

## ABSTRACT

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  QUEER REMAINS OF THE CHICANO ART  
  MOVEMENT, LOS ANGELES, 1969-2009.

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Directed By:                         Associate Professor Mary Corbin Sies,  
  American Studies

This dissertation proposes an interdisciplinary queer archive methodology I term “archival body/archival space,” which recovers, interprets, and assesses the alternative archives and preservation practices of homosexual men in the Chicano Art Movement, the cultural arm of the Mexican American civil rights struggle in the U.S. Without access to systemic modes of preservation, these men generated other archival practices to resist their erasure, omission, and obscurity. The study conducts a series of archive excavations mining “archival bodies” of homosexual artists from buried and unseen “archival spaces,” such as: domestic interiors, home furnishings, barrio neighborhoods, and museum installations. This allows us to reconstruct the artist archive and, thus, challenge how we see, know, and comprehend “Chicano art” as an aesthetic and cultural category. As such, I evidence the critical role of sexual difference within this visual vocabulary and illuminate networks of homosexual

Chicano artists taking place in gay bars, alternative art spaces, salons, and barrios throughout East Los Angeles.

My queer archive study model consists of five interpretative strategies: sexual agency of Chicano art, queer archival afterlife, containers of desire, archival chiaroscuro, and archive elicitation. I posit that by speaking through these artifact formations, the “archival body” performs the allegorical bones and flesh of the artist, an artifactual surrogacy articulated through things. My methodological innovation has direct bearing on how sexual difference shapes the material record and the places from which these “queer remains” are kept, sheltered, and displayed. These heritage purveyors questioned what constitutes an archive and a record, challenging the biased assumption that sexuality was insignificant to the Chicano Art Movement and leaving no material trace.

The structure of my dissertation presents five archive recovery projects, including: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, Joey Terrill, Mundo Meza, Teddy Sandoval, and VIVA: Lesbian and Gay Latino Artists of Los Angeles. The restoration of these artists also reveals the profound symbiosis between this circle of artists, Chicano avant-gardism, and the burgeoning gay and lesbian liberation movement in Los Angeles. My findings rupture the persistent heterosexual vision of this period and reveals a parallel visual lineage, one which dared to picture sexual difference in the epicenter of Chicano art production.

ARCHIVAL BODY/ARCHIVAL SPACE: QUEER REMAINS OF THE  
CHICANO ART MOVEMENT, LOS ANGELES, 1969-2009.

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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Advisory Committee:

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Associate Professor Jennifer Gonzalez

Associate Professor Angel David Nieves

Professor Martha Nell Smith

Associate Professor Psyche Williams-Forsen

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## Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents Robert and Debbie Hernandez  
for their unwavering faith and love.

In memory of Carlos Ibanez y Bueno (1941-2001),  
Mundo Meza (1955-1985) and Teddy Sandoval (1949-1995).

## Acknowledgements

Earning a Ph.D. was a goal I had never imagined for myself. Growing up in a small trailer park in Boulder, Colorado my perception of the world was bound to the walk to Crest View Elementary, Saturday morning visits to Grandma's house, and the endless span of park stretching far behind our home. My journey here was an unusual one spurred by curious escapes into television, creative writing, and my father's extensive VHS library--each tape meticulously registered, inventoried, and indeed, archived in a small notebook kept on the living room coffee table. His collection was a surprising but resonating influence, one of the first image archives I came in contact with.

The other was the collection of stories shared between the women in my family sitting around grandma's dining room. Chisme, as I would come to understand it later, was the convoy to the Chicano family's historical records. It was here that photographs would manifest from a closet storage box. The same box that would surface the night grandma died. Her passing on New Year's Eve of 2003 sent us reeling from Boulder Community Hospital. Our return to her empty house would be the last time we would talk through her things. This deeply emotional ritual sifting through her personal affects was a powerful and indescribable moment for me. It was a connection that would intensify as her private belongings were adopted between family members and her long-time home was sold to a California real estate developer.

Today, the plum tree orchard I remember so fondly is no more and the family garden is a paved parking lot. I grieve this loss and with it, my connection to

Boulder--a place where the majestic university on the hill was the only school I ever wanted to attend as well as the setting for grandma's employment. For 35 years she cleaned school classrooms, lab buildings, and the prized alumni house. Before she died, she attended my graduation and rightfully claimed a seat in the auditorium as my guest. I was her first grandson to graduate Magna Cum Laude with dual degrees from CU-Boulder. She smiled and called me her "John Boy." As I cross this final threshold in my graduate studies, I can't help but think of her, her laughter after picking up my bulging backpack of books, and her enthusiasm over every school achievement.

My path to Ph.D. competition may not have happened without the fortuitous meeting and support of key mentors, scholars, and friends that went beyond the call of duty and directed me along this life course. This began in 2003 with my enrollment in the Critical Studies M.A. Program in the Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media at UCLA. Key seminars with Professors John Caldwell, Kathleen McHugh, Chon Noriega, Rafael Perez-Torres, and the late Lisa Kernan and Teshome Gabriel were pivotal by introducing me to cultural criticism, media industries, and technologies. Moreover, my instantaneous bond with a cohort of film and television scholars including Elena Powell Beecher, Crystal Lemaire Bailey, Hye Jean Chung, Priscilla Espinoza Kaiserman, Burcu Melekolgu, Colin Gunkel, Laurel Westrup, and Maria Munoz Chacon made the intense conditions of graduate school less daunting and worthwhile.

From the moment I stepped foot on campus, Dr. Chon A. Noriega and his staff at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center formed an immediate intellectual

outlet. Chon's initiative, vision, and mentorship provided countless opportunities including an encounter with a man named "Cyclona" in 2004. Little did I realize that this initial meeting would radically alter my initial research aspirations and introduce me to a profound set of questions and concerns intensifying my search for the names of artists scattered in Legorreta's private collection. Names that would later have direct bearing on how Chicano art history is written, interpreted, and taught. True to his namesake, Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta opened Pandora's Box spurring new questions and lines of investigation and for that, I am forever grateful.

To accomplish this ambitious research agenda, I needed a new set of interdisciplinary skills. Fortunately, my interests in archive theory, Latino cultural heritage, visual culture, and art history found a home in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park and under the tutelage, mentorship, and rigor of Dr. Mary Corbin Sies. It is no coincidence that much of my training was cultivated under her watch and leadership. In fact, many of this dissertation's nascent ideas were cultivated in Mary's seminars on museum research, cultural landscape studies, and American studies theory and method, where a cohort of young scholars like Gina Callahan, Kirsten Crase, Patrick Grzanka, Doug Ishii, Bettina Judd, Tiffany King, Beck Krefting, Ana M. Perez, Maria Vargas, and Amelia Wong, shaped the contours of my work. Indeed, Mary is an invaluable asset to Maryland providing an unprecedented level of student mentoring, commitment, and engagement unmatched by any other American Studies faculty in the U.S.

Additionally, my supplementary studies in the areas of race, American art, and museum culture led me to the Department of Art History. In particular, seminars with



Dr. Renee Ater created a welcoming environment for a visual culture studies provocateur opening new lines of aesthetic and cultural inquiry, always with her encouraging words that Chicano art does have a place in the American art classroom. Her courses fueled my bond with a cluster of art history graduate students. Sybil Gohari, Eowyn Henry, Jennifer Quick, Megan Rook-Koepsel, Jonathan Walz, and the fabulous Breanne Robertson continued to ask me the hard questions and acknowledged me as one of their own.

From the moment I arrived at College Park much of my time outside the seminar room was dedicated to the development, advocacy, and planning of the U.S. Latina/o Studies Program (USLT), the first in the Mid-Atlantic region. From my involvement in the initial program proposal to Provost William Destler in 2006 to my role as the program coordinator in our pilot year (2007-08) and in the American Studies department (2009-10), I attained a rare glimpse into program building and curricular design. I was afforded the unusual opportunity to teach the first Latina/o Studies courses in American Studies including a class on Latino art and Museum Studies, and a senior capstone course on Latino cultural landscapes. Several undergraduates were instrumental in not only the success of my courses but in the institutionalization of the USLT program. Kristin Bergery, Pamela Cervera, Colleen Esper, Eddie Gamero, Arelis Hernandez, Janine Hernandez-Diaz, Evelyn Lopez, and Manny Ruiz believed in the Latina/o experience as an inextricable part of the American story. You stir my passion for social justice and remind me why Latina/o Studies matters.

In addition several graduate students and faculty honored my calls for “Latina/o Studies Working Group” meetings and even helped organize the groundbreaking “Disrupting Latinidad” Latino studies conference in 2006 and “Semana de la Latina” in 2010. Fernando Benavidez, Leandro Benmurgi, Maritza Gonzalez, Paula Halperin, Jessica M. Johnson, Ana M. Perez, Cristina Risco, and Tina Zarpour were stalwarts creating a graduate community for emergent U.S. Latina/o studies scholarship. As I close this chapter in my life, I hand the reigns off to my Chicana feminist colleagues, Ana M. Perez and Maria Vargas, with the belief that USLT must continue to grow and realize its potential within American studies and the University of Maryland.

A fortuitous conversation with Angel David Nieves led to my first seminar in Museum Scholarship co-taught by curators at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. This transformative seminar unleashed a hidden passion for not only archival and art-historical exhibition research but expanded my view on curatorial method, exhibition design, and display. This course facilitated my enrollment into the University of Maryland’s Certificate Program in Museum Scholarship and Material Culture Studies as well as my participation in the Smithsonian Latino Museum Studies Program in the summer of 2006. LMSP’s emphasis on the representation, interpretation, and preservation of U.S. Latina/o cultural heritage led me down an unexpected course of professional aspirations.

Much of this would not have been possible without the unwavering friendship, confidence, and support of Joanne Flores, who risked hiring a museum studies novice to coordinate LMSP in 2007 and 2008. Due to her trust in my vision, the

Smithsonian Latino Center became a permanent second family. Every summer I was given the opportunity to indulge my thirst for Latina/o contemporary art, curatorial politics, and new networks of renowned arts leaders, emergent young scholars, and Latino heritage advocates. My gratitude cannot be stressed enough to Joanne as well as Olivia Cadaval, Gil Cardenas, Eduardo Diaz, Olga Herrera, Liza Kirwin, E. Carmen Ramos, Andy Rebatta, Dan Sheehy, Ranald Woodaman, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generosity and compassion from my committee members, Mary Corbin Sies, Psyche Williams-Forson, and Angel David Nieves. My Dean's Representative, Martha Nell Smith, was a miracle and came to my rescue taking a chance on my project even in its latent phase. Thank you. A chance meeting at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2008 with Jennifer Gonzalez revealed our mutual intellectual curiosities and common interests. To my shock and surprise, Jennifer accepted my invitation to serve on the committee and even agreed to write more letters of recommendation than she needed to. Jennifer frequently went beyond the call of duty and I am greatly honored.

I directly benefited from formal and informal grants and fellowships. Initially, a Ford Foundation Predoctoral Diversity Fellowship (2005-2008) supported me during a battery of doctoral comprehensive exams. In addition, support from the Cosmos Club Foundation in Washington, D.C. and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center helped me complete fieldwork on Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta, Joey Terrill, Mundo Meza, and the VIVA art organization. Also, the "Tom and Elena Beecher Family Fellowship Fund" was pivotal to my research where couch vacancies,

airport rides, and blueberry sliders, were all the accommodations needed to complete the arduous and exhausting recovery project taking me from art studios in Santa Monica to art collections in Montebello.

Lastly, the Cesar E. Chavez Dissertation Writing Fellowship at Dartmouth College was instrumental to my completion of the project. The gift of time, resources, and scholar-mentorship is an opportunity afforded to few and I am forever grateful to the Latin American, Latino & Caribbean Studies Program for hosting me. In particular, Rebecca Biron, Raul Bueno, Mary Coffey, Reena Goldthree, Cristina Gomez, Lourdes Gutierrez-Najera, Jean Kim, Sheila Laplante, Doug Moody, Sylvia Spitta, and the illuminating Israel Reyes, saw meaning in my work even when I didn't and reminded me to see my ideas through. As well, the 2010 Thurgood Marshall Fellow, Uju Anya, was a ray of sunshine even in the bleakness of the Hanover winter. I will miss looking out my window and seeing her office light burning in the early hours of the morning and knowing that someone else out there was feeling the same medley of fear, possibility, and brilliance.

Of course, I would be remiss not to recognize the role of Dr. Angel David Nieves in my life. It was a fateful encounter in the Ethnic studies department copy room in 2001 where Evelyn Hu-Dehart encouraged me to meet the new assistant professor. A Black women's historian out of Cornell University, Dr. Nieves was unlike any scholar I had ever encountered at CU-Boulder. It was a fortuitous opportunity to reunite with Dr. Nieves (and Dick and Mitzy), this time as a doctoral student at UMD and corroborate with his ambitious set of ideas making my days in the School of Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation longer and thoroughly

more enriching. His involvement in the Consortium for Race, Gender and Ethnicity, the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, and the USLT program are cornerstones of his career at Maryland accomplishing more in five years than most in a lifetime. Suffice it to say, I may not have thrived at UMD without his reassuring words, sarcasm, and contagious cackle. If anything, I hope to be half the activist-scholar he is today.

Lastly, I want to thank my parents, Robert and Debbie, and my little brother Lonnie, for their innumerable sacrifices to get me here. From my father's regular airport runs to my mom's daily phone calls, they try to keep me as close to home as possible. Whether I'm traveling back to Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Hanover, or Austin, I find home cooked treats in my bag or surprise keepsakes in my suitcase and I know they are not far away. No matter how dark, lonely, and isolating this process may have been, I knew that a candle was lit for me on Mom's altar and "eye of the tiger" was evoked in my Dad's exhaustive repertoire of movie metaphors. And regardless of what benchmark I may have just endured, when I am home in the cradle of my mom's arms or my Dad's embrace, I am transported to that little trailer in Boulder where I imagined a life beyond the mountains and it is here that I am reminded where I came from and where I hope to go.

## Disclaimer

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Buried and Unseen: The Queer Afterlife of Chicano Art*

In *Your Denim Shirt* (2001) San Francisco-based Chicano<sup>1</sup> filmmaker Samuel Rodriguez presents an experimental video memorial. His filmic poem threads the overlapping voices of two young Chicano men; one has died from AIDS related complications and his lover collects, stores, and cares for his things left behind. Shot from the subjective vision of the young narrator, we are left to hear his lyrical voice rehearsing “your denim shirt” between poetic verses and the objects archiving his loss. The shallow and somber interior space of his apartment constructs a static display of things. The camera glides through the domestic corridors following the protagonist as he carefully attends to each remain of his boyfriend like a curator ordering an archive of lost love. The objects are visually framed like living still-life paintings reanimated in the young man’s hands. Music, memories, and voices

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<sup>1</sup> “Chicano” is a cultural, social, and political identity used primarily by people of Mexican descent having a connection to the Southwestern region of the United States, but those from other U.S. localities also use it as well. While the term’s meaning has changed over time and varies regionally, it most often refers to a person who lives in the United States with an anti-assimilationist attitude, sense of Mexican and/or Mexican American ethnic identity, and a political consciousness and affiliation with the Chicano civil rights movement. It is considered a term of ethnic pride, though not all Americans of Mexican descent self-identify as such. For more, see George Sanchez. *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo De Leon, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996). “Latino” is a broader umbrella term for people of Latin American descent in the United States. I recognize that this is fraught and potentially homogenizing. As a political subjectivity, “Latino” stands to collapse distinct ethnic, cultural, and national complexities. Where possible, I employ this term strategically as a stand-in for a political positionality. I strive to be specific in my use of the term careful not to misuse or over reach its precise meaning. For more on the historical and political context of “Latino” see, David G. Gutierrez, Ed. *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States Since 1960*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), and Suzanne Oboler. *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)presentation in the United States*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

permeate the object's surface entering the material world with homoerotic pleasures from his past.

In one scene, we view the protagonist opening the bedroom closet. He retrieves a felt fedora and places it on his head. The hat is no longer an empty article of clothing but instead, a conduit to the body. After we recognize it adorning his boyfriend's head in a photograph of the couple displayed on the candlelit window frame, we are drawn to its mnemonic power. The sound of "suavecito" by Chicano rock band Malo reverberates into the room and echoes of the couple's first dance possess him. Smelling the fedora and caressing its flawless brim, we have to wonder if the aural power of the object is the manifestation of the subject's memory or the voice of the artifact itself.

In a key sequence typifying the film's title, the young man irons his lover's denim shirt (see Figure 1.1). Pressing the creases lovingly, the iron glides across the fabric sleeves. Rodriguez transports us to an earlier time juxtaposing the "fine blue threads" with the nude slope of his lover's bare back. From the narrator's verse we learn that his boyfriend wore the denim shirt the first time they kissed. The camera lingers over the denim shirt as it is carefully returned to its closet dwelling. As the film closes, the narrator begins discarding the pill bottles, hats, and clothing, ridding his home of the looming specter of AIDS. In a close-up shot, his hands lower closing the closet doors. His touch prompts another flashback of his lover's nude body. Visually correlating the surface of the doors with the skin of his lover's body, Rodriguez prompts us to ponder the closet itself not as a technology to display consumption and value but an environment which these remains and AIDS inhabit.



In short, *Your Denim Shirt* presents the dark recesses of the closet as an aperture where we can fathom the queer and racialized possibilities of the archive, one where we can discern a different type of body constituted through gay male custodianship, critical curatorial practices, and the spatial arrangement of things.<sup>2</sup>

Screened at The Frameline San Francisco International Gay and Lesbian film festival in 2001, Rodriguez's first eight-minute video was shot while an undergraduate at the University of California-Berkeley. The independent short shares a striking resemblance to director Ang Lee's Oscar award-winning *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). This feature film explores a 20-year tortured love affair between ranchman Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and rodeo rider Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) set against the pastoral landscape of Brokeback Mountain, Wyoming. The story follows the lives of the young men as they fight to resist their indescribable desires for each other amid the pressures of marriage, children, and rural masculinity. Brief postcard messages passing between Texas and Wyoming cryptically conceal a relationship encoded by the permissible leisure activities of homosocial fraternity: fishing, hunting, swimming, and camping. Despite Jack's innumerable attempts to

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<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, I employ the use of the terms, "gay," "queer," and "homosexual" concisely always striving for the appropriate historical, cultural, and political contexts. Whereas, I take up the issue of "gay" and "homosexual" more directly later in this chapter, allow me to add that "queer" is an ambiguous term, which, by definition critically attempts to blur, vex, and trouble the very process of categorization and classification. For my purpose, the use of queer grasps at the strange, defiant, and non-compliant possibilities of the term. As an attitude, "queer" frustrates knowable subjectivities and asks us to think critically about the sexual and gender systems assimilable in mainstream political discourse. It is important to consider a term like the "queer archive" is inherently contradictory both refusing definition in an institution-sanctioned heritage system that is predicated on order, systematizing, and cataloguing. My aim is to move closer to the strange possibilities of archives, documents, and objects that refuse easy prescriptions and defy familiar identity-based assignments within canonical fields like "gay and lesbian" art history, visual culture, and material culture. For more see, Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. (New York: New York University Press, 2005), and Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999).

escape a social system of repression and hiding with Ennis (he suggests fleeing to Mexico at one point), Ennis's rebuff ultimately dooms the love affair. A final postcard returned to sender stamped "deceased" stirs Ennis's solemn exterior and he pieces together the circumstances surrounding Jack's death. Through careful juxtaposition of the actual details of his passing, perhaps suggesting Ennis's earlier premonitions and warnings, we, too, listen on a phone call to Jack's wife Lureen (Anne Hathaway) and discover he was murdered by a group of men.

In a pivotal scene that recalls *Your Denim Shirt*, Jack's mother invites Ennis to see her son's bedroom kept in perfect repose. Like entering the static conditions of a house museum, Ennis uncovers Jack's denim shirt concealed in a dark shallow compartment at the edge of the closet wall. Stained with Jack's blood after their first fight, he clutches the denim shirt, smelling, and cradling the cloth as though channeling the corporeality of his dead lover (see Figure 1.2). In the final scene, Ennis encloses himself in his trailer and opens his closet revealing the shirt hanging on the back of the door and pinned next to a postcard of Brokeback Mountain. Tears fill his eyes and like Rodriguez's protagonist, the shirt touches its custodian and parlays sensual feelings, intensive stimuli, and erotic memory (see Figure 1.3). In both films, the denim shirt is more than a keepsake, it is an agent in the diegetic space. An archival record that is neither explicitly "gay" nor overtly "homoerotic" in a gay political context, it is neither a souvenir of a gay pride march nor a keepsake from an AIDS fundraiser. This ambiguity necessitates another interpretative strategy to explain what bearing this correlation of homosexuality, the body, and archive has on ordinary material culture.

Though both films are fictitious narratives (Rodriguez has shared that his film shares some autobiographical detail), I am struck by the position of the closet itself not as the demarcation of the room's perimeter or as a "threshold" of order/disorder (feminist geographers and queer space scholars have already destabilized this shaky coupling) but as an archeological ground for these men's intimate attachment to objects.<sup>3</sup> After all, moments before Ennis reveals this closet installation, his 19-year-old daughter, Alma, Jr., chastises him for not having more furniture. "If you don't got nothin', then you don't need nothing,"<sup>4</sup> he shrugs. However, his desire concealed in the closet cavity betrays his presumed indifference to his bucolic domestic interior. The pivotal place of the closet in both films suggests that it is not a vacuous confine but instead a crucial corridor into gay male depositing and recordkeeping. This archaeological possibility of the home-site is an overlooked though significant contour for those objects left behind which enunciate queer pasts, same-sex desires, and cultural memories. While both *Your Denim Shirt* and *Brokeback Mountain* are perhaps surprising choices for my initial analysis as they are films neither explicitly "by, for, [or] about"<sup>5</sup> the Chicano Art Movement in Los Angeles—though the border narrative subtext in *Brokeback* is undeniable—they emphasize the ways in which the bodies of their departed male lovers remain in a cogent orchestration of things, spaces, containers, and arrangements. *Your Denim*

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<sup>3</sup> For an insightful reading of the queer spatial politics of the closet and domestic architecture see Henry Urbach. "Closets, Clothes, disClosure." *Assemblage*. 30 (August 1996), 62-73.

<sup>4</sup> Annie Proulx, Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana. *Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay*. (New York: Scribner, 2005), 125.

<sup>5</sup> I am borrowing on Rosa Linda Fregoso's summation of criteria that satisfies film texts "Chicano" designation. This was initially put forth by Chon Noriega's examination of markers that sufficiently delineate what becomes Chicano cultural text. See Rosa Linda Fregoso. *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xvii, and Chon Noriega, Ed. *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xix.

*Shirt* and *Brokeback Mountain* demonstrate efforts to preserve through alternative archive configurations in the frame of the house interior. These fragments capture the thrust of my dissertation and the recovery project at the core of my investigation.

“Archival Body/Archival Space: Queer Remains of the Chicano Art Movement in Los Angeles” examines the “queer afterlife of Chicano art” through an interdisciplinary queer archival methodology. By privileging the agency of these records as an extension of the individual, community, and social archival body, I conduct a series of ambitious excavations recovering the “queer remains” of homosexual Chicano artists from the buried and unseen corners of alternative repositories, such as: house furnishings, domestic interiors, barrio neighborhoods, and museum installations. Beyond the threshold of institutional repositories and systemic modes of preservation, these formations encourage us to interpret how sexuality remains in the material record, reconstruct the “archival body” from dispersed collections, and recover emergent visual articulations of sexual difference and same-sex desire in the Chicano Art Movement. Fundamentally, my investigation asks: How has this deluge of silence, secrecy, neglect and stigma constituted alternative modes of archiving for homosexual Chicano artist communities? How have these omitted artists remained in these visual and material expressions? What ideological differences and conditions contributed to their omission, recovery, and rescue? And, what can these transgressive archival forms tell us about the place of homosexuality in the Chicano Art Movement in Los Angeles over the last thirty years?

I must stress that it is quite remarkable that this very visual and material culture survived – even the scant and esoteric traces – especially in lieu of the

conservative collecting policies in traditional repositories, the consequences of art censorship in mainstream cultural institutions, and of course, the devastating effect of AIDS on art communities and private collections. As I will discuss further, the intersection of Chicano art, sexuality, and AIDS sets the stage for the “archival body’s” afterlife in the places of its eventual interment, protection, and preservation.

Though these archives are by no means comprehensive of the vast impact of AIDS on Chicano and Latino artists in other artistic fields like dance, music, theatre, and literature, the men’s archives that I have recovered for my study emphasize two things. Each of my excavations exposes a larger homosexual current in the Chicano Art Movement, a network of image-makers proposing other visual interrogations of racialized desire, sexual difference, and masculinity in 1960s and 1970s Los Angeles. It is important to acknowledge what AIDS has meant for the imagery that constitutes Chicano artistic expression in art history, museum collections, and exhibitions. The devastation of AIDS on Chicano art communities also damaged emergent lines of artistic investigation among early to mid-career artists. As a result, the records I present here represent the last strands of their image-making providing us with a more nuanced and complicated picture of same-sex desire and variant gender expression intrinsic to the Chicano Art Movement.

Second, these artists’ preservation in material things brings our attention to the archival form itself. It underscores how the deleterious ends of AIDS underlines these alternative archival practices, modes of commemoration, and sites of display. The interrelationship between archival content and, in particular, form must be spoken in tandem, further differentiating my approach from previous studies reliant

on the aesthetic appeal of the art-historical object without the greater social and anthropological outcomes of archive recovery.

### *The Chicano Art Movement*

Before we proceed, allow me to add a few words about the Chicano Art Movement. As the cultural arm of the Chicano civil rights struggle, it grew from the convergence of political mobilizations and demonstrations in barrio neighborhoods throughout the Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and Midwest in 1960s and 1970s. These artists drew upon Mexican cultural antecedents such as muralism, poster art, painting, and political graphics to contest agrarian labor abuse in the produce fields of California, the disproportionate Chicano presence in the Vietnam War draft, educational disparities in barrio high schools, and increasing poverty and economic decline.<sup>6</sup> Though these artists did not develop an explicitly formal aesthetic in something reminiscent of a school of art, they did fashion resistant images that pictured an anti-assimilationist sensibility conveyed by a cadre of iconographic, exhibitionary, and archival practices. The artists' revisionist lenses deconstructed American history and identity through the reclamation of Pre-Columbian mythic symbols, revolutionary heroes, religious icons, and the perpetuation of masculine and familial ideals.<sup>7</sup> As a result, several art organizations, art collectives, cultural centers,

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<sup>6</sup> As I discuss more fully in Chapter 3, the East Los Angeles high school "Blow Outs" or walk outs were a series of staged actions by mostly Chicano high school teens protesting inequitable treatment, racist aggression, and anti-Mexican attitudes in curriculum, administrative policy, and parent-teacher relations. The resulting arrest of teacher Sal Castro on conspiracy charges inflamed Chicano student militancy launching the contemporary Chicano civil rights struggle. For more on these protests, see Victoria-Maria MacDonald. *Latino Education in the United States: A Narrated History From 1513-2000*. (New York: Palgrave-MacMillian, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For a powerful investigation of the cultural discourse surrounding "la familia" in Chicano art, music, poetry, and literature, see Richard T. Rodriguez. *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

and ethnic specific galleries, museums, libraries, and archives surfaced in the barrios at this time.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Los Angeles emerged as the epicenter for this art production. On the east side, a multigenerational cohort of artists defined Chicano cultural politics through two distinct artistic strategies: representational figuration and avant-garde conceptualism. The former was committed to the art object defining Chicano art through painterly modes of self-expression and political identity. Through socially engaged iconography and protest aesthetics, muralism, poster art, and paintings constituted “Chicano art” which was also favored by public art museums. The latter abandoned the precious art object and fashioned theoretical, temporary, and guerrilla strategies in Chicano artistic expression. Foregoing the paintbrush or mural scaffolding, these visual provocateurs preferred a range of contemporary art practices—street happenings, performance art interventions, conceptualism, photo-collage, video art, installation, assemblage, and mail art—and subverted passive romanticism of the barrio with shock, spectacle, theatricality, and iconoclastic defiance. These artists would turn to Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, Pop Art, Hollywood celebrity, and American popular culture. Much like their American and European avant-garde forbearers, Chicano conceptualists also developed art collectives, performance collaborations, and alternative art spaces, such as: ASCO (Spanish for nausea) in 1972-87, Cyclona-Mundo-Gronk street happenings in 1969-74, and the founding of L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions in 1978. These competing modes of representation and artistic expression are important dimensions of the Chicano Art Movement in East Los Angeles occurring in tandem, and providing

some bearing on how Chicano art was constituted, contested, and investigated from within.

Nevertheless, the historical and cultural treatment of the Chicano Art Movement in scholarly discourse perpetuates a sexual myopia. Homosexuality has long remained an area inconsequentially evaluated, censored, or worse yet, ignored under the presumption that sexuality is an indeterminable and incomprehensible expression for archival, visual, or material culture study. As a consequence, the popular attitude that the art world was a hospitable place for all homosexuals must be deconstructed for its racist and heteronormative complacency. After all, art historian Jonathan D. Katz reminds us “the art world wasn’t nearly as exceptional in its widespread tolerance of sexual difference as it may appear from our contemporary vantage point.”<sup>8</sup> Such predominating views un-place the “gay Chicano” artist in a history of American art and perpetually locate this cultural worker as an anomaly or recent invention. The results of my investigation will make such a position impossible.

Moreover, my study is not interested in providing veritable proof of “gay Chicano art” as a disciplined aesthetic category or a separate register of the Chicano art movement. From the outset, I do not ask, “Why are there no great gay Chicano artists?”<sup>9</sup> As we will see, the ways in which these men negotiated Chicano homosexualities pictorially is complicated, inconsistent, and ambiguous. After all,

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Katz, “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” In *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, eds. Jonathan Katz and David Ward (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 15.

<sup>9</sup> This profound question fueled the feminist critique of art history. It was first asked by feminist scholar Linda Nochlin. See Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” In *Women, Art, and Power*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988) 145-178.



the manifestation of Chicano and homosexual image-making was visually nascent and crystallizing through the Chicano political culture and the gay and lesbian liberation struggle in Los Angeles. This had particular implications for a generation of Chicano men who had not yet embraced a cohesive and legible “gay identity” in the barrios of the city. This sexual subjectivity was something unrecognizable. Within a Foucauldian sense, it was institutionally disciplined and inscribed onto these barrio subjects.

Throughout this study, I use “homosexual” as a polysemic social location at play in this historical, political, and geographic moment.<sup>10</sup> As many of the artists in this study demonstrate, there were sexual expressions for Chicanos beyond the rigid prescription of “gay male identity” as a concretized political signifier. In fact, many were cautious of this restrictive signifying model of symbols and fashion codes that defined a Chicano and gay male hypermasculine exteriority. It is perhaps no surprise that several artists shared a defiant attitude that rang true among other heterosexual East Los Angeles avant-gardists and contemporary artists in L.A. Expressing a

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<sup>10</sup>I employ “homosexual” to capture complicated expressions of same-sex desires, behaviors, and practices that surpass “gay male identity” as a stable and knowable subject. This is especially true in East Los Angeles where such variable factors as Mexican masculinity, income, geography, language, immigration status, gang culture, Cholo style, and visual imagery subverted the ways gay maleness cohered to hegemonic discourses of whiteness, affluence, and identity. In the historical and spatial context of 1960s and 1970s East Los Angeles, “gay Chicano identity” was an unfulfilled and incomplete subject for homosexual men in the barrio. My position is one shared by other queer scholars of color. For instance, in *Black Queer Studies* editors E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson discuss the limitations and failures of “queer” to articulate “the racial, historical, and cultural specificity attached to the marker ‘black.’” (7) This is what Johnson later in his volume grasps as “quare studies.” Based on his grandmother’s southern vernacular, he reveals that quare “offers a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledges.” (127) In keeping with his assessment, I am careful not to conflate homosexual Chicano experiences and everyday knowledges within a contemporary gay male cultural context or historical moment. For more see E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Anderson, Eds. *Black Queer Studies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), and in particular, E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, Or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother,” In *Black Queer Studies*. Eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Anderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 127.

reciprocal willingness to subvert and offend through the rupture of Chicano visual imagery, cultural nationalism, and political identity, many homosexual artists were not only influential but also foundational to a growing Chicano conceptualist language and garish iconoclastic performance art that defined the 1960s and 1970s.

Though tempting as it may be, this dissertation does not dwell on Chicano artists' homosexuality for the sake of exposing sexual behaviors or indiscretions. Art historian Gavin Butt argues for the "role played by gossip in keeping the (presumed) homosexual identity of artists from this period in *discursive play*" as a corrective to the missing archive.<sup>11</sup> His methodological aim is daring but misguided. For the Chicanos central to my study, we cannot simply lament the "paucity of sexual evidence"<sup>12</sup> of established art world figures like Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, or Andy Warhol when they are nonetheless treasured in the pantheon of the New York art world. Chicano art as a secondary art market struggles for legitimacy and brokers through complex channels of American, Latin American, and Folk Art in art museums, galleries, and survey textbooks.<sup>13</sup> A topic more directly confronted in Chapter 2, records of same-sex sexuality in Chicano art are obscure, neglected, or omitted despite their historical and cultural significance to the period. By examining the "queer afterlife of Chicano art" and unfettering the "archival body," I want to understand queer meanings of these objects through the conditions catalyzing their

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<sup>11</sup> Gavin Butt. *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Here it is worth noting that in a study conducted by Rita Gonzalez entitled, "An Undocumented History: A Survey of Index Citations for Latina and Latino Artists," six Western art history textbooks used in college undergraduate surveys produced a meager seven citations for Latina/o artists. One book, Lisa Phillip's *The American Century*, was responsible for one-third of these names further exemplifying the art historical neglect of U.S. Latina/o art. See Rita Gonzalez, "An Undocumented History: A Survey of Index Citations for Latina and Latino Artists." No 2. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Research Report, 2003.

formation (i.e., collection, curation, custodianship, and conservation) and not necessarily including all Chicano artists simply based on their personal biographies and same-sex relations. Just as *Your Denim Shirt* demonstrates, I take interest in “queer remains” or objects that are not always textually apprehended in a conventional archival process but, in fact, comprehend other experiential and sensory relationships including the visual, spatial, and haptic.

### *The Task of the Archivist*

“The archive” is an imperfect project. Caught somewhere between completion and deletion, the archive is an assembly of remainders of past activities unable to reproduce the activity itself. This is quite clear in performance archives where digital and camera technologies mediate and constitute our experience of the past without ever accurately reproducing the event in the present. The resulting record grouping classified, categorized, and processed into file folders, flat boxes, and drums is shaped by this tension, projecting authority over past events to the foreclosure of other competing discourses unrepresented in the collection. For the ambitious scholar in the archive reading room, one may never know what has been jettisoned under the arbitrary measures of historic and cultural significance and thus, the document is taken at face value. This raises an important consideration of archive collections as a critical area of research in itself.

The field of archive studies understands that the archive is not a monolithic structure but rather a powerful state-sanctioned institution that governs the records of government, corporate, military, and social elite. As Jacques Derrida stresses, these

organizational bodies exist under “house arrest.”<sup>14</sup> Without these protective walls of marble, granite, and iron, “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”<sup>15</sup> We only need to look at the etymology of the word “archive” which derives from the Greek “archon” which means “a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded”<sup>16</sup> to understand how national discourses, memory, ideology, and historical inclusions are constituted across the physical and symbolic threshold of the archivist and the building itself. Indeed, only that which passes through the sanctified gates of these sovereign palaces would have direct historical value and significance. As Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop stress, “The space of the archive is never neutral, never empty.”<sup>17</sup> That is, public memory is made and verified from those document collections granted physical and material enclosure, custody, and interment.

