition at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This work by López resulted in protests against the museum by many members of the Santa Fe community. The controversy was a devastating experience for López who later goes on to design the poster for the 2006 Marcha Lésbica in Mexico City. In effect the Marcha Lésbica further transitions the Guadalupe image into a popular culture with identification to Mexican nationalism and gay identity.

Is the Virgin of Guadalupe the patron saint of Mexico, or is she the patron goddess of the people? The transformation of this beloved image and its use for social causes is what this thesis will demonstrate in visual art from Spanish Colonial Mexico to the present.

## Chapter One: Birth of A Mother Goddess

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a distinctly and uniquely recognizable one whose historical and cultural origins lie in Mexico. Her image is considered to be the patron goddess of the Americas, and she is identified as exclusively Mexican, regardless of the viewer's religious beliefs. The roots of the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparition story, like most of Mexico's existing culture, came over with the Spanish conquistadores and Catholic clergy who coerced many of the indigenous peoples of Mexico into Catholicism. This conversion was crucial to colonizing the new country and led to new oral narratives such as the story of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but also to Indian ambivalence toward the Spanish. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is responsible for fusing together both Spanish and Aztec traditions that unifies Mexico as it is today. In this chapter I will discuss the similarities in the oral accounts between the Virgin of Guadalupe of Spain and she of Mexico, and how the Mexican Virgin's appropriation of a preceding Aztec goddess, Tonanztin, gave birth to Mexico's patron saint.

It is no coincidence that Spain has its own image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the appearance of which produced the same effect of mass conversion on the Iberian Peninsula during the reconquest, from 788-1492. In the small town of Guadalupe in Extremadura, Spain, one finds today Our Lady of Guadalupe as a Romanesque statuette believed to have been carved by St. Luke the Evangelist. She is one of many European black madonnas and her connection to St. Luke endows her with an antiquity far exceeding that of other Marian figures.<sup>1</sup> After the Muslim invasion of Spain (711-788) the statuette was buried in a cave near the Guadalupe River for safekeeping.<sup>2</sup> It was uncovered accidentally 600 years<sup>3</sup> later by a humble cow herder who was looking for his

lost calf. He found his calf lying dead near the entrance of the cave, and just as he made the sign of the cross<sup>4</sup> upon his chest, the calf, just moments before dead, came miraculously alive. The Virgin Mary appeared to the herder at that moment and told him to dig in the location where he had found his calf, for there he would find an image of her that should be used to show the world her good mercy. The Virgin Mary also requested that he go to the clergy and mayors to ask for a chapel to be built in her honor so that people from all over the world might come to visit.

The statue is made out of cedar wood and is just over two feet tall. Traditionally it is dressed in festive garments often stitched in gold thread and embedded with precious jewels (Figure 1). Today she is located above the main altar in the chapel that was first built in the late thirteenth century, now known as el Real Monasterio de Santa María de Guadalupe, historically popular for pilgrims coming to give their thanks. Some notable pilgrims include Miguel de Cervantes, Christopher Columbus, and Hernán Cortez,<sup>5</sup> who visited the monastery in 1528 after his travels in Mexico.

Traditions tell us that on December 9, 1531 Juan Diego, an indigenous man, first saw the Virgin of Guadalupe on the hill of Tepeyac in present day Mexico City. On this particular day while Juan Diego was crossing Tepeyac on his way to celebrate mass, he heard a choir of celestial voices and saw the apparition of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary spoke to Juan Diego in his native tongue of Nahuatl and asked him to tell Archbishop Juan Zumárraga that she would like a church to be built in her honor at the hill of Tepeyac. Juan Diego went to see archbishop Zumárraga and explained to him what he had seen. To his dismay, the archbishop did not believe him. The next day, December 10, the Virgin appeared to Juan Diego again as he crossed over Tepeyac. When he told

her of his unsuccessful visit with the archbishop she urged him to try once more. This he did, but the archbishop remained skeptical of Juan Diego and asked him to return with a sign. In fear of angering the Virgin Mary, Juan Diego did not travel across Tepeyac on December 11. On the twelfth of December, however, Juan Diego had to cut across the Tepeyac hill to reach the convent of Santiago Tlaltelodco because his uncle had fallen ill and asked Juan Diego to find a priest to give him his last rites. It was on this day that the Virgin Mary appeared to him for the third and final time. Juan Diego told her that the archbishop was requesting a sign to prove that Juan Diego was telling the truth. She instructed him to pick some roses on a barren side of the hill and in return she would restore his uncle's health. Juan Diego did as was asked of him and went for the third time to the archbishop with his *tilmatli*<sup>6</sup> of roses. As Juan Diego dropped open his *tilmatli* full of roses, imprinted on it was the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe standing atop a crescent moon, her hands clasped in prayer, with dark brown skin and hair like that of the mestizos (Figure 2).

The apparition event led to the conversion of many to the Catholic Church, and the native Indians in Mexico used their ceremonial traditions of dance as a new form of veneration and prayer. By merging their ceremonial customs of worship, the newly converted community was able to keep their indigenous traditions and further spread the fame of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. For coincidentally, the hill of Tepeyac was also home to another, the Aztec mother goddess referred to as Tonaztin. The Nahuatl word *tonaztin* is not the name of any particular Aztec goddess, but rather means “revered mother” and refers to Mother Earth. As written by F. Martin de Leon, quoted in Eric Wolf's article *The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol*, “On the hill where

Our Lady of Guadalupe is they adored the idol of a goddess they called Tonantzin, which means Our Mother, and this is also the name they give Our Lady and they always say they are going to Tonantzin or they are celebrating Tonanztin and many of them understand this in the old way and not in the modern way.”<sup>7</sup> As the indigenous people understood her, Guadalupe was the embodiment of the Tonanztin goddess; they perceived her as the source of life and creation and interpreted her appearance as Tonanztin’s return.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Guadalupe is rooted in Aztec mythology, and this connection between their former goddess and the Virgin was the beginning of the image’s successful spread across the various indigenous groups in Mexico.

A particular act of veneration that was passed down from Tonanztin to the Guadalupe was that of pilgrimage. Pilgrimages to Tonantzin initiated the tradition of rituals, particularly the use of Aztec dance in celebration of her feast day. However, in the seventeenth century the Franciscan friars forbade drumming and dance because they believed they were pagan traditions of the Aztecs. It wasn’t until the eighteenth century that the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Augustinian friars “learned from the indigenous and incorporated dance at every celebration,”<sup>9</sup> traditions that remain even today during celebrations of various saints and, of course, on the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Today many pilgrims find their destinations in the central Plaza Mariana in Mexico City where the Basilica Antigua and the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe are set side by side. Cultural or religious groups may organize a pilgrimage and arrive in their favorite Virgin of Guadalupe tee shirts or cultural dress. Another type of pilgrimage is more personal; the pilgrim may travel alone or with close relatives or friends. Both individual and group pilgrimages may “take place at any time of the year. The pilgrim

may visit the shrine to seek relief from a personal problem often related to ill health.”<sup>10</sup> It is also usual to see pilgrims walking with a framed image of the Virgin of Guadalupe tied to their backs, or walking on their knees to the basilica, which is common if the pilgrim is fulfilling or making a promise to Guadalupe. “In this case, the future pilgrim vows to make a journey to the shrine if the crisis situation is happily resolved. Because there is no way to know what might have happened had the [promise] not been made requesting the intervention of [the Virgin of Guadalupe].”<sup>11</sup>

Figure 3 is an example of the mother goddess from the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. This terracotta figure, dated between 1250 and 1521, holds two babies in her arms and wears a crescent moon atop her head; this is the same crescent moon shape upon which the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe stands in Figure 2. Additionally, the statuette of the mother goddess also wears a rope, or maternity band, around her waist that signifies she is with child,<sup>12</sup> and we see this same accessory added to the Virgin of Guadalupe’s waist just beneath her clasped hands and high on her belly. The crescent moon and maternity band were symbols familiar to the Aztecs; they understood these connections upon viewing the image of the Guadalupe and concluded that she was the same revered mother, Tonantzin. This association with their goddess is one that aids in the Guadalupe’s evolution into a cultural icon.