In the U.S. the import of key archive theorists consolidated the role between the state-sanctioned archive and the custodianship of government records. Whereas, other countries such as Canada developed other more nuanced ideas about a range of archiving practices including the “total archive,”<sup>18</sup> the influence of early and modern archive thinkers like Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T.R. Schellenberg defined the task of the archivist through the stewarding of government documents. Polemic archive

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop. “Archiving ‘Archiving.’” *ESC*. 30.1 (March 2004): 6.

<sup>18</sup> Rob Fisher. “In Search of a Theory of Private Archives: The Foundational Writings of Jenkinson and Schellenberg Revisited.” *Archivaria*. 67 (Spring 2009): 2.

thinkers like Jenkinson, author of *A Manual of Archive Administration* (1922), argued that the role of the archivist was to keep records and objectively administer any remnant as determined by the record creator.<sup>19</sup> Hence the archivist was a custodian in the strictest sense, a scientific “engineer” organizing the “organic” generation of government record groups.<sup>20</sup>

For the father of appraisal theory, T.R. Schellenberg, this resulting encumbrance of “bulk” materials necessitated assignments of worth and evaluation for modern government collections.<sup>21</sup> He advocated on behalf of the archivist as a trained authority who had the discerning capabilities to protect and destroy materials deemed useless to the archival collection. This refined role of the archive professional eclipsed the passive sanctuary at the heart of Jenkinson’s approach and instead, promoted the importance of evidential value. That is, he impressed the “character” and “subject matter” of the evidence, liberating the archivist from Jenkinson’s custodial shackles.<sup>22</sup> However, Schellenberg’s approach discerned record appraisal in limiting ways, assigning “value” only to those archives of use to historians and other academicians.<sup>23</sup> This had implications for private modes of archive creation.

The currency of Jenkinson and Schellenberg in archive theory constituted methods, processing guidelines, and principles for public institutional records, which foreclosed attention to the personal archive. For a “purist” like Jenkinson there was

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<sup>19</sup> Sir Hilary Jenkinson. *A Manual of Archive Administration*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922).

<sup>20</sup> Terry Cook. “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift.” *Archivaria*. 43 (Spring 1997): 28.

<sup>21</sup> For more, see T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

<sup>22</sup> Fisher, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Cook, 29.

something inherently contradictory over the term “personal archive,” where the bias of the “personal” could never reconcile with the methodical and objective process of “archive” science.<sup>24</sup> As a result, according to Jenkinson, the archive maintains its integrity because it is “organically” generated by government, shares an unbroken strand of archive custodianship, and therefore, preserves its authentic original order in what is termed the “fonds.” According to Rob Fisher, Jenkinson’s theories of the private archive revealed how, “the presence of the personal, the intrusion of self, compromised the impartiality of the record; no archivist could guarantee the impartiality of a personal narrative written with regard to the future or to justify one’s actions in the eyes of others.”<sup>25</sup> His restrictive nomenclature of “the archive” also managed to overlook the role of the personal within government sanctioned correspondence further espousing a public/private divide despite proof to the contrary.

Even Schellenberg, a modern archive theorist, fares no better. Though granting further latitude for records created under legal, business, or organizational purpose, which he deemed potentially archival, personal archives are dismissed for their “haphazard” and “spontaneous expression.”<sup>26</sup> Under this premise, in no way can the private forms of archive creation present a collection unaffected by the taint of private exchange. This rigidity is exacerbated by a callous divide between archives and libraries where the former is constituted by accessioning and receiving records and the latter is preoccupied with collecting, purchasing, and acquisitioning. Hence, the personal record remains under the province of library collections and does not

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<sup>24</sup> Fisher, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 13.

qualify for archive custody. This distinction was an important one and elucidates the restrictive ways in which “archiving” was classically defined. It is little wonder that archive studies perpetuated a state-institutional archive model to the detriment of more complicated cultural expressions of private archive building. To recognize these alternative systems would only illuminate how state power restricts and defines public memory, cultural ideology, and historical discourse. Personal archiving remains an area under researched in archive studies criticism, and when confronted, it often imposes the same principles and guidelines suitable for government sanctioned record groupings.

This was all about to change. In the 1970s, the influence of postmodernism destabilized the “archival threshold” and deconstructed the mechanisms by which record groupings are assigned within the formal order of appraisal and description. For Sue McKemmish, “the bond” sealing the archive as a uniform whole was no longer possible when documents existed “somewhere beyond custody” and outside the restrictive bind of “house arrest.”<sup>27</sup> As archive scholar Adrian Cunningham writes, “To these critics the ‘archival bond’ and subsequent guarantees of authenticity should commence at the point of records creation which, by definition, cannot be physically in the archives. If the archival bond is achieved and guaranteed at the point of records creation, the decision when or whether to perform a physical act of custodial transfer to an archive becomes a minor administrative consideration, not a

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 4.

matter of central significance.”<sup>28</sup> In the 1970s, this “post-custodial” era in archive studies now emphasized the historical and sociological contexts of archiving.

This was due, in part, to the impact of the civil rights movement, new social history, feminist theory, and American ethnic studies, which anticipated the “cultural turn” in archive studies. By this, I mean, how race, class, and gender challenged the archival authority of the state, complicated the archive’s constituencies, and exposed the exclusions and omissions of minoritarian knowledges and histories. Thus, the complicated means of retrieving and appraising this history is little found in conventional finding aids but rather, must be “teased obliquely from sources collected, catalogued, and preserved as other kinds of testimony.”<sup>29</sup> As a result, visual and artifactual sources grew in importance undercutting archive authority and illuminating other resistant modes of recordkeeping, documentation, and cultural survival. Key ruminations developed in cultural studies literature and in particular, among queer studies scholars. As a result, “The queer archive” is frequently deployed as either a theoretical mediation or as a queer interpretive lens of mainstream archival records. That is, we are encouraged to see “archivally queer”<sup>30</sup> in the archive reading room or observe the redactions of sexual difference in the collection provenance.<sup>31</sup> However, few offer insights into the process of queer

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<sup>28</sup> Adrian Cunningham. “Archival Institutions.” In *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, eds. Sue McKemmish, et. al. (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, 2005), 45.

<sup>29</sup> Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg. *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

<sup>30</sup> By seeing “archivally queer” I am referring to Morris’s perceptual strategy that interprets same-sex desires in the “straight” archives of mainstream institutions by scrutinizing the silences and invisibilities surrounding queer subjects. Charles E. Morris. “Archival Queer.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*. 9.1 (Spring 2006): 145-151.

<sup>31</sup> John D. Wrathall. “Provenance as Text: Reading the Silences around Sexuality in Manuscript Collections.” *The Journal of American History*. 79.1 (June 1992): 165-178.



archival practice of personal collections or fieldwork methodologies and frameworks that do not reinscribe institutional archive empiricism.

Moreover, the queer cultural turn in archive studies rarely considers the influence of postmodern archive theory in the visual arts. In particular, contemporary artists were also compelled to redefine “archiving” by resignifying mainstream archives similar to the way museum institutional critique moved artists Fred Wilson’s, Mark Dion’s, and Andy Warhol’s interrogation of curatorial, classificatory, and display technologies.<sup>32</sup> According to art historian Hal Foster, the “archival artist” removed the walls of the repository and collapsed the authorial governance of the “official” recordkeeper, subverting the scientific hand of Jenkinson’s archival custodian. Typified through spatial interventions whether in gallery space or specific art installations, archival artists made crucial claims for “aesthetics of resistance”<sup>33</sup> by considering historical voids, forgetting, and social amnesia. As Foster says, “[Archival artists] seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present.”<sup>34</sup> By reassembling file cabinets and flat files, gathering official records, producing experimental documentary video art or installing scrapbooks, photo albums, and keepsakes, archival artists “interrogate the self-evidentiary claims of the archive by reading it against the grain. This interrogation may take aim at the structural and functional principles underlying the use of the archival document, or it may result in the creation of another archival structure as a means of establishing an

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<sup>32</sup> For more see James Putnam. *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Hal Foster. “An Archival Impulse.” *October*. 110 (Fall 2004): 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

archaeological relationship to history, evidence, information, and data that will give rise to its own interpretive categories.”<sup>35</sup>

The personal archival activities central to my dissertation build on Foster’s initial proposal and contemplate how the “archival impulse”<sup>36</sup> in Chicano art advances “the creation of another archival structure” especially for homosexual men. This creative process is an amalgamation of other visual, material, and spatial practices, and delimits the bond of record groupings, while it expands the transgressive possibilities of artifact formulations in displays, containers, arrangements, and image-making. Hence, the multiple archives composing my dissertation’s investigation unseal the restrictive bounds of written document administration. By interrogating and deconstructing the “archivization” process, or that which is deemed worth saving,<sup>37</sup> I demonstrate how archival creative expression subverts the institutional dictums of the authorial archive and illuminates personal archivist practices outside traditional record-keeping systems. Hence, “archival art” is an extension of self-documentation and communal preservation, a contemporary art practice that widens the scope of Chicano art making. Much like the domestic home altar,<sup>38</sup> the personal nicho,<sup>39</sup> the statuary in barrio yardscapes,<sup>40</sup> or custom car design

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<sup>35</sup> Okwui Enwezor, ed. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. (Steidl/ICP, 2008), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Foster, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Ketelaar. “Archivalisation and Archiving.” *Archives and Manuscripts*. 26.1 (May 1999): 55.

<sup>38</sup> See Kay Turner. “Mexican American Home Altars: Toward Their Interpretation.” In *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlan, 1970-2000*, eds. Chon Noriega, et. al. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2001), 327-344.

<sup>39</sup> See Laura Perez. *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> For more see Jacinto Quirarte. *A History and Appreciation of Chicano Art*. (San Antonio: Research Center for the Visual Arts, 1996), 127, and James Rojas, “The Enacted Environment: Examining the Streets and Yards of East Los Angeles,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J.B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 275-292.

and renovation,<sup>41</sup> Chicano art object arrangement can perform archival meaning through alternative configurations and constellations of visual and found materials – re-circuiting archival bonding between cultural memory, image-making, spatial expressions, and artifact display.

Chicano artists’ creative acts of archive production demonstrate what visual studies scholar Shawn Michelle Smith calls, “the counterarchive.”<sup>42</sup> In W.E.B. DuBois’s photographic exhibition at the Paris Exposition in 1900, photo albums of African American middle-class portraits were displayed to counter scientific and racist discourse of Black inferiority, defectiveness, and savagery. Smith comprehends archives as a social product of competing ideologies and political circumstances. She argues, “The archive is a vehicle of memory, and as it becomes the trace on which an historical record is founded, it makes some people, places, things, ideas and events visible, while relegating others, through its signifying absences, to invisibility.”<sup>43</sup> The resistant possibilities of DuBois’s collection are interlocked with institutional archives for competing claims on history. His photo albums became a “vernacular” archive that produced visual meaning between the dominant “public” discourse of racist knowledge systems and the alternative “private” collections of personal photography.

Smith characterizes DuBois’ American Negro Exhibit as an in-between space through a “comparative interpretive visual methodology”<sup>44</sup> juxtaposing the image

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<sup>41</sup> Brenda Jo Bright. “Remappings: Los Angeles Low Riders.” In *Looking High and Low Art and Cultural Identity*, eds. Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> Shawn Michelle Smith. *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race and Visual Culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

archive of DuBois against a grander repertoire of photographic records, which, in turn, constructs racial visual knowledge. In this way, her methodology intensifies the competing institutional and scientific racial discourses correlating the Black body with criminal, deviant, and biologically inferior connotations. However, her visual analysis of image archives as exclusively “racialized sites”<sup>45</sup> also extinguishes the complexities of gendered, sexualized, and erotic meanings within the visual work of the counterarchive. While this may very well have been the product of DuBois’s archival and curatorial prerogatives, I have to wonder how sexual propriety may have also shaped DuBois’s vision and, in turn, undergirded his archive as a sexualized site, as well. This sexualized way of being in these photographic books is something that complicates how image archives remit particular visual knowledges over Black bodies in the American imaginary at the turn of the century. I have to wonder how Carl Van Vechten’s private collection of homoerotic portraits of white-Black same-sex couplings exposes other visual discourses at play picturing racialized sexuality and desire.

“An obstinate cataloguer”<sup>46</sup> who also challenged racist imagery through his camerawork, Van Vechten pursued a line of personal and social inquiry into his racial and sexual desires. According to art historian James Smalls, these provocative images were likely exchanged through an intimate social circle of white and African American men, and therefore, seen in private and intimate settings. This suggests other pictorial collections at work at this time though not readily seen in a vast public installation like the Paris Exposition, the homoerotic Black body traveled through

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> James Smalls. *The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten: Public Face, Private Thoughts*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 3.

personal exhibitionary channels and presumably protected in the “closed circle” of homosexual men.<sup>47</sup> DuBois likely did not belong to these homoerotic visual circuits and so, the image archive at the core of Smith’s analysis is one constituted by particular navigations of sexuality in Black visual culture. The existence then of Van Vechten’s photo archive illuminates critical aspects of “counterarchiving” that mustn’t be overlooked between homosexuals: access, circulation, and curation. These are issues that impact what types of public archives are mined for samples to counter, analyze, and compare. None are likely to account for those collections in semi-private circulations of homosexual exchange. As we will discover throughout this study, these aspects of personal recordkeeping are not specific to an African American historical context but even applicable among homosexual Chicano artists in East Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s. Factors like access shape the resulting alternative archive configurations excavated in my study and the necessary interpretive strategy that must be fashioned, surpassing the racialized sites of institutional image records at the core of Smith’s analysis.

What I find most compelling about Smith’s “comparative archival methodology”<sup>48</sup> is the way she attributes the album collection to DuBois although the photographic content is the product of artist Thomas Askew. Her close attention to Askew’s counteraesthetic portraits of the Black middle class suggests that the photographer was complicit with DuBois’s archival work.<sup>49</sup> Though DuBois was

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, 24.

<sup>49</sup> This awareness of culturally affirming images of “social uplift” was not unusual for the time, and even evident in the “stagy” performances of the Hampton Institute in Frances Benjamin Johnston’s photographs. See Jeannene Przyblyski, “American Visions at the Paris Exposition, 1900: Another Look at Frances Benjamin Johnston’s Hampton Photographs,” *Art Journal* 57.3 (Autumn 1998): 60-68.

clearly the curator of the American Negro Exhibit, Askew's "counterimages"<sup>50</sup> were also archival and extended the subversive possibility of this preservationist work. Smith's approach then opens an important in-road for my study. By enfolding variable collections of image archives with the counterhegemonic ideologies of Black intellectuals and artists, the counterarchive is the product of what I term a "double archivist." That is, the counterarchival display was composed of compound archival visualities and materialities—the product of Askew's photo collection and DuBois's photo album collage and curation. This interrelationship between the artist's potential archival image production and the collector's archival framing and containment disrupts an archive research methodology dependent on a singular archive administrator, and, instead, presses for a variegated approach to counterarchiving, one which understands not only individual but multidimensional creative assembly.

Rather than present the alternative archival formations as the sole ideological decision of the collector-archivist (DuBois), I want to privilege the interrelated "counterimage" work of the artist-archivist (Askew) in tandem with the found material record that results from the excavation process. The resulting "double archivist" attribution realizes the complexities of counterarchives, object custody, and curatorial selection. Indeed, it suggests an amalgamated community response to historical erasure and cultural survival. For instance, the performance art and scrapbook of Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta is the product of photographic documentation of Cyclona's performances recorded by Gronk, Patssi Valdez, and Mundo Meza. As I will discuss in further detail in Chapter 3, one is able to examine Cyclona's "archival body" through the "double archivist" lens of these photographs

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<sup>50</sup> Smith, 75.

and Legorreta's restaging of self in the reappropriation of these images in his scrapbook, including toys and mass produced consumer items. In this way, he is able to counter the prevailing Chicano art-historical bias and heteronormative silences in the creative generation of an archival art intervention.

By advancing an "archival body/archival space" methodological approach, this investigation expands traditional conceptualizations of the record and redefines archives beyond two-dimensional written documents classified in institutional repositories. Moreover, I remove a predetermined analysis of primary sources in order to stress the architectural and spatial dimensions of the collection – an attention to the archive's social biography. So rather than recover this material culture to merely reconstitute the scholar's mastery and discipline over the individual record, I attend to the archive's formation as a type of artifactual surrogacy. Mindful of the way Samuel Rodriguez and Ang Lee cinematically correlated the surface of the denim shirt with the skin of the male body, we can discern critical insights from these other creative archival practices if we recover and investigate the *what*, *how*, and *where* of remains queerly left behind. In the following section, I will briefly elaborate on five operational concepts refortifying an archival body/archival space approach: the sexual agency of Chicano art (extended body), the queer archival afterlife (space and time), containers of desire (storage), archival chiaroscuro (conservation), and archive elicitation (oral history).

### *The Archival Body: The Sexual Agency of Chicano Art*

My interpretation of the "archival body" is directly indebted to a growing movement in material culture studies to redress the presumed divisions between the

subject and object and the excision of the self from the material world. My approach adjoins this debate and in the case of the archive, destabilizes and deconstructs human primacy, mastery, and control over the legible written record. Of course, I am not speaking of an “archival body” in a literal sense. This study does not furrow into actual human remains, funerary practices, osteopathy, or forensic anthropology. My “archival body” concept proposes a corporeal quality for the record, a sort of “intersubjectivity”<sup>51</sup> acting between the custodian, artist, and assembled collection.

This interpretation of the archive-as-body brings to mind a classic example presented by phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who troubles the relationship between a blind-man and his walking stick. The walking stick as an amputee extension of his body enabled sense of “touch” through the phantom limb. In this way, the corporeality of the man and the thing collapses into a tangible co-habitation and “transplants” the body.<sup>52</sup> So the human whole is stimulated by the skin of the walking stick. However, how might one understand an archive – typically defined as an assembly of papers, documents and correspondence – within this construct? Quite arguably, boxes of records are not critical for everyday survival as a human prosthesis might be, so how does one reconcile the distanced walls of the body and repository?

At first, “the archival body” is anchored in the initial work of anthropologist Alfred Gell. In his controversial study posthumously published, “Art and Agency,” he boldly contested the disciplinary boundaries between anthropology and art history. Placing emphasis on social relations over aesthetic explanation, his argument permitted a rethinking of objects as agents acting on the viewer. For Gell, artwork is

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<sup>51</sup> Bjørnar Olsen. *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*. (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2010), 133.

<sup>52</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. (London: Routledge, 1962), 143.



just one of many material object categories that are “instrumental” in shaping emotional experience. The agency of the object is not textually read from a semiotic visual study but felt by “the patient”<sup>53</sup> through related stimulation. So, for example, when the protagonist in *Your Denim Shirt* retrieves the felt fedora from the closet, the hat’s voice relayed the concealed sounds of music, voices, and memories. This illustrates what object-relation theorists call “cathexis,”<sup>54</sup> a psychoanalytical term for objects charged with psychic energy and emotional significance. Whereas Gell’s later work also interrogated the magic or enchantment of things,<sup>55</sup> his theoretical intervention collapses an art history dependent on arbitrary aesthetic categories of Western and Non-Western Art. He argues, “[I]n fact anything whatsoever could, conceivably, be an art object from the anthropological point of view, including living persons.”<sup>56</sup> For this study, Gell’s contribution to the “archival body” approach principally foregrounds the archive’s agency acting on human subjectivity. In the case of Chicano art, we have to imagine how the cathetexic power of the Frank Romero painting seen in an installation shot from the *Chicano Vision’s* exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art possesses Chicano art collector and actor, Cheech Marin (see Figure 1.4).

Given the devastation of AIDS, anti-gay stigma, and homophobic institutions and acquisition policies, the custodianship of homosexual Chicano men’s cultural heritage illuminates how archival custody can exteriorize social identities. Borrowing on what consumption studies scholar Russell Belk has classically termed “the

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<sup>53</sup> Alfred Gell. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Woodward. *Understanding Material Culture*. (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 139.

<sup>55</sup> See Alfred Gell, “The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology,” In *Art, Anthropology and Aesthetics*. Eds. J Coote and A Shelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> Gell, 7.

extended self,” Belk found that objects perform individual, familial, and collective identity. This permits “the possessions in our extended self [to] give us a personal archive or museum that allows us to reflect on our histories and how we have changed.”<sup>57</sup> For Belk, the archive is potentially anthropomorphic by extending selfhood through a “sense of permanence and place in the world.”<sup>58</sup> The archival record (or in this specific case, the family heirloom) not only acts on the subject but it embodies the custodian in a triangulated relation blurring the divides between the collector, the collection, and the collected. For our purposes, the “archival body” is an exteriorization of the individual, communal, and social body. The “double archivist” (i.e., the record keeper and the kept) then speaks through these artifactual performances, extending queer cultural memory in these dispersed collections. By speaking through these records, the “archival body” performs the bones and flesh of missing artists or what I term, “queer remains” commemorated in a type of artifactual surrogacy.

Despite the influence of Belk and Gell on my approach, they do not confront the racial, gender, or sexual consequences of art, agency, and possession. Though Gell enabled a paradigmatic shift in art-historical discourse, his emphasis on how art impacts the subject circumvents the sexualized possibilities of the visual object. This approach begins to reconcile this juncture if we perceive the cathetoxic inscription of queerness permeating and extending throughout our experience of the collection, but might be construed as complacent. Can we interpret the archive as not only a psycho-social construct linked to the collector but as a material culture with sexual

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<sup>57</sup> Russell W. Belk. “Possessions and the Extended Self.” *Journal of Consumer Research*. 15.2 (September 1988), 159.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

orientation itself? What does the object's experience reveal about sexuality and other archival materiality? In short, how does the "archival body" express queerness?

In part, we must recall Gell's interpretation that people are shaped through objects and these objects' biographies change over time.<sup>59</sup> This interest in the object's temporality or "life course"<sup>60</sup> provokes what Arjun Appadurai calls the "social life of things."<sup>61</sup> By directing our attention to the "paths" and "diversions" of objects, we can restore this social meaning through the multiple trajectories and directions of commodities.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Igor Kopytoff espouses the object lifecycle through a series of exchanges and recontextualizations. The object biography investigates the social influence by questioning its commodification, decommodification and recommodification.<sup>63</sup> This sort of regeneration through economic explanation perpetuates a lifecycle "path" organized by biological reproduction. Utilizing archive theory, someone such as Philip C. Brooks at the U.S. National Archives has referred to the archive collection's "life cycle" to deter poorly mismanaged and mishandled administration of public records.<sup>64</sup> Archives could be properly appraised, evaluated, and deaccessioned if record managers understood the document from the moment of its conception (birth) by the record creator, its storage and use off site, and destruction (death) in cases of non-use and non-archival appraisal. Closely mirroring a regenerative human narrative, "life cycle" approaches presume a heteronormative

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<sup>59</sup> See Gell, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>64</sup> Cook, 26.

corollary in the artifact's natural generation and conflation with the life of the record administrator without any thought to other spatio-temporal deviations and complexities.

In fact, object biography studies in material culture rarely explain how sexuality influences the object lifespan. One pivotal example is Janet Hoskins's *Biographical Objects*, which solicits the artifact as an instrument to explain "the narrative creation of self through the vehicle of the object."<sup>65</sup> Working with Kodi villagers on the Indonesian island of Sumba, Hoskins radically altered her fieldwork methods after she realized the complex and "intertwined"<sup>66</sup> relationship between people and things. In point of fact, Kodi sexuality was enfolded in the control and possession of artifacts.

Hoskins argued that these instruments became surrogates for sexual expression, desire, and fantasy. In fact, some objects were "double gendered" or, through circuits of exchange pieces symbolizing both men and women, constituted a sense of wholeness.<sup>67</sup> Describing this process as a pursuit for sexual self-fulfillment, Hoskins' "double gendered" material culture collapsed male-female gender objects with the corresponding heterosexual counterpart (i.e. men with women and women with men). While this is surely a product of her ethnographic findings, the biographical object is not only doubled in a binary gender system but also collapses a corresponding heterosexual orientation of the thing. Though Hoskins' work presents an important methodological attempt, her approach does not challenge a rampant and

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<sup>65</sup> Janet Hoskins. *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 24.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

compulsory heterosexuality in the material record. If sexuality remains in the Kodi's use of tools for surrogate desires, how might we fathom queerness in the afterlife of Chicano art? More specifically, can queer biographies of archives expose a lifecycle that circulates counter to the heteronormative futures inherent in object biography study?

Our investigation cannot simply approach a natural lifespan of things with beginnings, middles, and ends. The "queer afterlife of Chicano art" discloses an alternative temporal and spatial experience for things affected by shame, neglect, secrecy, invisibility, violence, and more often than not, death. The "archival body" reveals its queerness by its undeniable vulnerability and deviated life course. Subsisting on objects, records, and ephemera, these "archival bodies" are un-placed, un-wanted, or un-regarded in official institutional domiciles sanctifying American heritage preservation. This encourages other conceptualizations of object lifepaths that diverge from the aforementioned directional flows.

We can employ Judith Halberstam's insightful regard for "a queer time and place" to develop a useful correlation between the temporal obsolescence of things, the "failed" non-biological reproduction of queer futurity, and the linearity in which object biographies are assessed and written. As Halberstam suggests, "queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, queer temporality refuses hegemonic norms of life maturation and destabilizes the "natural" attainments of the heteronormative Westernized human subject. Time is then oriented outside

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<sup>68</sup> Judith Halberstam. *In a Queer Time and Place*. (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

“reproductive” life cycles, which unfairly conflate queer existence with such pejorative societal objections as immaturity, indulgence, incompleteness, or pathology.

I argue for something else in the alternative archive’s life cycle, something that shares a comparative strangeness with alternative queer temporalities. As such, I disrupt object biographical methods that presume the regenerative lifeline and, thus, infer a heteronormative constitution of object life cycles. This has important implications for how we study, interpret, and appraise archival custody, storage, and conservation. My approach re-apprehends the postmodern ambiguities of the Chicano art archive and rethinks the strange temporal and spatial locations in alternative archival formations outside formal institutional repositories. My strategy here is to interject queer temporal orientations of archives abandoned, rescued, and queerly arranged in counterarchival configurations reified in “dark cracks” or concealed places. I think this is one important area that illuminates not only the spaces from which these archives remain but also the environments in which they are stored.

As my investigation shows, the “queer remain” or the object unit composing the “archival body” is frequently disassembled or dislocated from a unified whole or ordered archival fonds. After all, as my case studies reveal, how does one preserve and interpret the lifespan of the archival body’s bones and flesh when these remains have been wracked by violence, confiscation, omission, erasure, or loss? These conditions present challenges for a positivist archival approach, one which presumes the boxes of records are complete or properly attributed. My analysis emphasizes the

Chicano art archive's queer afterlife from the grounds in which the remains dwell. Any excavation of the "archival body" compels one to ask: *what* remains, *how* do they remain, and *where* do they remain?

*Archival Space: Excavating Chicano Art Deposits*

By investigating the spatial experience of the "archival body," my analysis implicitly grasps the way differential temporalities and contrary lifecycles populate and stage these repositories. "Archival space" extends queer meaning and social identity through the architecture housing the collection. As Ann Cvetkovich dutifully reminds us, "The history of any archive is a history of space, which becomes the material measure and foundation of the archive's power and visibility as a form of public culture."<sup>69</sup> While Cvetkovich examines the competing "semipublic" power of the grassroots gay and lesbian archive as compared to the institutional project of gay and lesbian collections in mainstream organizations, I present a possible third archival space that considers the queer "power of art place."<sup>70</sup> That is, my approach examines the spatial layers of the archive's environment from its housing, custody, care, and placement. Adapting what historic archaeologist Hedley Swain terms "archaeological archives," I propose unifying all findings and records within the grounds of the excavation.<sup>71</sup> This enables an "archival space" methodology that extends queer meaning through the object's very spatialization in variable cultural landscapes:

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<sup>69</sup> Cvetkovitch, 245.

<sup>70</sup> I borrow this term from two significant books on cultural landscape studies, public history and art placement. See Dolores Hayden. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995) and Victoria Newhouse. *Art and the Power of Placement*. (Monacelli, 2005).

<sup>71</sup> Hedley Swain. *An Introduction to Museum Archaeology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 117.

domestic space, the built environment, public settings, art institutions, barrio neighborhoods, and gay nightlife.

For example, this process of excavating the deposits of queer remains may occur not inside the luminous grand hallways of the national archive but in the dark, shadowy, and nearly unnoticed confines of queer nightlife. Queer art critic Jennifer Doyle discusses her incidental discovery of a rare Andy Warhol print, *Sex Parts* (1978) in M.J.'s, a historic gay bar in Downtown Los Angeles. Rarely included within the museum industry's sanctioned Warhol oeuvre, this framed work-on-paper presents a gay male material culture in the collection of an overt homoerotic image. By dwelling inside the gay bar, the Warhol print intensifies the architectural relationship between the object, custody, and environment.

M.J.'s "queer wallpaper" is a surprising find for Doyle. She suggests that the print, unable to find domicile in the art museum, must make place within an "old neighborhood gay bar" and even more significantly, in the care and custody of the gay bar owners, patrons, and transient visitors. Though the piece is clearly installed for the sake of homoerotic décor, a familiar motif in gay bars, sex clubs, and bathhouses, this extraordinary wallpaper activates the architectural surface, drawing our attention to an irrefutable record of gay art history and expresses queerness through "not what it depicts, but where it hangs—and what its location makes visible."<sup>72</sup> While Doyle acknowledges the display as an interlocutor for queer sexuality, I would also stress the significance of the surrounding object environment. My interest here is not only in Doyle's encounter with the Warhol print, but more

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<sup>72</sup> Jennifer Doyle, "Queer Wallpaper," In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).



specifically, in the way the bar interior becomes the archival space for the queer record. We have to wonder: how did the object end up here? Who cares for the object? How might we see and know the sexual agency of the artwork? And most importantly, what does the object's spatialization say about its sexual agency? How might the place of its housing suggest an alternative afterlife for the print—one that is queer *and* racialized? Ultimately, the “queer wallpaper” is a spatial expression of non-heteronormative sexuality in an alternative repository, which remits a different spatial experience for the material object itself.

The case of Chicano art queer dwelling is made more clearly by book collector and critical theorist Walter Benjamin, when he famously espoused, “I am unpacking my library. Yes I am.”<sup>73</sup> The rows of rare and irreplaceable collectibles engulf and dissolve him. The spatial disorder of books constructs the stones of a dwelling and his body is enclosed within. Benjamin's body is, therefore, exteriorized in the assembly of material artifacts unpacked on his apartment floor and installed in the home library. In short, Benjamin's collection of artifacts--his bibliographic archive--stages his embodiment through the intersubjective spatial enclosure of body and object dwelling. For it is not only the self that Benjamin unpacks but the interrelated way his book collection or “archival body” places the domestic interior. For Benjamin, the library is not a passive container of rare finds but an “archival space” ordered by the collection, placement, and the corporeal co-habitation of artifact arrangements.

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<sup>73</sup> Walter Benjamin. “Unpacking My Library.” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt. (New York: Schocken, 1968), 59.

Here I am indebted to Jennifer Gonzalez's work on racialized discourse in installation art and in particular, her concept of "autotopography." Defined as "a practice of claiming ontological rights through the preservation and display of personal objects,"<sup>74</sup> these spatial practices are countersites extending self-representation through memory landscapes. These spatialized practices of material objects – heirlooms, mementos, souvenirs and gifts – demonstrate autobiographic narratives in "the more intimate expressions of values and beliefs, emotions and desires . . . found in the domestic collection and arrangement of objects."<sup>75</sup> Similar to Gonzalez's self mapping through material constellations, I am interested in the queerness of archival custody as spatial practice. These stages of domestic interiors and public arenas frame the place of archival embodiment – the orientation of space by the externalization of the archival body.

### *Containers of Desire: Reporting Conspicuous Items*

More specifically, an "archival space" can also shape human subjectivity not only through the grounds of its interment but through the "power of art place."<sup>76</sup> Following Gell, if we privilege the agency of art by the way it acts on human subjects, how might we interpret sexuality vis-à-vis storage, care, and containment? This encourages a more precise approach to "archival space," moving spatial analysis from the macro- to the micro- containers of things. I discern queer meaning from a

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<sup>74</sup> Jennifer Gonzalez. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Gonzalez. "Autotopographies." In *Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies*, eds. Gabriel Brahm, Jr. and Mark Driscoll, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 133.

<sup>76</sup> Victoria Newhouse. *Art and the Power of Placement*. (Monacelli, 2005).

rarely examined archival architecture for Chicano art, wherein the encasement, sheathing, enveloping, and sheltering of the material culture constitutes the “ante” or “before” skin of the thing.<sup>77</sup> My thinking finds queer possibilities through gay men’s care of the “archival body” ranging from the buried and unseen grounds of the attic trunk to the opulent reliquary.

Of course, the custody of personal papers, keepsakes, and souvenirs in shoeboxes or desk drawers is not extraordinary in and of itself. As I will explain further in Chapter 2, the private keeping or everyday collection storage of entrusted papers, photographs, family heirlooms, or art collections inherited from elders, family members, or religious leaders constitutes much of the literature in collection studies.<sup>78</sup> Arguably, the intimate and psychological self-investments in things shape a private act of memory-making giving further insight into the mutual constitution between subject and object.

In fact, some studies have implicitly offered racialized and gendered possibilities into these conservation practices. In *Telling to Live*, the Latina Feminist Group, a collective of pan-Latina scholars and activists, discuss “papelitos guardados,” an intimate collection of private writings and confessions “tucked away [and] hidden from inquiring eyes.”<sup>79</sup> Of course, the materiality of Latina feminist archival storage is mentioned but subtly unexamined. For what meaning about Latina feminist life history might be derived from the act of “tucking away” and more

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<sup>77</sup> Jean-Pierre Warnier, “Inside and Outside: Surfaces and Containers,” In *Handbook of Material Culture*. Ed. Christopher Tilley, et. al. (New York: Sage Publications, 2006).

<sup>78</sup> For example see, Susan M. Pearce, Ed. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. (London: Routledge 1994).

<sup>79</sup> The Latina Feminist Group, eds. *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 1.

importantly, the environment of its concealment? What is perhaps more pressing is the threat these papelitos pose when the buried container of her unseen archive is unearthed, excavated, and viewed. In some way, it is not only the papelitos but the container that has the power to expose and therefore, the agency to act upon the custodian.

The looming danger of revelation or exposure has critical significance when the collection in question sheds light on the person's sexuality, desires, and illicit behaviors. Indeed, the nightstand, chest of drawers, closet, or headboard compartment may actually menace, with its power to upset a home setting with the exposure of erotic paraphernalia, pornography, or explicit materials. After all, too many readers can remember the accidental uncovering of a private collection of men's magazines in a conspicuous place or perhaps the discovery of personal desires in a box hidden beneath the bed. In this way, ordinary furniture in the domestic landscape possesses a sexual agency charged with daily reminders of erotic self-exposure. Much as Daniel Miller conferred a ghost in the haunting of house ordering, sometimes furniture as "containers of desire" remits ghostly possibilities in its chasm, a haunting of that which lurks in the dark corners of the furnishings.<sup>80</sup> And it is this reminder that grants these ordinary containers agency as the repository of sexualized self-meaning. These archival spaces--and not just the thing--have the potential to shape social relations, experiences of the home, and sexual subjectivity.

Of course, these containers have the power to touch us, extending their reach far beyond our co-habitation with the furnishings. For example, a trip to the

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<sup>80</sup> See Daniel Miller, *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*. (New York: Berg Publishers, 2001).

emergency room may set into motion a back-up plan between friends where the nightstand, closet, or armoire are “cleaned” of certain illicit contents before the interception and prying eyes of anxious parents or relations. Sometimes these object environments are manipulated, re-placed or re-staged before the housekeeper, out-of-town guest, or moving company enters the domestic environment, disrupting (even temporarily) the way in which these things live. And yet, these containers remain a concealed architecture queerly catalyzing certain behaviors, spatial experiences, and performances in the everyday. Spaces of erotic depositing perform an unsaid yet powerful spatial organization of our sexual lives. These containers of desire demand a rethinking of the archival repository inside the private domain of the “home-site.”<sup>81</sup> Yet, we must also consider how the spatialization of these “queer remains” inside furnishings and containers exemplifies the commemorative or memory-making practices for homosexual men’s cultural heritage. In this next section, I want to briefly discuss how an archival space approach not only reveals the custodian’s co-habitation with the thing but how the thing experiences the very storage and conservation practices of the custodian.

### *Archival Chiaroscuro: Inside the Dark Cracks*

As one considers a queer afterlife of Chicano art, one must take care not to overlook the atmospheric elements of “archival body” dwelling within dimly lit places. In an archival architecture, shadow itself is a significant appliqué—a coat of darkness for homosexual men’s deposits living in shadow and buried behind walls of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

cabinetry, chests, and compartments. After all, it is between the shadowy cavity of the wall and the bedroom closet where Ennis uncovers Jack's denim shirt in *Brokeback Mountain*. While we cannot necessarily see through the opacity of these dark environments, it is easy to overlook the shadow as an inconsequential aspect of art placement. It may even appear that darkness is a consequence of light sources or even the haphazard consequences of the home and not a principal agent in the object lifecycle.

I want to propose an archival chiaroscuro as a conservationist material to preserve these "queer remains." Rather than espouse the queer afterlife of things in containers and furnishings, how then does their treatment and care shape human-object relationships? Heretofore, we have principally understood the perception of the "archival body" within the interlocking elements of light and what bathing objects in the dark reveals about curatorial and preservationist practices. Influenced by what Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sorensen call "the anthropology of luminosity," they argue, "the study of luminosity and *lightscaapes* is about attributing agency to light in the relationship between thing and person, through the illuminations and shadows this creates, and the meaning invested in these relationships."<sup>82</sup> And so, the containers and storage of things inherent to my fieldwork are also enmeshed in light fields shaping an experience of the object in its keeping as much as its display. This interplay of light and dark bares significant meaning within the alternative archive configuration.

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<sup>82</sup> Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen. "An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light." *Journal of Material Culture*. 12.3 (2007), 280.

Overall, my excavations are situated closer to the gradient sources of an archival chiaroscuro, seeking meaning from the ambiguities of shade and iridescence in these compelling arrangements of race, sexuality, and visual knowledge. For what does it mean to envelop remains in cold dark shadow? How might the sources of light facilitate an experience between sexuality, object custody, and material culture? How does this shadowing of things impact how these archives live and survive? Fundamentally, the sources of luminosity are important indicators of how the properties of chiaroscuro are used as a restorative material to treat and conserve queer remains. This underscores how sexuality informs the placement of objects and the ways darkness can transgressively protect things from anti-gay hostilities or material deterioration; a “queer remain” housed in darkness only to be re-experienced in light on ritualistic, rare, or meaningful occasions. Like the protagonist in *Your Denim Shirt* routinely channeling his dead lover as he irons, presses, and returns the shirt to the dark confines of the armoire, his intentional adaptation of darkness indicates how these Chicano art objects must live in the conservation of sexual difference.

*Archive Elicitation: Surveying the Body*

In addition to these methodological strategies, I also infuse my excavations with what I term “archive elicitation.” This oral-history based analytic model draws on other qualitative research instruments familiar to visual anthropology, art history, and ethnography, including: photographic and film documentation, visual analysis, participant observation, and in particular, oral history interviews. Through this method, each archivist, custodian, and cultural heritage purveyor is elicited in an

archive collection-based interview and activity. Some subject-participants were engaged in house/studio tours, private record inventories, or storage management surveys. This line of inquiry, which borrows on ethnographic strategies of oral history interviews and life writing, examines supplementary elements from the aforementioned interpretative strategies. Although this method is familiar in cultural anthropology and visual and material culture analysis, where photo albums or family heirlooms are used as mnemonic prompts during interviews, I differ by soliciting data from the collector-custodian's archival process.<sup>83</sup> Because the totality of objects is diverse in size, type, medium and placement, this method yields insight into a greater constellation of material, aesthetic, and spatial expressions. As such, "archive elicitation" reveals invaluable detail and irreplaceable information about the artist, objects, provenance, image assessment, and the political, cultural, and social conditions facing Chicano homosexual image-makers in the 1960s and 1970s. Extensive interviews with artists, family members, friends, collaborators, and collectors facilitated my entry into some of the most private, intimate, and secured areas of the home, art studio, garage, or repository. This established rapport and the enthusiastic reception for my investigation by the subject-informants prompted

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<sup>83</sup> In *Treasures: The Stories Women Tell About the Things They Keep*, Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman unveil the alternative archival methods of women protecting and guarding records of "deeply held values and source of meaning" (vii). Examining gender and collecting through an ethnographic approach, they assembled hundreds of stories about the social life of artifacts from interviews focused around one object. Participants ranged in age, geographic location, sexuality, race, and marital status, and all interview subjects participated in some pattern of collecting. Hence, it was possible to understand women's lives in their visual and material displays of special possessions. The objects in the study ranged from photography, artwork, and plaques to a can of buttons, keepsakes, and clothing. According to Cairns and Silverman, it is quite possible to know and document a female treasuring practice. Despite the fact that gender and archives are stable, knowable, and legible categories, Cairns and Silverman were influential on my method and oral history approach. See Kathleen Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman. *Treasures: The Stories Women Tell About the Things They Keep*. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004).



introductions and phone calls to other collectors with critical insights and rare primary source materials. These snowballing samples ultimately shaped the material record and became the basis for my investigation.

As an interdisciplinary American studies scholar, my project was influenced by the fields of critical archive studies, material culture, visual culture, art history, new museology, cultural geography, performance studies, queer theory, U.S. Latina/o studies, cultural studies, and feminist theory. It is perhaps odd or unsettling to some readers that this study centrally foregrounds an emergent group of homosexual male artists in the Chicano Art Movement to the seeming preclusion of Chicana lesbian artists in Los Angeles. While this critique is more directly discussed in Chapter 2, this research project could not have been accomplished without the significant contributions of third world feminisms and feminist critique in art history, architecture, visual studies, and film. As the artists essential to my study would assuredly agree, women played significant roles in their lives and the cultural landscapes of Los Angeles. When possible, this creative and political work is punctuated within my study.

However, it is the stories of neglect, loss, and erasure that spurred this initial project. While certainly my investigation could have also included women and transgenders among other queer subjects, this study is by no means intended to be representative of homosexuality and Chicano art over the last thirty years. My impetus was the heteronormative master narratives perpetuated by art critics, curators and cultural theorists that furthered the displacement of a significant strand of homosexuals permeating the foundations of Chicano art production and national

identity. My post-structuralist decentering of this heteronormative discourse exposes an art-historical amnesia further magnified by the specter of AIDS, arts censorship, and disappearance.

### *The Organization for the Study*

This dissertation is divided into a series of case study excavations of six crucial yet disregarded artists or art collectives. Opening in East Los Angeles in 1969, a pivotal year for the Chicano movement and the modern gay and lesbian civil rights movement, each chapter progresses, exposing the treatment of homosexuality in the popular discourse of Chicano art history and criticism and examines the recovery of archival bodies. From this terrain, the dissertation seeks to destabilize the foundations of the Chicano Art Movement and reveals the ways in which these men have always remained in buried and unseen repositories.

In *Chapter 2: Paranormal Activity: Homosexuality, Chicano Art, and the Phantom's Phantom*, I locate homosexuality through a discourse analysis of varying bodies of literature including a survey of Chicano art history, material culture studies, and critical archive studies. Challenging the principal allegory of Harry Gamboa, Jr.'s "phantom culture"<sup>84</sup> and its current circulation in mainstream curatorial practice, I expose the silences reifying or eliding homosexuality among the phantoms in East Los Angeles. My careful discursive analysis reveals the way homosexuality is cited and interpreted by mostly heterosexual Chicana/o artists. Though by no means exhaustive, my objectives question the presumed exclusions of homosexuals in

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<sup>84</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr. "No Phantoms," *High Performance* 14 (1981): 15.

Chicano art and reveal how heterosexual artists interpreted, relegated, or omitted Chicano sexual differences and subjectivities.

The performance art and collaborations of Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta are the topic of *Chapter 3: Cyclonic Possession: The Artifactual Performances of “Cyclona.”* An iconoclast street performance artist from East Los Angeles, Legorreta confounded the line separating possession from possessor. As a living art object, Legorreta’s Cyclona art piece became the muse and material for Chicano conceptual avant-gardists. Like an embodied “ready-made” or East L.A. found object, Cyclona was a disruptive spectacle and possession. Examining Legorreta’s artifactual performances, including *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) and the *Wedding of Maria Theresa Conchita Con Chin Gow* (1971), I discuss Chicano artists’ objectification of the Cyclona image as a queer barrio artifact. In particular, I will also consider the acquisition of Legorreta’s “Fire of Life” archive at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center as an extension of his artifactual embodiments in an archival body performance.

A contemporary of Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta and Mundo Meza, Joey Terrill converged with these East L.A. provocateurs at the Gay Dance Parties at Troupers Hall in the 1970s. In *Chapter 4: How to Kiss a Homeboy: The Mariconographic Portraiture of Joey Terrill*, I discuss the archival practices of Terrill through his ironic satires of barrio culture, Chicano hypermasculinity, and white gay male culture. In particular, I examine critical precepts in Terrill’s experimentation in the traditions of book art, photography, portraiture, and genre painting. This early work resulted in a series of self-published magazines entitled, “Homeboy Beautiful”

produced by Terrill in 1977-79 and sold throughout Los Angeles. Sardonicly contesting the affluent domestic settings of “House Beautiful” magazine, Terrill and his cohort of gay and lesbian Chicanas and Chicanos pictured a barrio world where overt homoeroticism and social deviance turned librarians into *cholas*, and *maricones* terrorized the social elite of West L.A. Terrill’s archival practices demonstrates a rare chapter of homosexual artistic collaborations in the Chicano art movement.

In *Chapter 5: Archival Body Destruction: The Wonder of Mundo Meza*, I detail my efforts to recover the queer remains of Meza’s artistic oeuvre. Meza, a performance artist, painter, and collaborator of Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, died of AIDS related complication in Los Angeles in 1985. His breadth of work, reportedly untraceable, was allegedly seized and destroyed by his family. Renowned for his brilliant department store windows, paintings, fashion designs and street performances, I will excavate what remains of his archival body through extensive fieldwork, oral history interviews and analysis of photographic archives. I present recovered queer remains of his work and restore his collection from obscurity. By theorizing the queer afterlife of Mundo Meza’s art, I question the places of his interment and homosexual men’s acts of commemoration.

Teddy Sandoval is the subject of *Chapter 6: Butch Gardens and Queer Cabinets: The Corazon Herida of Teddy Sandoval*.<sup>85</sup> When he died of AIDS related causes in 1995, he had been commissioned to design a public art piece for the

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<sup>85</sup> Sandoval was renowned among a growing collective of Chicano avant-garde artists and exhibited in the famed *Chicanarte* exhibit at the Barnsdall art park in 1975. Sandoval founded the notorious Butch Gardens School of Fine Arts, a fictitious art school based on a gay bar he frequented. Despite working in a medium quite rare in Chicano art practices—decorative ceramics—Sandoval’s flamboyance and artistic interests in interior design and the homoerotic are a rarely acknowledged element of the Chicano art movement in L.A.

Southwest Museum Station for the newly minted Metro Transit L.A. Gold Line. However, financial set backs and political circumstances delayed the project years after his death. In this chapter, I discuss the tensions surrounding this “gateway to Highlands Park” between Metro Transit, the Southwest Museum administration, and Sandoval’s life partner and estate executor Paul Polubinskas. Transforming the Chicano neighborhood landscape through sculptures of mosaic guardians, Ionic columns, and melting dice, I explore how this collection of Sandoval’s ceramics became a largely unrecognized Chicano AIDS countermemorial.

In *Chapter 7: The VIVA Museum: Queer Geographies of Chicano Art*, I examine VIVA: Gay and Lesbian Artists of Los Angeles. Founded by gay Guatemalan activist Roland Palencia in 1987, this groundbreaking organization attracted hundreds of artists throughout its 13 year history, among them: Robert Cyclona Legorreta, Joey Terrill, Teddy Sandoval and Mundo Meza’s partner, Jef Huereque. Arguably, AIDS drove VIVA’s programming and as I will argue, so did its curatorial and spatial interventions. The art organization contested the finite place of “Chicano art” in Los Angeles and reconfigured the battleground of AIDS warfare. In fact, I insist that the transgressive spatiality of VIVA art exhibitions produced a rarely considered queer cartography for “Chicano art.” I argue that sexuality prompted a queer place-making project for Chicano art and generated other re-adaptive uses of gallery space beyond the expanse of barrio neighborhoods and ethnic-specific galleries in the city. I will discuss three polemic shows exemplifying VIVA’s curatorial practices beginning with *VIVA’s Mexico: Too Many Centuries of Denial, Invisibility and Silence* (1991), *Julio Ugay: Paintings, Drawings, Prints*,

*Ceramics* (1992), and *VIVA's Tenth Anniversary Show* (1998). Through each exhibition, I demonstrate how object arrangements and display techniques produced “other” stagings for queer sexualities in Chicano art and queer spatial experiences for Chicano art viewership.

Lastly, in *Chapter 8: An Impossible Moment: Toward the Dark Cracks of Chicano Art History*, my dissertation comes full circle and discusses “Homombre L.A.” silkscreen atelier at Self-Help Graphics in East Los Angeles on December 2007. Led by painter and illustrator Miguel Angel Reyes (formerly of the VIVA art organization board of directors), ten artists came together for the first gay male themed printmaking workshop in the 35-year history of the organization. This effort is quite profound when we reconsider the Catholic origins of this East L.A. institution under the direction of Sister Karen Bocalero, a Franciscan nun, and the suspicious erasure of her homosexual artist-colleagues, Carlos Bueno and his lover, Antonio Ibanez. Unfortunately, the “Homombre” atelier has yet to be fully evaluated and the collection of prints has never been displayed. This closing chapter will offer a necessary comment on a growing generation of mixed-media artists in California shaped or impacted by the men central to this study.

Inspired by feminist art historian Griselda Pollock’s call for a virtual feminist museum, the outcome of my investigation operates like an allegorical archival exhibition.<sup>86</sup> Each case study is its own repository questioning the place of homosexuality in the Chicano art movement, examining what “gay Chicano” subjectivities looked like, and more importantly, interrogating how this collection of

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<sup>86</sup> For more see, Griselda Pollock. *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

homosexual artists has visually and materially survived, albeit in the “dark cracks” of Los Angeles. My project works from a fulcrum of visual and material culture. I recover those physical objects exteriorizing other ways of being and seeing Chicano male sexuality, and conceptualize the variegated archive formations and processes within the alternative care of homosexual heritage purveyors. This dissertation ultimately disrupts the compulsory heterosexual sight of this movement and therefore, radically posits the inherent role of homosexuality making Chicano art visible in the American imagination.

## Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

### *Paranormal Activity: Homosexuality, Chicano Art, and the Phantom's Phantom*

It goes without saying that phantoms have been haunting Los Angeles ever since Chicano conceptual artist Harry Gamboa, Jr. compared Chicano culture to a ghostly apparition in his famed article, "No Phantoms" (1981).<sup>1</sup> Intangible and invisible to the cultural elite, Chicanos were another ephemeral presence buried and unseen from the creative milieu in the city. In this chapter, I want to return to his formative concept of "phantom culture," a term that has gained great currency in recent years. It is the vehicle by which contemporary Chicano art has been reintroduced to mainstream curators, critics, collectors, and audiences in the famed *Phantom Sightings* exhibition in 2008. And yet, I argue that it is a term that has particular meaning for homosexual omissions in the Chicano art-historical record. This double meaning of the phantom or what I term as "the phantom's phantom" is quite ironic considering Gamboa's acknowledged role in the Chicano avant-garde art collective ASCO as the "unofficial" historian for the group. His early writings captured an ideological philosophy for experimental Chicano imagery infused with themes of alienation, obscurity, and exile. His camera or super 8 film lenses became the mechanisms of his archive. By negotiating the documentary and the conceptual,

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr. "No Phantoms," *High Performance* 14 (1981): 15.



his photographs unmask the unmarked, unseen, or refuted influence of Chicanos in the Los Angeles urban landscape and broader American social fabric.<sup>2</sup>

However, his image-making also recorded the unrepresented, unbelievable, and unrecorded haunting of a different kind: the allusive specter of AIDS. My alternative reading of “phantom culture” and in turn, “phantom sighting” punctuates the critical omissions at work in the way the Chicano Art Movement has been constituted and the varying bodies of literature contributing to this silence. It is perhaps fitting that this essay begins with Gamboa’s words, words that have traveled and shaped a significant trajectory for Chicano art institutionally, art-historically, and now museologically. Nonetheless, they are words that have yet to be realized in the context of sexual difference and the AIDS crisis.

Opening in April of 2008 *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* marked a milestone for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the history of Chicano art exhibitions in the U.S. Not since the *Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation* (CARA) show in 1990 had a major public art museum in California re-evaluated emergent Chicano art practices and generational artistic differences among their practitioners. Drawing on abstract, conceptual, and spatial aesthetics, these 25 artists from across the U.S., many too young to experience the Chicano art movement in the 1970s, cited the interventionist work of Marcel Duchamp, Zurich Dada, Hollywood, Japanese anime, and hip hop as stylistic referents over the Pre-Columbian mythology, Indigeneity and Mexican modernism that appealed to an art generation before. These cinematic, global, and hybridic

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<sup>2</sup>For more, see Chon A. Noriega, Ed. *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998).

qualities revealed an avant-garde as much “American” as it was “Mexican.” The resulting postmodern slippage of identity and taxonomies of Chicano imagery revealed visual practices within and against the limiting scope of art-historical literature and rigid museum institutional systems. Though some critics faulted the show for an often misperceived “post-identity” position, curators Rita Gonzalez, Howard Fox, and Chon Noriega were quick to emphasize “art after the Chicano movement” as a “postscript” or a temporal demarcation of contemporary social and urban experiences rather than the familiar visual artillery of protest aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

What is perhaps most essential to their curatorial schema is the foregrounding of “Phantom Sighting,” a museological application of “phantom culture”<sup>4</sup> a term from the early writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr. In the LACMA show, the ephemeral and fleeting quality of Chicano cultural practices shaped a curatorial approach that “places an emphasis on seeing what is not considered to be there.”<sup>5</sup> Thus breaking and fragmenting such realist and representational expectations of Chicano community-based figurative art, the exhibition theoretically conjured “three phantoms” or “tendencies”<sup>6</sup> at work in the show. The formations of these specters are neither hierarchical nor causal. Rather, they demonstrate the fluidity and malleability between high art and low art, the local and global, the mass and popular culture.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Christopher Miles, “LACMA East: ‘Phantom Sights’ Chronicles the Rise of Post-Chicanoism,” *L.A. Weekly*, May 1, 2008. Ken Johnson, “They’re Chicanos and Artists. But Is Their Art Chicano?,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr. “No Phantoms,” *High Performance* 14 (1981): 15.

<sup>5</sup> Chon Noriega, “The Orphans of Modernism,” In *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, eds. Rita Gonzalez, Howard Fox and Chon Noriega (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

In his catalogue essay “Orphans of Modernism,” Chon Noriega discusses the “first phantom”<sup>7</sup> as that which knowingly embraces Chicano art categorization, although unacknowledged within the broader circuitry of the art marketplace and mainstream museum institutions. Correspondingly or perhaps as a result, the “second phantom”<sup>8</sup> is an irreconcilable haunting for artists of Mexican descent reinscribed within a Chicano art genealogy though not necessarily working within Chicano social protest and identity politics. This kind of ghost is a familiar one, parsing the essentialist meaning of “Chicano art” and prompting several reviewers of the exhibition to reduce its complexities to another debate over ethnic labeling. In response, independent curator Pilar Tompkins-Rivas quipped, “I think more articles have been written about whether Chicano art exists than there have been art exhibits dedicated to exploring the idea.”<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, Noriega proposes the “third phantom”<sup>10</sup> as a spatial and referential function of this art. These acts of siting/citing make tangible claims to an art history denied and recognize the “meanwhile”<sup>11</sup> time lag in art historical writings. Rather than add Chicano art as a minority addendum to the art history survey textbook, Noriega wants us to think about the “meanwhile” as a context for vital dialogue that reoccurred with modernist concerns. This maneuver appeals to a constant involvement rather than a separate severed bookend. He writes, “This engagement with the art historical cuts across various boundaries within Chicano art – whether my distinction of three phantoms, different generational cohorts, or the curatorial binaries

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Carolina A. Miranda, “How Chicano Is It ?,” *ARTnews*, September 2010, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Noriega, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Noriega, 38.

established by touchstone Chicano art surveys since the 1980s – Chicano artists are not sui generis concerned only with the creation of identity art, but rather artists who have engaged global issues, participated in international art movements, and contributed to new genres and formal developments.”<sup>12</sup> Through an expansive reuse of Gamboa’s writing, Noriega’s triad boldly articulates these burgeoning directions in contemporary Chicano art.

However, I would like to return to Gamboa’s social biography for other possible sources of “phantom sighting.” My efforts here are not to prescribe fixed significations for “phantom culture” but rather, to investigate other paranormal activities certainly less cited although present in the haunts of global Los Angeles. According to painter Joey Terrill, “If being Chicano is like a phantom culture, I think being a queer or lesbian Latina/Latino artist is almost like you’re a phantom within a phantom culture.”<sup>13</sup> Might we consider homosexuality as the “fourth phantom” under Noriega’s rubric? Can the allusive though undeniable permutations of homosexuality in the shadows of Chicano representational protest art and avant-garde conceptualism constitute the conditions for the phantom’s phantom?

In the following discussion, I read “along the archival grain”<sup>14</sup> and distinguish the discursive formations of homosexuality in the Chicano art-historical record and explicate how scholars and artists have written about the homosexual subject in Chicano art history. By examining the place for non-heteronormative sexual expression, I discern the conditions for same-sex desires in the Chicano Art

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<sup>12</sup> Noriega, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August, 2007. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Laura Stoler. “Colonial Archives and the Acts of Governance.” *Archival Science*. 2 (2002): 99.

Movement and then evaluate occurrences when this phantom is bared. This critical overview of Chicano artist oral histories, Chicano art history, material culture studies, and archive studies reveals the officiating discourses of homosexuality in the Chicano art archive, historical voids, limitations of sexuality research in the material record, and in turn, the significance of counterarchival practices central to my investigation. In short, I ask: how has the “official” Chicano art-historical narrative broached the topic of homosexuality and how has it produced knowledge about sexual difference? My attention to these discursive bodies enunciates the shortfalls and omissions taking place across a variety of disciplines and thus, illuminates the critical need for the interdisciplinary methodology and recovery project at the crux of my dissertation. These factors converge in the story of Jack Vargas.

*The Haunting of Jack Vargas*

In an interview with art critic Jeffrey Rangel in 1999 for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Harry Gamboa, Jr. discusses friend and colleague Jack Vargas. A conceptualist and painter from Cypress, CA in Orange County, Vargas’s obscurity in Chicano art history is regrettable to say the least, especially given his early artistic antecedents in the mail art movement where his use of image-text and sexual innuendo configured a key precept for homoerotic Chicano representational practice. Vargas was principally regarded for his pictorial investigations of L.A. suburbia, a preoccupation enhanced by his own spatial experience of planned neighborhoods that characterized his upbringing. This is evident in a piece of mail art dated January 1, 1976.

In figure 2.1, he assembles a color Xerox collage of a fictive magazine cover entitled, “Suburban J” a self-referential title of his own name. Beneath the bold masthead, a topographical tourist map of Los Angeles County is juxtaposed by a landscape photograph of a Spanish mission-style home. The central position of two ladders placed at ground and mid-levels draws our attention to the distorted surface of the stucco planes. This exteriority portrays a L.A. suburban home-in-the-making through cosmetic alterations to the house exterior, a sustained attention to housing artifice. Presumably, this transitioning house identity is a gesture toward the cohesive stylistic façade, something predictable and common for suburban enclaves in Southern California planned communities.

The commercial pop quality of the mail art design is reminiscent of the David Hockney’s Southland suburbia with its reflective pools staging gay sexual fantasies.<sup>15</sup> Vargas also draws attention to his own psycho-sexual tensions of what lies between the inside and outside of this picture perfect L.A. landscape. To the far left of the landscape photo, Vargas includes vertically paired photographs in the collage, one a barren house garden inscribed as “before” and the next, portraying a bountiful cluster of blooming daisies as the “after” (see Figure 2.2). Perhaps “Suburban J” conveys an allegory for home improvement in the seen/unseen valences of the landscape. Three words in floating bubbles ascend the Spanish style house from tangential lines reading, “tre,” “men,” and “do.” Vargas’s sparse interplay with Italian and English text suggests an unexpected bilingualism for Chicano artists at the time. Take for instance Vargas’s mail art trademark, “Le Club for Boys.” Branded and rubber

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<sup>15</sup> For an excellent discussion of David Hockney’s erotic biography of the city, see Cecile Whiting. *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). I also discuss Hockney’s relationship to Chicano artist Joey Terrill in chapter four of this study.

stamped on his pieces, Vargas's parody subverted canonical "schools of art" and assumed a French and English code-switching that emptied Chicano art tactics based on claims to ancient Mexican indigenous languages like Nahuatl, Mixtec, or Zapotec.

Inside, the folded postcard reveals a commercial advertisement of three prototypical suburban white men intimately entrenched in a homosocial activity. In figure 2.3, they explore the complex wiring of the TV console; we view the men closely inserting tools and probing the mechanical entanglements of the wire grids. By peering into the confines of Vargas's suburbia, we stumble upon a scene quite different from Hockney's masculine, bathing youths. The "Tre" "Men" "Do" is a fraternal order of three suburbanite husbands, two men observing as the other unfetters his wire. Might this reveal what "Tre" "Men" "Do"? At the mid ground of the advertisement, Vargas poses a provocative question in type lettering, "Where would you find these men any night of the week after 10 p.m.?" The insinuation is suggestive, remarking on concealed behaviors between men and alluding to late evening activities beyond the seemingly innocent wire play inside the L.A. Spanish style home. Though it is unclear if it is Vargas's intention to coax a coy return answer from his gay Chicano correspondent, his image-text strategy is enough to show a critical engagement with conceptual art at the convergence of Chicano identity, homosexuality, and the built environment.

Vargas's important though unacknowledged role in advancing Chicano conceptualism was firmly concretized in his submission to the highly regarded "Chicanarte" exhibition at the Barnsdall Art Park in Los Angeles in 1975. This statewide California art show bolstered over 100 artists becoming the first major

Chicano art exhibit at Barnsdall Art Park and one of the first all-Chicano organized and juried art exhibitions of this type and scale.<sup>16</sup> Led by Al Frente Communications, Inc., and the UCLA Chicano Arts Council, the show faced difficulties, unable to secure a gallery space from area art galleries. It was only after political pressure and community outcry that the City of L.A.'s Municipal Arts Department agreed to lend out the venue.<sup>17</sup> "Chicanarte" was a major compendium of Chicano art collectives that defined the art movement like ASCO, Self-Help Graphics, Los Four, and the Royal Chicano Air Force. This multi-generational convergence of varied artistic expressions and strategies generated exposure to new aesthetic forms and art networks across the state. It is important to note that in the same year, "Chicanismo en el Arte" was co-juried by LACMA for East Los Angeles College's Vincent Price Gallery. Though smaller in size, this show included the work of 31 young Chicano artists from 12 regional art schools, including the art of Roberto Gil de Montes, Teddy Sandoval, Richard Nieblas, Gronk, Patssi Valdez, and Willie Herron.<sup>18</sup> Both shows represent a Chicano museum culture in Los Angeles reaching its apex in 1975. After all, Los Four had the first Chicano art show at a major public art museum, LACMA, just one year prior. Within this context, these mainstream venues not only facilitated artist networks and exchanges but also exposed new aesthetic proposals including homoerotic imagery by Carlos Bueno, Teddy Sandoval, and Jack Vargas.

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<sup>16</sup> Raul V. Romero, "Chicanarte: A Major Exposition of California Arts," *Newworld*, [Fall 1975], 22 (Box 6, Folder 16) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Chicanismo en el Arte*. Exhibition Catalogue. (East Los Angeles College, 1975). From the Estate of Teddy Sandoval.



In fact, Gamboa recalls his first encounter with Vargas's work at "Chicanarte," a rolodex of words assembling sexually suggestive innuendo within the envelop order (see Figure 2.4). This early conceptual interplay with an ordinary found object, photography, and language appealed to Gamboa's growing experimentation with pun and wordplay. In fact, Vargas's piece, a provocative interrogation of Chicano art and sexual identity, provoked hostile reactions from gallery attendants. Gamboa recalled, "People wanted to toss him into the tar pits basically. And because of the way I am, a fast talker and I've always had to kind of intervene and do things, I cut in and was able to out talk and out argue as he escaped the third exit, you know. And so that was it. And I always remembered that. But I remember that that particular piece, the way he played with the words had an effect on the way I think from that point on [...] [T]he way I would use words."<sup>19</sup> Several years later, Gamboa thanked Vargas.

In 1995, Vargas posed in Gamboa's highly lauded Chicano Male Unbonded photo series on urban masculinity and the Chicano portrait. A librarian at the L.A. Public Library, Vargas agreed and the two men met downtown. Waiting for the appropriate lighting, they talked for an hour and a half before commencing the shoot. Gamboa was pleased with the outcome of their collaboration. Afterwards, phone calls to Vargas were unreturned. Both his home and work phone numbers were disconnected. Returning to the public library, Gamboa approached a staff member and asked for his friend. The woman responded that Jack had AIDS and passed away. With the photo portrait in his hand, Gamboa realized that the image of Jack Vargas

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<sup>19</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr. Interview by Jeffrey Rangel, audio recording, 1-16 April, 1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Los Angeles, California.

was taken just days before his death. Following this moment in his interview, Rangel pondered this ephemeral moment, the “here and gone”<sup>20</sup> conditions of AIDS, also likening it to phantom culture.

Returning to what Noriega called the “seeing what is not considered to be there”<sup>21</sup> of phantom sighting, I am interested in the way the absence and invisibility of Vargas’s place in Chicano art conceptualism recommits acts of disappearance and void. The allusive specter of non-heteronormative sexualities conjures a “phantom of phantoms” unseen in the foundations of Chicano art history. This is only further confounded by the devastating impact of AIDS on Chicano artists, a poorly documented and unseen travesty dissolving bodies, art collections, and private archival collections. By reconsidering Gamboa’s testimonio not as exceptional but indicative of a homosexual illusion, we confront Vargas’s phantom, his unrecorded aesthetic influence, and little known body of work on display at a foundational Chicano art exhibition. In this way, Vargas’s story signals a pivotal queer re-visioning for “phantom sighting,” something overlooked by the LACMA show. After all, how is a phantom’s sight produced when the capacity to see remains the province of heterosexuality? That is, might phantom sight perpetuate a blind spot over its own shadow unaware of the phantom’s phantom? This intangibility of homosexualities in Gamboa’s biography suggests a type of queer location in the Chicano Art Movement, a “dark crack” unintelligible even among phantoms.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Noriega, 18.

Que(e)rying the Chicano Art Movement

This sexual myopia persists in the existing historical record and the officiating discourse of the Chicano Art Movement. As we “read with the archival grain,” it goes without saying that Chicanos have always had a precarious relationship with systems of public record, preservation, and commemoration. This was exemplified by the obliteration of Mayan codices by Spanish colonial forces in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the “melting”<sup>22</sup> of adobe settlements, the Anglo-Eurocentric bias of historical bibliographies in the Southwest, and the “unnoticed” 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexican American literary tradition by Texas libraries and special collections.<sup>23</sup> In fact, even the negligence of “Hispanic” nominations in the National Register of Historic Places indicates the expendability of Chicano heritage sites<sup>24</sup> such as La Placita in Tucson,<sup>25</sup> and most recently, Olvera Street in Los Angeles, which faces encroaching threats by downtown urban development.<sup>26</sup> Under these conditions, the “America” at the center of “American cultural heritage” and historic preservation efforts might actually begin in 1848 after the signing of the Treaty of the Guadalupe Hidalgo. Following the U.S. invasion of Mexican territories, the regions now composing the physical U.S./Mexico border became the spoils of war and with it, Indigenous, New Spanish, and Mexican

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<sup>22</sup> Greg Hise. “Border City: Race and Social Distance in Los Angeles.” *American Quarterly*.56.3 (September 2004): 549.

<sup>23</sup> For an excellent summary of Chicano/Latino relationships with the archive read Salvador Guereña, “Archives and Manuscripts: Historical Antecedents to Contemporary Chicano Collections.” [www.cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/arcman.html](http://www.cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/arcman.html) (Last access: September 16, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Pope reveals that few Hispanic historic places are nominated to the national registry for preservation and even fewer are outside of the Southwest and Puerto Rico. For more see, Sarah Dillard Pope, “Hispanic History in the National Register of Historic Places.” *CRM*. 20.11 (1997).

<sup>25</sup> See Lydia R. Otero, “La Placita Committee: Claiming Place and History.” In *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*, eds. Vicki Ruiz and John Chavez, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008) 44-68.

<sup>26</sup> Ruben Vives, “Olvera Street businesses say rent increases may force closures,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 2010.

occupants. As a result, this created an “unnatural boundary” separating families and villages, constituting a zone of unresolved contestation and hostility. This contentious and inflamed border landscape refuted the Mexican presence in the U.S., casting it as “alien,” “foreign,” and illegitimate. This perception had powerful implications for Mexican American cultural heritage in the visual, material, and archival record.

The territorial convergence between New Spain, Native America, and Mexico produced a cultural syncretism, including the adoption of new tools, materials, and distribution networks for weaving, saddlery, silversmithing, and woodcarving. American westward expansion circulated burgeoning regional art practices, introduced trade in the Camino Real, and fueled a commercial market demand for bultos, retablos, and santos.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, foodways, dances, corridos, folklore and alternative healing traditions and mysticism persisted through the embodied acts of bodily transfer in what Diana Taylor calls “the repertoire.”<sup>28</sup> Cultural knowledge survived in non-written technologies and exchange such as oral, auditory, or haptic acquisition. This episode of American art and global culture at the U.S./Mexico border captures what art historians and cultural critics Shifra Goldman and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto consider a major antecedent in Chicano art, a non-European concession in the critical discourse of American art history. In truth, Chicano cultural practices were anything but “foreign” or “alien” to the U.S.