In order to spread the story of the Virgin Mary’s miracles and the narrative of her apparition, works of art were created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that were pictorial accounts of the encounters between Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe. Figures 4 and 5 are examples of the art commissioned that was purposefully made for sharing her apparition story with the illiterate. In Figure 4, the story can be read from the



bottom left corner in a clockwise direction. This painting has four framed roundels in each corner. Three depict the apparitions to Juan Diego, and the fourth depicts the scene of Juan Diego showing Archbishop Zumárraga his *tilmatli*. Little information about the painting's origins is known. However, the Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture before 1800 at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Ronda Kasl, believes a painting of this size might have been created for the open market and was possibly created in Spain and exported to the New World.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 5 is a more elaborate work of art. Artist Sebastian Salcedo included scenes of the Virgin of Guadalupe's miracles<sup>14</sup> in the upper half of the painting accompanied by prophets, saints, and angels. During the eighteenth century countless stories of miracles attributed to the Virgin of Guadalupe were brought to the clergy and, while most were discredited, the most important miracle story that strengthened the Virgin of Guadalupe image was her triumph over the 1737 plague in Mexico. This led Pope Benedict XIV, pictured in the bottom left in Figure 5, to proclaim her as Patroness of New Spain.<sup>15</sup> Salcedo also included "an indigenous noble-woman holding an Aztec *macquahuitl*, or sword, with obsidian blades."<sup>16</sup> The Aztec woman is meant to personify the New World. Though she is dressed in a "hybrid indigenous-European costume," she holds a shield emblazoned with the image of an eagle with a snake in its beak perched on a prickly pear cactus, soon thereafter adopted as the national emblem of Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

These early works of Mexican art were a way to share Mexico's apparition story of the Virgin Mary with Spain and were also key to spreading her celebrity in the Americas. In one way, they acted as a form of validation of what was being accomplished in Mexico by the Spanish, as they spread Catholic beliefs to the people. The next chapter

will discuss how these early images and the spread of her legend ultimately led to the unification of Mexico.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup> Jeanette Favrot Peterson, "The Reproducibility of the Sacred: Simulacra of the Virgin of Guadalupe," in *Exploring New World Imagery*, ed. Donna Pierce, Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jeanette Favrot Peterson, Carolyn Dean, Juana Gutiérrez Haces, and Alexandra Kennedy Troya (Denver Art Museum, 2005), 48.

<sup>2</sup> "Legend," *Monastery of Guadalupe*. [www.monasterioguadalupe.com/?page\\_id=42](http://www.monasterioguadalupe.com/?page_id=42)., March 2014.

<sup>3</sup> "The Virgin of Guadalupe." *Initiative for the Study of Material & Visual Cultures of Religion*. <http://mavcor.yale.edu/conversations/object-narratives/virgin-guadalupe-extremadura-spain>., March 2014

<sup>4</sup> The sign of the cross is made by holding up two fingers together and touching them in a cross formation from the forehead to the chest, across to the left shoulder and then to the right one.

<sup>5</sup> "Illustrious Pilgrims," *Monesterio Guadalupe*. [http://monasterioguadalupe.com/?page\\_id=48](http://monasterioguadalupe.com/?page_id=48)., September 6, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> *Tilmatli* is a cloak- or robe-like article of clothing made out of agave fiber.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Wolf, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol," *The Journal of American Folklore Society* 71, no. 279 (Jan.-Mar. 1958): 34-39.

<sup>8</sup> Wolf, 37. "To the Indian groups, the symbol was more than an embodiment of life and hope; it restores to them hopes of salvation. We must not forget that the Spanish Conquest signified not only military defeat, but the defeat also of the old gold and the decline of the old ritual. The apparition of the Guadalupe to an Indian commoner thus represents on one level the return of Tonanztin."

<sup>9</sup> *Danzas Mexicanas, Origin of Religious Dances: Originally Chichimecas Mexico Dances Began in Secret*, <http://www.danzasmexicanas.com/lo-nuestro/origen-de-las-danzas-religiosas/>. 2013

<sup>10</sup> Mary Lee Nolan, "The Mexican Pilgrimage Tradition," *Pioneer America* 5, no. 2 (1973): 15.

<sup>11</sup> Nolan, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Patty Phipps, "Answers to recent questions," The Mary Page, The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, University of Dayton, last modified September 28, 2010, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq/yq89.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Indianapolis Museum, “Director’s Journal: Virgin of Guadalupe,” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EEclo1tikM>, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, 62. “...above her head three communal miracles that are opportunities for Guadalupe to demonstrate her love for and loyalty to all her constituencies in New Spain.”

<sup>15</sup> Peterson, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Peterson, 64.

<sup>17</sup> Peterson, 64.

## Chapter Two: The Virgin of Guadalupe and Father Miguel Hidalgo

The Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance to newly baptized indigenous native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico City in 1531 did not go unnoticed by the clergy, Spanish colonists, and other native converts. Her appearance was vital to the well-being of the indigenous people and to the newly established Catholic Church in "New Spain." Examining what was happening in the first decade after the Spanish conquest of Mexico and before the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the period of roughly 1519-1530, is crucial to understanding her influence there. During that period there was great strife within the Catholic Church in New Spain because of its unsuccessful efforts in converting the natives. The Indians were baptized and claimed to be new converts, but kept beliefs in their own gods that their society had had faith in for centuries. This underground practice and worship of the pagan gods was greatly frowned upon by the Spanish colonists, local priests, and the *Audencia*,<sup>1</sup> or the administrative court responsible for judicial and administrative matters under their jurisdiction. The *Audencia* would take these matters into their own hands later on.

In Donald Kurtz' *The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Politics of Becoming Human*, the author states that "New Spain was unstable and on the verge of civil and religious anarchy. To deal with secular matters King Charles V appointed in 1528 the first *Audencia* as supreme civil authority."<sup>2</sup> The *Audencia* abused their right to power, going against the church and clergymen, and created chaos and violence in New Spain. This heavily affected the social outcome of the Indians, turning them into slaves and encouraging the idea that the Indians were only fit to be as such. They were even

successful in dividing the clergy, influencing them to believe that the abusive actions being taken by the *Audencia* were done in the name of God and a utopian New Spain.

Between the years of 1521 and 1531 the *encomenderos* (large estate holders), clergy, civil authorities, and settlers severely abused the indigenous people, while diseases of smallpox and influenza continued to decimate them.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in Spain, King Charles V heard of the abuse and poor welfare of the indigenous population, and in December of 1527 he nominated Juan Zumárraga, a Franciscan friar, as the Bishop of Mexico. Zumárraga had studied the teachings of Sir Thomas More and Erasmus and believed in a humanistic philosophy that all people, regardless of race or color, were brothers and sisters in Christ. Following these teachings and having faith in these philosophies made him the perfect candidate to send to Mexico. Charles V appointed Zumárraga as protector of the Indians of New Spain,<sup>4</sup> assigning him to be the head of their conversion and protector from exploitation. In December 1528 Zumárraga landed in Mexico. However, before leaving Spain, he still had not received papal confirmation of his position as bishop; this would obstruct his duties once he reached Mexico.

Upon Zumárraga's arrival he learned the clergy were very much divided and nothing was being done to save the Indians from abuse by the civilian authorities. The monks in Mexico were few in numbers and preferred to not help in the conversion of the Indians. They opposed Zumárraga's ideals of a peaceful, united, Christianized New Spain, which made carrying out successful conversions difficult. The clergy were actually Zumárraga's biggest challenge because they supported the abusive policies of the civil authorities. Zumárraga saw them as superficial and uneducated. They believed that paganism should be stamped out forcefully, and preferred to continue to take tithes

from Indians rather than helping them. Zumárraga did have the support of the mendicant orders – namely, the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians – who served as great allies because they, too, believed in the ideal Christian utopia. But the mendicants lacked the ability to unite and there was constant arguing about jurisdiction and control over the Indians; and the Franciscans were accused of monopolizing the Indians because they were more successful in converting them.<sup>5</sup>

The president and first commander of the *Audencia* was Nuño Bertrande Guzman, who, along with four other Spaniards named to serve as judges, made his way to Mexico on the same ship as Zumárraga. Guzman and the judges released a reign of terror upon the Indians once they arrived, using great brutality and the death penalty to motivate the building of houses and villas. Zumárraga tried to put a stop to the behavior but the *Audencia* was not going to listen to a “bishop elect,” ridiculing him to stick with tending to the Indians’ souls. Zumárraga tried to get word to King Charles V about their behavior and their disrespect to a bishop, but the *Audencia* intercepted his letters. Rebellious behavior began to break out amongst the Indians, for they were tired of being run by such a tyrannical hand. From the image’s lengthy history between Spain and Mexico it may be seen why it was vital for the Spanish conquistadores, and later the Spanish government, to gain control over the various indigenous people of Mexico in order to impose their way of life on them. While Spanish clergy were using a formula of introducing the Virgin Mary through a divine apparition to facilitate a mass conversion that had previously worked on the Iberian Peninsula, they could not have anticipated the political impact the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe would later have. What happens next in the Virgin of Guadalupe’s evolution is her rise to political activism.

If the Virgin of Guadalupe is revered as the Mother of Mexico, the title of Father of Mexico can be attributed to Spanish-born clergyman, Father Miguel Hidalgo. He was the first person to use her image for social change, and this employment played a pivotal role in transitioning the Virgin of Guadalupe image into the cultural icon it is today. Without this historical event the image may have remained as a tool for the Spanish government to keep the native people under its weighty thumb. As a priest committing a rebellious act, Hidalgo put his life in danger to do what he felt the Virgin of Guadalupe would believe to be right – that is, free the Indians from the oppression of the Spaniards. Hidalgo’s title as a clergyman was significant to his cause because he was part of the system that had initially brought oppression to the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Fighting alongside the oppressed made Hidalgo a naturalized Mexican hero.

In the early morning on September 16, 1810, the small sleepy town of Dolores in Guanajuato, Mexico awoke to ringing church bells. Catholic priest, Father Miguel Hidalgo gathered his congregation at Our Lady of Sorrows church for service and gave a speech that would later be titled *El Grito de Dolores*, the Cry of Our Lady of Sorrows. Hidalgo spoke out against the Spanish colonial rule over Mexico and the elite’s exploitation and oppression of Indian-born Mexicans. Hidalgo “summoned them to ‘defend their religion and their homes,’ [and] called upon his mestizo and Indian audience to do so by fighting.”<sup>6</sup> This iconic speech and the revolts that followed ignited the Mexican War of Independence in 1810.