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<sup>27</sup> See Tey Marianna Nunn. *Sin Nombre: Hispana and Hispano Artists of the New Deal Era*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> See Diana Taylor. *The Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

In their related study, Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto propose a trajectory of four chronological periods in Chicano art history: the Pre-Columbian and New Spanish antecedents in territories now considered the American southwest (1598-1821), the Mexican American War and Manifest Destiny (1821-1910), the formation of Mexican America (1910-1965) and two generations of Chicana/o art production (1968-1975 and 1975-1981).<sup>29</sup> Of late, scholars like Ybarra-Frausto, Noriega, and Gonzalez have committed sustained inquiry into the “post-Chicano”<sup>30</sup> or what might be termed “millennial generation”<sup>31</sup> in Chicano art, an imperfect periodization that can also be traced to East L.A. avant-gardism in the 1960s and 70s. For this dissertation, I revisit the two generational periods of Chicano art, a timeframe that correlates with pivotal actions of Chicano political protest and direct action organizing such as the Chicano Moratorium, the United Farm Workers Hunger Strikes, the East L.A. High School Blowouts, and the adoption of manifestos like the El Plan de Santa Barbara, El Plan de Delano, and the El Plan de Aztlan.

It is little wonder that the Chicano Art Movement developed what Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto termed an eye on public visibility and the archive.<sup>32</sup> Through this emphasis on visual knowledge, Chicano political ideologues catalyzed social dissent through an iconographic milieu aiding specific political objectives and outcomes. For Southern California artists such as Carlos Almaraz, Judy Baca, Barbara Carrasco, Gilbert “Magu” Lujan, Frank Romero and John Valadez (to name a few), this meant

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<sup>29</sup> Shifra Goldman and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto. *Arte Chicano: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965-1981*. (Berkeley: Chicano Studies Library Publications Unit, 1985), 16.

<sup>30</sup> See Rita Gonzalez, “Strangeways Here We Come.” In *Recent Pasts: Art in Southern California from the '90s to Now*, ed. John C. Welchman, (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> See Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, “Post-Movimiento: The Contemporary (Re)Generation of Chicana(o) Art.” In *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 289-296.

<sup>32</sup> Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto, 5.

working in varied media, environments, materials, and scales. They generated auditorium length banners for United Farm Worker conventions, portable frescos, and site-specific murals, political graphics, silkscreen posters, chromolith calendarios, art festivals, and even curated temporary Chicano art exhibits for conferences, rallies and college campuses as early as the 1960s.

By developing a visual vocabulary of resistance in a representational aesthetic, the Chicano Art Movement fathomed a course of self-determination through the indigenous past, folkloric figures, Aztec mythologies, ancient homelands, and revolutionary heroes.<sup>33</sup> The agricultural worker, the zoot-suit clad pachuco, and the self-sacrificing virgin-mother became “glamorized”<sup>34</sup> icons for Chicano political mobilization. This pursuit for public visibility, transgressive imagery, and identity in the face of hegemonic marginality shaped what Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto called an “archival consciousness.”<sup>35</sup> That is, Chicano artists were “subliminally” aware of the historical importance of visual and material records to contest social erasure. In turn, activists built other organizational modes for cultural preservation in community-based cultural centers, arts workshops, and barrio gallerias (neighborhood galleries). According to Carlos Francisco Jackson, “In the spirit of self-determination, cultural workers, artists, and activists used community centers and workshops to define the lens through which Chicano culture and history would be viewed.”<sup>36</sup> In Los Angeles, this resulted in the formation of Self-Help Graphics, the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Shifra Goldman. “The Iconography of Chicano Self-Determination: Race, Ethnicity, and Class.” *Art Journal*. (Summer 1990): 171.

<sup>35</sup> Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Carlos Francisco Jackson. *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 158.

Mechicano Art Center, Goetz Gallery, the Social Public Art Resource Center, and Plaza de la Raza.

However, if Chicano libraries, museums, and repositories were the tangible outcome of an “archival conscious,” as Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto suggest, then what might occupy the reciprocal “archival unconscious”? This is a question they overlook and it is here, too, where the officiating discourse of the Chicano art movement constitutes a gender and sexual neutrality in the archive. In this way, the literature about the Chicano art movement perpetuates how “artists have taken an affirmative stance celebrating race, ethnicity, and class” without recognizing how sexuality was an integral though shadowed presence in this cultural production and archive-building.<sup>37</sup>

Within the context of Freudian psychoanalysis, the unconscious mind is a repository for the libidinal urges of the repressed self, wherein fantasy, desire and buried impulses lie. The Id of the human psyche contains the “dark, inaccessible part of our personality.”<sup>38</sup> Might it be that while the “archival conscious” in Chicano art came to depend on constellations of objects, images, and subjects with an I/eye on preserving history and promoting visibility, it simultaneously repressed things that expose illicit desires in the dark corners of the self? After all, if “archival consciousness” produced repositories and collections to preserve cultural longevity within the traditional conventions of systematic preservation, then what might the buried “archival unconsciousness” reveal in the libidinal potency of collections and things dwelling in dark places?

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<sup>37</sup> Goldman, 167.

<sup>38</sup> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973), 106.

With this in mind, my dissertation reimagines the Chicano Art Movement through the dark places where the illicit fantasies and repressed desires complicate and confound the heteronormative vision of Chicano art. Implicitly, this ruptures the cultural heritage institutions lauded in Chicano art history and illuminates the ways in which “queer remains” anticipate other archival configurations. By directing critical attention to these unlikely grounds and collections, my study begins a long overdue project to excavate, repair, and retrieve those things concealed and absolved from the breadth of Chicano art historical literature and criticism. In this way, the modicum of queer evidence in an “archival conscious” perpetuates the common misperception that homosexuality is an anomaly or an inconsequential element of a grander artist pantheon. Hence, the presumed dearth of records in “salient” institutional archives legitimates this complacency and neglect.

### *Sexual Disclosures in Art History*

This is a familiar intellectual posture we can observe in the field of art history. Broadly speaking, these disciplinarians defend and shield canonical masters in European derived art movements from the drains of “populist modernism”<sup>39</sup> and troublesome identity politics. In part, this position is complicated when we trouble the authority these scholars give to archival records and visual materials. According to art historian James Smalls, there are three preeminent methodological approaches to art history: formalism (close attendance to aestheticism, style and form), social history (historical materialist and economic), and critical theory (cultural,

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<sup>39</sup> Kobena Mercer, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation.” *Third Text* 10 (Spring 1990): 63.



psychoanalytical, and contextual).<sup>40</sup> Although art historian Stephen Eisenmann emphatically endorsed art history's potential to "excavat[e] the histories of the various national racisms, and uncover[ing] the roots of the present political and ideological impasse,"<sup>41</sup> the object-centered emphasis in the discipline imposes a methodology to "prove" the object's aesthetic quality under the qualifier of "close reading." This formalist position inherently disarms post-structuralist and post-modern critics' suspicions of master narratives, authorial genius, institutional authority, and "ways of looking."<sup>42</sup> As a result, claims of significance based on the racial and sexualized implications of an artist's biography are disregarded as little more than baseless conjecture or the untrained eye of interdisciplinarians in American studies, Ethnic studies, or Gender and Sexuality studies.

This attitude even has implications for gay American art historians. In Jonathan Weinberg's assessment of homosexuality among New York American modernists like Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley, he exposes how any inquiry into "clandestine sexual subculture" tests the limits of what is considered "the proper domain of art history" and provokes accusations of "looking too deep."<sup>43</sup> The source of such anxiety reveals a deeper worry when queer interpretation stands to mend sexual identity and biography within aesthetic content. Such visual suturing impacts how moderns like Demuth and Hartley are seen and valued in the art marketplace, museum industry, and intellectual field.

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<sup>40</sup> James Smalls. "Ghost of a Chance: Invisibility and Elision in African American Art Historical Practice," *Art Documentation* 13.1 (Spring 1994): 3.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, "Triangulating Racism." *Art Bulletin* 78.4 (December 1996): 604.

<sup>42</sup> John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant-Garde*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xiii.

This was clearly the obstacle facing the controversial *Hide/Seek* show at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in 2010, a topic I take up more directly in Chapter 4. Using sexuality as a lens to view familiar canonical works, including American genre painting and high modern abstraction, the curators decoded and challenged the presumptive heteronormative views in art-historical discourse. Jonathan Katz argues, “[O]ur goal has been to address the role of sexual difference within the American mainstream, both as a means of underscoring the hypocrisy of the current post-Mapplethorpe anxiety about referencing same-sex desire in the museum world and toward scrutinizing the widely held but utterly unsupportable assumption that same-sex desire is at best tangential to the history of American art.”<sup>44</sup> To its credit, *Hide/Seek* confronted how art world institutions have operated under some de facto “don’t ask don’t tell” rule, challenging the presumption that sexuality is an inferior or insignificant dimension of some central and stable human subjectivity.

For scholars of Chicano art history the thought of a “post-Mapplethorpe” rebuke was perhaps enough to withdraw the adjoining of sexual analysis in biography and aesthetic evaluation. This was certainly the case in interpretations of famed Chicano painter Carlos Almaraz, co-founder of Los Four, the first Chicano art collective to exhibit at LACMA in 1974. His oeuvre of expressive paintings depicting apocalyptic freeway landscapes, twisted car collisions, and aggressive brushstrokes of explosive color catapulted his career into the mainstream. Trained at Otis College of Art and Design and married to Chicana painter and photographer Elsa Flores, it was shocking when Almaraz died in 1989 of AIDS related complications.

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Katz, “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” In *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, eds. Jonathan Katz and David Ward (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 15.

His sexuality remains an unacknowledged caveat in his biography, disregarded as an insincere or libelous claim for art-historical and queer study.

However, Almaraz's sexual orientation looms in the unwritten memory of Chicano artists' recollections of the painter. For instance, fellow Los Four member Gil "Magu" Lujan bluntly describes Almaraz as a "gay man." In a 1997 interview with Jeffrey Rangel, he recalls, "Carlos, at that time, wasn't public about what he was, but we knew and he didn't hide it from us [Los Four]."<sup>45</sup> According to Lujan, his sexuality was a distinctive element of the art collective with each member's "lifestyle" shaping the artistic exchange and overall creative production. Oddly, "Los Four" member Frank Romero, who met Almaraz as an 18-year-old, makes no explicit claims to his sexuality in his discussions about the artist.<sup>46</sup> Ironically enough, according to Lujan, Romero himself was also subject of gay rumor because of his uncharacteristic masculinity and preoccupation with painting over women.<sup>47</sup>

A similar type of gay-baiting reportedly hounded Chicana painter and illustrator Barbara Carrasco who revealed how Chicano artists' overt womanizing hindered her love life, for which men like Ricardo Duardo accused her of lesbianism. Mentored by Carlos Almaraz, Carrasco encountered homosexuality throughout her early training and participation in the Chicano Art Movement. In fact, she retells an occasion when Almaraz invited her to the beach and held her in his confidence. Carrasco, a rather sheltered child raised by a traditional Mexican mother and under

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<sup>45</sup> Gilbert Sanchez Lujan. Interview by Jeffrey Rangel, audio recording, 7-17 November 1997. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Romero. Interview by Jeffrey Rangel, audio recording, 17 January 1997 and 2 March 1997. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>47</sup> Gilbert Sanchez Lujan. Interview by Jeffrey Rangel, audio recording, 7-17 November 1997. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Los Angeles, California.

the conservative dictums of the Catholic Church, was shocked by his self-disclosure. She remembered, “[H]e brought out this book and it was all about homosexuality and it was women with women. There were drawings, a series of drawings of women with women and men with men. And then he said that he brought me the book to tell me –it was his way of easing me into telling me that he was bisexual.”<sup>48</sup> Whether gay, bisexual, or something unsaid, the evasive sexuality of Carlos Almaraz can be read as a silent promise on behalf of early Chicana and Chicano artists to inoculate Almaraz from harm, a commercial artist within an art market inhospitable to Chicanos generally and much less to gay and bisexual Chicano artists. While I do not take up how his sexuality may be explained in the visual poetics of his muscular paintings (a worthy endeavor), I am interested in this discourse as seeming constellations of queer encounters and sexual transgressions.<sup>49</sup> Thus, we can begin to see how the presumed sexual neutrality of the Chicano art archive is actually punctuated by these phantom presences.

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<sup>48</sup>Barbara Carrasco. Interview by Jeffrey Rangel, audio recording, 13-26 April 1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>49</sup>We can also scrutinize the way homosexuality is broadly seen and placed when it is confronted in Chicano art-historical narratives. Male homosexuality in early Chicano art discourse is a spatially and temporally distanced topic. They are far removed from the very barrios authenticating the “voice of the people.” For instance, Frank Romero cites his own enclosed barrio upbringing as a sharp contrast from the sexually liberated homosexuals he encountered on Hollywood Boulevard with Carlos Almaraz and Dan Guerrero. Similarly, in an interview with Peter Bermingham, Chicano sculptor and illustrator Luis Jimenez discussed his frustration and inability to commission work in the limited art marketplace of Austin, Texas. Only able to secure mural jobs at the local Pizza Hut and the Engineering Department at University of Texas, Austin, Jimenez impulsively left his family, packed his car and drove to New York City. Upon his arrival, Jimenez chose to stay at a local YMCA where he first encountered homosexuality. “I tried to stay at the 35<sup>th</sup> Street Y. I came out of the sticks. When I went into the 35<sup>th</sup> Street Y and I saw everybody was gay—I mean, not everybody, but I thought everybody was gay—I was just terrified. I went out and I slept in my car the first night.” Jimenez’s sexual anxiety and fear shows a discursive location for homosexuality placed at the convergences of Chicano art, sexual identity and cultural geography. See Luis Jimenez. Interview by Peter Bermingham, audio recording, 15-17 December 1985. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Tucson, Arizona.

Heretofore, the predominating erasure of homosexuality in Chicano art agitates the positivism undergirding mainstream repositories and unveils the social construction of the archive's formation. The residual void of sexuality studies in Chicano art literature is explained away as the by-product of the archivist's neglect. Though as the aforementioned case studies of Jack Vargas and Carlos Almaraz indicate, the Chicano Art Movement was cognizant to varying degrees of differing male sexual expressions. In fact, the impression that "gay men and lesbians" were vilified or entirely absent in the Chicano Art Movement must also be deconstructed for its simplicity. For example, in their opening essay, "Latinos and Society: Culture, Politics and Class," Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres discuss the changing socio-economic factors contributing to burgeoning new directions in U.S. Latina/o research. In a section regarding gender, sexuality, and power, they observe:

In a political environment that already viewed feminist ideology as divisive and destructive to the Latino community, lesbians and gays experience much hostility and political attack from 'within.' Without question, a cultural nationalist ideology that utilized its power, on the one hand, to perpetuate stereotypical images of Latino women as sacrificing and long-suffering mothers and wives, and on the other, to legitimate an unrelenting machismo, could hardly support a politics of inclusion and equality for homosexuals and lesbians who were considered a danger to the 'raza.'<sup>50</sup>

Such an extensive quote is necessary here to show their well-intended but presumptuous summation. Darder and Torres' unfortunate pursuit for "gay and lesbian" historical actors in *el movimiento* too easily overlooks what ambiguities and complexities undergird desire and intimacies within the cadre of Latino or Chicano

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<sup>50</sup> Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres. "Latinos and Society: Culture, Politics, and Class." In *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy and Society*. Eds. Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 11.

cultural producers. While images of Latinas were categorically reduced to stereotypical portrayals of “mothers and wives,” they overlook what visual language may have also imagined the gay Latino male subject. Might we deduce that this identity was too reprehensible or threatening to picture? Moreover, they employ “gay” and “lesbian,” terms that were not entirely applicable to Latina/o or Chicana/o subjects in the 1960s. “Gay” was not a trans-historical category and not yet applicable for this spatial context.<sup>51</sup>

In their efforts to explain a heterosexist master narrative, Darder and Torres fail not only to explicate how sexuality and gender were, in fact, intrinsic to the formation of Latino and more specifically, Chicano cultural ideologies but that they also circumvented how same-sex desire, homosociality, and homosexuality complicate any blunt explanation of gender and sexual identity. In short, sexist and homophobic attitudes and “unrelenting machismo” are the explanatory outcomes for these historical voids. While I am not suggesting that the Chicano Art Movement was not hostile to self-proclaimed “gay and lesbian” subjects, I do suggest that we rethink presumptions that too easily prescribe a false heterosexual truth or a homogenous and unified “gay” identitarian counterpart. Implicitly, Darder and Torres suggest that the heterosexual social order of the Chicano movement successfully staved the threat from “within” despite evidence to the contrary (i.e. what would Jack Vargas do?). In part, my dissertation’s very focus as to what Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto call the early “generations” of the Chicano Art

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<sup>51</sup> As I explained more fully earlier in this dissertation, I use “homosexual” to capture same-sex desires, behaviors, and practices that surpass “gay male identity” as a stable and knowable subject affiliated with a political movement. For more on this distinction please see Chapter 1.

Movement in the 1960s and 1970s forces a confrontation between these complacent conclusions as well as the sexual currents permeating this artistic production.

Here we are left to wonder: If absence and ostracism are not the sole coordinates of this discourse, how then is knowledge about homosexual subjectivities produced through the prevailing institutional ideologies of the archive? Typically, homosexuality surfaces in Chicano art criticism in a contemporary context. Since the 1990s, the proliferation of Chicana feminist lesbian criticism has certainly touted the cultural work of Monica Palacios, Alma Lopez, Ester Hernandez, Yolanda Lopez, Diane Gamboa and recently, the Butchlis de Panochitlan. In fact, the restorative and revisionist work of Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Karen Mary Davalos, Amalia Mesa-Baines, Laura Perez, and Terezita Romo challenged the monolithic Chicano masculinist assessments of Chicano art in California.<sup>52</sup> Unveiling the patriarchal hegemony of Chicano art history, these feminist scholars upended the presupposed gender and sexual neutrality of the archive and posited a corrective through Chicana representational practices, aesthetics, and curated shows. Artist-scholar Amalia Mesa-Baines argues “artists of the Chicana/Latina community have developed critical content for their work from the retrieval of personal histories, urban experiences, rural memories, and domestic tensions. The ability to construct identities that can be reproduced and disseminated through visual material is the real power of art

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<sup>52</sup> For instance, see Alicia Gaspar de Alba. *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), Karen Mary Davalos, “A Poetics of Love and Rescue in the Collection of Chicana/o Art.” *Latino Studies*. 5 (2007): 76-103, Laura Perez. *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) and Terezita Romo, “Mestiza Aesthetics and Chicana Painterly Visions.” In *Chicano Visions*, ed. Cheech Marin, (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2002).

making.”<sup>53</sup> By contesting the threat of erasure through the pursuit of “great but missing” women artists, they simultaneously proposed a knowable feminist or lesbian subject foreground against the sexist pillars of the Aztlan nation.

Chicano male homosexuality in visual art is rarely addressed. Some artists working within overtly homoerotic imagery like Miguel Angel Reyes,<sup>54</sup> Alex Donis<sup>55</sup> and lately, Hector Silva<sup>56</sup> have ascertained degrees of scholarly interest among Chicano cultural critics, journalists, and art historians. Unfortunately, book-length investigations have yet to be written. Even among more commercially established Chicano artists like Gronk in Los Angeles, Mario Castillo in Chicago, and Franco Mondini-Ruiz in San Antonio, scholarly inquiry into their sexual biographies is erased, diminished, or minimally cited. Even in George Vargas’s *Contemporary Chicana@ Art*<sup>57</sup> (2010) and Carlos Francisco Jackson’s *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte*<sup>58</sup> (2009) – two recent surveys of Chicano art history – these men are referenced without any sustained attention to sexuality or queer perspectives in the Chicano Art Movement, more broadly.

Perhaps the only notable exception, *Images of Ambiente* (2000) by Rudi Bleys is a survey of homoerotic male images in Latin American art. His chapter “Queer Visions of Latino/a Exile” focused on the U.S. Latino Diaspora in major urban cities

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<sup>53</sup> Amalia Mesa-Baines, “Calafia/Califas: A Brief History of Chicana California,” In *Art/Women/California: Parallels and Intersections*, eds. Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 131.

<sup>54</sup> Gregg Michael Michaud, “Miguel Reyes and His Not So Obscure Objects of Desire.” *Tentaciones Magazine*, 1.2 (February 2000), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Meyer, “Alex Donis: An Introduction.” *Theatre Journal* 55.3 (2003): 581-583.

<sup>56</sup> Richard T. Rodriguez, “Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic.” *Aztlan* 31.2 (Fall 2006): 127-137.

<sup>57</sup> George Vargas. *Contemporary Chicana@ Art: Color & Culture For A New America*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> Carlos Francisco Jackson. *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009).



like L.A., San Antonio, Miami, and New York. He recognizes Chicano artists like Vargas, Teddy Sandoval, Miguel Angel Reyes, Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, Mundo Meza, and the experimental gender play of ASCO but his historical inaccuracies, misattributions, and cursory remarks are too numerous and unwieldy to rely upon. For example, he misidentifies “Cyclona” as a drag queen, affiliates him with the ASCO art collective, and misinterprets the “cock scene” from “Ca-ca Roaches Have No Friends,” a performance piece written by Gronk in 1969.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, Chicano art historical discourse leaves us with few impressions, one that this work is a recent phenomenon without a traceable art-historical lineage and the other, an episodic occurrence.

This is not to say that sexuality and art were overlooked under the broader auspices of U.S. Latina/o cultural criticism. In fact, we may deduce that queer Puerto Rican scholars like Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes,<sup>60</sup> Arnaldo Cruz-Malave,<sup>61</sup> and Ricardo Montez<sup>62</sup> have more extensively researched and directly engaged the unrecognized contributions of men like Mario Montez, Juanito Xtravaganza, LA2, and the broader Nuyorican street culture to the commercial New York Art World in a manner unseen in Chicano art history. Nonetheless, the place of Chicano or Latino male homosexualities in the institutional logics of the archive inscribes an explicit “gay” subject, further reifying other paranormal conditions and possibilities beyond the repository threshold. Predictably, the institutional modes of archival discourse

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<sup>59</sup> Rudi Bleys. *Images of Ambiente: Homotextuality and Latin American Art*. (London: Continuum), 173.

<sup>60</sup> See Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes. *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> See Arnaldo Cruz-Malave. *Queer Latino Testimonio, Keith Haring, and Juanito Xtravaganza*. (New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2007).

<sup>62</sup> See Ricardo Montez, “‘Trade’ Marks: LA2, Keith Haring and a Queer Economy of Collaboration.” *GLQ* 12.3 (2006): 425-440.

classify and categorize rather than complicate queer expressions in a time and place where this visual economy was contested, negotiated, and unrecognized.

### *Homosexuality and Material Culture Studies*

As we situate archives within the broader framework of material culture studies – a field constituted by its exhaustive mixed methods of human-object relations – sexuality research is limited or criticized. Again, material culture studies as an interdisciplinary field examines “the way people live their life through, by, around, in spite of, in pursuit of, in denial of, and because of the material world.”<sup>63</sup> Explaining the human interaction with the inanimate and natural physical world, the study of things encourages deeper understanding between people, objects, and the social, cultural, political and economic conditions in which they live. The term itself is cited to 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural anthropologists explaining traditions, rituals, foodways, and folk practices. Also, studies of artifacts have made varying inroads in traditional disciplines. Social historians have used things to merely illustrate that which can be verified in empirical archives, art historians have viewed objects as material recordings to explain aesthetic change, stylistic influence, and difference in the life of an artist or art movement. Other fields like historic archaeology, architecture, cultural geography, industrial design, history of technology, and cultural

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<sup>63</sup> Ann Smart Martin, “Material Things and Cultural Meanings: Notes on the Study of Early American Material Culture.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* LIII.1 (January 1996): 5.

landscape studies have also made important theoretical and methodological explanations of culture through artifacts.<sup>64</sup>

Within this context, I append archive collections, something that has been a resource for artifact analysis rather than an object of inquiry itself. According to archival scientist Hugh Taylor, archives are also explanatory “instruments” bridging the otherwise distant but related domains of the museum exhibition and record repository.<sup>65</sup> This archive and artifact divide persists because “literacy objectifies and detaches us from what we read, information becomes almost rootless, floating away from the artifact in which it was anchored.”<sup>66</sup> Taylor urges his colleagues to reconcile the long-standing two-dimensional visual materials in archives such as Sanborn maps, photographs, illustrations, and architectural surveys within the rubric of three-dimensional artifacts prominent in material culture scholarship. In fact, in his presidential address to the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in 1979 entitled “Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist,” he even challenged the profession to reconsider “visual creation as a document worthy of full membership in an archival family” and, therefore, rendering watercolor and oil painting under the auspices of archival classification.<sup>67</sup> While these early precepts in archive studies broadened the meaning of archive, image, and material culture, they anticipated the postmodernist turn central to my inquiry, redefining the parameters of what constitutes a document and artifact.

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<sup>64</sup> Ann Smart Martin, J. Ritchie Garrison and Henry Francis Du Pont, eds. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. (Dover: Winterthur Museum, 1997).

<sup>65</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “‘Heritage’ Revisited: Documents as Artifacts in the Context of Museums and Material Culture.” *Archivaria* 40 (199?): 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist.” *The American Archivist* 42.4 (October 1979): 417.

And yet, the areas of race, gender, and sexual meaning in the material record are rarely explored in tandem, or surface as an afterthought, or are belittled as mere conjecture. In archive studies, the heterosexual bias in collection policy and processing displace or undermine gender difference in the repository. In *Working in Women's Archives*, Carole Gerson argues that the methodological difficulties begin with the trouble of locating women subjects in “the often hidden, poorly documented and incomplete record of female persons.”<sup>68</sup> That is, her concern for the absence of research materials in Canadian women’s literary heritage entails questions about collection acquisition, the concealment of women’s letters in the fonds of “great men,” and the surreptitious “luck” of primary sources coincidentally cross-referenced in unlikely or missed repositories. Helen Buss adds, “[A]rchives are not neutral sites of primary research materials but collections developed from specific social assumptions that dictate what documents are valuable, social assumptions that construct priorities that often exclude women’s documents.”<sup>69</sup> So even within the institutional grounds of archives and artifacts, a “great man” approach can mishandle which materials are deemed treasures or valuable and, therefore, significant to historical and cultural explanation.

Over the last 15 years in historical archaeology a series of groundbreaking works have interrogated sexuality. Though Barbara Voss commends this burgeoning new area, she stresses, “It is not yet clear whether this situation has significantly changed. Most archaeological texts still read as if they were written to be approved

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<sup>68</sup> Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, Eds. *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

by a morals committee for the promotion of family values.”<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, these scholars are relieved from any serious attempt to explain what shapes the material record, how things are left behind, and whose records then constitute the collection. Barriers abound regarding the study of sexuality and in particular, queer theory of the material record, ranging from a lack of language and terminology in historical archaeology to the general fear discouraging ethnographers from voyaging too deeply into subject-participants’ private lives. Biased researchers presume what Robert Schmidt and Barbara Voss call “sex essentialism,”<sup>71</sup> the assumption that sexuality need not be investigated as a cultural phenomenon because it is a biologically determined reality. Under this purview, people and cultures repopulate and so any further examination of sexuality or sex practices is unnecessary. Kinship configurations, marital ceremonies or fertility goddess idols are the few places where sexuality is legitimately explored.<sup>72</sup> Few refute the standing presumption that sexuality leaves no material trace. However, when homosexuality enters material culture investigations, the artifactual support must record a stable identity or queer personage, satisfying the methodological scrutiny of object-centered textual analysis.

Though there have been major contributions made in the growing area of “queer space” where gay bookstores, bathhouses, political offices, and neighborhoods become the historic documents of a “gay and lesbian” community history, this stable community identity pervades the literature on gay heritage in material culture

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<sup>70</sup> Barbara L. Voss, “Sexuality Studies in Archaeology.” *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 37 (June 2008): 318.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Schmidt and Barbara Voss, eds. *The Archaeologies of Sexuality*. (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Voss, 318.

studies.<sup>73</sup> For example, in “The Material Culture of the Homosexual Male: A Case of Archaeological Exploration,” Keith Matthews proposes a distinct gay male material culture constituted through collections of “homoerotic artifacts.”<sup>74</sup> These objects consist of three central categories: body adornment, sex toys, and homoerotic art. Body adornment refers to clothing, jewelry, and sub-cultural dress codes signifying homosexual orientation to other men. Sex toys as a category encompasses a quasi-history of erotic technology and the homoerotic art object presupposes “overtly or covertly sexual homoerotic content”<sup>75</sup> in men’s homes. In particular, he references the familiar appearance of paintings by Caravaggio in domestic interiors and that “it is a commonplace that the home of every gay man contains a reproduction of Michelangelo’s David.”<sup>76</sup> Matthews oversimplifies the material possibilities of queer sexualities, object collection practices, and the complexities racialization provides. By privileging a “Fine Arts” designation of European art history under the homoerotic art nomenclature, he obscures rather than enfold other aesthetic and collecting behaviors beyond the aesthete reverence for the Baroque or Renaissance tradition.

In this present configuration, a knowable “gay male” material culture is defined through a strict classification system. Homosexuality is then legibly discernible, further validating the argument that if sexuality is not recognizable in the

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<sup>73</sup> The literature is too wide to fully explicate here. In general, some key texts include David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds. *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality*. (London: Routledge, 1995), Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette and Yolanda Retter, eds. *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), and Aaron Betsky. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. (New York: William and Morrow and Company, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> Keith Matthews “The Material Culture of the Homosexual Male: A Case of Archaeological Exploration. In *Gender and Material Culture in Archaeological Perspective*, eds. Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe (New York: St. Martin Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

material record it is inconsequential to the cultural explanation of “gay male identity” and confounds institutional archive practices. In this way, the “sex essentialism” that Schmidt and Voss decry is merely reconstituted. This evokes a familiar structuralist approach that emphasizes a text-based reading of homosexuality. Such tendencies in material culture studies privilege what objects evidence but not what objects do.

Unlike the disciplinary end roads of the domestic archaeology in Matthews’ assessment, art historian Richard Meyer’s foray into gay male material culture operates at the cusp of what the architectural framing of objects, style, and artifact placement can reveal about homosexuality. In “Mapplethorpe’s Living Room: Photography and the Furnishing of Desire,” he escapes the dictatorial regime of textual analysis with a provocative rethinking of how art and furniture “remodel[ed] the space of homosexuality.”<sup>77</sup> His thorough examination of the 1989 Christie’s auction catalogue of the Robert Mapplethorpe Collection which included 587 objects from the artist’s home, including vases, busts, pedestals, plant stands, and Arts and Crafts furniture, correlated these ordinary items with the homoerotic fantasies pictured in his oeuvre.

For example, the aesthetic appeal of the Gustave Stickley oak bench, lot number 245 in Christie’s, was the focus of the artist photographed in *Mandate*, a gay pornographic magazine in 1981. The bench was also featured in a *New York Times* article reproducing Mapplethorpe’s portrait, entitled *Larry Hunt* in 1978 and the subject of his loft interior showcased in *House & Garden* magazine in 1988. Meyer suggests that the Stickley bench typifies the artist’s stylistic preoccupation with

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<sup>77</sup> Richard Meyer, “Mapplethorpe’s Living Room: Photography and the Furnishing of Desire.” *Art History* 24.2 (April 2001): 295.

masculine qualities, a reverence for “rugged” and muscular design.<sup>78</sup> The bench itself possesses a homoerotic persona staged throughout these images and placed in a gay male fantasy world. As Meyer argues, “Mapplethorpe pictured homosexuality not simply as a sexual act or an individual identity but also as set of spaces, surfaces and objects, as a theatrical scene in which the backdrop and the props are no less important than the players.”<sup>79</sup> By focusing on the furnishing themselves, Meyer’s analysis explicates a sexual agency in the way things perform sexuality without the overt inscriptions of gay male identity. The stylistic prerogatives of the Mapplethorpe collection and the spatialization of things exemplify how my approach resonates with a direction in material culture analysis that moves away from the traditional object-centered dictates of Jules Prown<sup>80</sup> or Charles Montgomery<sup>81</sup> and closer to the domain of consumer behaviorists and performance scholars like Russell Belk<sup>82</sup> and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton.<sup>83</sup> Within the broader material culture studies schema, I find Meyer’s work significant as he delimits preservationist agendas that occlude queer domestic architectures, furnishings of desire, or the queerness of interior design over more conventional interpretations of “gay and lesbian” commemoration in the public sphere, such as:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 304.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 308.

<sup>80</sup> Jules David Prown. *Art as Evidence: Writing on Art and Material Culture*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 69.

<sup>81</sup> Charles F. Montgomery, “The Connoisseurship of Artifacts.” In *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas Schlereth, (Nashville: AASLH, 1982), 143-152.

<sup>82</sup> Russell W. Belk. “Possessions and the Extended Self.” *Journal of Consumer Research*. 15.2 (September 1988).

<sup>83</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).



landmark designation, National Trust registry, cultural heritage walking tours, public monuments, and heritage plaques.<sup>84</sup>

### *Queer Dilemmas in Archive Transference*

The implication for archive studies is illustrative in the case of processing the late artist David Wojnarowicz's personal records. In 1997, the New York University Fales Library and Special Collection acquired Wojnarowicz's papers as a part of its Downtown Collection.<sup>85</sup> For an artist who resisted barriers and fixed classifications of his work, the Fales seemed to be a perfect repository. The archive maintains policies and procedures contrary to most university libraries. They concede multiple forms of documentation and include materials that contest preservation and processing. Rather than provide a limited interpretation of "record," the material culture of the artist can range from three-dimensional objects to films and videos.

However, the staff at Fales was vexed by the acquisition of an artifact from Wojnarowicz's bedroom called, *The Magic Box*. A small pine box privately hidden away from public view underneath his bed, the object was apparently never discussed and neither was his method of collecting. The box stored 59 pieces including jewelry, toys, seed, religious paraphernalia, bones, and rock. In her essay about the processing of his papers, "Study in Documents: The Archival Object: A Memoir of Disintegration," Lisa Darms suggests that the library was unsure how to preserve the box, contents, and the principal of original order and provenance. The methods of the

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<sup>84</sup> For an excellent overview see, Gail Lee Dubrow, "Blazing Trails with Pink Triangles and Rainbow Flags: Improving the Preservation and Interpretation of Gay and Lesbian Heritage," In *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, eds. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 281-302.

<sup>85</sup> Lisa Darms. "Study in Documents: The Archival Object: A Memoir of Disintegration." *Archivaria*. 67 (2009), 143.

Fales staff interpreted the meaning of Wojnarowicz's Magic Box through two main evaluative criteria in tension: fonds and object preservation.<sup>86</sup> Unsure if the contents were considered documents and if so, if they should be processed separately from the container, the Fales archivists proposed a diachronic approach. The contents would be categorized separately but they would be restored to Wojnarowicz's original order despite the materials' gradual decay. Upsetting the very obligations of archival conservation and custodianship, this record lives in a state of deterioration that will lead to "the loss of the person but also the loss of the organizing principle."<sup>87</sup>

Arguably, her bereavement over the "official" document's demise is directed at archive professionals. However, she fails to see how the object is an embodied archive of self. *The Magic Box's* displacement from its bedroom staging removes two critical elements in Wojnarowicz's private archive: body and space. It is important to stress that Wojnarowicz was a long time AIDS activist and openly gay man. In his visual repertoire, he often combined homoerotically charged photographs from gay pornography with images from the natural and spiritual world. His reliance on photomontage reconciled the copulation of male bodies within a landscape perhaps reordering the landscape by erotic juxtaposition.