As part of Hidalgo’s uprising for independence, the Virgin of Guadalupe made her political debut on the banner he carried, pictured in Figure 6. The Guadalupe’s image on the banner was powerful because, as explained by Peter Calvert, “the dark-skinned



Virgin of Guadalupe was by papal command regarded as the patroness of the Indies [and] with the image of the Virgin at its head... the revolt became one that was truly national.”<sup>7</sup> Calvert further explains that Hidalgo’s goals were to abolish slavery and the taxes on the Indians, and the use of the patroness Virgin of Guadalupe was a significant choice as her dark skin was identifiable with the mestizos and the Indians. This identifiable distinctiveness “guaranteed a rightful place to the Indians in a new social system of New Spain.”<sup>8</sup>

By 1810, the native population had been acquainted with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe for 279 years (since the apparition). They were now accustomed to the story of her appearance to Juan Diego, were familiar with her image, and could identify themselves in her dark complexion – she was one of them. The unique identity and association with the Virgin of Guadalupe shaped Mexican nationalism, and as Stephen D. Morris explains in his article, “Reforming the Nation: Mexican Nationalism in Context,” the “reverence for the Virgin of Guadalupe [was] seen generally as God’s confirmation of the nation’s spiritual and even racial uniqueness.”<sup>9</sup> This newly formed connection to the Virgin of Guadalupe was what Valentina Napolitano calls a “nexus of affect;” that is, “a bond, link; a means of connection between things or parts, but also as a predicative relation... which has a power to act upon or mobilize forces.”<sup>10</sup> Now the mestizos and Indians had a country and a national emblem that represented them. Yet, as much as the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe united the people of New Spain, Fr. Miguel Hidalgo was also integral to their unity as a nation and essential to Mexico’s history. Without him, the image of the Guadalupe may never have taken up her role as protector of the people.

In Figure 7 we see an admirable depiction of Hidalgo as the heroic father of the revolution. Though the date of the painting is unknown, artist Jesus de la Helguera (1910-1971) was known for his Pre-Columbian-style imagery of Aztec mythology. Here, Helguera depicts Hidalgo holding the banner he used on September 16, 1810. With a raised right arm and his face turned towards the sky, we can see that the light source above him illuminates his face and chest and highlights the banner's image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Behind Hidalgo is Mexico's Angel of Independence, modeled after the Greek statue of Victory of Samothrace, the winged Nike who symbolizes victory. Beneath his feet we see the iron chains and cuffs of slavery, lying on the stone floor as if the wearer had disappeared, leaving them chained and locked in the wake of vanishing. This work by Helguera is impactful for its revolutionary trinity of the Angel of Independence, Hidalgo, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. These three icons are an undivided force that created a cultural identity in a country that started out as New Spain, but instead became Mexico. Without Hidalgo's use of the Virgin of Guadalupe's image in uniting the people, the image may have remained an object with only religious significance rather than becoming identified with the culture.

Countless more paintings from Mexican artists from the late nineteenth through the early twenty-first centuries depict the Virgin of Guadalupe paired with Hidalgo. Illustrated alongside Hidalgo, she is placed in historical context to commemorate the Virgin's part in his efforts toward establishing Mexico's independence. One notable example is *Trilogia de la Independencia de Mexico*, or Trinity of the Mexican Independence by Alfredo Arreguin (Figure 8). This 1988 painting depicts the Guadalupe and Hidalgo intermingled together in Arreguin's signature blend of repeating patterns,

and in it he mischievously includes the image of a devil's face next to that of the Virgin. The reason for including the devil image is unknown, and further research did not yield any supported answers, which may have been the artist's intention. However, its source could possibly be the *diablito*, or little devil, from the popular game *Loteria*.<sup>11</sup> In any case, this painting is the perfect example depicting the level of popularity of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the story of Hidalgo.

To conclude, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has become synonymous with the history of Miguel Hidalgo. The story of how he rallied the people to unite under one image led to his saint-like reputation in Mexico's history. The "*Grito*" (after Hidalgo's galvanizing speech in 1810) continues to be recited annually by Mexico's president on September 16 in the main square, or *El Zocalo*, of Mexico City.<sup>12</sup> Hidalgo's name is the first to be called as one of the heroes of the country, and ringing a bell before and after the recitation remains a tradition. We will see how the tradition of using the image of the Virgin in times of struggle remains. History repeats itself in the next chapter when the Virgin of Guadalupe migrates to the United States.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup> The *Audencia* was considered to be law enforcement who ensured that social order prevailed. They proved to be a major corrupt organization that only made life in New Spain worse.

<sup>2</sup> Donald V. Kurtz, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Politics of Becoming Human," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 38, no. 2 (1982): 199.

<sup>3</sup> Kurtz, 197.

<sup>4</sup> Kurtz, 199.

<sup>5</sup> Kurtz, 201.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Calvert, *Mexico* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Calvert, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Wolf, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol," *The Journal of American Folklore Society* 71, no. 279 (Jan.-Mar. 1958): 37.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen D. Morris, "Reforming the Nation: Mexican Nationalism in Context," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31, no. 2 (1999): 370.

<sup>10</sup> Valentina Napolitano, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Nexus of Affect," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009): 99.

"I have argued that to understand this nexus of affect we need to pay attention to the symptoms that recur about a loss of unity insofar as they connect to the repression and re-narrativization of religious histories within a 'modern' Mexican nation. This nexus of affect points to a desire for a project of Catholic citizenship as the basis for a unity of the Mexican nation... Hence the Virgin of Guadalupe is not just a symbol, where a signified connects to a historically changing signifier."

<sup>11</sup> *Loteria* is a game similar to the American version of bingo. A caller pulls cards with various images on them from a shuffled deck. If the image called is on a player's game card they cover it up using a marker, such as a bean. The first player to have four images grouped together or in a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal line calls out "*loteria*" and wins the game.

<sup>12</sup> Grito called out today:

¡Mexicanos!

¡Vivan los héroes que nos dieron la patria y libertad!

¡Viva Hidalgo!

¡Viva Morelos!

¡Viva Josefa Ortíz de Dominguez!  
¡Viva Allende!  
¡Viva Galeana y los Bravo!  
¡Viva Aldama y Matamoros!  
¡Viva la Independencia Nacional!  
¡Viva México! ¡Viva México! ¡Viva México!

### Chapter Three: The Virgin of Guadalupe Migrates to the United States

As we have seen from the revolutionary beginnings of the War of Mexican Independence, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was a powerful tool aiding in the fight against the Spanish government. The people wanted a change: a fair system that would not ignore their needs and a democratic government that they could actively participate in and be heard by. The same idea applied in the 1960s when a young farm worker in California became the founder of another type of social revolution, the United Farm Workers Movement. Like Hidalgo, Cesar Chavez would carry the Guadalupe's image on a banner, this time from the small town of Delano to the state capitol in Sacramento in a continuing battle for social change and search for civil rights.

It began in the summer of 1965. Cesar Chavez had already founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) three years before and was working towards his goal of transforming the group into a successful union. Migrating farm workers from the Coachella Valley had reached Delano, some 250 miles to the north, to pick grapes; there they asked the landowners for the same hourly pay of \$1.25 they received in the Coachella Valley. When the hourly rate was refused, nine farms were struck on September 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> The Agricultural Workers Organization Committee (AWOC), founded by Filipino leader Larry Itliong, met with Chavez and the NFWA on September 16, 1965 at Our Lady of Guadalupe church in Delano to decide if NFWA would join the strike. Chavez believed a successful strike was their best option to gain better pay and working conditions for farm workers<sup>2</sup> and bring to public consciousness their unseen exploitations.<sup>3</sup>

It seemed that history would repeat itself. The date of the first meeting, September 16, and name of the church, Our Lady of Guadalupe, were both symbolic references known by the mostly Mexican and Chicano group, making it only fitting to engage once again the mighty image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in service to the Delano Grape Strike. The many Chicanos then involved with the NFWA brought the image of the Guadalupe into the cause and used her, as Hidalgo had, to unite the community and lead a peaceful procession, this time to Sacramento. The Guadalupe was again at the head of an uprising for human rights. Photographs from that time in Figures 9, 10, and 11 show the Virgin of Guadalupe banner carried during the march. The group began the nearly 340-mile journey from Delano to Sacramento on March 7, 1966, and arrived at the steps of the Capital building on Easter Sunday, April 10.<sup>4</sup>

This march to Sacramento was more than a protest march; it was a pilgrimage. The practice of pilgrimage continues to be widely observed today in the United States among Latino communities, especially to churches with replicated images of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The United Farm Workers' march to Sacramento echoed the religious beliefs in traveling to a sacred site where a request for the Guadalupe's intercession is offered in the act of pilgrimage. As discussed in chapter one, pilgrimages to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe were both an indigenous and Catholic ritual in Mexico. In the case of the United Farm Workers, it was a political pilgrimage to demonstrate a unified group ready for change. This curious similarity to Hidalgo's revolt is another significant adaption of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Alongside Cesar Chavez and the UFW she stepped out of the pages of history and into a modern setting where themes of political issues and struggle remained the same. In this new setting the Virgin of

Guadalupe introduced herself to American culture. Her use of activism, though well known in Mexico, was now initiated in the United States. This resulted in growing popularity in this country in subsequent artwork and activism.

Religious imagery was important for the Farm Workers Movement. Cesar Chavez understood that he had to work with churches to publicize his message to the masses. The use of the Virgin of Guadalupe had everything to do with gaining exposure and support in order to “bring his union practical benefits.”<sup>5</sup> Yet the image of the Guadalupe was more than a religious image, as her history with Hidalgo had given her the reputation of an interceding leader that had historically unified different groups of people. This image strengthened the Farm Workers Movement because of her past history and allowed Chicano artists to further reinterpret the mother goddess icon. One beautiful artistic tribute to Chavez and Guadalupe can be seen in Alfredo Arreguin’s *Sal Si Puedes II (Get Out If You Can II)* (Figure 12). This 1993 painting was made in memoriam to Cesar Chavez who died that same year. Arreguin’s iconic artistic style of repetitive geometric and floral patterns come together to make the face of Chavez. Just below this image is a farm worker, or *campesino*, standing out in bold solid colors with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s face on his shirt. The viewer now pairs the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe with Cesar Chavez, just as she has been paired with Miguel Hidalgo. She is the sidekick to the heroes who have sought her aid in their causes.

Chicano artists exploring their indigenous roots and learning Mexican history began to experiment with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Questions of gender, identity, and cultural dualism are a few areas of artistic exploration these artists journey



through. The next chapter will look closely at artwork of Chicano artists whose reinterpretations of the Guadalupe image accelerated her progression into popular culture.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup> “History,” United Farm Workers, accessed March 17, 2014, [http://www.ufw.org/\\_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html](http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html).

<sup>2</sup> “History.” United Farm Workers, accessed March 17, 2014, [http://www.ufw.org/\\_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html](http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html)

“Grape pickers in 1965 were making an average of \$.90/hour, plus ten cents per “lug” (basket) picked. State laws regarding working standards were simply ignored by growers. At one farm the boss made the workers all drink from the same cup “a beer can” in the field; at another ranch workers were forced to pay a quarter per cup. No ranches had portable field toilets. Workers’ temporary housing was strictly segregated by race, and they paid two dollars or more per day for unheated metal shacks-often infested with mosquitoes-with no indoor plumbing or cooking facilities.”

<sup>3</sup> Miriam Powell interviewed by Saul Gonzalez, “United Farm Workers 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, PBS, June 22, 2012, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2012/06/22/june-22-2012-united-farm-workers-50th-anniversary/11407/>.

<sup>4</sup> “History.” United Farm Workers, accessed March 17, 2014, [http://www.ufw.org/\\_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html](http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html)

“Seventy strikers left Delano on foot on March 17, 1966, led by Chavez. They walked nearly 340 miles in 25 days. Along the way they picked up hundreds of friends and rallied with thousands of people. A Chicano theater group, El Teatro Campesino, staged skits about the struggle from the back of a flatbed truck every night. The march attracted media attention and public support. Arriving in Sacramento on Easter morning, Chavez announced to a cheering demonstration of 10,000 supporters in front of the Capital building that Schenley had bowed before the pressure and signed an agreement with NFWA.”

<sup>5</sup> Chris Hartmire interviewed by Saul Gonzalez, “United Farm Workers 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, PBS, June 22, 2012, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2012/06/22/june-22-2012-united-farm-workers-50th-anniversary/11407/>.

## Chapter Four: The Virgin of Guadalupe in Chicano Art

The Civil Rights movements in the United States in the late 1960s aroused a creative renaissance for Chicano artists exploring images of their Mexican roots. Visual arts depicting Aztec mythology, Mexican revolutionaries, and, of course, the Virgin of Guadalupe, were all subjects of artistic expression. These newly expressed images can be seen in park murals, poster art, and tattoos. This Chicano Art movement truly shifts the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to a cultural icon, especially among Chicana artists. They used the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe “in more egalitarian ways, crossing [the Guadalupe] with goddesses, superwomen, and everyday, racialized women.”<sup>1</sup> She was redefined in a contemporary fashion for a new generation of Mexican-Americans and a twentieth-century audience. This chapter will discuss works of art that display significant signs of the Guadalupe’s shift to a popular cultural icon in the twentieth century in the United States.

San Francisco Bay Area Chicana artist Ester Hernandez is recognized for her graphic art and “has made a life-long career of political and feminist provocation.”<sup>2</sup> In her art, she stresses gender equality by depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe out of character. Refer, for example, to Figure 13, an etching titled *The Virgin of Guadalupe Defending the Rights of the Xicanos*, in which Hernandez has removed the Virgin of Guadalupe from her traditional pose and dress and depicted her as a karate fighter. The Guadalupe kicks her left leg out of the secure space of her mandorla with a scowling expression on her face. The angelic-faced cherub that normally holds the Guadalupe on the crescent moon leans forward toward the viewer with a look of discontent. This work is a unique representation of the Guadalupe because she is seen, midmotion, stepping out

of her familiar spatial barrier. The Virgin's modernized sportswear dates her to the twentieth century, a modern woman. Laura Perez, author of *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, describes this version of the Guadalupe as a "righteous warrior" and interprets it as "invok[ing] [Aztec goddess] Coyolxauhqui's image, reminding us of a lineage of female warriors that is interestingly not incompatible with the tradition of Mary as the quintessential warrior against evil."<sup>3</sup> Hernandez's image does indeed invoke elements comparable to the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui,<sup>4</sup> yet engages the modern audience.

A more current image of the Virgin of Guadalupe recently appeared in El Paso, Texas in 2011 during the fourteenth annual *Virgen de Guadalupe Art Exhibition* (hosted at the Ysleta Independent School District's La Galería de la Misión de Senecu), which combined both professional and student works with an aim to inspire future generations of artists.<sup>5</sup> One artwork by Pablo de la Cruz, *Virgin Motha* (Figure 14), captures attention because of its similarity to Ester Hernandez's etching. This depiction of the Guadalupe appeals to a younger audience, one familiar with comic books and action heroes. This version of the mother goddess throws a forceful left-armed punch into the viewer's space with a clenched fist, flashing a ring with the letter "V" on her middle finger. She is dressed in ninja-like clothing: a green mantle worn over her head and a mask covers her nose and mouth; her mandorla and cherub... gone. The Guadalupe stands before us in our earthly realm with a city skyline behind her and visible streets below. This Guadalupe is not one you would want to cross paths with, yet she remains a defender of the people, like a superhero. Comparable to Hernandez's image in Figure 13, this Guadalupe has made a move away from and out of her traditional confined space. She is free from her

usual tranquil demeanor. De la Cruz presents her as a fierce, dominant, and bold character. We see how transformed the goddess Guadalupe is from the original image. The change in her can only mean her appeal has grown since 1531; more than a religious icon, she is a humanitarian icon.

Another uncharacteristic example of the Virgin of Guadalupe image can be seen in Yolanda López's Guadalupe triptych (Figures 15-17). This triptych was "part of a larger, groundbreaking *Guadalupe* series"<sup>6</sup> in which the artist experimented with images from Aztec mythology and combined them with those of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This triptych immortalizes portraits of López's grandmother and mother and López herself as Virgins of Guadalupe. She inserts these otherwise unknown, hardworking, everyday women into the sacred space of the Guadalupe. Rather than depict the Mother Goddess impersonating López's female relatives, she depicts her family members as ideal women, as Virgins of Guadalupe. In this context the triptych portraits are declarations that all women can be the Virgin of Guadalupe. This idea is a deconstruction of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the ideal woman and role model for girls. Each portrait is a new notion of the "ideal woman," a strong young Chicana (Figure 15), a working mother (Figure 16), and a wise matriarch (Figure 17). López's self-portrait is a portrayal of a strong, young woman leaping over the cherub and running toward the viewer away from the confined space of the mandorla. She is the youthful version of Guadalupe. The artist's mother, Margaret F. Stewart in Figure 16, is the working class mother version of the Guadalupe. She is seated at her sewing table, glasses positioned on her nose, running the blue mantle of the Guadalupe through the sewing machine in mid-mend. The sweet-faced cherub looks up admiringly at Margaret with his face in his hand. In Figure 17, Victoria F.

Franco, the artist's grandmother, is delicately seated on the Virgin's blue cloak, her hands holding a snakeskin as they rest across her lap. López includes the cherub this time in the middle ground holding up a row of roses. This last portrait is endearing; the Virgin of Guadalupe is a grandmother. López created three powerful depictions of female strength that illustrate the identity of the Virgin of Guadalupe as an image being passed down through generations.