In the end of his career in 1992, he worked on a series of untitled photographs where his bodily decomposition, dematerialization, and eventual disappearance were the subjects of aesthetic contemplation. In Richard Meyer's reading of this last untitled work before his death, Wojnarowicz contests presence and absence, as well

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 152.

as “the boundary between internal self and external world.”<sup>88</sup> The archivists in the Fales collection hardly considered how *The Magic Box* is an extension of his own artistic oeuvre and sexuality. By contemplating his bodily deterioration in his visual work, the collection itself is not the unexplainable “curiosity cabinet” as Darms hints but rather a performative embodiment encapsulating his own degradation. The box containing bones and religious paraphernalia coalesces his private archive of a brief life – a queer life cut short by AIDS. Moreover, the presumed “neutralizing” threshold of the Fales archive severely undercuts the sexually suggestive connotation of *The Magic Box*. Again, it is a collection interred in the bedroom. Just what is the “magic” of *The Magic Box*? This is a question Darms fails to ask because to do so would require a methodological concession on her part: the recognition that this potentially erotically charged document might queer the repository itself and rupture neat categorizations of gay men in archive professional practice.

As Meyer’s demonstrates, the significance of the object’s staging is another area for alarm. If the *Magic Box* is an extension of Wojnarowicz’s own deteriorating body and visual repertoire, then how might its archival space trouble the Fales handling and interpretation? Again, *The Magic Box* was stored in his bedroom concealed in the dark places beneath the bed. The object’s placement and concealment demands a critical thinking about not just the in-situ display but the way space invests the personal archive with queer meaning. After all, if the muscularity of a Stickley bench or Biedermeier chair discharges complicated desires through the visual and spatial intimations of Mapplethorpe’s fantasies, how might Wojnarowicz’s

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<sup>88</sup> Richard Meyer. *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth Century American Art*. (Boston, Beacon Press, 2002), 264.

bed sheets provide a similar performance – an opening into the magic of *The Magic Box*? The diminished queer analysis in Darms’ essay and in the Fales Library processing practices elucidates how textual prescription of gay male material culture can conceal the queer possibilities of things. This perplexes traditional archive practice and professional training.

Moving material culture studies closer to the sexual agency of these counterarchives, my dissertation foregrounds the alternative ways sexuality remains in these collections. Rendered unseen in the dark vestige of the repository, phantoms have persisted in Los Angeles’s Chicano Art Movement, even unrecognizable among other phantoms. Given the social authority of empirical archives, the sexual anxieties of art-historical analysis, and presumptuous methods in the material record, it is not surprising that the artists at the core of my study were easily overlooked, misinterpreted, or omitted. As a remedy to these men’s unrecorded and uncredited significance, the archive was of paramount cultural and political importance. In the proceeding investigation, I adapt an interdisciplinary archival method and approach to reconcile the distorted presumptions about sexuality in the Chicano Art Movement and excavate how these remains have always dwelled in alternative repositories. This intensive review of the varying bodies of literature at the crux of this project was necessary to magnify the officiating discourse of homosexuality, the unexplained yet undeniable presence of these men and the potential to recover a parallel visual lineage born out of racialized sexuality, Chicano social protest, and same-sex desire. This erasure is not happenstance but a product of invariable factors occurring in the literature. As we will see in the following chapter, our dig unearths one of the most

controversial performance artists to sashay down Whittier Boulevard. We begin with the curious case of Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta.

## Chapter 3: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta

### *Cyclonic Possession: The Artifactual Performances of “Cyclona”*

“Cyclona” was born on a stage in Belvedere Park in East Los Angeles, November 20, 1969. Performing in a woman’s black nightgown, white face paint, red lipstick and fur, a 17-year-old Robert Legorreta mimed, danced, and simulated a sex orgy with his cohort of guerrilla artist provocateurs. His audience, composed largely of heterosexual Chicana/o families anticipating “agitprop” theater (a popular performance emerging out of Luis Valdez’s Teatro Campesino), was shocked to see this excessive display of homoerotic desire, gender play, and social discord all under the guise of Chicano family entertainment. In the infamous “cock scene,” Cyclona trotted “Billy” to the stage, Legorreta’s boyfriend at the time (see Figure 3.1). With a water balloon and two eggs attached to his crotch symbolizing an exteriorized phallus, the shirtless and painted young man was subservient to the will of this performer. Cyclona dropped to his knees, caressed the balloon, and popped it amid a sea of shocked faces. Decrying prescient heteropatriarchy in *el movimiento*, Cyclona hurled the eggs at the audience and the crowd erupted loudly, setting trashcans ablaze, and threatening the lives of the actors. Suffice it to say, they were banned from ever performing in Belvedere Park again. Recalling the impact of this early performance piece in 1994, Legorreta concludes, “We were trying to shock people

into believing that they could do anything they wanted to do . . . I always say East L.A. was like a giant rubber that was ready to explode.”<sup>1</sup>

This interventionist action entitled, *Ca Ca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969), written by a young “beatnik” barrio artist named Gronk with a set designed by Mundo Meza, was a catalyst of sorts, a critical antecedent to the interventionist street art that would later define the ASCO art collective (1972-1987) and typify the Chicano avant-garde in East Los Angeles. Although ASCO’s origin was said to begin with an invitation from Harry Gamboa, Jr. to Gronk, Willie Herron, and Patssi Valdez to join the newspaper, *Regeneracion* in 1971, they were all participant-observers of this Belvedere Park happening. In fact, Valdez and her sister Karen performed in the orgy scene.<sup>2</sup> This elision in the ASCO origin-myth needs to be punctuated here if only to expose this historic marker of Chicano performance art within ASCO’s formative years and also, foreground the Cyclona image within the greater creative milieu of East Los Angeles.

The audience’s troubled reaction propelled Cyclona’s signature experimentalism to legendary status within the Chicano avant-garde beginning in 1969 and extending throughout the expanse of his 35-year long career. Appearing on the streets, artist show openings, and fundraisers in elaborate gowns, face paint, and

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<sup>1</sup> Elson Carr, “Just Another Painter from East L.A.,” clipping from *L.A. Weekly*, March 18-24, 1994 18 (flatbox 40, folder 5).

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with Linda Burnham in *High Performance* magazine, Gronk discusses Patssi’s participation. Despite some reports that Gronk knew her from art classes at Garfield High School, he suggests that he had “seen her on the street and she looked so great I invited her to be in it.” Despite Legorreta and Meza sharing a similar first meeting with Gronk on the streets of East Los Angeles, they are minimized in this interview. Meza is completely omitted and Legorreta is only referred to by his nickname “Bob,” a chola drag queen. The implication here conflated Cyclona as a female impersonator mined and installed into Gronk’s play. Thus, Legorreta was not a performance artist in his own right. For more see, Linda Burnham, “Gronk,” [1986], (Box 13, Folder 54) article from *High Performance*, 9.3, 57, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

iridescent found materials like tinsel, glitter, foil, sequins and fireworks, he quickly gained notoriety and captured the visual imagination of Chicana/o photographers, painters, muralists, illustrators, and installation artists. Not yet a senior at Garfield High School, young Robert Legorreta learned early on that his alter ego “Cyclona” could raise consciousness and political engagement by inciting the visceral and spectacular with each controversial performance and grotesque embodiment.

The performance art of Cyclona reveals a series of interventionist acts concurrent with the political and social conditions shaping Chicano protest in East L.A. Legorreta’s presence at the Garfield High School blowouts in 1968, the Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War in 1970, and several demonstrations disturbs a Chicano political history that precludes not only sexual difference but the important role of conceptual artists who explored and subverted the boundaries of Chicano imagery, perception, and taste. Moreover, his early cultural work precedes the founding of the highly regarded ASCO art collective (1972), the first Chicano art show, *Los Four* at the L.A. County Museum of Art (1974), and the inception of such iconic cultural institutions as Self-Help Graphics (1970), Social Public Art Resource Center (1976), Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (1978), and High Performance Magazine (1978).

Indeed, it is quite surprising that Legorreta’s influence, significance, and impact on a generation of avant-gardists are little known. To date, he is continuously elided from most historical treatments of the Chicano Art Movement in Los Angeles, though recently rediscovered and included in two art exhibitions, *Arte No Es Vida*:



*Action by Artists of the Americas* (2009)<sup>3</sup> at El Museo del Barrio in New York City and *ASCO: Elite of the Obscure* (2011)<sup>4</sup> at LACMA. Much like the recovery of the outrageous embodiments and salacious activities of American Dadaist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven by feminist art historians,<sup>5</sup> the recuperation of the confrontational Cyclona figure reveals a compendium of art actions and images within the same barrio landscapes revered in Chicano political discourse and cultural nationalist ideology.

Legorreta's unfixed performative ways of being have often misled journalists', researchers', and curators' comprehension of Cyclona. The misconception resonates among cultural critics determined to link his gender experimentation within the reductive confines of drag queens, cross-dressers, and transsexuals. Legorreta has always maintained that Cyclona's cultural apprehension is a reflection of the spectator's own "mind-bending" reception and, thus, visual psychology. For Legorreta, Cyclona is a living art piece in harmony with his maleness and femaleness distanced from the social identitarian category of female impersonation. He states, "I'm very masculine but also very feminine, but it's my harmony of my sexuality, if people can get it together they become like that [in harmony with both gender identities] instead of [being] lost."<sup>6</sup>

Legorreta's liminality within the literature on Chicano conceptualism, Los Angeles performance art, and Chicano political history calls for a reappraisal. More

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<sup>3</sup> For more see, Deborah Cullen, Ed. *Arte [No Es] Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000*. (New York: El Museo Del Barrio, 2008), 68.

<sup>4</sup> For more see, Rita Gonzalez and C. Ondine Chavoya, Eds. *ASCO: Elite of the Obscure*. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> See Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 5 June 2005. Los Angeles, California.

puzzling still is what his archive of artistic collaborations reveals – interventionist performances that “liberated” people’s minds, spurred social disunity, and provoked political consciousness vis-à-vis the bizarre picturing of Chicano masculine embodiment draped in feminine materials, found objects, and dress. Artists like Jaime Aguilar, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Gronk, Roberto Gutierrez, Mundo Meza, Marisela Norte, Myke Syke, and Patssi Valdez, among others, featured the Cyclona icon within a variety of media, contexts, and experimental aesthetics. As a self-proclaimed living art piece, he was painted, designed, and objectified in this work. The circulation of his outlandish image in a perfunctory network of galleries and alternative art spaces in the 1970s sealed his reputation as “the legendary street performer of East Los Angeles.”<sup>7</sup> This figure was a fascinating subject for young Chicano artists, an unlikely muse, occupying a critical but overlooked place in an emergent Chicano visual vocabulary. It is perhaps this very complicated relationship between Legorreta as Cyclona, artistic collaboration, and modeling at “the vanishing point”<sup>8</sup> of performance that intensifies his elision, misattribution, and in turn, reciprocal investments within the archive as an artistic and political project.

The urgency to preserve and document his cultural significance brought a 53-year-old Robert Legorreta out of self-imposed retirement. Donating his expansive collection, *The Fire of Life*, to the University of California, Los Angeles Chicano Studies Research Center in 2003, Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta wanted his vast archive to be readily accessed by the public and in particular, young people. Through these

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<sup>7</sup> Photocopy of Legorreta’s Biographical Sketch, undated, in “Cyclona” (unpaginated booklet of autobiographical materials and press kit compiled by Robert Legorreta), undated, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection*, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Schneider. “Archives Performance Remains.” *Performance Research*. 6.2 (2001): 100.

remains we find traces of his extensive career among the tattered ephemera, photographs, slides, and correspondence composing a complex, contradictory, and sorrowful lament of homophobic violence, racial injustice, and personal loss. From the AIDS-related death of his soul mate and fellow artist Mundo Meza in 1985, *The Fire of Life* archival collection attempts to remedy his expulsion from the Chicano art historical record and restore his influence in Chicano popular culture and American mass media. The results deconstruct institutional archive practices and instill a postmodern conceptualization of form and content, another performance of what I call Legorreta's "archival body."

In this essay, I juxtapose Legorreta's biography against the discourse of ASCO's founding and magnify traces of his informative role as muse among the cadre of characters composing the ASCO narrative. By exhuming Legorreta's Cyclona scrapbook from *The Fire of Life* Collection, a self-made album of carefully composed newspaper illustration, collage, and photomontage, I examine how this muse is appropriated and ingrained within the oeuvre of Chicano conceptualist imagery. Blurring the line between subject and object, Legorreta's "artifactual performances" enable us to understand how this artist assumes an artifact embodiment through the manipulation of material accoutrements, found materials, and stagings. The collaborative performance of *The Wedding of Maria Theresa Conchita Con Chin Gow* (1972) reveals how this bizarre East L.A. artifact enacts a transgressive agency. As a living canvas, Legorreta contests the passivity of the model-muse and the flaccid subservience of the art object by producing strange and destabilizing visual experiences. His artifactual embodiment not only blurs human-

object relationships but points to the broader cultural conditions precipitating the disturbing image. That is, what does the employment of the Cyclona muse reveal about the Chicano avant-garde, artistic collaboration, and the influence of transgressive sexuality in 1960s-70s East L.A.? This line of inquiry illuminates the circumstances behind Legorreta's deletion and, thus, his cultural engagements with self-preservation as an alternative archive-building strategy. So rather than limit my analysis to the sexually transgressive aesthetics of Legorreta's performance art, this chapter reconsiders the epistemological gain from positioning the artist as not only an image-maker, but also as an object, collector, and archivist in his own right. In this way, we can better apprehend how artifact, performance, and archive were intimately correlated visual strategies underlying his cultural interventions, art-making, and curatorial practices. This brings us closer to how his physical embodiment and collections of artifacts perform an archival body.

It is important to underline that in this essay I refer to Cyclona as "homosexual" not only to capture his own self-identification but also to argue for the importance of "situated knowledges"<sup>9</sup> about same-sex desire in relation to art, political action, popular culture, and cultural identity. Although it is risky to re-employ "homosexual" as a sexual *practice*, given an academic emphasis on sexual *identities* and *desires* (queer, gay, bisexual and transgender), such specificity is critical to understanding Legorreta's biography, Cyclona's performative constructions, and Chicana/o art and cultural histories of East Los Angeles. In

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<sup>9</sup> Donna Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women : The Reinvention of Nature*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 183.

dismissing “queer” as trendy, universalist, or what he calls a “pop situation,”<sup>10</sup> and “gay” as Eurocentric in its definition of civil rights, Legorreta calls into question the exclusionary tendencies of both terms, as well as their inadequacy for his own agenda as an artist living in and identified with East Los Angeles. This is not to say that he is apolitical, ahistorical, or static. Quite the contrary, Legorreta presents himself as someone who has dedicated his life to educating future generations, contesting the rigidity of identity, and fighting for liberation from structural oppressions and hegemonic domination. For Legorreta, performance provides a way of bisecting, uprooting, and undoing subjectivities, resulting in an unfixed way of being in Chicano art history outside categorical organizations of canon, genre, or artistic genius. As I will discuss further at a later point, it is perhaps this resonating ambiguity, or what literary critic Kandice Chuh calls “subjectlessness”<sup>11</sup> that, in part, accounts for Cyclona’s erasure from the historical record.

In an effort to restore Legorreta within East Los Angeles’s avant-garde, this essay accounts for the primacy of his voice through numerous oral histories, conversations, and the artist’s own feedback. By remaining in close contact with Legorreta, I frame a complex artist while also reminding myself of numerous stories, political diatribes, and personal phone conversations too lengthy to include in this all too brief summation of his life history. Inserting his voice into the crux of this essay is a necessary tool to understand not only his conception of his art and engagement with gender and political performance but also the writing of his sexualized self. Before examining these performances, it is important to delineate how Legorreta’s

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Legorreta, personal communication to author, March 23, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 9-11.

life experiences shaped his relationships with the men critical to his artistic collaborations. In the following section, I will briefly set the stage for his emergence as Cyclona.

*An Accidental Queen: The Art and Activism of Cyclona*

Before he was Cyclona, Robert Legorreta was a child of the border. Born on September 15, 1952 in El Paso, TX, his family relocated to East Los Angeles when he was only three. The third brother among four boys, Legorreta was expected to behave “like a man.” At moments when he wasn’t masculine enough, he was policed and punished by the men in his family, usually through verbal and physical violence. Even as a young child, his parents warned him about the predatory homosexuals in McArthur Park, the shadowy men they would see on long drives back to East L.A. Yet by the age of four he started to realize that he was different.

I was at the public swimming pools and I saw these two twin guys nude, and I was like checking them out, and I was like this four year old little kid and they must have been maybe 12 or 13 because they were getting hair at that time on their bodies and stuff and they actually looked at me. And it’s really funny because that day, the lifeguards, got one of the guys that was working there and they were running with him you know, real silly, and they were yelling ‘tie his balls up!’ and all this stuff. So, you know, *that* was going on at that time in the early 60s and the 50s, it was a different type of situation, it was more innocent and nobody really cared about it [homosexuality].<sup>12</sup>

It was also at this age that Legorreta noticed his attraction to the enlisted servicemen of the Korean War. Ironically, it was his uncle who served in the Korean War that

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<sup>12</sup> Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 5 June 2005. Los Angeles, California.

first caught little Bobby playing “spin the bottle” with a group of young boys from the neighborhood.

Despite his early awareness of his sexual desires for other men, his discovery of feminine style was quite accidental.

It was 1966, it was the end of summer and my mother said, ‘you got too dark for the color of your hair so I’m going to bleach your hair,’ and so she bleached it with bleach and it came out red. So this girl that liked me at school when I went to school after summer, they saw me and she said, ‘oh, your a queer’ and that was actually the first reaction that I got.<sup>13</sup>

The public’s responsiveness to his feminine hair color taught Legorreta a number of lessons. Not only was he faced with resistance from his peers for his uncharacteristic masculine appearance but their reactions encouraged him to experiment with his outward look. By Halloween of that year, he found a polyester jumpsuit, tied water balloons around his chest to create the illusion of large breasts, and added deep red lipstick and eyeliner like the *Cholas* he saw around the barrio. His convincing performance of “Vata Loca” drag led him to boldly flirt and tease *Cholitos* cruising their cars down Whittier Boulevard.

I was like 14, 15, 16 and at that time it was drag and I would have a fun time with it. I used to go down to the sweetheart cafe and dance with all the *Braceros* [Mexican workers], and all that. You know it was wild and every year there was this man that would be salivating, on the street and he would tell me, ‘I will make you the Queen of Montebello.’<sup>14</sup>

It was also at this time that Legorreta cultivated two of the most important relationships of his life. Upon entering Garfield High School, he joined a collective

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

of Chicano artists called “Doc’s People.”<sup>15</sup> It was in this amalgamation of musicians, performers, singers, and painters that he first heard of Mundo Meza, a Chicano from Huntington Park that “acted a little queer.” After a chance meeting on the street, Legorreta and Mundo became inseparable. Early on they participated in fundraisers for the East L.A. High School Blow Out Riots, an early student led movement to unify the youth of barrio schools against educational disparity. They raffled and sold Mundo’s artwork. Though Legorreta was only a first year at Garfield High School, he remembers the first of the riots; “I went outside to the front [of the school] and people were in the crowds and screaming ‘Chicano Power’ and it lit up within me and everything I had been doing would exactly fit into this movement . . . challenging people’s minds.”<sup>16</sup> Legorreta spent much of high school with a protest sign in his hand while also participating in resident guru Harry Gamboa, Jr’s Tree People art collective and singing in Garfield’s Glee Club. In fact, it was not until 1970, his senior year, that an openly gay tenor told Legorreta that he thought he was also gay, a term unbeknownst to him until then. Later in life he resented the identifier insisting that he was assigned the label, a descriptor that was too commercial, normative, and Euro-centric for his combative set of politics. It was also through Meza’s and Legorreta’s friendship that they would meet another odd character in East L.A., an artist who called himself Gronk.

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<sup>15</sup> Photocopy of Legorreta’s Biographical Sketch, undated, in “Cyclona” (unpaginated booklet of autobiographical materials and press kit compiled by Robert Legorreta), undated, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection*, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>16</sup> Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 5 June 2005. Los Angeles, California.



Legorreta first remembers seeing Gronk following him and Mundo around Whittier Boulevard through varying consignment shops. Gronk approached the two self-proclaimed “psychedelic glitter queens” about joining his production of a street play entitled “Caca-Roaches Have No Friends” in Belvedere Park. They accepted and collaborated in two performances, one in the Belvedere Park gymnasium and the infamous event at the band shell. Mundo performed in the orgy scene and Legorreta fulfilled the role of “The Cyclona,” an homage to Pachuca bombshells of the Zoot Suiter ‘40s, and an outrageous drag character that would become more than a one-time performance.

The evolution of Cyclona’s artistic interventions can be viewed in three distinct periods: street theatre and performance art with Mundo and Gronk from 1969-1974, additional collaborations in paintings, costume design, and photographs with Anthony Friedkin, Harry Gamboa, Jr., and Patssi Valdez between 1980-1985, and AIDS activist theatrical productions with VIVA!, Cara a Cara AIDS Project’s Gamut Productions, and his own performance group, Urban Disturbance, between 1987-1992. Legorreta and Gronk would have multiple public feuds with a last “falling out” just prior to Meza’s death from AIDS-related causes in 1985.

Following the devastation of AIDS in the barrios, the “Hispanicization” of the Chicana/o movement, and a burgeoning commercial Chicano art market in the 1980s, the collaborative relationship between Legorreta and Gronk came to an end and foreclosed any future joint projects. By the 1990s, Gronk became the first Chicano with a solo retrospective show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1994 (his show was curiously absent of pre-ASCO pieces and, in turn, Cyclona and Meza

collaborations) and Legorreta, reeling from the loss of Meza, attempted to rebuild an artistic community with gay Chicano performers and activists. He developed a close relationship with painter Roberto Gutierrez in these years and worked with “gay” organizations for the last time.<sup>17</sup> Although performing an original work “Death Becomes Life, Life Becomes ?” in 1992 and sporadically making appearances between 1995-1997, including the “Beyond Memorials and Symbols” Robert Farber AIDS art show, and a performance for the Farber show in July of 1998 at the Village fitted with pyrotechnics and fireworks, Legorreta entered retirement and self-seclusion by the end of the decade. Today, he loudly proclaims, “I’m gone from the gay community. It doesn’t represent me and I don’t represent it.”<sup>18</sup>

### *A Star-Crossed and Cross-Dressed History of ASCO*

Legorreta’s biography puts the origins of the ASCO art collective into question. If we relocate Legorreta within the formative conditions of Chicano avant-gardism, the scholarship about the history of Chicano conceptualism becomes more misleading, sometimes replicating the very absurdity that became ASCO’s provocative mantra. For instance, Chicano art historians posit that it is not *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) that sparked the initial artistic union for Gronk, Harry Gamboa, Willie Herron, and Patssi Valdez but the urban realities experienced at Garfield High School. The school is revered in this history and as a result, this

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<sup>17</sup> Legorreta and Gutierrez’s friendship had started in the early 1970s. Legorreta recalls that they met just after Gutierrez had completed his service in the Vietnam War as a member of the U.S. Marine Corps. Curiously, this past is omitted among Gutierrez’s early career influences. For a critical biography of Gutierrez and his watercolors of Los Angeles, see Jose Orozco, “Roberto Gutierrez and the Art of Mapping Latino Los Angeles,” *Aztlan* 29.2 (2004): 123-52.

<sup>18</sup> Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, tape recording, 15 September 2004. Los Angeles, California.

formative performance piece is abbreviated or excised from ASCO's aesthetic influences in art-historical assessments.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, as Legorreta's biographical sketch revealed, his social location at Garfield High School between 1968-1970 was also a decisive political moment for the artist as well as the Chicano civil rights movement, student organizing, and art production. Not only was Garfield High School at the epicenter of the East Los Angeles blowouts and the FBI's COINTELPRO operations, but it worked at the cusp of social dissidence, protest aesthetics, and a mutually reinforcing strategy of artistic collaboration and group participation.

After all, Legorreta first met Harry Gamboa, Jr., among other Chicano art deviants in the esoteric grouping of *Doc's People*. True, this encounter is indicative of the creative grounds of the high school but it was something that established contact between Legorreta and Gamboa even before the unification of Herron, Valdez, and Gronk. In fact, even Gamboa acknowledges in his historical essay, "In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms," it was the collaborative forces of Cyclona, Meza, Gronk, and Valdez in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) that served a critical artistic precept for things to come.<sup>20</sup> This act of social defiance and exploration of homoeroticism, public provocation, and glamorous excess established

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<sup>19</sup> Garfield High School is foregrounded in historical treatments of ASCO's formation with little indication of Legorreta or Meza. Whereas Cadaval (2000) makes passing reference to them, they are almost absent in critical studies about this period, including S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas. "Harry Gamboa and ASCO: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971-1987." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1988. Also see, Gerardo Cadaval, "ASCO = Nausea: Chicano Art as Chicano Politics." Senior honor's thesis, Dartmouth College, 2000, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr., "In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms," In *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* Ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 75.

a fundamental expression of Chicano conceptualist performance, a rebellious and rancorous sensibility.

This early interventionist act established what Gamboa called “gender diffusion” or the cultural cross-dressing that typified later subversive gender practices in ASCO. That is, this transgressive body fashioning reconfigured Chicano artist masculinity, leaving the hypermasculine para-military uniforms of Chicano militants like the Brown Berets, the Royal Chicano Art Force, or Con Safo art collective for an ASCO masculine alterity, one where even Gamboa, Herron and Humberto Sandoval draped their bodies in glittering fabrics, cosmetics, and body-conscious costuming (see fig 3.2 and fig. 3.3). By picturing this Chicano male beauty theatricality, we can see the inherent critique of barrio masculine aggression and impenetrability. However, unlike Cyclona, Gronk and Meza’s carnivalesque, ASCO male self-fashioning averted sexually explicit homoerotic display.

As Gamboa inferred, Patssi Valdez was also immersed in body art alongside these homosexual men, the outcome of which incited community disunity through the exterior manipulations of skin, hair, fabrics, installation and set design. In the predominating historical discourse about ASCO, where Gronk would be lauded for advancing the group’s design and conceptual muralism, Valdez achieved recognition for her chameleonic beauty, a model capable of multiple permutations and yet, still assuming the ubiquitous place among fetish objects beholden to male artists. Though not denying Valdez’s own contribution to the conceptual oeuvre of the group, her foundational experience within the interventionist self-fashioning body art of Cyclona and Meza is hard to deny. Their influence on Valdez is poorly documented in most

historical and curatorial writings about her formative years at Garfield High School. In fact, as early as 1971, she was showing her artwork alongside Meza at the Mechicano Art Gallery.<sup>21</sup> Her continued collaborations with Cyclona in her “living sculpture” series in the 1980s reveal an often overlooked role for these visual provocateurs. In this way, I find it necessary to recontextualize Valdez’s place as the chief model of ASCO within the convergences of homosexuality, performance art, and Chicano male gender diffusion, if only to acknowledge Legorreta and Meza’s precursory role. We can trouble Valdez’s conflation as the Rose Selavy of ASCO, a claim espoused by Kosiba-Vargas that attempts to affiliate Valdez within a Duchampian and more broadly, Dadaist lineage. I find this an unfitting if unsuitable art-historical referent.<sup>22</sup> After all, Valdez’s performances glamorize the Chicana anti-celebrity, reducing her iconic status to absurd and ridiculous end. Her strategy is one reminiscent of Cindy Sherman’s conceptual portraits manipulating the bounds of cinematic frames and reconstituting female signification in American film history. Though I do not want to disregard her transformative persona in ASCO collaborations, we must interrogate how her grander historicization in this mode of model and muse is due in part to the controversial visual lineage of the Cyclona figure.

As a result, the trace of Cyclona’s significance is subsumed within historical discourses perpetuating a narrative of ASCO that footnotes Legorreta as one among

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<sup>21</sup> Eddie Ytuarte, “Chicano Art Lives in East L.A.,” *El Chicano* newspaper clipping, [1972], 9 (Box 2, Folder 7) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>22</sup> S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas. “Harry Gamboa and ASCO: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971-1987.” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1988, 77.

several characters attending Garfield High School.<sup>23</sup> His shocking performance art with Meza and Gronk is truncated within this geo-spatial context and thus, seen outside the Chicano art activities of the ASCO group. Henceforth, the residual art historical accounts suggest that it is not “gender diffusion” but the estrangement from Cholo culture in East Los Angeles that yielded a “jetter” self-styling for Gamboa, Gronk, Herron, and Valdez. They grasped a fashion conscious mod image outside and against the ordinary barrio street wear of their peers. This stylistic appeal highlighted intellectualism, high fashion, and art over gang identity and street violence.<sup>24</sup>

In a familiar narrative recounted in cultural and journalistic accounts, Gamboa, a political gadfly at the time, confronted the overt racial intimidation and institutionally sanctioned brutality at Chicano political demonstrations. It was at one of these rallies where he met Francisca Flores, who published *Regeneracion*, one of several propagandist Chicano journals. Escaping police batons and tear gas clouds, she handed Gamboa an issue of the magazine only to escape into the throngs of demonstrators.<sup>25</sup> Gamboa joined Flores’ efforts and agreed to edit five issues of the second volume but needed an art department. The following origin-story is subject to urban legend and myth. According to most historical treatments, Gronk’s mystique and outrageous reputation lured Gamboa. At the time, Valdez was in art class with Gronk and she was dating Herron, a musician and muralist. Together, the four

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<sup>23</sup> Gerardo Cadaval, “ASCO = Nausea: Chicano Art as Chicano Politics.” Senior honor’s thesis, Dartmouth College, 2000, 41.

<sup>24</sup> S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr., “In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms,” In *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* Ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 75.

cultivated a shared revulsion for typical Chicano visual fare, grasped the absurd theater of the barrio, and expressed a preoccupation with an East L.A. urban ostracism. The resulting camaraderie led to their first public street action, *Stations of the Cross* (1971), an intervention protesting the Vietnam War draft. In *Pie in Deface* (1972), ASCO vandalized the Los Angeles County Museum of Art “tagging” their names in spray paint in protest of one curator’s glib disregard of Chicano art as nothing more than criminal behavior. Like a painter inscribing his/her signature on an art piece, this guerrilla action conflates the museum site itself with ASCO’s artist oeuvre. LACMA itself became a conceptual Chicano art piece. This action would anticipate other contemporary artists’ interrogation of museum institutions in later years, a trend that subverts curatorial authority and board sanctioned governing policies through the deconstruction of museum administration. However, it was not until a group exhibition at Self-Help Graphics in 1974 that the collective was coincidentally referred to as ASCO, meaning nausea, a conflation possibly with the name of the exhibit.

As previously mentioned, the aesthetic inheritance of Cyclona and Meza is widely overlooked as demonstrated by the omission of art actions prior to 1971; however, the circumstances behind their deletion are curious. It is difficult to know how to assess the early performance art of Cyclona, Meza, and even Gronk and Valdez within the vicissitudes of contemporary Chicano art. Beyond a homophobic rationale for this absence – a clumsy explanation – how then did ASCO artists understand or apprehend the confrontational embodiments and homoerotic play of

Cyclona and Meza? What place did they share within this cultural context of Chicano art experimentation especially after ASCO's emergence in 1971?

One possible answer comes from art critic Max Benavidez's monograph *Gronk* (2008). Describing his early work with *Regeneracion* and new found delight with Gamboa, Herron, and Valdez, Gronk recalled, "[A]ll of a sudden I think, you know, 'This is where I think I belong.' And the drugs and the chaos of the other group [that included Cyclona and Mundo Meza], it just was not something that I thought I could stay with. So I think Cyclona thought that was a rejection and so did, perhaps, the other artists in the group. 'Oh, look at it. He's going with those straight kids.'"<sup>26</sup> By Gronk's own admission, his departure from this "other group" potentially and symbolically denounced his own sexual identity and in turn, his homosexual art pieces. The drugs and chaos surrounding Cyclona and Meza might be construed as sufficient reason for his leaving them, but his subsequent ties with "those straight kids," highlight his anxieties over this perception, indicating the way homosexuality informed the artistic landscape and, partly, catalyzed ASCO's formation. By hailing the "other group," Gronk interpolates Legorreta as a recognizable creative force, an acknowledged figure associated with homosexual creative expression within the East L.A. avant-garde. Retrospectively speaking, this explains how Gronk understood the place of ASCO in these formative years, not in tandem but against the sexually explicit interventionist actions of these "other" visual provocateurs. This said, it is surprising that Cyclona continued to permeate the contours of the ASCO collective albeit through different modes of representation. Despite his abjection even among the far fringes, he proved to be a fascinating subject

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<sup>26</sup> Benavidez, 36.



and object for these artists individually though separate from the formal collective itself. In the following section, I want to explore the appearances of the Cyclona figure within this visual imaginary, and examine how “the legendary street artist”<sup>27</sup> transgressed artistic boundaries of these groups and precipitated a bizarre, odd, or queer image in Chicano conceptualism, a found object for the Chicano avant-garde’s distanced but engaged visions.

### *A Curio of East Los Angeles*

We can discern the artifactual possibility of Cyclona’s performance art from his earliest collaborations with Gronk in 1969. Though Legorreta and Meza’s performances on the street may mark episodic disruptions in the mundane everydayness of East Los Angeles, these acts were more than circumstantial exercises in public disruption. As self-proclaimed “psychedelic glitter queens,” they experimented with the social limits of bohemian fashion, hippy aesthetics, and garish glam rock. Walking about the urban sprawl like barrio *flaneurs*, these young men’s salacious appetite for racial, sexual, and gender transgression made Cyclona’s becoming possible. Meza’s signature afro, tie-dye pants, and patchwork handbags and Legorreta’s striking physical excess, height, and size mirrored the larger than life characters Gronk needed for his play, *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*.

Whereas Gronk in an interview with Harry Gamboa, Jr. revealed that the Cyclona role was originally filled by an African American drag queen, the recasting of Legorreta superseded the bounds of female impersonation. In this way, he

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<sup>27</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr., “Gronk: No Movie Maker,” In *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* Ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 46.

replaced the otherwise shocking image of drag with an equally disturbing sight, a Chicano curiosity inciting repulsion and anxiety by transgressing Chicano male embodiment. In fact, we can only presume Gronk's inevitable fascination and delight dipping in and out of storefronts amused by this bizarre spectacle. Legorreta's eventual remaking as the Cyclona figure cannot be removed from this potentially anthropomorphic context or Gronk's ethnographic gaze set on Legorreta and Meza. As art critic Max Benavidez observed, "Gronk would later characterize himself as an 'urban archaeologist' . . . [with the] ability to assemble the magical, the fantastic, and the defiant, including a cohort of like-minded collaborators, from an environment of scarcity and limited options."<sup>28</sup> Much like a curiosity collected from the waste and discard littering the East L.A. streets, Gronk's new collectible arrested Legorreta within the repertoire of an objectified muse, another thing for his barrio cabinet of curiosity.