In yet another departure from the traditional motif, Figure 18 is one of a series of “photo mural/altars”<sup>7</sup> created by photographer Delilah Montoya in the late 1990s that focused on prison inmates and “the relationship between social invisibility and social sacrifice,”<sup>8</sup> both of which were frequent struggles among urban Chicanos. This image depicts a man with his back turned toward the viewer, hands cuffed behind him, with his prison jumpsuit pulled down to his waist. He faces a set of prison bars. The photo is mostly black and white except for the color tattooed image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on his back, which takes center stage. Montoya frames the photo with more images of Guadalupe tattoos on the biceps, forearms, and backs of other subjects. The 14' x 10' photomural is enlarged so the viewer's eyes meet the shackled hands of the inmate, and it is installed with candles, flowers, and figurines of the Guadalupe. This altar is similar to ones traditionally made for the celebrated *Día de Los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, on November 1 and 2 during which departed souls are remembered with offerings of life's indulgences. Therefore, “it suggests that the prisoner has become a living altar, because he bears a sacred image on his flesh, and because his life is sacrificed for social redemption.”<sup>9</sup> Not only has the inmate become a “living altar,” but the tattoo is his

offering to the Virgin of Guadalupe. He offers his body and prison sentence to her in exchange for her protection.

The Spanish word *ofrenda*, or offering, is closely associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe. As discussed in the first chapter, pilgrims visiting the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe come to offer their prayers or requests for her intercession. Figure 19, a serigraph created by Ester Hernandez titled *La Ofrenda*, exemplifies this idea. It depicts a woman with her back to the viewer and face turned to give a right profile. On her back is a tattoo of the Virgin of Guadalupe, just as in Montoya's *La Guadalupana*. A hand enters the picture from the bottom left corner, offering a rose to the Guadalupe tattoo. Both these works of art communicate the popular acceptance of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The works of both Montoya and Hernandez "convey the presence, humanity, vulnerability---and spiritual consciousness"<sup>10</sup> of their subjects, while the Guadalupe is displayed on a new type of canvas, the body.

Another example is *Hombre que le Gustan las Mujeres (The Man Who Loves Women)* by Cesar Martinez (Figure 20). This 44" x 45" oil on canvas is a portrait of a man with three distinct ladies tattooed on each bicep and his chest: the Vixen, the Virtuous, and the Virgin. The left arm's tattoo (on the viewer's right) is the sweet face of a virtuous woman. She wears a flower in her hair, braided to rest in front of each of her shoulders. She is dressed in a ruffled blouse and has a shy smile on her lips. She represents the chaste woman you bring home to meet mama. Her counterpart? The Vixen. The Vixen is continuously seen in art history and portrayed as the mistress or prostitute. She is the woman you do not bring home to meet mama. She is prominently tattooed on the man's right arm (on the viewer's left), naked and wearing fingerless gloves. Her long

hair is curled and worn down. This woman stands with fierce attitude, her arms crossed at her chest. She is the complete opposite from the virtuous female on the right arm. The third tattoo on the man who loves women is, of course, the Virgin of Guadalupe. She is significantly bigger than the previous two women discussed, and her image calls attention away from the Vixen and the Virtuous woman. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the central focus; she is the supreme female figure. This painting is charming because of the subtle details of the opposing tattoo characters, and the clever tan lines on his skin. The man's forehead is a lighter shade than the rest of his face, as if he wears a hat as protection from the sun. Even the colors of the Virgin's hands are a lighter shade than her face where she rests higher on his chest. It was the intention of the artist to depict everyday Chicanos and Chicanas as heroes, similar to what Yolanda López was trying to accomplish with her portraits.

These works of art show the personal connections the artists (and subjects) have to the Virgin of Guadalupe image. The popular trend of tattoos immerses the mother image into popular culture. The sacred image that aided in the unification of a nation is now a desirable design. Ester Hernandez and Yolanda López both deconstruct the Guadalupe image to demonstrate her power and humanness, but the act of deconstructing this image is a sensitive one. Artists pursuing this route of expression have often run into disputes because, while popular, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe also remains a religious icon. This is a key issue in many cultures and religions, and no different for the Virgin of Guadalupe image. The next chapter will discuss the particularly sensitive issues confronted by artist Alma López in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup> Laura E. Perez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Duke University Press, 2007): 4.

<sup>2</sup> Tere Romero, "Mestiza Aesthetics and Chicana Painterly Visions," *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* (Boston: Bullfinch, 2002), .

<sup>3</sup> Romero, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Coyolxauhqui was the daughter of mother goddess Coatlicue, who was pregnant with Huitzilopochtli, God of War. Coyolxauhqui, together with her 399 brothers and sisters, attempted to assassinate their mother in a fit of jealousy over the impending birth of Huitzilopochtli. The story ends with Huitzilopochtli jumping from his mother's womb to save her by dismembering Coyolxauhqui.

<sup>5</sup> Ramon Rentaría, "Versions of Guadalupe: Student and professional artists create new visions for competition," *El Paso Times*, December 11, 2011, accessed March 1, 2014, [http://www.elpasotimes.com/ci\\_19518791](http://www.elpasotimes.com/ci_19518791).

"Melissa Barba-Espinosa, curator at Senecu gallery, pointed out that Our Lady of Guadalupe is an important religious symbol but also a popular artistic icon. 'Culturally, she represents someone who's really accessible to people. You see it through the various interpretations that we have here, from student works to professional artists.'"

<sup>6</sup> Rentaría, 273.

<sup>7</sup> Perez, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Perez, 136.

<sup>9</sup> Perez, 136.

<sup>10</sup> Perez, 136.

## Chapter Five: The Virgin of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Controversy

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe came to a controversial crossroads in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2001. The art exhibition titled *Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology* at the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) included the piece titled *Our Lady* by Alma Lopez (Figure 21). This small 14” x 17.5” photo-based digital print created an unexpected whirlwind of controversy over its content. The image is of a woman dressed in a bikini made of flowers, standing on a black crescent moon, held up by a bare-breasted woman with monarch butterfly wings. The depiction just described could seem rather harmless; however, placing the bikini-clad woman in the mandorla and imagery of the Virgin of Guadalupe created a hurricane of unprecedented scandal. The primary goal of the *Cyber Arte* exhibition, according to curator Dr. Tey Marianne Nunn, was to display works of art from four Hispanic and Chicana artists who were creating their art using technology as a new artistic medium with traditional folk and cultural imagery.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will discuss the particular controversy over *Our Lady* as an example of how the image divided groups of people rather than unifying them (as was the historical case) and review the additional controversial pieces that artist Alma Lopez has since created, used in the Mexican and Chicana lesbian communities to advocate for their rights as gay citizens. Above all, this topic remains a sensitive issue where the line of sacred image and pop culture has been easily crossed.

Early signs of controversy were seen before *Cyber Arte* had even opened to the public. Promotional brochures had been distributed by the museum advertising *Cyber Arte*<sup>2</sup> (Figure 22), and premature complaints were received by MOIFA concerning the photo of *Our Lady* by Lopez. On February 25, 2001 the work of art itself was unveiled to

the Santa Fe community. Shortly thereafter protests were organized by “community activists and representatives of the Catholic Church.”<sup>3</sup> One protestor declared a “holy war” on the state museum;<sup>4</sup> many more requested both the removal of Lopez’s work and a formal apology from the museum and staff involved. The installation of this small photo was clearly a sensitive and emotional issue for many. Archbishop Michael Sheehan voiced his opinion that the Virgin Mary could only be interpreted by the Catholic Church,<sup>5</sup> calling the image blasphemous. He stated his objection was “on the basis of the insult to the religious beliefs of a very large number of people.”<sup>6</sup> On March 17, 2001 an article titled “Skimpily Attired ‘Our Lady’ Protested” was published in the Albuquerque Journal by staff writer, Morgan Lee. The article mentions a man named Jose L. Villegas, who had asked the museum to remove the work for its disrespectful nature of displaying the “scantily clad Virgin Mary” in a bikini.<sup>7</sup> The Albuquerque Journal article nicknamed the work “The Bikini Virgin,”<sup>8</sup> and other media sources followed suit in referring to *Our Lady* by this new name.

The same day, March 17, Lopez received an email from the passionate and deeply distraught New Mexican man, Jose L. Villegas. The email, which Lopez later published on her website, emphasizes his frustration with the image, declaring Lopez’s “point of view” a disrespect to sacred art, and stating that she had “no right to provoke new thoughts of what type of art images are accepted”<sup>9</sup> of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Six days later Thomas Wilson, New Mexico Museum director; Edson Way, State Cultural Affairs Officer; and Joyce Ice, Museum Director of MOIFA hosted a meeting with Deacon Anthony Trujillo and Villegas to open a dialogue about *Our Lady*. However, the meeting was anything but an “important, respectful, and illuminating” dialogue.<sup>10</sup> The following

day more media coverage was released concerning the cultural insensitivity of Lopez's piece, and the most significant issue at hand was the spread of controversy ignited by this media attention.

In an effort to smooth things over, MOIFA opened their Board of Regents meeting to the public on April 4, 2001, hoping to open a conversation about Lopez's work with the audience that had been so openly critical of *Our Lady*. MOIFA spent approximately \$12,000 on the April 4 forum (and the total budget for the *Cyber Arte* exhibition was only \$4,500).<sup>11</sup> The additional \$7,500 spent not initially budgeted was an indication of MOIFA's sincerity in expressing their intentions of *Cyber Arte* as an exhibition of cultural pride in folk art, not as an exhibition intended to offend the Catholic community of New Mexico. The planned forum backfired after too many supporters and protestors turned up to be safely allowed in the museum. The forum was rescheduled to April 16 at a larger venue in downtown Santa Fe, the Sweeney Center. Organizations protesting *Our Lady* arranged for bus transportation and brown bag lunches and offered childcare for people who wished to take part in the forum. Reports estimated between 600 and 1000 people attended the event.<sup>12</sup> At both the April 4 and April 16 events peaceful processions of "protestor-pilgrims" arrived carrying a "shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe carried on a small palanquin, followed by the faithful [holding signs] demanding 'Stop Blasphemy Now' and 'Honor thy Mother,'" <sup>13</sup> wearing images of the original image of the Guadalupe on their clothes. Lopez later wrote that she was afraid to admit she was scared during this time and especially during her narrow escape from a physically violent altercation after the April 4 meeting.<sup>14</sup> At this first gathering both

Lopez and curator Nunn were escorted from the building by security and United States marshalls to “a getaway car and motorcade.”<sup>15</sup>

Things got progressively worse before getting better. After wide media coverage of the controversial *Our Lady*, the community’s anger toward the artist and museum, and the “protestor-pilgrims,” the federal government became involved, sending the FBI to monitor museum phone calls because of the recurring bomb and death threats reported by museum staff.<sup>16</sup> One particularly disturbing anonymous phone call, as related by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, was recorded on July 6, 2001. The caller mentions that Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber (and devout Catholic) who had been executed just weeks before, had instructed the caller in his final days to “flatten the building.” The caller threatened that if the photo of *Our Lady* was not removed by the following week he would bomb the museum.<sup>17</sup> The most painful portion of this ordeal for Alma Lopez was the anonymously addressed manila envelope that contained hate mail written by small children: “I received an anonymous large yellow envelope with about fifteen handwritten letters by children who were instructed to write me hate mail.”<sup>18</sup>

In April 2001 the museum’s Committee of Sensitive Materials quickly stepped in during the chaos of flooding complaints and threats. The committee, made of up of nine members from curators and senior museum staff, reviewed all the materials of the exhibition, statements from protestors, and museum procedures to determine if the photo of *Our Lady* should be considered “sacred art.” On May 22, 2001 the committee released their statement that they found no sanctified evidence in the photo of *Our Lady*, because the photo was placed in a museum, a site of education, and not a site of worship, and MOIFA had a “responsibility to represent folk art in the context of cultural change in

communities throughout the world.”<sup>19</sup> The committee compromised that it would uninstall *Cyber Arte* on October 28, 2001, the original closing date, rather than the extended date of February 2002. While the majority of the protestors were unhappy with the compromise, it was the most diplomatic as it did not violate the artist’s first amendment rights and still guaranteed the image would come down.

While the duration of *Cyber Arte* was an emotional rollercoaster, from the bad can come the good. This sensational, controversial exhibition further inspired other Chicana artists who supported Lopez’s work to create similar exhibitions that would continue the deconstruction of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the aftermath of the heated and emotional disorder of *Cyber Arte*, other exhibitions in Santa Fe began to pop up. Deliha Montoya, artist and New Mexican resident, curated two exhibitions related to feminist activists, *Las Malcriadas* (2001) and *Chicana Badgirls: Las Hociconas* (2009). Lopez participated in both, lending *Our Lady* for *Las Malcriadas* and creating new works specifically for *Chicana Badgirls*, and there were no “reprisals or invectives or even rumors of scandal.”<sup>20</sup> In 2006 Lopez was asked to create the poster for the annual Marcha Lésbica planned to take place in Mexico City’s Zócalo, the central city square. Incorporating a photo collage titled *Lupe and Sirena in Love*<sup>21</sup> that she’d created in 1999, Lopez composed the poster depicting a woman in a “Rosie the Riveter” pose with her right arm lifted showing off a tattoo on her bicep, the image of *Lupe and Sirena in Love* within a “stylized Sacred Heart.”<sup>22</sup> In the background the viewer can make out the outline of the Metropolitan Cathedral and National Palace in Mexico City. Images of butterflies float above the crowd gathered in the Zócalo that is composed of a monochromatic photo-image from the previous year’s march. Not surprisingly, the poster was vandalized

or removed wherever it was posted, yet it did not disrupt the success of the march on March 25, 2006, the goal of which was to unite activists “across various borders of nation, race, language, sexuality, and class under a common banner that heretically refigured the most sanctified Catholic symbol of the feminine ideal.” As Cristina Serna describes it, “Mexico’s Virgen de Guadalupe broke out of her ecclesiastical closet to join an impassioned group of Chicana, Latina, and Mexicana lesbians and queer allies” and fight for equal rights of gay citizens in their communities. Much like the previous struggles of Father Hidalgo and Cesar Chavez to unify various groups, the Marcha Lésbica was a modern expression of those historical events where the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was once again called up for humanitarian action.

The Santa Fe controversy over *Our Lady* was a pivotal point in the history of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and it raised awareness of the sensitive nature of the image while exemplifying its transition into popular culture. Although *Our Lady* was Alma Lopez’s personal expression of the Guadalupe, the community was strongly against the deconstruction of the image and insulted by Lopez’s interpretation. Where should the line between sacred imagery and pop culture imagery be drawn, or should it be drawn at all? After all, MOIFA’s Sensitive Materials Committee found no evidence that the image was in violation of “sacredness;” therefore, should the community have accepted *Our Lady* as a work of art rather than a work of slander? It appears clear that the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was in a state of change and fluctuating with modern times. Lopez’s interpretation (Figure 21) of the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Figure 2) was not intended to defame the image but to aid its progression into the twenty-first century. Its recent use in the 2006 Marcha Lésbica poster is a further example of its continuing

progression and use in times of humanitarian need. The Virgin of Guadalupe remains the Mother Goddess of the people.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup> Tey Marianne Nunn, “It’s Not about the Art in the Folk, It’s about the Folks in the Art: A Curator’s Tale,” *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’s Irreverent Apparition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), Kindle edition, loc. 568.

<sup>2</sup> Alma López, “Irreverent Apparition (Chicana Matters),” *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’s Irreverent Apparition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), Kindle edition, loc. 5798.

“In September of 2000, MOIFA printed and distributed 11,000 brochures; 750 were mailed, announcing Cyber Arte and other museum events. Our Lady was printed in full color to announce the opening reception, the panel discussion, and the exhibition dates.”

<sup>3</sup> Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “A Subject That Needs No Introduction,” *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’s Irreverent Apparition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), Kindle edition, loc. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Nunn, loc. 661.

“In regard to the artwork, one of the main protestors stated: ‘I see the devil’ and declared a ‘holy war’ (his words) on the state museum ‘They started the fire, and we’re going to put it out. No one has a right to attack our religion.’”

<sup>5</sup> Nunn, loc. 435.

<sup>6</sup> Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “Devil in a Rose Bikini: The Second Coming of Our Lady in Santa Fe,” *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’s Irreverent Apparition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), Kindle edition, loc. 4466.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan Lee, “Skimpily Attired ‘Our Lady’ Protested,” *Albuquerque Journal*, March 17, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Nunn, loc. 536.

<sup>9</sup> Jose L. Villegas, e-mail to Alma López, March 17, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Nunn, loc. 532.

“However, rather than entering what could have been a very important, respectful, and illuminating cultural dialogue for all involved, the two men went directly to the local press after the meeting. The next day, an article outlining their concerns and demands appeared in the local paper.”

<sup>11</sup> Gaspar de Alba, loc. 4679.

<sup>12</sup> Gaspar de Alba, loc. 4675.

<sup>13</sup> Gaspar de Alba, loc. 4747.

<sup>14</sup> López, loc. 5843.

<sup>15</sup> López, loc. 695.

<sup>16</sup> López, loc. 695.

<sup>17</sup> Gaspar de Alba, incident report, Museum of New Mexico phone log, July 6, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> López, loc. 5835.

<sup>19</sup> “Santa Fe Museum Offers Compromise,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> López, loc. 5916.

<sup>21</sup> Sirena is the mermaid symbol from the popular game, Lotería, or Mexican bingo. The photo collage depicts Sirena being lovingly embraced by Lupe; behind them lies a cityscape and beneath them a map of Mexico, and cherubs hover nearby holding roses and ribbon over their heads.

<sup>22</sup> Cristina Serna, “It’s Not About the Virgins in My Life, It’s About the Life in My Virgins,” *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López’s Irreverent Apparition*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), Kindle edition, loc. 3484.

## Conclusion

Since the date of Father Miguel Hidalgo's iconic speech in 1810, the Virgin of Guadalupe image has gone through a gradual transformation. The original image is still highly recognizable due to the discussed historical events that led to her popularity. Today the image can be seen on everything from aprons to bumper stickers, and like popular sports teams, the image is found on clothing such as tee shirts and hats. The Guadalupe image has risen into popular culture and has created a following of believers and nonbelievers, Mexican and non-Mexican alike. Her presence in popular culture is distinctly identified with Mexican culture rather than religious discipline. The Guadalupe's transformation will continue as evolving political, religious, and humanitarian issues arise.