This artifactual mimesis is further evident in the reuse and reappropriation of waste and commercial products to fabricate the Cyclona image; he unifies his body within the barrio refuse of the physical object world. This act embeds his performance art among other East L.A. artifacts, a corporeality that correlates his skin with plastic artifice. Similar to what art historian Jennifer Gonzalez calls the "epidermalization" of the human body, bodies and objects are infused to produce racial meaning through corroborating surfaces.<sup>29</sup> However, rather than perpetuate a racial discourse inscribed upon the object surface, the disunity and disassembly of a coherent Chicano heteromale image refuses textual inscription and performs a

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<sup>28</sup> Benavidez, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Gonzalez. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 4.

counterdiscursive visual strategy at the interstices of racialization, sexuality and gender expression. Assuming the status of a barrio curiosity, the Cyclona figure causes conflict in his visual provocations but also in art-historical methodologies based on stable objects, racial legibility, and artist attribution. Hence, Legorreta's cultural work operates at the convergences of collaboration and individual self-expression, further blurring the anthropomorphic bounds of the Cyclona figure. This ambiguity leaves us wondering whether Cyclona is a performance of Legorreta, the product of Meza's camaraderie, or the theatrical direction of Gronk.

Without the ability to replicate *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* performance, it is difficult to resolve these tensions, something necessary for art-historical categorization or inclusion. This complexity is further compounded by Legorreta's admission that the Cyclona facial surface – originally characterized by white foundation, charcoal eyebrows and red lips – bore the hand of the attending artist-collaborator, usually Mundo Meza or a guest artist, and never his own. This artist-muse distinction, something aligned with the portraitist-sitter dyad, complicates a proper authorial signature for Legorreta's pieces and punctuates his artifactual quality, a blank canvas that actualizes the hand of the painter. For instance, in an *L.A. Weekly* cover story on gay and lesbian Latinos, "Family Among Strangers: Crossing the Borders in Gay L.A.," writer Doug Sadownick featured a photograph of Cyclona, Gronk and Valdez taken at a party in 1987.<sup>30</sup> Dressed in a Patssi Valdez paper fashion, a large blossoming flower composes Cyclona's headpiece, triangulated spokes cascade along the gown, glittering geometric circles surround his eyes and his

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<sup>30</sup> Doug Sadownick, "Family Among Strangers: Crossing the Borders in Gay L.A.," *L.A. Weekly*, June 23-June 29, 1989, 18.

lips are striped by symmetrical vertical lines. The newspaper caption reads, “Cyclona in the old days with avant-gardists Gronk and Patssi Valdez. Valdez designed the Cyclona ‘look.’”<sup>31</sup> Unbeknownst to Sadownick, the *Weekly*’s artistic attribution implies that Cyclona is literally *designed* and, thus, reflects the signature markings of the *designer*. Legorreta himself is not the arbiter and artistic owner of the style.

This is clearly observable in Figure 3.5.<sup>32</sup> The two are pictured together in the same costuming from the newspaper, suggesting that the photograph was taken moments before the *L.A. Weekly* picture, perhaps from the same day. Cyclona grasps the center of the composition, visibly a central and spectacular subject for the photographer. To his left, Valdez stands in a contrapposto pose, her weight shifted on one foot. She is tilted toward the foreground and Cyclona is posed slightly behind. His body is amorphous and entirely engulfed in Valdez’s art. We gain visual access to her body sighting her skin. Valdez is embodied baring an open stance and direct gaze. The mark of her flesh breaks away from Cyclona’s arrest within the urban archeological record. These visual elements draw distinctions between the immobility of Cyclona’s artifactual flesh and the virile mobility of the Chicana conceptualist. This photographic document retrieved from Valdez’s own image collection is quite suggestive. It documents an artist with her work lending an objectifying resonance for the Cyclona figure and credence to the *Weekly*’s observation.

Furthermore, Valdez’s employment of the Cyclona figure is a continuation of her aesthetic evolution. As her biography for the *Topia/Utopia* show curated by

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Color photograph of *Patssi Valdez*, undated [1987], Patssi Valdez Digital Image Collection, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

Harry Gamboa, Jr. at the Terrain Gallery in 1988 indicates, “her work in performance and mixed media has led to further [sic] experimentation and tableaux work using live models, leading towards a ‘single unified sculpture object.’”<sup>33</sup> This nod toward the sculptural is difficult to ignore and lends added meaning into Valdez’s work on this perverse muse. In some sense, Legorreta as performance artist is visually conscripted within Valdez’s experimental sculptural design, an object painted, staged, and even molded to mirror her conceptual repertoire.

As this moment with Valdez reveals, if we accept these avant-gardists’ interrogations of materiality, perception, and identity on the body of this living canvas, we might also consider how the staging and circulation of *Cyclona* embedded this artifact within discursive circuits of exhibition and display. Records indicate that the *Cyclona* icon was one of several “urban archaeological” finds installed in group and individual shows with ASCO members, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Valdez, and Gronk. For instance, *Cyclona* was featured in the No Movie “Titanic” (1980) exhibited in the ASCO ’83 show at the Mary Sesnon Art Gallery at the University of California, Santa Cruz.<sup>34</sup> Several performance art pieces with “the famous *Cyclona*” were heralded and curatorially enfolded among Gronk’s “accion” series. By looking at the interventionist street art “scraps” of *Cyclona* and Meza, the reporter reviewing Gronk’s show argued, “it is in these sometimes secret, sometimes public performances that Gronk’s life truly becomes art and art becomes life.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Topia/Utopia* exhibition brochure, [1988], (Box 11, Folder 19) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>34</sup> *ASCO ’83* Exhibition brochure, [1983], (Box 2, Folder 2) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>35</sup> Untitled newspaper clipping, [1987], (Box 2, Folder 7) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

It then comes as no surprise that Legorreta claims that he declined an invitation to join ASCO's infamous *Walking Mural* (1972), one of the collective's earliest and most recognized interventionist street actions (see Figure 3.6). The happening contested the stasis and immobility of archetypical romantic Chicano murals. Should we position Cyclona as a living art piece, his inclusion within this public intervention seems fitting. Nothing could symbolically interrogate the mural form more than this conflictual performative encounter. That is, Cyclona as an artifactual embodiment, a living work of art, inherently troubles the two-dimensionality of Chicano painting. Certainly, Cyclona's deconstruction of human-object division was not lost on Gronk.

Legorreta argues that the Cyclona image was adapted in Gronk and Herron's *Black and White Mural* at Estrada Courts in 1972 (Figure 3.7). His image of a ghastly clown in white face paint, lipstick, and thick eyebrows juxtaposed by Gronk's "Popcorn" alter-ego completes the confrontational cinematic poetics of the piece which also included portraits of ASCO members Willie Herron and Patssi Valdez (Figure 3.8). Based on film theorist Sergei Eisenstein's principles of montage and audience "shock," the assembly of the Cyclona cell among other disorienting figures instills a confrontational projection upon the Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War.<sup>36</sup> As art historian Mario Ontiveros observed, *Black and White Mural* (1973) symbolically opposed public parks and recreation's "beautification" plan, which adopted the medium to exteriorize and romanticize Chicano and Mexican

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<sup>36</sup> For more on methods of montage see, Sergei Eisenstein. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949).

cultural heritage.<sup>37</sup> Rather, Gronk and Herron presented an “anti-beautification” mural emphasizing the grotesque and violent realities constructing their experiences of the barrio. Given *Cyclona*’s role as visual provocateur and disturbing muse, his inclusion within the chaos extends a counter-aesthetic strategy, just one more perverse character reflecting a twisted psyche and disturbing picture of East Los Angeles’s urban chaos.

Clearly, there is some credibility to Legorreta’s claims his estranged performances were frequently recalled in Gronk’s early oeuvre. In 1971, Gamboa even notes Gronk’s interior mural entitled *Cyclona* painted at the Equal Opportunities Office in the basement of the East L.A. Community College library.<sup>38</sup> *Cyclona*’s reputation as a spectacular sight and disruptive provocateur raised his profile among these contemporary art circles and gained notoriety from fascinated gallery attendees, collectors, and homophile leaders and activists including Gay and Lesbian Liberation Front founder and art collector, Morris Kight.

By 1973, Legorreta and his family left Los Angeles, moving to Lakewood, Colorado. Facing extreme anti-Mexican hostility, Legorreta’s isolation was discomfiting. Though removed from the Chicano art nexus of the U.S., his character grew in popularity. Correspondence from Gronk to Legorreta dated January 21, 1973 hints at the burgeoning audiences for this perverse muse and entry into the art marketplace. He writes,

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<sup>37</sup> Mario Ontiveros. “Reconfiguring Activism: Inquires into Obligation, Responsibility, and Social Relations in Post-1960s Art Practices in the United States.” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Harry Gamboa, Jr., “In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms,” In *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* Ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 75.

Everyone seems to be asking the question, ‘who is this Cyclona?’ I’ve been asked so many questions, I don’t have room to explain you’ve been asked to appear at many functions such as gay liberated Chicanos party at the park and at the highland branch. Your popularity has grown so much everyone is asking to meet you.<sup>39</sup>

The political significance of the Cyclona icon intensified through these informal and formal circuits of display. That is, the ethnographic portraits of this curiosity incited potentially politically subversive and liberating reactions to the object encounter. For Gronk, this resulted in an intimate relationship with his perverse collectible. This was quite evident even in 1972 when Gronk was drafted to Vietnam.

Although archival documentation is unclear, Gronk’s effort to avoid the military was wrought with his own brand of riddle and surrealist stream of thought, even claiming to live on the roof of East L.A. College in a pup tent to escape the draft. For fellow ASCO member Willie Herron, he thwarted the draft by shaving his eyebrows and not his head disturbing military officials. Some art historians make passing reference to Gronk’s prompt exit from military service, though they oversimplify this biographical and queer episode in his biography. It is an abridgement rather than a question mark, pregnant with suggestive possibility. In 1972, Gronk was stationed at Fort Ord, a 28,500 acre military training camp based in Monterrey Bay, California, 340 miles away from Los Angeles. Upon arrival, enlisted men, reservists and draftees endured several combat training courses, orientations and exams including aptitude tests, clothing issue, automotive mechanic’s helper class, and a language qualification test. After completing coursework, young soldiers were

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<sup>39</sup> Gronk to Cyclona. 22 September 1973. *The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida*: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta Collection. Box 3. Folder 1. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.



assigned to a platoon for eight weeks of basic training.<sup>40</sup> Gronk would feign sickness, visit the psychiatrist, and share photographs of Cyclona to the young men in the service trying to attain a discharge as a registered homosexual.

In a letter dated April of 1972 from Gronk to Cyclona he writes that he began showing photographs of Cyclona to “bring a little cheer to the service men or political prisoners . . . everyone thinks you’re a woman!”<sup>41</sup> Although Cyclona spent a brief period as a bizarre war time pin-up, Gronk would need more than Cyclona’s outrageous appearance to successfully secure a discharge from Fort Ord. In an urgent letter written to Legorreta on toilet paper, he describes his failing attempts to escape military service. “So I’ve been going out on sick call in the morning to avoid testing and being sent to boot camp, looks as if they aren’t going to let me out.”<sup>42</sup> He continues to describe his visits with the military psychiatrist to confirm his homosexuality of which was denied without clear proof of what was deemed a “mental illness” at the time. In this letter, Gronk adds,

It’s important that you find out as much information from them as possible also mention I’ve told them I’m a homosexual. But my word alone isn’t good enough I need proof from the outside (gay liberation [front] has a title that may be the proof I need). . . I hope you’ll be able to help me out or I may have to do something drastic! (only a little time left) the faster everything works out . . . I’ve had enough of this Capitalistic Pig society that send these men to this fucked up death farm. Power to the People oppressed people everywhere!<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “A Base to Be Remembered-Fort Ord.” History of Fort Ord, fortord.org, July 4, 2004, [http://www.fortord.org/1970yb\\_lewis/1d-ftord1.jpg](http://www.fortord.org/1970yb_lewis/1d-ftord1.jpg)

<sup>41</sup> Gronk to Cyclona, April 1972. The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta Collection. Box 3. Folder 1. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>42</sup> Gronk to Cyclona, 13 April 1971. The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta Collection. Box 3. Folder 1. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Within this early period of the 1970s, Gronk's and Legorreta's relationship reached a creative, political, and personal height. As a collection of letters between these intimates attests, Legorreta had become a confidant of sorts. The Cyclona muse facilitated a way for Gronk to seek liberation from the Vietnam War and confirm his homosexuality.

Through their correspondence we can observe the consequences and daily experiences homosexuals endured during the Vietnam War era. Unable to prove his homosexuality at Ford Ord, Gronk was forced to affiliate himself with a publicly recognized organizational body, the Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles.<sup>44</sup> Despite the involvement of Chicano civil rights leaders protesting the disproportionate presence of *gente* in the war, he needed a particular political identity to "register" and confirm his same-sex attractions. Despite his resistant maneuverings including feigning illness, secretly plotting his dismissal through correspondence, and the willingness to do "something drastic," this was all foregrounded by the circulated imagery of the Cyclona muse, a political icon now obstructing the compulsory heterosexuality of the military and conventions of Chicano masculinity

In a 2004 interview, Legorreta ameliorated his own struggle to reconcile his creative ambitions with other artists' desires to work with the Cyclona persona. "[Gronk] told me one night now you're going to be Cyclona. So I feel that it was kind of God's gift because I had to accept it – something that for a long time I couldn't accept. Especially at that age, you know. Something that was thrown in your face. And then you have to accept it in your life, a part of life . . . . God says

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<sup>44</sup> It is important to recognize the presence of bisexuals and transgenders though not a recognized constituency within national gay and lesbian civil rights struggles until decades later.

*this*, and that was it. ‘You better want it now!’ And so I had to accept and fall in love with it because it wasn’t an alter ego.’<sup>45</sup>

Cyclona, Mundo and Gronk continued to collaborate on a variety of other performance pieces including *Pig Lick*, (1969) a protest of the Los Angeles Police Department; *God the Nurturing Mother* (1971), set in the scenic landscapes of the San Gabriel Valley; *Cyclorama* (1972), an experiment in aesthetic vocabulary and generic conventions; And, *The Wedding of Maria Theresa Conchita and Con Chin Gow* (1971), a sarcastic reinterpretation of Chicano same-sex weddings which I will discuss further. The aforementioned featured a spectacular Cyclona embodiment in bold colors, paint, and excessive fabrics, further typifying Legorreta’s exercises in artifactual performance.

#### *The Cyclona Scrapbook and the Double Archivist*

It is perhaps due to the complexities of artistic collaboration, appropriation, and the irreproducibility of the performance medium that Legorreta’s personal archive grew in political and historical importance. The abject treatment of Cyclona in most art-historical and curatorial approaches about ASCO fueled his political stake in self- documentation and visibility. Among the keepsakes, ephemera, commercial materials, record albums, and toys composing the “Fire of Life” collection is the donation of Legorreta’s scrapbook. This unbound compilation of approximately 28 pages records an incoherent, non-linear anthology consisting of performance documentation, newspaper clippings, illustrations, and artist practice sketches of the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Cyclona icon from 1967-1980. Unlike WEB DuBois's arrangement of Askew's portrait photography in his counterarchival albums, the bizarre construction of Legorreta's photo collage is reminiscent of Dadaist interrogations of commercial materials and photographic reproductions, a practice denying the authority of painting and sculpture.<sup>46</sup>

The book itself is constructed of a mix of cardboard and glycerin paper. Each performance is mounted with tape and glue adhesive and categorically organized on each page in a cinematic sequencing. Unlike ASCO's renowned "No Movie," an experimental film still with a satirical nod to the racialized economy of the Hollywood industry, Legorreta's strategic order of the Cyclona photographs animates progressive movements. The asymmetrical layouts respect the limits of the page and so his collages never test the restrictions of the material boundary (see Figure 3.9). Instead, he chooses to present a sequential disordering with some photos strangely disunified; some are intentionally turned, tilted or cropped for kinetic effect. Each image-cell continues his disruptive performance work in the spatial alteration and break with the temporal structures of photographic display. From the extracts of these experimental actions, it is apparent that the Cyclona image did not always descend upon the urban sprawl of East L.A. strip malls, crowded streets, and twisted freeways, but spatially ruptured the reserved pastoral backdrops of Southland beaches, mountains, and ocean scenery.

The scrapbook itself constructs its own historical discourse of the Chicano avant-garde, one which makes competing claims to artistic invention prior to ASCO's

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<sup>46</sup> Diane Waldman. *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 102.

foundings through a counter-display of the Cyclona artifact in a Duchampian *boite-en-valise*.<sup>47</sup> It must be stressed that Legorreta stages this archival exhibition through the reassembly of not only the Cyclona image but also through a reappropriation of Gronk, Valdez, and Meza's image archive. As a living art canvas, the scrapbook cannot easily valorize Legorreta's self-contained performance without the photographic documentation of this East L.A. found object. The resulting "double archivist" attribution complicates the finite relations between the collector and the collected. The scrapbook is less about the keepsakes of an artist's career and instead, an archival mediation of his objectification. Legorreta's curatorial practice assembles the uses and employment of the Cyclona muse like a postmodern anthropological exhibit rendering a curio in its ethnographic permutations. This approach is quite evident in Legorreta's collage for *Madman Butterfly* (1970), a performance constituted by photographic documentation of the action and the residual acrylic portrait sketches by Gronk and Mundo Meza (see Figure 3.10). The counterarchival possibilities of the scrapbook are not solely about the history of performance art actions but on how this East L.A. curiosity and its multiple embodiments ushered other Chicano representational forms and visual experiences. While several examples abound, for the remainder of this discussion I will narrow my discussion to Legorreta's display of *The Wedding of Maria Theresa Conchita Con Chin Gow* (1971).

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<sup>47</sup> James Putnam. *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 19.

*All Dressed in White: The Artifactual Performance of a Grotesque Bride*

*The Marriage of Maria Theresa Conchita and Con Chin Gow* was performed at California State University-Los Angeles on June 3, 1971 in the free speech commons area stunning and disrupting the mundane meanderings of students' everyday lives. Though it is tempting to revisit and revise this act as a precursor to or in anticipation of today's same-sex marriage debates and further some cultural lineage for gays and lesbians in their greater pursuit of social and equitable civility, it is the defiant and assaulting spectacle of the bridal figure that remains Cyclona's most significant contribution.

The spectacular invention of Cyclona's bride performance troubled popularized notions of the archetype. Descending onto these students with his wedding party – which included Meza as bridesmaid, Gronk as the presiding official, George Cavazud as the groom, and Charlie Cock, Joyce Nagasaki, Eddie Kilton, and Rubelia – spectators were taken aback when the young woman “all dressed in white” was actually a large hairy Chicano man. The Cyclona costume was a collaborative design between Meza and him, and signified the conventions of bride. In Figure 3.11, the sleeveless white satin gown gaped open at the neckline revealing a pearl necklace nestled in black chest hair. His veil, a long bow tied around his head, framed a familiar canvas. Cyclona's eyebrows were high and arched, his eye make-up reached down the sides of his cheekbones and his lips were feminine and red. A full beard lined his jaw, an intentional gesture precluding any misinterpretation that he was a glamorous drag queen or a virginal bride. His excessive embodiment of bridal signifiers exaggerated his striking appearance as a recognizable ceremonial icon.

Though Legorreta seemed to most closely toe the line between performance art and drag, he argues:

In some of the photographs when you see that I'm cross-dressing I actually have a beard, with a moustache because I wanted people to know that's not actually what I'm doing [being a drag queen]. Even in the wedding, I had that big wedding gown . . . and I was like a bearded woman; And boy, did they go crazy at Cal State LA!<sup>48</sup>

Uninterested in female impersonation, Legorreta's work operated within the perceptual modalities of his large masculine and racialized body contesting spectatorial expectations of a sanctified virgin in her white feminine purity.

Furthermore, as an artistic embodiment, the Cyclona figure contested the affective prescriptions of American bridal material culture.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, this is not to imply that the archetypal European-influenced U.S. bridal body was somehow fixed and stable. As Elizabeth Freeman in *The Wedding Complex* briefly examined, the wedding ritual costuming remade the female body. For instance, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the wedding gown grew in importance differentiating between bride and bridesmaid and deemphasizing the groom's costume. These shifts were assisted by the rise of metropolitan department stores with bridal rooms, bridal magazine publications and other social networks permitting female sociability and, in turn, wedding planning.<sup>50</sup> By the twentieth century the ceremony became "the remaking of the female body and feminine expressivity"<sup>51</sup> through the reproducible

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<sup>48</sup> Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 5 June 2005. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>49</sup> "The Wedding of Maria Theresa," June 3, 1970, *The Fire of Life: Cyclona Collection*. Box 4. Folder 21. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

typing of marital accoutrements and affective assignments maintained by a national wedding industry complex.

In *Wedding as Text*, Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz similarly refutes the stability of wedding rituals, exhaustively interviewing hundreds of brides and comprehending the way they observed ceremonies and distinguishing the patterns of the bridal image over time. According to her study, these women reported attending other women's weddings and incorporating similar or dissimilar materials (i.e. costuming, setting, site, etc.) in their own planning and image construction. Through her consistent uniformity of the white gown, each woman was reassured that she was read as "Bride," and that she may "combine contradictory parts into a seamless whole, and [she] will be censured if the seams show too clearly."<sup>52</sup> Hence, the bridal body is transformative. It adapts and performs variant translatable marital symbols while preserving "the seams" of tradition and, in turn, joins a feminine "community" and continuity. In this bid for popular recognition and "authenticity," Leeds-Hurwitz suggests that women model their bridal bodies within a recognizable image nomenclature.

Cyclona's disturbing performance as Maria Theresa Conchita re-embodied the bridal archetype through the transformative appropriation of wedding symbols and material objects. Disrupting the fantasy of the "totalizing wedding world,"<sup>53</sup> Cyclona upset bridal beauty aesthetics through his Chicano masculine appearance. This deconstruction of wedding accoutrements destabilized the conventional ornamental objects that projected a unified and recognizable bride body. Through grotesque

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<sup>52</sup> Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *Wedding as Text: Communicating Cultural Identities Through Ritual*, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), 95.

<sup>53</sup> Freeman, p. 32.



aesthetic juxtapositions--veil/beard, gown/corpulence, necklace/chest hair, and lipstick/sneer--the bride figure is reassembled into a curio of the bizarre. Cyclona's intentional repudiation of Eurocentric heteronormative beauty standards not only challenges "the seams" of bridal authenticity but he also upsets the delicate affective orientation of the bride ornamentation. Hence, the pathos evoked by the veil, gown, ring, or bouquet was countered by his grotesque re-signification across his excessive and racialized male body.

In part, this artifactual quality of the performance is evident in Legorreta's presentation of the wedding event in his scrapbook display. The portrait photography of Maria Theresa Conchita demonstrates a transgressive adoption of the wedding photo album. It is important to reconsider the historic relevance of photography as a visual method to preserve heterosexual coupling, demarcate the conjoining of new kinships, while it assists in the performance of familial ritual. Again, Elizabeth Freeman traces the origins of couple and bride portraits to the advent of daguerreotypes in 1839. In the Antebellum Era this mechanical medium visualized heteronormative conventions, portrayed a unitary bride figure and extracted the bride from spatial or temporal limitations, isolating her image from social or cultural contexts. The bride image symbolically suggested a certain social standing, class and generational "bloodline" solidifying membership in the family.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, her visual portrayal "elaborated feminine sexual innocence as a quality of the spirit that manifested itself through face, eyes, dress, pose, and the artifacts of domestic life, and figured masculine sexual prerogative as the cameraman's or picture buyer's ability to

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 183.

‘see’ into this deeply concealed feminine interior.’<sup>55</sup> As Freeman suggests, the archetypal bride portrait had the visual power to incite an affective impulse among her viewers certifying her legitimacy and authenticity as a proper object staged in ritual. Through reserved body posturing and subtle poses, the bridal portrait conveys her performative ability to negotiate bridal ornamentation and display her virginal and feminine innocence.

In Legorreta’s scrapbook, he arranged the photo documentation of the performance through a range of images taken of Cyclona as bride, the bridesmaid (Meza) and the commencing ceremony with groom (George) and official (Gronk). In Figure 3.12, we see Cyclona countering bridal conventions in a series of bridal portraits taken by Gronk. The grotesque bride is sensually positioned, his mouth is slightly open in one frame and puckered in the next perhaps howling into the stillness of Cal State-Los Angeles. The absurdity of this marriage is extended in a photomontage arrangement soliciting imitative sequential movement; we see Cyclona embrace his maid of honor (Meza) from behind. The two are clutched in a tight embrace. In the following image, his head is thrown back in orgiastic ecstasy that subverts the virginal innocence conveyed in typical nuptial portraits. Cyclona’s sexually suggestive theatricality is clearly staged before Gronk’s iconoclastic direction: Cyclona’s back is arched, mouth is gaping, and his eyes look deeply and penetratingly into Gronk’s lens. It is quite clear in his excessive theatricality and activity that he is not a passive innocent inducted into wedlock, but rather a sensuous bride and eroticized homoerotic “find” liberating spectators through the estrangement of the wedding ritual.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 178.

The symbolic importance of the bridal grotesque to the Chicano avant-garde's nascent barrio urban expression is evident in an issue of *Regeneracion*. Clearly, reflecting the artistic direction of the ASCO collective, we can see the reappropriation of Cyclona and Meza from the wedding performance. The photograph, now a pen and ink illustration attributed to "Popcorn '74" (Gronk's alter-ego), shows how Legorreta's performances were conflated within the anthropomorphic muses of Gronk as urban archaeologist (see Figure 3.13). That is, the display of the wedding portrait is enlisted to stimulate shock and confusion as well as to embed Cyclona among the visual logics of Gronk's confrontational repertoire. His containment within the pages of ASCO's magazine demonstrates Cyclona's circulation at the level of experimental aesthetics but also at the level of the collected. This is even discernible in Gronk's own admission in a 1987 interview. Reflecting on his first public intervention, he remarked, "The first performance I did was called 'Cockroaches Have Friends.' I dress people up. It's like painting, because I assemble things and put them in front of an audience. It can change and it can move, it can walk and talk, it can do all kinds of things."<sup>56</sup> Though referencing his first piece with Legorreta and Meza, the inference can assuredly be applied to other actions with the Cyclona figure. Staged, posed, dressed, and moved, Legorreta's place in Gronk's oeuvre was clear. He was an artist reconstituted as a curio, possessed and embedded within the confrontational and aesthetic experimentations of the early Chicano avant-garde – the first act in ASCO's theatre of the absurd.

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<sup>56</sup> Julia Brown and Jacqueline Crist, "Gronk," Exhibition Catalogue, [1986], (Box 2, Folder 6) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

*Queering/Querying the Archive: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection*

Although much of this essay has historicized and re-situated Cyclona as a performer, artist, and art object, little is known of Robert Legorreta as a collector. A frequent attendant of antique shows, rummage sales, and goodwill flea markets, Cyclona amassed an eclectic assortment of popular materials ranging from toys, ceramics, paintings, baseball cards, and, in particular, albums. His extensive collection includes a wide range of records from different time periods, musical styles, and artists. For instance, his compilation of Puerto Rican teen sensation boy band Menudo records is juxtaposed against albums of legendary flamenco artist Carmen Amaya, one of the first women dancers to wear men's suits on stage. Raised from early childhood in East L.A., Cyclona's albums trace the polyphonic rhythms composing the "East L.A. sound" with records from El Chicano, The Midnighters, Johnny Chingas, Pachuco, and Las Illegals.<sup>57</sup>

Some materials capture the tropicalizing ideologies in the U.S. marketplace. He boasts one of the largest collections of "Yo Quiero Taco Bell" Chihuahua memorabilia, a successful marketing campaign for the Taco Bell Fast Food Company in the late 1990s.<sup>58</sup> Other artifacts in his archive include the Erik Estrada CHiPs action figure,<sup>59</sup> a Mexican version of Barbie called "Maria," and several toys, Pez

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<sup>57</sup> Album Collection, The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta Collection. Box 31. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>58</sup> "Toys." The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta Collection. Box 16. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>59</sup> "Toys." The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta Collection. Box 13. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

dispensers, and novelty dinnerware showcasing the Warner Bros. cartoon character Speedy Gonzales.<sup>60</sup>

His personal collection of this “contemptible” racist material culture also accounts for decorative arts, ceramics, and clothing depicting a U.S. colonial conception of habitual siesta-taking Mexicans, generous señoritas, and cactus lined romantic borderlands. Although decrying and denouncing tropicalist stereotypes in the mass media, Cyclona dissonantly locates and historicizes his own significance and cultural relevance through this very popular culture. He claims that the figurines, toys, and action figures of Walt Disney’s 1995 blockbuster *The Little Mermaid* arch nemesis Ursula resemble his early look (he cites the 1969 show “Ca-Ca Roaches Have No Friends specifically”).<sup>61</sup> Collecting matchbox cars called “the Psyclone”<sup>62</sup> and popsicles named “the sherbet Cyclone,”<sup>63</sup> he situates his cultural work within a trajectory of material objects and publicity texts promoting and celebrating “cyclones” as explosive, mind-bending, forceful, and destructive.

A collector that cannot be categorically located, Cyclona selects materials that permit him to both prove the popular currency of racist collectibles in U.S. popular culture on the one hand, while also indicting mass media as a hegemonic machine that appropriates and commodifies cultural invention from Chicana/o artists on the other. Legorreta’s complicated negotiation between racist depictions of Latinidad in

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<sup>60</sup> “Toys.” *The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta Collection*. Box 16. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>61</sup> Ursula Figurines. *The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta Collection*. Box 13. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>62</sup> Die Cast Toy Cars. *The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida: Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta Collection*. Box 16. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>63</sup> Photocopy collage from the Legorreta’s Biographical Sketch, undated, in “Cyclona” (unpaginated booklet of autobiographical materials and press kit compiled by Robert Legorreta), undated, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection*, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

the material objects of the everyday, and his self-identification with artifacts that mimic the images and qualities of his very namesake, demonstrates the complexities underscoring the artist, his work, and the archive. This tension complicates any linear examinations that attempt to encapsulate his archive as a unified whole.

Legorreta's collection exposes the white and heteronormative epistemological assumptions undergirding archival practice. He is neither confined to one signature artist, medium, or even time period, and so, his collecting habits circumvent convenient categorization. Much as Cyclona's bodied excess, grotesque poses, and shocking embodiments elated his experimental live performances, his archive is a synonymous exercise of the bizarre. One container may contain photographs from a VIVA! fundraiser and in yet another, an image of Ray Orbinson<sup>64</sup> or a souvenir hand fan featuring Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy.<sup>65</sup> With several pounds of food coupons, political mailings and "junk" mail, the enormity with which Legorreta collects vexes archival conventions and troubles researchers' expectations. Hence, the archive is an experiment of the preservationist form. It continues to test the scholar-researcher and trouble how one conceives and interprets a polysemic range of disassembled ephemeral parts. A challenge for processors and archivists to conserve the patron's intent and to make publicly accessible materials otherwise deemed too frivolous to protect, Cyclona's uncharacteristic choices incite conflict between preservationists, academicians, patrons and host institutions. What is "The Fire of Life" for Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta? What does this bizarre archival body ask of

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<sup>64</sup> Ray Orbinson, *The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida*: Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta Collection. Box 3. Folder 7. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>65</sup> Souvenir Fan, *The Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida*: Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta Collection. Box 3. Folder 23. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

its user? At this moment, it becomes clearer that his collection is just one more Cyclonic machination. An alternative cultural heritage repository too excessive, too extensive and too ambiguous to be processed simply, it is another manifestation of Cyclona's performative body through a curious artifactual form.

*Conclusion: Recovering a Cyclone in Aztlan*

The Fire of Life Collection of Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta demonstrates his passion for collecting meaningful materials of the past and evidencing artifacts, objects, and memorabilia that symbolically represent the racist, anti-immigrant, and stereotypical conditions plaguing Chicano and Mexican manifestations in U.S. popular culture. As a primary source of original material, his archive speaks to the greater importance of Chicana/o cultural preservation and heritage, and opens new scholarly possibilities into the study of L.A.'s Chicana/o social protest movement history, visual culture, queer theorizations and examinations of racial and gender performance, racialized femininities, and drag within cultural studies criticism.

Now housed in an official UCLA university archive of the Chicano Studies Research Center, Cyclona's art has traveled from the confines of East L.A. to the scholarly wealth of Westwood Village. A child harassed and brutalized by teachers in the classroom for being "different" and denied academic advancement due to learning and reading disabilities, Cyclona's presence at a research one institution is his own intellectual accomplishment, a nod of acknowledgement and a point of liberation. He states, "I'm at Westwood for a political reason, you know, until I

fulfill that political reason, I'll move somewhere else to liberate.”<sup>66</sup> Legorreta’s journey took him to the forefront of artistic movements, waves, and the beginnings of Chicana/o artists’ careers, and yet he simultaneously existed outside of even the most liminal artists in the Chicano avant-garde, expelled, repelled, and dispelled as an artist, art object, and collector. Hence, the archive becomes a performative medium and battleground for contested Chicano art histories. It is a politicized site of deep personal significance wherein Cyclona as an appropriated and objectified muse demands recognition more than 35 years later and seizes a moment to intervene and tell his “controversial truth.”

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<sup>66</sup> Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, tape recording, 15 September 2004. Los Angeles, California.



## Chapter 4: Joey Terrill

### *How to Kiss a Homeboy: The Mariconographic Portraits of Joey Terrill*

The opening of *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery on October 30, 2010 marked a major milestone in the exhibition history of gay American art. Curated by Jonathan Katz and David Ward, it was the first major exhibition “to chart the influence of gay and lesbian artists on modern American portraiture.”<sup>1</sup> The show presented a comprehensive array of shifting visual images and strategies complicating predominating views of major American modernists. Through a curatorial process of encoding/decoding (something that would even meet Stuart Hall’s approval), audiences were presented with the codifying modalities of portraitists (especially abstractionists), expressing homosexual desires and subject formations hidden just beneath the surface. As such the sexuality that populates the visual field, and more importantly, the archival possibilities of portraiture, itself – a documentary function of personal and cultural memory – are articulated. The gay and lesbian American portrait is the means by which these artists remembered and recorded their sexual identities, histories, and self-expressions. Therefore, *Hide/Seek* was more than an intervention in the persistent heteronormative vision of American modernism, it laid claim to the past by decoding image and text in the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin E. Sullivan, “Foreword,” In *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, eds. Jonathan Katz and David Ward (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 9.

The archival function of portraiture and, in turn, the re-envisioning of American art history was not overlooked by the National Portrait Gallery especially when we situate *Hide/Seek* in relationship to the show, *Lost and Found: Selections from the Archives of American Art* in the adjoining gallery. In the midst of correspondence, photographs, pencil studies, and diary entries – all in evidence at the gallery – the tightly packed vitrines presented gay artist narratives and suggestive language, hinting at sexual persuasions and behaviors. Taken as a whole, these exhibitions punctuated the “expansive”<sup>2</sup> lens with which portraiture and, I would argue, the archive is understood. A multidimensional record of gay and lesbian American life, the show challenged art museum curators’ distaste over identity linked to aesthetics and cultural politics. By assuaging these fears, it revealed the historical and political significance of portraiture as a self-documentary, biographical, and commemorative strategy.

However, despite the show’s significant claims to American art history, race is oversimplified. As we look at these records of gay and lesbian lives we have to wonder if racialized homosexual expressions and desires were inconsequential to the largely white men foregrounding this exhibition? Though *Hide/Seek* is by no means complete (an admission made even by the curators), when explored, the interrelationship of racialized queer desires, identities, and visual knowledges was tenuously organized around the Harlem Renaissance and in particular, the camera work of Carl Van Vechten, constituting racial difference without any further exploration of a polysemic queer Blackness or other racialized American visual

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Katz, “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” In *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, eds. Jonathan Katz and David Ward (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 15.

cultures. This truncation is surprising. Even under the curatorial themes of postmodern portraiture and AIDS art activism over the last thirty years (an era of heightened visibility for queer people of color, I might add), homosexual Chicano and Latino subjectivities were excised entirely. The only Chicano portraitist represented in the show, photographer Laura Aguilar, was assessed under the condescending rubric of “self-taught” and “outsider” artist.<sup>3</sup>

*Hide/Seek*'s limited image archive displayed a particular type of gay portraiture where race is static, stable, and fixed. We never gain insight into the ways that gay artists interrogate racialized visual knowledge or how these identity categories operate and have been negotiated outside formal systems of the commercial art world. Had *Hide/Seek* confronted this range of racialized self-representations, the presumed stable gay subject hiding behind the painting's cyphering falters, and the sexuality we seek to know is not applicable to a universal gay subjectivity. This intensifies the political importance of portrait-making as a corrective to the archival shortfall.

It is my contention that portraiture grew in significance for homosexual Chicano artists in the 1970s seeking to define and preserve a self-image against social marginality, cultural amnesia, and misrepresentation. This is something the exhibition underestimated. For no matter where we “hide” or “seek,” our visual heritage is still unfounded within a “comprehensive survey” that promotes gay

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<sup>3</sup> The results overlook the possible stylistic and biographical influences of Romaine Brooks, Marsden Hartley, Marcel Duchamp, and in particular, David Hockney and Don Bachardy on Chicano homosexual artists. This is odd given that, especially in 1970s Los Angeles, the Southern California urban landscape was ripe with cultural infusions between the Chicano civil rights movement, gay identity, and homoerotic desire in the city. This is an issue that I will take up more directly later in this chapter.

portrait practices among canonical American art figures in favor of the ethnic periphery. From this context, it is difficult to ascertain how Chicano homosexuality was comprehended, represented, and seen. In short, we are pressed to ask how can a portrait convey what Chicano homosexuality looks like?

In this essay, I consider the portraiture of Chicano painter, photographer, and conceptualist Joey Terrill as a corrective to this absence. Born in 1955 and raised in Highland Park, a small neighborhood in Southeast Los Angeles, Terrill's story is little known. His frequent encounters and mingling with Chicano avant-gardists including Robert Cyclona, Mundo Meza, Gronk, Jack Vargas, Teddy Sandoval and the ASCO art collective is little regarded. Moreover, his foundational pictorial work fathoming a Chicano homosexual visual culture and sensibility in Los Angeles is largely uncredited or ostensibly omitted from Chicano art-historical inquiry. His elision from the *Hide/Seek* exhibition only intensifies his obscurity and minimizes his activity within gay and lesbian artistic circles in Los Angeles in the 1970s.

Given these geo-spatial perimeters, it is important to realize that Terrill's documentary process emerges out of the dearth of Chicano homosexual cultural representation and his eagerness to pursue the personal narratives he felt and experienced. Terrill's artistic practices reflect an archival line of investigation to record a subjectivity repressed under local and national registers even in the ferment of Chicano media visibility. Ironically enough, to picture Chicano homosexuality was to manifest an image incomprehensible within the proliferating yet restricting nomenclature of Chicano cultural nationalism whose referents were Pre-Columbian myth, revolutionary idolatry, historic revisionism, and religious figuration. Reacting

to these symbolic prescriptions, Terrill countered this visual economy by rehearsing an artistic strategy that portrayed and actualized his personal narratives, homoerotic life experiences, and private details as a self-described, Chicano “gay-identified man.”<sup>4</sup>

Developing what I term “*mariconography*,” Terrill generated a radical visual vocabulary to name and face a sequestered subjectivity then unnamed and unseen. Similar to the ways countercultural social movements reclaimed pejorative slurs from discursive attack, Terrill’s re-appropriation of “el maricon” (Spanish slang for faggot) disarmed its stigma and proposed other models of Chicano masculinity, sexual difference, and same-sex desire. In this essay, I recover these pictorial records and discern how mariconographic aesthetics enabled cultural resistance through a subversive pictorial lexicon, something, as I argue later, that was influenced by the political attitudes and self-determining character of the Chicano Art Movement, as well as the defiant sexual spectacles of gay and lesbian liberation at the time.

Beginning with an examination of Terrill’s social and cultural location in Los Angeles, I turn my attention to his “Maricon” portrait series with artist Teddy Sandoval in 1975-76 and, in particular, *Homeboy Beautiful*, a self-published magazine produced in 1977-79. Playfully subverting the iconic representations of affluent domestic settings in *House Beautiful* magazine, Terrill’s conceptualist explorations brought book art, the photo essay, mail art, street performance, barrio gang calligraphy, and gay male self-documentation under the Chicano print media form. Terrill’s photographs documenting these collaborative performances pictured a

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<sup>4</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

perverse barrio world where overt homoeroticism and social deviance turned innocent librarians into garish Cholas and Chicano gangsters terrorized the West L.A. elite with Judy Garland tunes. As an extension of the Chicano avant-garde's photographic explorations of the film form, urban happenings, and performance art, *Homeboy Beautiful* circulates a homoerotic Chicano masculinity and sexuality through the readapted magazine medium. Terrill's mariconographic practices constituted a crucial antecedent to later gay Chicano men's print culture; his portraits archive a way of visually constituting and knowing homosexual Chicano subjectivities and desires, a mariconographic coherence that is still at work among young contemporary artists today.

#### *A Tale of Two Cities*

The origins of Joey Terrill's search for a homosexual Chicano aesthetic can be traced to several formative encounters with race, sexual difference, and the visual. Born in 1955 at University Hospital in Los Angeles, Terrill attributes his artistic skills to his father, who was a painter, craftsman, and furniture-maker. After his parents divorced in 1961, he moved to Highland Park with his mother and sister when he was 11. Early on, Terrill immersed himself inside a fantasy world of American popular culture, comic books, Hollywood starlets, and rock and roll music. Sitting in front of the television, he watched shows such as "The Roaring 20s," where he would sketch star Dorothy Provine in her glamorous flapper costumes and glittering stage design.<sup>5</sup> Wallpapering his bedroom with illustrations, photographs, and newspaper clippings, Terrill sought refuge in a world of images, withdrawing into a private asylum inside

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<sup>5</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

the repressive realities of his fractured home life, his mother's mental illness, absentee father, and an early awareness of his same-sex desires.

However, his understanding of homosexuality as an identity and cultural representation was incomplete. Though he recalls reading a small article in the *L.A. Free Press* mentioning the New York Stonewall Bar Riots, a formative moment in the gay and lesbian liberation movement in 1969, visual portrayals of Chicano homosexuals were nearly non-existent. In fact, his earliest awareness of non-heteronormative identity was Mary Lou, a resident transsexual generally acknowledged and accepted even among the Cholos in Highland Park. Known for her spunk and aggression, her confrontational demeanor often discouraged men from antagonizing her. For young Terrill, Mary Lou signified a homosexual ethnic identity that provoked confusion. Unsure if she was a sign of his approaching future, his youthful eyes could not comprehend all the things he was seeing and feeling, unable to internalize the reality that Mary Lou represented.

Broadly speaking, Terrill's general perceptions of homosexuals were fraught with anxiety. These men populated an immanent scene, one sometimes sighted from his aunt's house located just across the street from Tykes, a gay bar. Warning him about his tight bell-bottoms, self-fashioning, and effeminacy, Terrill's aunt tried to discourage any misconception of her nephew's sexuality, a worry that, in turn, affected how Terrill perceived the ominous homosexual other.<sup>6</sup> Her cautionary tales conjoined sexual deviance with dress and outward looks. Homosexual men were occasionally spotted in the local laundromat where Terrill's cousin taught him how

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<sup>6</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

“to see” homosexuals, sometimes narrowing his decryptions to tidy appearances and clean fingernails alone. From such social anxieties, Terrill intuitively knew there were others like him.<sup>7</sup> However, this “homosexual community” was irreconcilable within his particular urban experience, geography, and social location. Nameless, unseen, and unknown, Chicano homosexuality was a cultural nonentity, indiscernible from his barrio reference point.

This void was particularly paradoxical for Terrill whose introduction to the Chicano civil rights struggle was replete with political visibility, self-affirming imagery, and anti-assimilationist rhetoric against institutional state violence. As a teen at Cathedral Catholic High School, his social, political, and spiritual perspectives were influenced by two politically engaged priests, Brothers Gerard Perez and Richard Orona. Stewarding Terrill as a young Chicano from a single parent home, the clergymen initiated political awareness and interjected debate, intent on furthering calls for Chicano protest and social change. As part of their effort to incite political consciousness, Terrill first screened Luis Valdez’s “Yo Soy Joaquin,” a cinematic adaptation of Corky Gonzales’s poetic manifesto, in the school cafeteria.<sup>8</sup> In 1972, he attended La Festival de los Barrios with Brother Gerard at Lincoln High School in East L.A. where he witnessed performances of Teatro Campesino, Chicano art exhibits, and displays of political oration.<sup>9</sup> However, his self-awareness and excitement was undercut by the limits of this cultural renaissance. The prescriptive

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See Antonio Esquibel and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, Eds. *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings*. (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> In turn, this prompted Terrill’s political activities in the Chicano civil rights movement as a young man. Terrill marched in the Chicano moratorium against the Vietnam draft, experienced the second wave of East L.A. high school “walk outs,” and volunteered to register the public to boycott grocery stores carrying non-union grapes and lettuce.



political manifestos, ideologies, and social uprisings relegated sexuality under the guise of a procreative familia (family) and La Raza Unida (the people united). So even within this wealth of artistic production and confrontational protest aesthetics, sexual difference was unplaced and unacknowledged.

However, Terrill's relationship with these cleric stewards also precipitated something he cites among his most significant artistic influences. In late 1970, Terrill was invited to join Brothers Gerard and Shawn Flores in San Francisco. Here, he embarked on a romantic cultural landscape quite different from the barrio urban conditions of Highland Park. On the Richmond neighborhood streets where he was staying, was the Edwardian-style architecture for which San Francisco is famous. Talking with local residents, they had a matter-of-fact regard for homosexuals who were mingling with and a part of the proliferating hippy counterculture. With Brother Gerard, Terrill saw director Mike Nichols's "Catch-22" and went to a rock concert at the Fillmore West theatre.<sup>10</sup> Leaving the liberating environment of San Francisco for the homophobic realities of Cathedral High School weighed heavy on Terrill. With his high school friend Terry Saunders, he would run away and hitchhike up the Pacific Coast Highway to San Francisco soon thereafter, fleeing Highland Park for the Bay Area at least three more times while still in his teens.

### *A Life in Glitter and Scandal*

On one such occasion, Terrill had arrived in San Francisco, although he had been separated from Terry by a logistical error. He arranged to stay at an acquaintance's house. However, after a surprise inspection from a suspicious

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<sup>10</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

landlady, he was suddenly evicted. Unable to find work or lodging, Terrill approached a hippy couple on the street that directed him to the Project Artaud, an arts complex in the Mission district, which traded labor for housing. Named after French poet Antonin Artaud, a major figure in surrealist theatre and auto-writing experimentation, Terrill descended on the commune and entered a fantasy world, which harbored strange and dreamlike elements of avant-garde performance. He was stunned by the alternative interior design, which he described as consisting of plastic tunnel installations, alternative art spaces, and a two-story house construction built inside the warehouse. The building played host to a weekend affair called, “As the World Turns,” featuring an art exhibit on the roof, film screenings, and a concert of eclectic musical talent including: a gospel choir from Berkeley, jazz band, salsa band, and at midnight, a group called, “The Cockettes.” In exchange for a place to stay, he voluntarily helped build the stage and served nuts and fruit to a peculiar audience of hippies, vampires, princesses, and people in renaissance fair costuming.

In the near distance, the silhouette of women immaculately attired in Pre-World War II gowns, jewelry, and furs astonished Terrill. As they moved through the food line, he realized that they were not women at all. They were “The Cockettes” flaunting beards dipped in glitter, full moon false eyelashes, and brows shimmering with eye shadow. This overt rupture of a binary gender system excited Terrill’s imagination. In this outrageous expression of what was termed “gender fucking,” The Cockettes captured an androgyny whose flamboyant theatrics mixed psychedelics and burlesque, and that anticipated glamrock. Performers Sylvester, Goldie Glitters, and Johnny stormed the stage, capturing the attention of the entire

commune with raunchy vignettes, campy show tunes, vaudevillian spectacle, and uninhibited sexual expressiveness. The brash performativity of a queer masculinity was a critical turn in Terrill's search for self-expression. In a way that led performance artists like Robert Cyclona, Mundo Meza, and Gronk in 1969 to stage iconoclastic assaults against Chicano hetero-masculine propriety, Terrill, too, sought artistic alternatives. His San Francisco experiences alluded to a later subversive play with maleness through deviant performances of Chicano body and image.

Following his transformative exposure to the Cockettes, Terrill returned to Los Angeles embodying a queer social defiance, refusing to conform or subscribe to appropriate gender and sexual relations and identities. In turn, his non-conformist appearance started to reject social conventions and tested the Catholic values of his high school where he even threatened to take a drag queen date to his senior prom on one occasion.<sup>11</sup> He recalls, "My head was full of ideas and possibilities and glitter in my hair and it was just pretty wild and it was sort of an artistic defiance that overtook me and I was like, 'Well, I don't give a fuck about the Cholos and . . . you want to call me names? Call me a puto? Well, fuck you! I am a puto! What are you going to do about it?' I got real uppity and started hanging out in Hollywood and sneaking into clubs at 15 and again, always just to dance, for the fashion, and dressing up and really to look at *that* as art. That whole dressing up, going out, posing, and being seen was living your art. And in Hollywood there were a whole bunch of younger

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<sup>11</sup> After receiving several threats and harassment from Cathedral High School administrators, Terrill was eventually banned from his high school senior prom. This story was relayed by the artist. Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

Latinos who were doing this.”<sup>12</sup> This was Terrill’s foray into a world of gay teen nightlife. He played into the creative synergy of the “gay funky dances”<sup>13</sup> organized by the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center at Trouper’s Hall, the setting where photographer Anthony Friedkin developed a respective focus on East L.A. Chicano homosexuals in his photo series, “The Gay Essay.”<sup>14</sup>

Dressed in vintage 1940s neckties, high-waist pants, and platform shoes encrusted in mirror shards and Cubist painting collage, Terrill sashayed into Trouper’s Hall where he, too, mingled with other homosexual Chicano youth searching for likeminded others, while they, in turn were acting out outrageous and glamorous personas. This set the tone for an emergent style politic that enfolded bodily expression with social transformation. Through these dances, he first met Mundo Meza and his boyfriend, Charles, Robert Cyclona, Jim Aguilar, Richard Nieblas, Jack Vargas, Jef Huereque, Gronk, Patssi Valdez and other members of the ASCO art collective. Just as Friedkin had discovered, Trouper’s Hall was a cultural nexus for Chicano artistic communities “living [their] art.” This interrelationship between Chicano avant-gardism and gay urban nightlife must be stressed here if only to illuminate how these social networks generated collaborative possibilities, bred conceptual art pieces, and spawned group exhibitions, a rejoinder unacknowledged in the story of the Chicano Art Movement.

For instance, Escandalosas Gallery, an experimental Chicano artist salon hosted at Richard Nieblas’s house at 1502 ½ McGilvrey in East Los Angeles,

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<sup>12</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>13</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>14</sup> This series of photographs is more completely examined in Chapter 5 on Mundo Meza.

manifested this synergistic art circuit.<sup>15</sup> Little documentation survives of the temporary art space, but Terrill partook in the outrageous nature of these happenings. On one such occasion his collaborative artist illustrated “cookbook” was caught in the misfires of pig slaughtering and group urination. He recalls, “They brought in a head of a pig as part of the scene, the performance art, you know, and they ended up pissing on the pig’s head. You know, it got kind of, it sounds so cliché to say wild or freaky but my poor cookbook ended up getting like pissed on, watered, and damaged and I was like, ‘Oh my god! Do I want to hang out with these people if my art is going to get damaged?’ And I was like, ‘Well, I guess!’”<sup>16</sup>

The ephemerality of this salon space demonstrates the experimental language emerging among Chicano conceptualists, a suggestion that the productive and liberating possibilities of the Chicano avant-garde was laced with sexual liberation, recoding the social body, and homoerotic self-expression. Salons like Escandalosas Gallery became the fertile ground for excessive, provocative, and controversial Chicano art practice, a fissure little known in the frequent retellings of the ASCO art collective. For Terrill, his participation within this scene was an important site for his nascent visual vocabulary and conceptualist tendencies.

### *The Clone Wars*

Records of Terrill’s burgeoning self-analytic perspective is apparent in a collection of acrylic paintings he calls the “clone” series from 1975. In these figurative social portraits of homosexual male dress codes, Terrill deconstructs a

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<sup>15</sup> Escandalosas Gallery Announcement, December 18, 1975, The Fire of Life: Cyclona Collection. Box 3. Folder 3. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>16</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

hypermasculine archetype to which gay men of the era aspired. Deconstructing this prescriptive, arcane, and caricatured maleness, Terrill's paintings subvert a model of manhood through visual sarcasm and stinging parody. He recalled, "I needed to start to look at this whole idea of 'clones,' it was just getting to be so cliché. And so that's when I started doing paintings called the clone series. So it was pictures of these men with their little alligator t-shirts or whatever . . . and of course, Rick, my boyfriend, was one of the West Hollywood 100 so he was a muscle guy and was wearing the Lacoste shirts . . . and you know, he used to think, 'Why are you dressing like that?' and I was like, 'Why do you dress the way you dress?' You know, you know let's really examine that! So I started to do these paintings like *Summer Became an Endless Round of Parties Said the Clone* and pictures of clones drinking and *Clones Eating Taquitos* and I would exhibit these at least twice at Different Light Bookstore and I remember that the proprietors of Different Light Bookstore loved that I was sort of parodying within the gay community and there were a couple of people who actually came up to me and said they were offended or criticized, 'why are you making fun of the clone?' Well think about it? What's the whole concept of being a clone? What about being an individual? We're subjugating our individuality to become a part of a group."<sup>17</sup>

Receiving mixed reviews from viewers, some offended by his analytical parlance and others offered their approval, Terrill's social portraits were an important documentary exercise rejecting a masculine archetype of cowboys, lumberjacks, and brawny construction workers. Through an examination of a restrictive and flat

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<sup>17</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

hypermasculine visual discourse, he reappropriates homosexual dress codes, uniform exteriority, and athlete muscularity to magnify the homogeneity of homosexual self-fashioning. Clone social portraiture provided Terrill an analytic method to expose the absurdity of these social conventions, illuminating the ways that even racialized signification was a troubling subject in this world of self-mockery. Quite possibly, the series references the visual lessons he ascertained in an East L.A. laundromat as a young man eyeing homosexual difference. Terrill's clone series proposed self-reflective ways of seeing an archetypal model of male homosexuality in dress code, a manifestation distinct from the defiant style politics that defined Terrill and other Chicano homosexual avant-gardists at the time.

### *The Maricon Portrait*

Among the intersections of these art practices and the sardonic disregard of white homosexual maleness, Terrill's exposure to the homoerotic work of Chicano artist Teddy Sandoval also influenced his aesthetic proposals. Attending the *Chicanarte* show at the L.A. Municipal Gallery at Barnsdall Art Park in 1975, Terrill viewed a collage of a female nude with male genitalia. Though it is difficult to identify what specific piece from Sandoval's oeuvre he remembers, the exhibition brochure notes a piece entitled, "Nude #5 with David" (N.D.) mixed media on paper. Quite possibly, this piece stirred Terrill who was already expressing an artistic daring and rebellious disposition. The small 3" x 5" object, dwarfed by the grand scale of Brown power fists, United Farm Worker flags and Aztec pyramids, countered a political discourse that reified overt sexual commentary. Displayed within a Chicano

exhibitionary experience, Sandoval's work exposed a natural relationship between homoerotic and Chicano artistic expression. That is, this object placement generated a potentially queer viewership upsetting the Chicano ideological tenets of family, procreativity, and sex-gender duality. This is something that even evoked hostility over the conceptual image-text work of Jack Vargas also at the *Chicanarte* show as described in Chapter 2. Regardless, the name of California State University-Long Beach art student "Ted Sandoval" left a critical impression.

Terrill's encounter with "Nude #5 with David" was soon followed by his coincidental introduction to Sandoval at Las Escandolosas Gallery. This resulted in an immediate friendship and collaborative foundation, with both men linked by their shared artistic interests. In addition to the gay funky dances at Trouper's Hall and group art shows, Terrill and Sandoval's relationship was fueled by a number of philosophical and political ideas on race, art, and same-sex desire. Whereas Sandoval would reference Native American spiritual beliefs, citing its mystical explanation of the two-spirited or fourth sexed people, Terrill's approach ruminated with feminist art, lesbian self-representation, and in particular, the self-portraits of Romaine Brooks. His aesthetic affinity for Brooks was not unfounded, given the historic and visible role of feminist art political expressions throughout L.A., including Judy Chicago, Carole Caroompas, WomanHouse in Venice, and the feminist art hub at Cal-ARTS.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the feminist art movement in Los Angeles, see Cecile Whiting. *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) and Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni, Eds. *Art/Women/California: Parallels and Intersections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).



Through artistic and ideological exchange, Terrill and Sandoval sought a name for Chicano homosexuality, at that point, a nameless and unrecognized figure within the Chicano civil rights struggle, gay liberation, and the broader contemporary art and visual culture in Los Angeles. Under a reductive and simplistic taxonomy like “homosexual,” “gay,” or “sissy,” a racialized Chicano homosexual subjectivity could not be fully pictured with the limitation of identity categories, where race is visually irreconcilable from sexuality and visual representation. “Maricon,” however, provided Terrill and Sandoval with a self-naming visual statement wherein the Mexican hostility and stigma of “the faggot” would be reinvested with empowering possibilities and cultural significance. Perhaps even drawing on the violent and taunting word that trailed Terrill down the hallways of Cathedral High School, the reclamation of a vile Spanish slur opened a range of artistic expressions much in the same way “Chicano,” “Black,” or “Nuyorican” protest aesthetics intervened in marginality through self-determined art movements.

At Terrill’s apartment in 1975, he and Sandoval developed a series of photographic self-portraits to render the maricon visually. In Figure 4.1, Terrill is set in a medium shot. Direct and determined in appearance, his face-forward positioning fills the visual field. His heavy dark brow, moustache, and slicked hair convey a racialized masculinity, one that indexes a familiar impenetrable and muscular male embodiment. He displays a barrio style resonant among young Chicano men in the 1970s, perhaps demanding recognition, legibility, or at least, familiarity within a Cholo archetype. By resisting any inviting facial cues, Terrill is hard and foreboding. His clenched mouth, forward leaning jaw line, and direct, pointed gaze intimidate the

viewer, exteriorizing a public image that contests the flamboyance or delicacy with which homosexuals were perceived. Also, quite possibly connoting his own sexual interests, Terrill's active posturing as opposed to passive demeanor reads as a sexual self-descriptor, preferring to be seen as the aggressor in the dalliance of male cruising. Standing against the shallow space of one of his abstract paintings, the geographical elements of the domestic interior enfold his deference as Chicano artist within his pictured self-expression. The self-documentary outcome of the portrait maps mariconography among the visual possibilities of his own artistic repertoire, situating this artistic expression among Chicano art and his affinities for American modernism and abstraction.

In the central frame, we are faced with the word "maricon" stretched across Terrill's broad chest. By readapting the slur, his fit athletic body is defiantly branded and self-labeled. He externalizes a pejorative slur as a badge of pride and reverses the vulgarity of this barrio classification. In this way, we read this allusive identity across the literary text of his body. We are asked to ponder: Is this what a "maricon" looks like? This literal body transcription presents a self-marking strategy, one that is made visible through an iconic branding. By making a public declaration in a photographic portrait, his act of self-naming defies exclusions and omissions in an alternative form of record-taking and recordkeeping. Here, Terrill cites a body that not only creates a certain salience as homosexual *and* Chicano but also translates a coherent social body.

From this series, in Figure 4.2 we see a revised self-portrait exercise from the same photo shoot. In supine position, Terrill's hands are rested and folded across his

torso. Whereas, his aggressive gaze in Figure 4.1 demanded self-recognition and challenged the audience, here his eyes are closed in a passive internal retreat. His receptive body is available to be looked at, inviting the visual consumption of other men. Bearing the markings of the “maricon,” his self-display collapses a Chicano masculine virility and homoerotic vulnerability against the homophobic vehemence of an anti-gay slur. This tension undergirds Terrill’s interventionist statement. That is, he pictures a paradoxical reality through the simultaneous collision of racialized and sexualized signifiers. We see a solid hypermasculine body, yet positioned in fragile repose. We view his homoerotic body display offset by the contrasting fabrics of the Mexican folk blanket and the overt sexual demarcations of the t-shirt. Such staging in the visual field intensifies Terrill’s search to reconcile the irreconcilable. His mariconographic visual lexicon seeks to empower not only through its pictorial modes of representation and visibilities, but in its forthright documentation and citation of a sequestered subjectivity unbound and unrepresented within the Chicano art movement corpus.

The non-conformist and visual provocations of Terrill’s self-portraiture resounded with several friends and acquaintances also seeking ways to visualize Chicano homosexual cultural expression and political identity. In 1976, the “maricon” artistic and political project proliferated. Terrill produced another series of “maricon” t-shirts and for his lesbian counterparts, “malflora” companion pieces. Unlike his first series, the second edition readapted Cholo gang calligraphy. Using this barrio typology as a self-expressive strategy, Terrill reverses the criminal connotations of graffiti and uses it for queer community unifying ends. Encoding

themselves in a familiar style, they are embodied placas, a type of street signage that inscribes territories and gang spatial identities. They collectively concretize a “maricon/malflora” signature that belongs to the barrio cultural landscape.

This is evident in Figure 4.3. Photographed at DeLongpre Park in 1977, these homosexual Chicanos and Chicanas use the body-placa to make place and reclaim a political identity formation within an urban geography revered in Chicano movement protest history. Much like graffiti territorializing the wall, this group portrait coalesces their body-placas in a type of “corporeal tagging” archived within the pictured landscape. Daring a heteropatriarchal Chicano visual regime to look, see, and know the “maricon/malflora” figure, the resistant body-placa of the community portrait is a pictorial challenge to anyone intent on denying or eradicating their place within a barrio cultural reality. Exhibiting these shirts at the Christopher Street West gay pride parade, gay bars in West Hollywood, and gay-in rallies, Terrill’s mariconographic practices shaped a social body by which he strategizes to name and affirm Chicano sexual difference.

This foundational mariconographic language generated other artistic efforts to imagine the homosexual Chicano subject. For ceramicist and illustrator Teddy Sandoval, this meant returning to the image archive of Terrill’s self-portrait photography. In figure 4.4, Sandoval produced a glazed ceramic cup reducing literal figurative representation of the homosexual male form to its fundamental elements. His abstraction of the Terrill image portrays a mariconographic motif allowing the non-descript body to stand-in for the maricon subject. As we can discern from the cup detail designed by Sandoval in 1976, the ceramic portrait indexes Terrill in line

and shape. The silhouette traces Terrill's square jaw, expressionless face, and signature moustache correlating his portrait with the surface of ordinary Chicano decorative art. The design conveys a masculine anonymity emptying the image of all defining traits or didactic signifiers. In this way, the ceramic portrait is an allegory for the anonymous sexual encounter and symbolizes the lingering shadow of the unnamed and unidentified lover. Sandoval's perspective tells us we need not be bothered with any extraneous details or the personal information of this man – his mariconographic visual representation is enough – a looming erotic memory made manifest. Terrill's body concretized in the decorative art form can only be re-experienced from the suggestive surface of cup design, the glimpse of his shadow, and the tactile swallow of his contents. Under Sandoval's artistic expression, the maricon's bodily trace is an empowering document of identity and desire. For both Terrill and Sandoval, this powerful investigation of maricon visual meaning reconstitutes Chicano homoerotic representation in their own way and on their own terms.

### *The Cyclops and 30 Lesbians*

From this visual material, we can extract the ways the maricon portrait photography anticipates Terrill's later aesthetic and ideological foray into performance and group collaboration. This would play an exceedingly critical tenet in his artistic vocabulary, finding ways to expand the basis for Chicano homosexual images from the singular photographic record to a broader conceptual statement. This was due, in part, to his formal artistic training after Cathedral High School. In

1973-76, Terrill attended Immaculate Heart College and entered the art department. Studying under the apprentices of Sister Corita Kent, a socially-conscious printmaker and mentor of Sister Karen Bocalero,<sup>19</sup> Terrill was exposed to a network of young contemporary artists fielding the art practices of the moment, abandoning painting and sculpture for the happenings, body art, mail art, site-specific installations and pop art of Allen Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, James Turrell, John Baldessari, Bruce Nauman, Judy Chicago, and Eleanor Antin. Terrill's artist colleagues also rehearsed Dadist interventions, bringing photomontage, assemblage, collage, propaganda pamphlets, and satire within their art-activist strategies.<sup>20</sup> Coaxed into the mail art movement by his circle of friends and art school peers, Terrill found possibility in this collaborative art process and distributed exchange. This encouraged new directions for Terrill's mariconographic expressions.

In 1977, a *New West Magazine* cover story exposed its middle-class Southern California readers to Chola gangs from East L.A. Adapting a condescending and patronizing perspective on this juvenile "social problem," the article perpetuated a caricature of these women. Frustrated with inaccurate media representation and stereotypical rhetoric reifying Chicanos to the criminal edges of the city, Terrill started to wonder: What would happen if the tables were turned and the Cholas investigated the affluent dictums of high culture and refined taste among west side elites?

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<sup>19</sup> Sister Karen Bocalero (1933-1997) was born in Globe, AZ and grew up in Boyle Heights, a barrio neighborhood in East Los Angeles. She would later co-found Self-Help Graphics, a major Chicano cultural arts center and community gallery in 1972. For more, see Kristen Guzman. *Self Help Graphics & Art: Art in the Heart of East Los Angeles*. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

Storyboarding adventures in a homo-homeboy world, *Homeboy Beautiful* magazine emerged, presenting the life, style, and fashion for an urban Chicano homosexual subject. A parody of *House Beautiful* magazine with its glossy page layouts of home furnishings, interior designs, and wall décor, Terrill deconstructed its high class social standing and exposed the absurdity of American consumption, commercialism, and displays of wealth and distinction. In its pages the “normalcy” of white heteropatriarchy was denaturalized and arrested by a raucous maricon readership demanding its own art and community interests. We can cite the magazine’s principal reliance on photography as an extension of Terrill’s early self-documentary work, as well as reflecting the style of gay print media at the time, the technology garnering a “crucial role in producing modern gay and lesbian visibility.”<sup>21</sup> His exploration of print culture was not new, however. In fact, Terrill’s engagements with the book form were among his seminal artistic strategies portraying racial and sexual difference.

For instance, a copy of Homer’s *The Odyssey* from Terrill’s high school English Literature and Philosophy class taught by Brother Gary York in 1972-73 demonstrates his preoccupation with the homoerotic possibilities of reappropriation, figurative drawing, and the bounded book form. In figure 4.5, we see a Hans Erni illustration of Polyphemus, the Cyclops. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus and his men are trapped inside a cave where the giant proceeds to devour the explorers. Convincing the Cyclops to drink enchanted wine, he falls asleep after which Odysseus impales his eye with a wooden spear. Blinded and disoriented, the creature wrestles a horned

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Meyer, “Gay Power Circa 1970: Visual Strategies for Sexual Revolution.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.3 (2006): 451.

sheep searching for the explorer, who escapes tied to the bottom of the sheep's wool. Pinned on his back beneath the hooves of the animal and the feet of the giant, Odysseus is caught in the chaotic entanglements of fur, limbs, and frenetic movement.

In figure 4.5, the triadic composition creates a hierarchical arrangement of sight paths. The Cyclops' ocularity stretches from the top of the frame, assuming the central visual power of the scene. Beneath this prescient eye, the sheep's head pivots slightly upward, matching its line of sight with the creature in a symbiotic alignment. At the ground level, Odysseus struggles to see, his vision averted beneath the towering figures. This triangulated visual arrangement of sights, lines, and bodies provokes a homoerotic entanglement of muscularity, physical power, and virility. The sexual subtext of the scene is not farfetched and must have caught the attention of young Terrill who, by 1971, had escaped to San Francisco, experienced gay nightlife in Hollywood, and assumed a non-conformist gay liberatory attitude at Cathedral High School.

In figure 4.6, we see Erni's illustration in verso. Terrill reappropriates this episode from Book IX and replaces it with a graphic depiction of ancient Greek sodomy. Extracting the sheep from the central composition, we see what relationship is hiding behind the fluffs of wool and the kinetic commotion. Terrill presents a scene in mid-coitus. Polyphemus is no longer trying to cannibalize Odysseus but instead, hungering for something else. The Cyclops straddles him impaled not by Odysseus's spear but by the explorer. Odysseus's head is thrown back in orgiastic delight. The copulating male bodies visualize a perverse fantasy and a homoerotic re-



reading of the book illustration. Though Terrill's queer re-working of *The Odyssey* might be disregarded as the scribbles of an apathetic high school teen, his pen and ink revisionist drawings permeate the book, suggesting an important precursory artistic strategy. That is, we can ascertain his initial interests in parody, humor, appropriation, and homoeroticism. These are traits that later come to define the inception of *Homeboy Beautiful*. Moreover, one must remember how these fundamental exercises in provocative image-making were also expressed and negotiated through the book form.

A related antecedent in Terrill's repertoire also emphasized collective artist production as a critical dimension of print media appropriation. Referencing the feminist movement mantra of "the personal is political" and the ways women artists reworked craft, such as needlepoint, quilting, scrapbooking and crochet for political ends, Terrill employed bookmaking to externalize and archive private desire and memoir. In 1975, he compiled a collection of lesbian self-portraits, an unusual art project for a Chicano artist and gay man at the time. His project constructed a personal archive through the image making and visibility of lesbian self-representation. The book, entitled *30 Lesbian Photos*, promised a shocking depiction of woman-to-woman erotica.

In figure 4.7, the bold and aggressive crimson book cover shares a certain pulp novel sensibility, something quite cognizant among exploitive lesbian graphics in 1940s dime novels. Promising the reader "Explicit!" photographs of woman-to-woman erotica, the propagandistic quality of the cover design emboldens public curiosity and fantasy. Rather than reconstitute these patriarchal and anti-lesbian

discourses, Terrill uses a misogynist visual logic against itself, disguising a covert feminist project behind the book jacket. For what was truly shocking between the pages were 30 lesbian photographic portraits of the mundane.

Asking several lesbian women, some of whom were his friends and relatives to participate, Terrill's book consists of each collaborator's contributing photographs and personal effects visualizing her identity. The page layout depicted each woman's individual portrait, reflecting her own lesbian visual manifestation. What was veiled as a sensationalist expose on woman-to-woman perversion is actually images of lesbians attending college, resting at home, out on a night with friends, or childhood memories (see Figure 4.8). By manipulating hegemonic presumptions and patriarchal expectations, Terrill's collection of lesbian portraits counterdiscursively challenges the exploitative and objectifying conditions undergirding lesbian representation in American popular culture. *30 Lesbian Photos*, a rare yet significant artistic statement for a homosexual Chicano artist, demonstrates a sense of collective art through the book art format. The collaborative precepts of this documentary project would become more fully recognized in *Homeboy Beautiful* magazine.