In chapter one Figures 4 and 5 were discussed as pictorial accounts of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, used to advance her popularity in Mexico. These paintings were the beginning components of creating Mexican identity. Figure 5 by Sebastian Salcedo (1779) notably carries early signs of emerging Mexican identity in the aerial view of the basilica and the indigenous noblewoman. These early signs are indications of the image's appeal to creole and mestizo people and the beginning of her appropriation. The more the image was recognized and associated with the mestizos, the further it strayed from its roots in Spain. This is part of the image's unique characteristic in later artistic expressions, specifically in Chicano art where the image further strays from its religious origins. The early integration to mestizo culture gradually begins to change the image into an identifiable icon of Mexican nationalism.

With the aid of Fr. Miguel Hidalgo, the image was hauled into politics by representing oppressed indigenous people and the mestizos against the established Spanish government and foreign elite. Relating the Guadalupe with *mestizaje*, or the process of mixing races, led to her future identification with Mexico. While the image is a depiction of the Virgin Mary, the image in the design of the Virgin of Guadalupe has found its own identity under Mexican nationalism. Hidalgo is partially responsible for the image's initial development into the popular Mexican figure it is today. Figures 7 and 8, as discussed in chapter two, demonstrate that Guadalupe's visual pairing with Hidalgo was a significant event in Mexican art history. Hidalgo's goals of abolishing slavery and the discriminatory treatment of indigenous people attracted the community he served, and his influential speech inspired the War of Mexican Independence. This event solidified the Virgin of Guadalupe's image as belonging to the people of Mexico. This special identification with the people is the most significant characteristic of the Virgin of Guadalupe image and is one that has remained consistent in her evolution into a cultural icon.

A further example of the Virgin of Guadalupe's career in activism was discussed in chapter three. In twentieth-century California, Cesar Chavez saw that unity within the farm worker community was essential to making progress in the struggle for worker rights. His use of the image during his activism with the United Farm Workers (UFW) helped unify the workers who coordinated the boycott of grapes and organized the political pilgrimage to Sacramento. Due to the fact that the majority of workers on strike were Mexican, Mexico's political history influenced the UFW and Chavez because they, like their predecessors, turned to the Virgin of Guadalupe during the hardships of the

strikes. The UFW banner, similar to Hidalgo's, was constructed with the Virgin of Guadalupe on it and carried at the head of the march, leading the pilgrimage. Associating the image of the Guadalupe with the farm worker strikes implied a shared understanding of Mexican history and culture. This communal identity through the Guadalupe image not only united the group but also provided emotional strength to the UFW members. Like the Mexican people under Hidalgo's unification, the farm workers no longer felt alone in the fight for their working rights. In this example, the Guadalupe image acted as an icon of mutual identity of both cultural and religious beliefs. This duality was then explored in Chicano art, roughly between 1970 and 2000, when various Chicano artists recreated the representation and explored the imagery of their Mexican roots.

Figures 13 through 19 examined Chicano artistic reinterpretations of the Guadalupe. Chicano artists' connection to Mexican culture was expressed by deconstructing the image into various representations of the aspects of the Virgin of Guadalupe: defender of human rights (Figures 13 and 14), a woman (Figure 19), and a mother and grandmother (Figures 16 and 17). Yolanda López's self-portrait, as seen in Figure 15, was the most purposeful piece from her Guadalupe triptych because she created the Virgin of Guadalupe in her own image: in it, she is the Guadalupe and the Guadalupe is Yolanda. A similarly bold representation is also seen in Alma López's digital print, *Our Lady* (Figure 21).

*Our Lady* may have stirred controversy in Santa Fe, but it also created the opportunity to take a close look at the Virgin of Guadalupe's significance to two different groups of people, artists and the religious. For López, *Our Lady* was not intended as an insult to the image of the Guadalupe, but rather intended to portray her as a woman with a

female physique. In addition, with *Our Lady*, López intended for the Virgin to be interpreted as a strong and vigorous female figure with attitude. Then, during the 2006 Marcha Lésbica, the Guadalupe was once again utilized, this time as an advocate for the LGBT community in Mexico City. This pivotal point in the Guadalupe perception significantly pushed her into the role of a popular cultural icon creating a shared connection between Mexican nationalism and gay identity. The Virgin of Guadalupe has now become an essential emblem in protests, humanitarian activism, and quests for fairness no matter the cause. The popularity of the image has proven its versatility and remains exclusively the Mother Goddess of the people.



Figure 2: *Our Lady of Guadalupe*  
1531, Mexico City, Mexico



Figure 1: *Our Lady of Guadalupe*  
12<sup>th</sup> century, Extremadura, Spain



Figure 3: Figure of a mother goddess  
Pre-Columbian, post-classic 1250-1521  
Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City,  
Mexico



Figure 4: *Virgin of Guadalupe*  
Artist unknown, c. 1700  
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis,  
IN



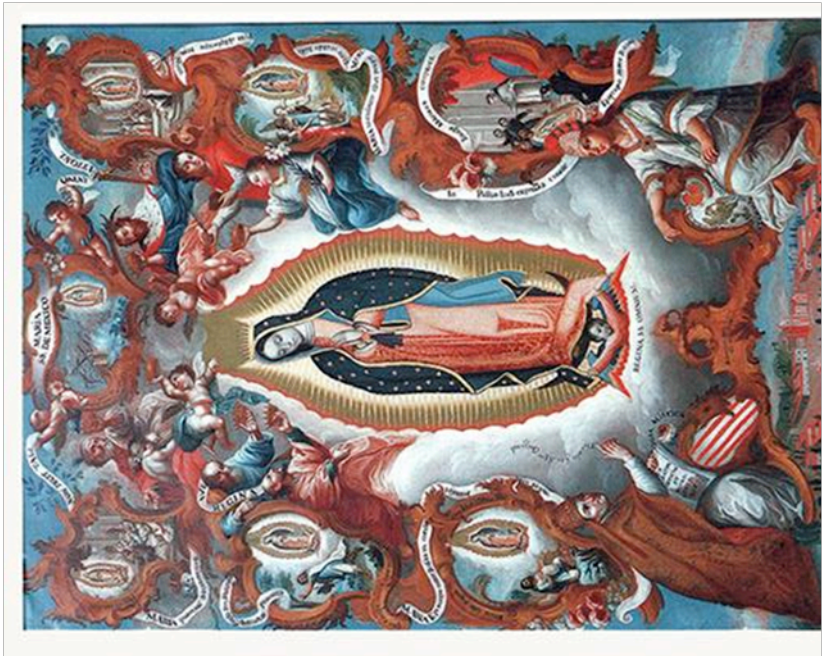


Figure 5: *Virgin of Guadalupe*  
Sebastian Salcedo, 1779  
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO



Figure 6: Banner of Hidalgo  
1810  
National History Museum, Mexico City,  
Mexico



Figure 7: *Hidalgo*  
Jesus de la Helguera, date unknown, whereabouts unknown



Figure 8: *Trilogia de la Independencia de Mexico*  
Alfredo Arreguin, 1988, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico



Figure 9: The Virgin of Guadalupe image leading the pilgrimage

Photo taken by Jon Lewis, 1966  
San Francisco State University of California Library  
San Francisco, CA



Figure 10: Woman holds a framed image of the Virgin of Guadalupe

Photo taken by Jesus Garza, 1966  
San Francisco State University of California Library  
San Francisco, CA



Figure 11: Police stand by as the marchers pass on their pilgrimage

Photo taken by Harvey Richards, 1966  
San Francisco State University of California Library  
San Francisco, CA

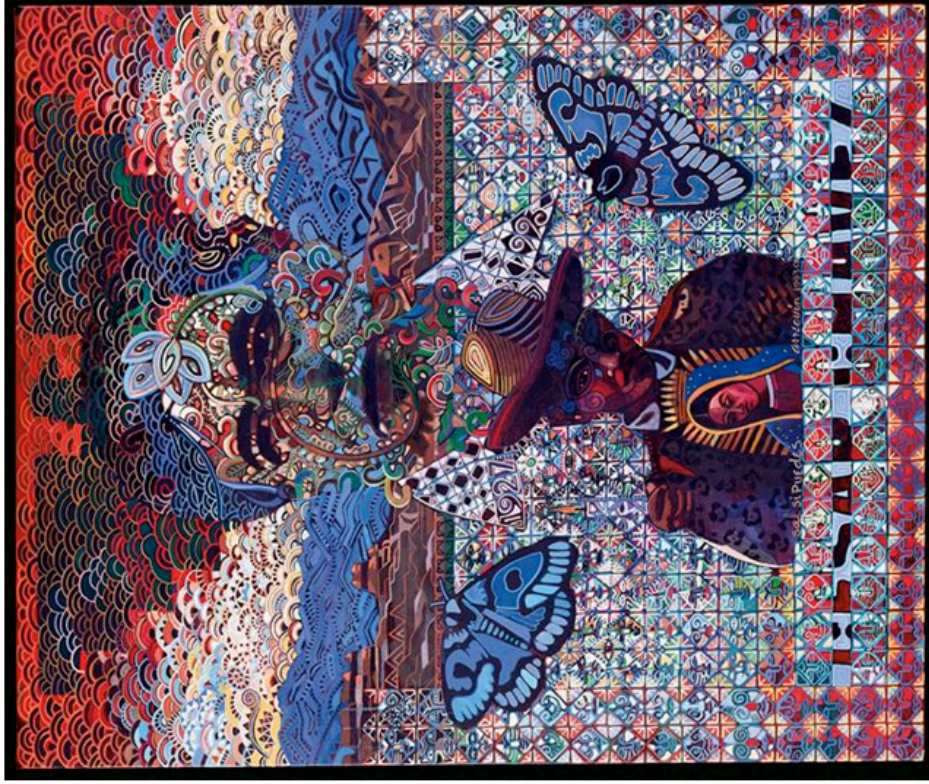


Figure 12: *Sal Si Puedes II*  
Alfredo Arreguin, 1993  
Sea Mar Community Health Center, Seattle, WA

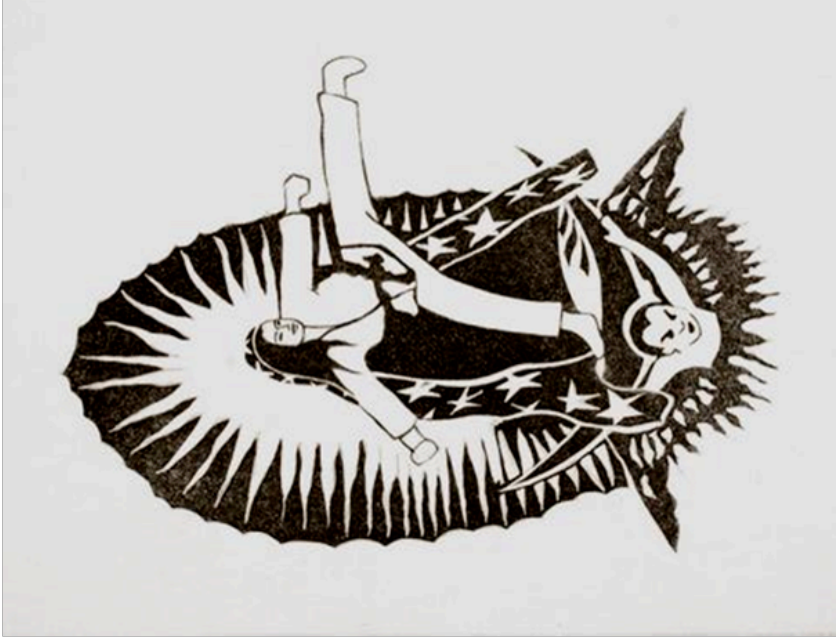


Figure 13: *The Virgin of Guadalupe Defending the*

*Rights of the Xicanos*

Ester Hernandez, 1975

Collection of the artist

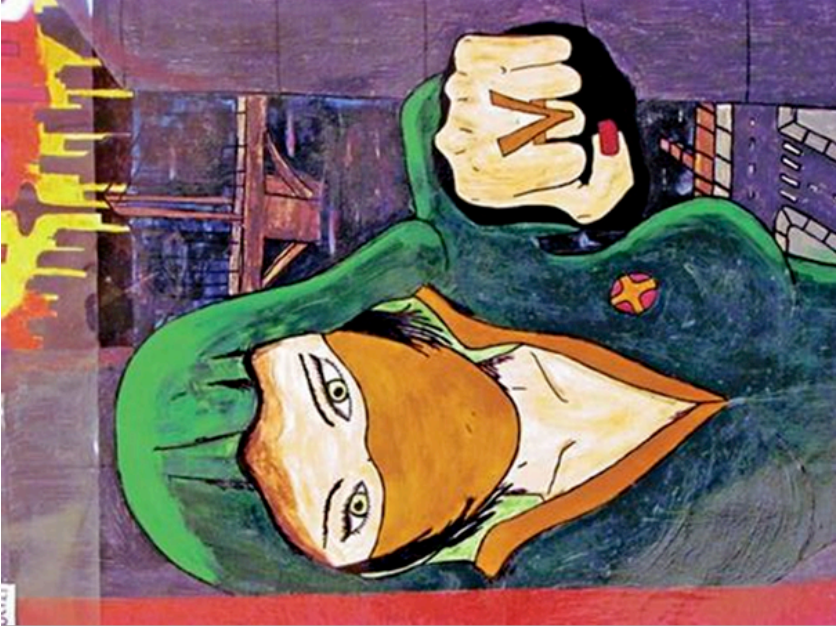


Figure 14 *Virgin Motha*

Pablo de la Cruz, 2011

*Virgen de Guadalupe Art Exhibition*, hosted at the Ysleta  
Independent School District's La Galeria de la Misión de Senecú,  
El Paso, TX



Figure 15: *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*  
Yolanda Lopez, 1978  
Collection of the artist



Figure 16: *Margaret F. Stewart: Our Lady of Guadalupe*  
Yolanda Lopez, 1978  
Collection of the artist



Figure 17: *Victoria F. Franco: Our Lady of Guadalupe*  
Yolanda Lopez, 1978  
Collection of the artist



Figure 18: *La Guadalupeana*  
Deliah Montoya, 1999  
Collection of the artist



Figure 19: *La Ofrenda*  
Ester Hernandez, 1988  
Oakland Museum of California,  
Oakland, CA

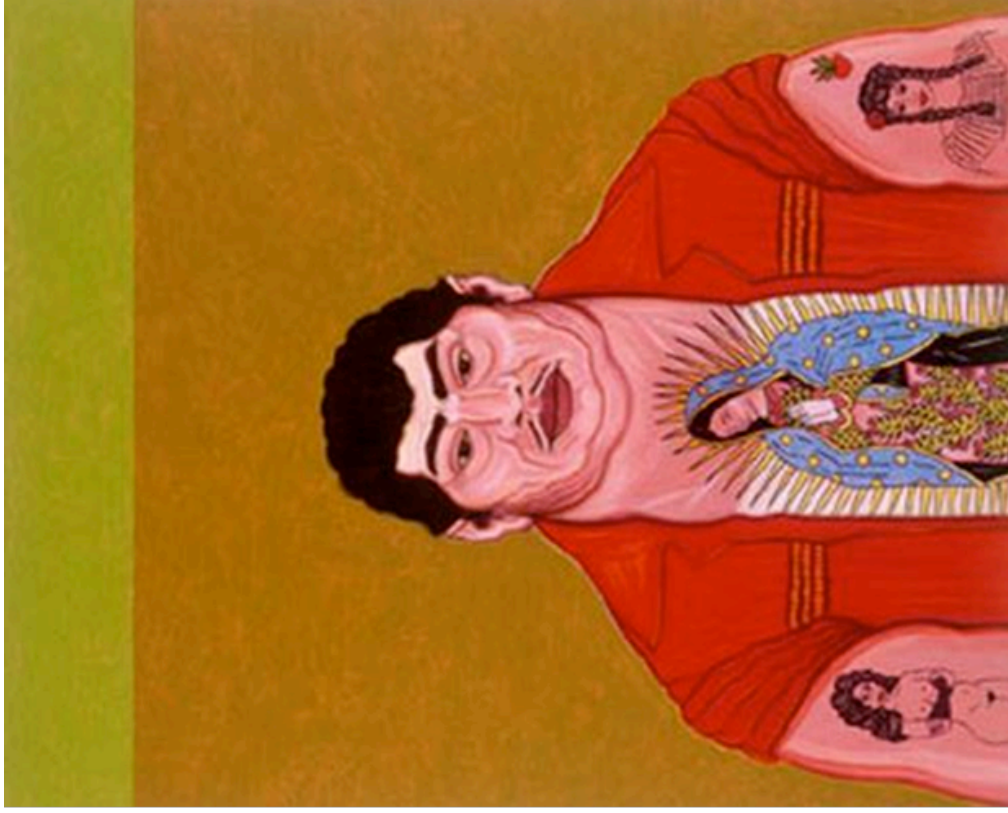


Figure 20: *El Hombre que le Gustan las Mujeres*  
(*The Man Who Loves Women*)  
Cesar Martinez, 2000  
Collection of Cheech Marin





Figure 21: *Our Lady*  
 Alma Lopez, 2000  
 Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe,  
 MX

FRONT COVER, PHOTOGRAPH BY BLAIR CLARK

**Cyber Arte**  
 Computer-inspired art combines elements traditionally defined as "folk" with state of the art computer technology to create a new aesthetic for the 21st Century.

**OPENING RECEPTION**  
 Sunday, February 25, 2001  
 2:00 - 4:00 pm  
 hosted by the Women's Board of the Museum of New Mexico  
**Panel Discussion**  
 2:00 - 3:00 pm  
 "Tradition Meets Technology"  
 with Curator Dr. Tey Marianna Nunn  
 and special guests in Museum Auditorium  
 By museum admission

**EXHIBITION DATES**  
 February 25, 2001 - October 28, 2001

ALMA LOPEZ "OUR LADY" LUPE & SIRENA SERIES  
 INSTALLED ON CARVING BY KATEY 1999

Figure 22: Cyber Arte advertisement flyer distributed by Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe

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