*Found Footage: Kissing Cholos in Geraghty Loma*

Produced in 1977-79, Terrill published two editions of *Homeboy Beautiful* (see Figure 4.9). Due to the exceeding popularity of Xerox photocopying and color ink reproduction, the magazine was mass-produced and sold for \$3.50 at Chatterton's

Bookstore in Silverlake, an urban gay enclave of the city.<sup>22</sup> Reflecting Terrill's militant predisposition and a likening to tabloid, sensationalism, and propagandist media, each issue staged a different exposé of "Homo-Homeboys." Similar to the exploitative journalism of *New West Magazine*, Terrill adopted a Cholo alter-ego, Santo, an investigative reporter and story protagonist, who reveals the cultural traditions, rituals, and perverse sexual behaviors of men in the barrio underground. Sharing a comparable organizational structure with mainstream fashion magazines including an advice column, style tips, editorial commentary, and a classified ads department, all, of course, with a "homo-homeboy" twist, *Homeboy Beautiful* uses the magazine format to question the absurdity of the West Los Angeles elite – signifiers of wealth and status – versus East Los Angeles Chicano masculinity. Much like *30 Lesbian Photos*, Terrill defies through disguise, unmasking the heterosexual façade and the false exteriority of Cholo style. His work draws "homo-homeboy" definition through the comparative symbolic relationships between homosexual self-expression and the manicured hypermasculine Cholo image.

In the inaugural issue, Santo voyages into an underground Cholo party where he documents the shocking realities of a barrio sexual subculture. Entitled, "What Really Happens On Those Hot Summer Nights in Geraghty Loma!,"<sup>23</sup> Santo narrates his investigation of the "homo underground in E.L.A."<sup>24</sup> Following an anonymous tip, he gains access to a private house party where nearly 50 men arrived. Surprised

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<sup>22</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>23</sup> Geraghty Loma is one of many historic East Los Angeles gangs including East Side Clover, Cypress Park Boys, The Avenues, El Chemo, Whitefence, 18<sup>th</sup> Street, among others. These gangs are specifically evoked in the pages of *Homeboy Beautiful* further exposing the unseen homo-homeboy underground.

<sup>24</sup> Joey Terrill, "What Really Happens on Those Hot Summer Nights in Geraghty Loma!," *Homeboy Beautiful*, Spring 1978, 14.

by the noticeable absence of women, he watches these men remove their shirts, bandanas, and inhibitions over the course of the night. Apparently suffering from temporary amnesia, Santo cannot recall what became of him or the rest of the night. The resulting “found footage” records the remainder of Santo’s night, which included a drunken knife fight, slow dancing to Judy Garland musical numbers, and his consensual seduction with another homeboy in the back bedroom. As an ethnological record of a “bizarre”<sup>25</sup> community practice, the photographs show without question the existence of these men and even guides readers how to identify them. Santo reminds us, “It’s very hard to tell but one sure give away is: vanity. A homo-homeboy is extremely vain about his appearance. As these photos show, a homo-homeboy will spend up to 5 hours in the bathroom combing his hair.”<sup>26</sup> In a manner parallel to his maricon portrait series, the visual explanation of homosexuals hiding in Chicano gangs confounds a heterosexual search to see and know sexual difference. Terrill follows a familiar path outlined by his mariconographic visual investigations to reduce heterosexual Chicano identity to its ridiculous and contradictory base.

For instance, Terrill draws parallels between the convoluted significations of dress codes and consumptive behaviors. In the exposé, Santo watches the homo-homeboys remove their bandanas from their heads and re-place them in their back pockets. The object performs a transgressive function, stripped from a gang currency of color affiliation and reproduced in a homosexual erotic marketplace. A reference to the “hanky code” – a popular practice among homosexual men to denote sexual

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 26.

behavior preferences – Terrill collapses these image systems demonstrating an indifferent alignment between the style symbolism of Cholo machismo and homosexuality. This is more explicitly visible in a scene where two homo-homeboys replace records of 1950s doo-wop music, a popular genre among Chicanos, with Judy Garland. Reimagining a Geraghty Loma house party with a soundscape of the “Trolley Song,” Terrill parodies a Chicano masculine connoisseurship of all things Judy. By conflating a picture of Cholo hypermasculinity with the equally preposterous image of homosexual camp and Hollywood musicals, Chicano culture in all reality shares a closer relationship with the maricon than previously believed.

In part, the effectiveness of Terrill’s “found footage” approach is in the way the public assigns fact and validity to these mariconographic depictions. As a result, through the staged performances of Homo-Homeboy world, Terrill is able to manipulate and deconstruct presumptions of photography as a tool of scientific accuracy. The images of the Geraghty Loma house party incites visual shock by stripping away a complacent heteronormative Chicano visual culture with documentary “proof” of a seemingly true-to-life reality: “homo-homeboy” desire in the gang culture of East Los Angeles. In turn, the found footage is a visual record of sexual behaviors that are seemingly immanent and pervasive, always lurking under the social fabric of Cholo gang culture. Hence, by extending his foundational visual vocabulary to also articulate the maricon’s potential sexual emergence, his photo-essay dares to show the elusive possibility of Cholo same-sex intimacy. For Terrill this is made manifest in the act of the male-male kiss.

Based on Santo's investigation, it is only after the removal of bandanas and the introduction of Judy Garland's music that the young men intermingle, moving closer on the couch and swaying cheek-to-cheek on the dance floor (see Figure 4.10). After a knife fight ensues between a jealous homeboy over his boyfriend, the next scandalous set of pictures shows an inebriated Santo in an intimate embrace; a Cholo kisses his neck and grips his crotch. Above the found picture, the accompanying graphic warns, "As you can see the homo-homeboys look perfectly normal on the outside. How deceiving!!!"<sup>27</sup> The implication suggests the homo-homeboy is a contrived performance of code and deception. The machismo body expression "look[s] perfectly normal"<sup>28</sup> but always has the potential to invite male desire and (un)wanted attention. While the caption is clearly a sarcastic pun destabilizing the Chicano masculine facade, its source actually references Terrill's formative biographical encounter with this paradoxical reality.

As a young man not only did Terrill occupy Trouper's Hall along with other homosexual Chicano youth but he also frequented Latino male bars in Highland Park and East Los Angeles. In 1973, he visited Ken's River Club with his boyfriend at the time, Ronnie Carrillo, an ex-Cholo. However, the homeboy patrons astounded Terrill. That is, Chicano gang members that were homosexual in behavior but not in identity. The contradiction of perpetuating a Chicano heteromasculine persona publicly and, yet, desiring homosexual men privately antagonized Terrill's political outlook and entrenched relationship to the Chicano movement and gay and lesbian liberation. For Terrill, these men stopped short of what could have deconstructed

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

broader presumptions of Chicano sexual politics and gender expression. In what has more contemporaneously been called “The Down Low” in American popular culture, this was a restitution of barrio masculinity, barring any suspicion that may prevent one’s entrance or place within a restrictive gang culture and lifestyle within the broader context of East Los Angeles. These are realities that remit alternative performances of Chicano same-sex desires without foreclosing a claim to the very gangs enunciated in the pages of *Homeboy Beautiful*. As Terrill remembers, “Here they are, macho, violent homeboy existence but they like men but they choose not be open about it! So I had felt like within the dominant advocacy for gay liberation, you know, in the general population that there was a different need for Chicano/Latino community to get a grip on itself.”<sup>29</sup> Without imagery to translate this complicated homeboy existence, Terrill bore witness to a temporary performance of Cholo desires removed and omitted from Chicano political discourse and visual expression.

His option was to remedy this disjointed relationship by restaging this hypermasculine display in the pages of *Homeboy Beautiful* and in particular, visualize Cholo sexual difference, a veritable absence in the Chicano Art Movement and barrio vernacular practices. In fact, to picture something as ordinary as a kiss between Cholo was to pictorially archive and cite this desire. An act as Terrill retells that was too sexually confrontational and even policed among other Chicano homosexuals. Terrill remembers one such incident at Ken’s River Club, “We were standing there holding hands and he kissed me and they told us ‘no kissing.’ So I copped an attitude and I became more aware see that this cholo over [in the gay bar] but had a girlfriend

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<sup>29</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

over [in the barrio].”<sup>30</sup> Denied the right to kiss his boyfriend was an egregious hypocrisy and aggravated Terrill’s sense of sexual freedom. To kiss a Cholo in a Chicano homosexual public environment against these constraints was a pivotal though overlooked political act.

This incident precipitated the found footage strategy within the conceptual project of *Homeboy Beautiful*. For instance, according to Santo’s investigative findings, “Homeboys filled the house, some were holding hands, some were even kissing!!! Yes, kissing on the lips! Frenching was the rule rather than the exception!!!”<sup>31</sup> Assuming the voice of his alter ego, Santo, he exposes the paradoxical truths about the boys in Geraghty Loma and exhibits the rare pictures to prove it. Indeed, Santo identifies homo-homeboys in the underground where they commit the most shocking lewd act of all: they kiss. By literally underlining “kissing” in the article for dramatic effect, Terrill conveys all the contradictory fury he felt at Ken’s River Club. He stresses the absurdity with which a banal act sparked such overreactions from other homosexual Chicanos. In line with what Charles Morris and John Sloop demands as an “aggressive call for [the] deeper politicization”<sup>32</sup> of homosexual male kissing, and “the impetus for such representation, therefore, lie[s] in its ability to signify unfettered, undiluted non-normative sexuality,”<sup>33</sup> Terrill, too, visualizes the complex racialized meaning of this

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Joey Terrill, “What Really Happens on Those Hot Summer Nights in Geraghty Loma!” *Homeboy Beautiful*, Spring 1978, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Morris and John Sloop, “What Lips These Lips Have Kissed: Refiguring the Politics of Queer Public Kissing.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3.1 (March 2006): 10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



same-sex desire. By picturing an intimate embrace between cholo men, he is yielding a political statement within a mariconographic expressive corpus.

For instance, we see Teddy Sandoval and Louis Vela in a medium photographic shot in figure 4.11. Both men are in a deep embrace. Performing as their homo-homeboy personifications, they exhibit recognizable visual cues within barrio fashion nomenclature. Vela is in a white tank top and knit cap and Sandoval wears a white t-shirt and earring in his right ear. The graffiti placas in the left background of the frame unifies this same-sex cholo union within the barrio territorial markings of gang identity. Their brown skin, black hair, and moustaches model a cholo male form and intensify the fragility of a racialized masculine spectacle – bodies embrace, hands caress, and lips touch.

As a political performance, the Sandoval and Vela kiss visually exemplifies homo-homeboy same-sex desires uninhibited and unrestrained between Chicano men in the ordinary confines of a Geraghty Loma house party. The presumption of truth in Terrill's found footage approach allows viewers to believe that they are observing an actual act of perversion and salacious exposure. They are exposed to the most dangerous betrayal of all in Cholo gang culture – maricons in their midst, hiding in plain sight. Cholo kissing becomes a recurrent visual device in Terrill's second issue of *Homeboy Beautiful*, this time staging a terrorist-activist take over of the editorial office, an image central to contemporary Latino artists most notably Alex Donis in recent years.<sup>34</sup> Overall, we cannot overlook how Terrill, in the process of reconciling the Chicano homosexual image, understood the kiss's symbolic importance for maricon public visibility and its powerful implications for social portraiture.

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Meyer, "Alex Donis: An Introduction." *Theatre Journal* 55.3 (2003): 581-583.

*Yes Movie/No Movie*

It goes without saying that Terrill's guerrilla theatre resounds with the practices of fellow Chicano avant-gardists at the time. Early performance art from Cyclona, Mundo Meza, and Gronk tested the limits of the Chicano masculine body and reconstituted other corporeal expressions through the investigation of found objects, refuse, fabrics, paints, and photo-documentation. The carnivalesque theatrics of such collaborations visually assaulted and disrupted the activities of the barrio mundane. However, Terrill's group art pieces extended a queer visual language through the appropriation and recognition of a Cholo masculine referent. Given Terrill's earlier explications of "cloned" white homosexual homogeneity in patterned models of disciplined and uniformed appearance, the homo-homeboy performances remodel Cholo masculine formations. That is, his artistic interventions are successful by re-signifying and re-configuring a visual system predicated on an impenetrable and heteronormative Chicano hypermasculine exterior.

The resulting photographic records of these staged acts are very much in tandem with the self-documentary practices of Cyclona's artifactual performances and in particular, ASCO's street actions in East Los Angeles (see Chapter 3). As such, it is possible to situate *Homeboy Beautiful* within a related visual lineage, also exploring the conceptual possibilities and representational strategies of the photographic form in Chicano art. A look at ASCO's No Movie series is clearly indicative of this aesthetic translation. Decrying the Hollywood film industry's blatant unwillingness to produce Chicano-themed motion pictures, ASCO shot a singular photo still to symbolize Chicano cinema left unmade and neglected.

Circulating the “No Movie” through the mail, ASCO staged several hoaxes in the press, even coaxing media outlets to report false news stories about movies that were fictitious and unmade. True, both ASCO and Terrill share an affinity for propagandistic media and a penchant to infiltrate mainstream viewing publics through the photographic medium. Unlike the No Movie, however, *Homeboy Beautiful’s* mariconography conveys a cinematic process through its temporal order, sequencing, narrative structure, and emphasis on social portraiture sustaining a recognizable Chicano system of style codes and archetypes. Whereas ASCO’s interventionist aesthetics operate at the level of denial and absence, Terrill strove for possibility and presence.

Although ASCO generated an array of No-Movie barrio stars which included Patssi Valdez in several alluring incarnations, these characters sought to “mimic the glamour and explicit sexuality of Hollywood.”<sup>35</sup> However, *Homeboy Beautiful* posited a mariconographic sensibility, constructing homoerotic cholo gang environments as opposed to the individual, exceptional, or with an iconic star-signifier. By casting 20 homosexual Cholo actors and Chola drag queens, which included avant-gardists Teddy Sandoval and Jim Aguilar, Terrill constructs homosocial pictorial frames filled with homo-homeboys to create the illusion of mass, reproducibility, and social scale. The star in Terrill’s world is not the disappearing Chicana anti-celebrity but rather, the undifferentiated, reappearing, and reoccurring homosexual homeboy in the barrio-everyday. These performance actions set in homes, low-riders, East L.A. neighborhoods, and downtown Los Angeles streetscapes

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<sup>35</sup> Ondine Chavoya, “Orphans of Modernism: The Performance Art of ASCO.” In *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000), 251.

project a cinematic mimesis within the absurdist activities of an emergent Chicano avant-garde aesthetic. Self-analyzing and examining the Chicano movement and homosexual male identity, Terrill's performance art questions and parodies. Like the rest of the artists featured in my investigation, Terrill was neither explicitly a part of ASCO but rather part of a related though extended homosexual periphery. The performative and cinematic dimensions of *Homeboy Beautiful* demonstrate a conversant Chicano artistic and political impulse to deconstruct masculine signification and investigate film, camera, and print media technologies with sarcastic wit and stinging queer cultural criticism.

#### *Queer Portraiture as Visual Diary*

Through the commemorative function of the portrait, Terrill leaves us with a recording of his life and lays claim to a genre by which racialized homosexuality is visually negotiated and registered. The documentary impetus of Terrill's work is quite reminiscent of gay British painter David Hockney, who moved to Los Angeles in 1963. Hockney's paintings of his friends and lovers, such as Peter Schlesinger and Gregory Evans, construct a "highly personal diary of his life,"<sup>36</sup> narrated in the shimmering pools and sun-kissed male nudes of L.A. suburbia. Imparting a performative quality and highly intimate collaboration with his sitters, Hockney demanded a reading of the personal and encouraged a biographical interpretation of his work, incorporating names of people (e.g. *Peter Getting Out of Nick's Pool*, 1966)

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<sup>36</sup> Marco Livingstone, "The Private Face of a Public Art," In *David Hockney Portraits*, eds. Sarah Howgate and Barbara Stern Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 17.

and places (e.g. *Building, Pershing Square, Los Angeles*, 1964).<sup>37</sup> This is a characteristic shared by Terrill, who also dubs pictures after their referential activity such as a diary passage entry (e.g. *Chicanos Invade New York Series, Searching for Burritos*, 1981 and *I Got Drunk, Called His Machine and Threatened to Punch His Fuckin Face In*, 1996). As Hockney's paintings demonstrate, portraiture produces an alternative configuration of personal archiving. Or rather, by way of his visual diary as Livingstone intimates, the paintings "memorialized some of [Hockney's] own experiences in Los Angeles."<sup>38</sup> As archive scholar Sue McKemmish espouses about this practice of self-archiving, recordkeeping "is but one kind of witnessing, one of the processes that contributes to keeping the narrative going but nevertheless . . . linked inextricably to fundamental issues of individual and cultural identity."<sup>39</sup> And it is this act of bearing witness where we can expand portraiture's social significance and relevance, particularly for racialized sexualities omitted from mainstream visibility. The documentary detail in Terrill's work records personal and social memory as an act of cultural survival. His portraits solicit the means by which we, too, witness the traces of his life and examine the queer remains of a formative Chicano homosexual identity in East Los Angeles in the 1970s.

The correlation between Hockney's and Terrill's archival practices is not coincidental. It is important to list Hockney among his biographical influences as Terrill had the opportunity to meet him at a private dinner party in 1979. Terrill was an acquaintance of gay artist Don Bachardy and his lover, the British writer

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<sup>37</sup> Cecile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 119.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> Sue McKemmish, "Evidence of Me . . ." *Archives and Manuscripts* 24.1 (May 1996): 37.

Christopher Isherwood. Hockney himself shared a long-time friendship with the couple as demonstrated in his double portrait, *Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy* (1968), an honest and reverent image of homosexual partnering. After moving to Los Angeles, Hockney befriended Isherwood, both of whom were from the north of England, openly homosexual, and shared similar interests in Californian “American boys.”<sup>40</sup> Though Terrill was not a fixture in their social gatherings, he did interface with Bachardy and Isherwood on more than one occasion. In fact, he posed for Bachardy over the course of four years, clothed and nude (see figure 4.12). His last session was in 1984 when Isherwood had gotten sick. Their collaboration produced a number of life drawings and acrylic paintings, some of which have been reproduced and published, and others of which circulate in Bachardy’s exhibitions.

During one such occasion, he recalls:

One time, we were having people over and I was like yeah, and I thought to myself . . . who he was going to have and sure enough I arrive and there was David Hockney and it couldn’t have been better if Romaine Brooks had risen from the dead, eight gay men in a range of backgrounds and lifestyle and the thing was Hockney had a sketch book and it was being passed around and we were having cocktails and it finally came to me for a couple of hours and it was like, it was holiness in my hands and his most recent drawings and I look at the sketch of me from across the room.<sup>41</sup>

His familiarity with this circle of homosexual British expatriates was such that Isherwood agreed to sit for Terrill. His willingness to do so may reflect Isherwood’s mentoring and encouragement of his own lover, Bachardy, whom he met in Los

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<sup>40</sup> Edmund White, “The Lineaments of Desire,” In *David Hockney Portraits*, eds. Sarah Howgate and Barbara Stern Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>41</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

Angeles in 1953 when Barchardy was only 18. Isherwood, then 48 years old, pressed his young protégé to embark on life drawing, choosing to be his first model-subject. The success of this initial experiment led young Bachardy to enroll at Chouinard Art Institute.<sup>42</sup> Over 1953-1985, he came to paint several portraits of Isherwood. The paintings became, “the lasting intimacy of a deep relationship: they record the inner movements of give-and-take between artist and sitter, the subtleties of emotional states at different phases, the never-ending quest to know, and understand, and have compassion for another human being.”<sup>43</sup> Quite clearly a testament to their intimate connection, the Isherwood portraits reveal a deep personal understanding between the men, a memoir of their lives together bound in a “remnant of a human life.”<sup>44</sup> Isherwood died of cancer in 1986, at 81 years.

Terrill’s artist-sitter interaction with Isherwood is proof of his attaining a certain artistic pedigree through a particular act of self-citation. By contributing to the portraiture of this famed homosexual model-muse, he, too, joined the ranks of a distinct homosexual artist stratum in Los Angeles. This is evident in his portrait, entitled *Portrait of Christopher Isherwood* (1982). In Figure 4.13, we see a gloved anonymous hand perhaps of a photographic custodian appear to remove (or place?) a photograph of Terrill’s parents obscured by Isherwood’s shoulder and a potted plant in the mid-ground. The flat and non-descript hand is empty of any identifiable details. A blank stand-in, the hand cares to show the viewer the black and white photographic rendering of his parents relaying a cultural heredity in the pictorial

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Clothier, “Don Bachardy: Pictures of Christopher,” In *Don Bachardy: Christopher Isherwood Portraits, 1953-1985*, (Fullerton: California State University, Fullerton Main Art Gallery, 2001), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 8.

relations in the painting. Terrill indexes himself as the unseen off-spring of a different kind of union – an alternative homosexual artist kinship as opposed to a biological one. In this dualist portraiture of Isherwood and himself, he implicitly reveals competing sources of Chicano visual expressions, embedding gay historical subject matter among his markers of significance and art-historical influences.

*Conclusion: Self-Documentation as Cultural Survival*

Throughout our visual excavations, we have retrieved a collection of portraits that rescue, in part, Chicano homosexuality from its obscurity and obfuscation. Expanding the conventional standing of portraiture beyond likeness and social distinction, Terrill's self-documentation reinvests portraiture as a method to self-name and self-reflect persons, lovers, colleagues, and more broadly, communities. This strategy of cultural survival rehearses the difficult task of enunciating racialized sexual subjectivity through visual and material expression. As curator and art historian Jonathan Katz reminds us, "the pervasive silencing of same-sex desire in accounts of American portrait painting is all the more notable because the genre is perhaps the most extensive - yet still untapped – sexuality archive in existence."<sup>45</sup> Having said this, Terrill's portraits remain stand-ins for an archival body, a visual diary that memorializes and remembers the ordinary and banal incidents of his everyday life. He contends, "When I look at documentation, I look at a personal narrative, I enjoy looking at pictures of people's lives and so I looked at it as layers,

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Katz, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," In *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, eds. Jonathan Katz and David Ward (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 15-6.



of not seeing enough pictures of Latinos, queer Latinos[.] [A]nd, in fact, with Chicano art, [the] Chicano power movement being focused on ‘la familia’ and the narrow ideas of what ‘la familia’ meant--on the role of men and women--and that propelled me to document an alternative to that [imagery] within a Chicano context.”<sup>46</sup> His collection becomes one of the largest visual strands of homosexual Chicano self-narrative in Los Angeles, the importance of which is revealed through the assembly of queer remains, in this case, portraiture where we can ascertain a foundational lexicon for maricon cultural expression. Such documentation reveals how Chicano art rectified an incomprehensible subjectivity.

As a result of Terrill’s formative visual vocabulary, the legacy of *Homeboy Beautiful* can still be experienced today. Several gay Latino men’s journals have proliferated throughout Los Angeles since Terrill’s magazine debut in 1977. *Adelante* and the short-lived *QV Magazine* perpetuate a commercial viability for a knowing urban gay Latino man, selling him a particular lifestyle populated by dark, muscular, handsome, and available Cholos in glitzy nightclubs. This visual milieu provides the fundamentals of mariconography and the artistic coherence of Chicano homosexuality. Fathoming a social portrait of a community omitted from cultural visibility, Terrill’s artistic proposals reconciled the basis for visual expression and documented sexual difference in a Chicano art lexicon. Terrill brought together a symbolic realignment, drawing our attention to the fulcrum of Chicano political culture and the gay liberation movement, as well as the queer contours of Chicano artistic exchange in the bars, dances, and social spaces constituting gay and lesbian

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<sup>46</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 28 August 2010. Los Angeles, California.

experiences in the city. A pillar of the Chicano Art Movement project in the 1970s, this art-historical nexus is, nonetheless, either widely discredited or little known.

As stated earlier, Terrill's inclusion within my study punctuates the archival and restorative implications of portraiture. There is critical significance in these acts of self-naming and aesthetic experimentation. The mariconographic enterprise outlined here created historical and political possibilities in the visualization of Chicano homosexual imagery. While up to this point, I have primarily highlighted the self-documentary claims of Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta and Joey Terrill in the archive, now I turn my attention to commemorative strategies restoring an "archival body" assaulted by violence, censorship, and most especially, the AIDS crisis in Los Angeles. In the following chapter, I detail one such case: an archive born out of destruction. Next, I investigate the queer remains of Mundo Meza.

## Chapter 5: Mundo Meza

### *Archival Body Destruction: The Wonder of Mundo Meza*

On September 25, 2006, the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center hosted “Queering the Archive, Or Archiving the Queer,” a day-long symposium highlighting the “archival turn” in Chicana/o cultural studies and the multiple ways that queer historical investigations of gay and lesbian Chicana/o subjects provoke complicated and paradoxical experiences in mainstream repositories. Mainly composed of cultural studies theorists and critics rather than cultural heritage practitioners or archive science professionals, the event furthered an important discussion about queer archival knowledge and the ways in which interpretative strategies solicit queer possibilities in the silences, absences, and suggestive subtexts of primary records. Heretofore, these scholars questioned the sexual neutrality of repositories withdrawn from social, political, and cultural conditions and in turn, contested the “straight” orientation of archives, inviting further interrogations of sexuality, research, and power.

The catalysis for the symposium was the recent acquisitions of feminist and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Chicana/o collections at the CSRC as well as the ruminations over postmodern archives that deviate from conventional archival methods, placing order and classification on more nuanced and contradictory record collections. Or characterizing it more bluntly: objects, ephemera, and persons

that “just don’t fit” making “the bond” that interconnects the document with the record creator and archive administrator all the more obscure.<sup>1</sup> This fractured seal in critical archive studies complicates the search for a knowable “gay” subject in finding aids, series descriptions or fonds, blurring the archive as a controlled, administered, and stable collection. As a result, the “archival queering”<sup>2</sup> was likely in recognition of the Robert Legorreta—Cyclona collection as I have argued in the previous investigation, an acquisition marred by the Chicano performance artist’s assembly of eclectic content and incomprehensible collecting practices.<sup>3</sup> However, what is perhaps the most striking element of the conference had little to do with the research exchange at hand but instead, the iconic image used to promote the event: the portrait of Edmundo “Mundo” Meza (see Figure 5.1).

Selected from the Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta scrapbook, the photograph depicts Meza dressed as half man and half woman. His eyes point off camera, looking beyond the frame of the photograph. From this portrayal, the viewer can only surmise that Meza is cross-dressing, performing, or perhaps in stage costume. He dons a blonde wig and gown on one half of his body and a tuxedo on the other. The photo was used on flier advertisements for the event, and welcomed symposium panelists and audience members by being projected on the conference screen. Meza’s

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<sup>1</sup> The archival bond sealing and interconnecting record, collection, and record administration is frequently deconstructed in postmodern archive theory. For more see, Adrian Cunningham. “Archival Institutions.” In *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, eds. Sue McKemmish, et. Al. (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Here I am borrowing on Charles Morris’s explication of queering archives and contesting institutional neutrality in the construction of archival forms and processing procedures. For more see Charles E. Morris. “Archival Queer.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*. 9.1 (Spring 2006): 145-151.

<sup>3</sup> For more see Robb Hernandez. *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection*. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2009).

portrait was an empty signifier of sorts, decontextualized and reinvested within the conference's discourse of historical erasure, amnesia, and loss.

As an emblem of archival destruction, his body became a symbolic warning to scholars. For attendees unfamiliar with this androgynous artist, director Chon Noriega briefly retells in his opening address, "when [Mundo] passed away a great portion of his materials were then destroyed by family."<sup>4</sup> The limits of Meza's biography, aesthetic and historical contributions begin and end here. We are given little explanation why he died, what circumstances facilitated the destruction of these objects, what consequences these violent acts have meant for Chicano art history, and more to this point, why this portrait of Mundo Meza typifies, "The Queer Archive."

Although the selection of this image may not seem out of the ordinary, it very well could have been a decision to promote the Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta--Cyclona Collection, an exhaustive undertaking for the administration and staff. I find Meza's selection an intentional one. For it is not Cyclona who is epitomized as the face of queer Chicano historical recovery but rather, Mundo Meza, an artist circumscribed by this narrative of violence, loss, and extinction. Within the context of this event, he is a cautionary tale of vulnerability, an archive constituted by its very destruction. Correlating his portrait with archival ruin, this reappropriated Meza image collapses the fragility of archival records with the fragility of the corporeal body.

This association is particularly powerful because the young artist's annihilated remains have much to do with the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, the severe social stigma

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<sup>4</sup> Chon Noriega. "Queer Archive 2006 hour 1." Queering the Archive, Or Archiving the Queer. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. 18 Mar. 2011  
<<http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Browse/ucla-public.3788449026>>.

attached to his health status, and the consequential memorializing aftereffects following his death in 1985. After all, it is from within Legorreta's carefully arranged scrapbook that the Meza photograph was spared, removed, and recuperated for the symposium. Implicitly, this suggests how the interrelated destruction of body and archive precipitated other strategies of cultural survival to remember and preserve Meza, a factor quite lost from this discourse.

The adoption of the Meza portrait elides this provenance and portrays a different story about loss without explicating the significance of the particular image to the homosexual heritage purveyor, in this case, Robert Legorreta or its preservation within the pages of the scrapbook, the container of desire. In short, the Mundo Meza Archive is constituted by destruction rather than by its care, custody and conservation. This presumes that all traces of Meza's artistic expressions are also deceased or at the very least, unintelligible, the results of which intensify the symbolism of the Meza portrait projected on the conference screen looming over the panelists, in some way bating the audience to save gay and lesbian Chicana/o heritage before it is too late.<sup>5</sup> Meza's archival traces are synonymous with his portrait. That is, it is by way of his embodiment, rather than his art objects, that we comprehend an image of loss and destruction.

Meza's portrait becomes the case in point for the following essay, an archive reconstructing an artist's repertoire from its presumed extinction and obsolescence. In this chapter, I present objects from a series of excavations searching for the traces of Mundo Meza from photographic materials, newspaper print, paintings, ephemera,

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<sup>5</sup> Here I am inspired by a chief UCLA Chicano Studies Research Report on the vast neglect and disappearance of Chicano art historical primary documents. See Rita Gonzalez. "Archiving the Latino Arts Before Its Too Late." *Latino Policy and Issues Brief*. 6.4 (April 2003).

and oral histories. By no means comprehensive, my strategy here is to think about the ways in which Meza's representative and figurative body has remained albeit outside institutional collections ordered by the artist himself, the archival institution, or his estate. As a result, much of my findings reassemble his archival body from these traces in private collections. The initiative I present here surpasses the job of the archive curator or the tenacious investigative work of the art historian. This queer take on the archive adapts a postmodern perspective of Meza's oeuvre by not only linking the mutual constitution of the Meza portrait with the document but also, and most importantly, even assessing the alternative archival practices of Meza's custodians. The product of my excavation is to not only fathom an archive born out of destruction, but also to understand how Meza's remains have survived the diverse tactics of gay male heritage custodianship and purveyance.

This restorative approach draws an expansive definition of "document" and "record" borrowing from the temporary, intangible, and non-written forms of memory making. After all, Meza died in 1985 before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. His well-regarded acrylic paintings occupied alternative art spaces rather than commercial art galleries of mainstream museums, while much of his oeuvre is undocumented, demanding another set of considerations. The following archive I present here is structured around a series of object case studies. Each "remain" is submitted for critical interpretation and reveals detail and insight into Mundo Meza's biography, the confiscation of his objects, and in particular, the commemorative strategies employed by homosexual Chicano artists to revive and resuscitate this archival body. This chapter strives to reconceptualize an alternative archive collection about Meza from

obscurity and disassembled parts and comprehend what I term the “queer afterlife of Mundo Meza,” or the ways that his death generated an alternative lifecycle for objects remaining beyond the authorial threshold of American heritage institutions. I construct this repository from the chasm of destruction and ruin, offering an important chapter on queer cultural memory, preservation, and the impact of AIDS on Chicano artist communities and their things.

*Object Study #1: The Oral Trace*

There is little written documentation about the early life history of Edmundo “Mundo” Meza in the government record. The scant records that document these formative years were collected and recorded by his long-time artistic collaborator and friend, Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Following Meza’s AIDS related death in 1985, Legorreta emerged as the “de facto” estate executor through his custodial efforts to propagate attention and recognition for the artist he called his lifelong companion and “soul mate.” As we may observe from the portrait of Meza foregrounding this investigation, the image was retrieved from the Cyclona scrapbook.

In Figure 5.2, we see this portrait again recontextualized within the archival logics of the album collage. Meza’s image is but one photo-document from October 1973, the night of Cyclona’s comeback party, an engagement hosted by fellow Chicano avant-garde collaborator-artist Gronk. The photographs are progressively arranged, perhaps taking the viewer through the sequential preparatory efforts of the night. We see Meza’s portrait unified within the pictorial relations of Chicano artistic



collaboration.<sup>6</sup> In one photo, we observe Meza's hand carefully applying cosmetics onto Legorreta's face, coated in a familiar alabaster façade. As the collage reveals, we are mere moments away from his transformation into the Cyclona figure. This recording of artistic exchange substantiates Legorreta's earlier contention in Chapter 3 that he was a living art piece and painted, designed, and sculpted by Chicano avant-gardists, particularly Mundo Meza. Although Figure 5.1 reappropriated Meza's body to signify disappearance and archival violence, the extraction of his portrait severed Meza from the alternative picture narrative. This circumvents possible insights from the chronological ordering, display and unification of the photograph within the collage. This elision undermines Legorreta's display strategies, which strived to create visual and historical linkages and insights from these coterminous relationships. This intensifies Legorreta's custodial initiative and careful restorative strategies reliant on non-written practices of commemoration through image, collage, and spoken word.

Drawing on what performance studies scholar Diana Taylor calls "archival memory,"<sup>7</sup> the institutionalizing of written technologies superseded ancient methods of bodily transfer and knowledge production in the means of expressive culture, such as: the spoken word tradition, pictograms, music, dance, and foodways. Resisting a false binary between archive and repertoire, Taylor argues that "these systems sustain and mutually produce each other; neither is outside or antithetical to the logic of the

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<sup>6</sup> Meza is but one of the visual artist provocateurs at Legorreta's apartment which included Meza's then boyfriend, Charles Halusca, dressed as an oversize valentine heart costume in elaborate face make-up.

<sup>7</sup> Diana Taylor. *The Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

other.”<sup>8</sup> Legorreta’s custodial practices also perform embodied sources of knowledge. In this way, I want to situate his care and keeping of Meza’s life story within the shared relations of archive and repertoire, or as an ephemeral repository resonating within the drum of his body. Following Taylor, Legorreta’s oral-based practices are a critical example of cultural survival and archival custody. I submit this embodied strategy as an intangible “queer remain” or an oral reservoir of memory and meaning delimiting the authorial restrictions of government records, administrative files, and business documents. This non-written document is just as crucial as Meza’s birth certificate, obituary, or letter correspondence, assisting me in recreating a portrait of the artist.

In my efforts to clarify Meza’s formative years, oral history interviews with Legorreta generated a verbal portrait of the artist, relaying his likeness, personality, and extraordinary qualities. Legorreta claims he first met Meza well before this meeting of Doc’s People, a consciousness-raising Chicano artist collective at Garfield High School in 1968. However, he also remembered another uncanny encounter relayed to him by Meza. “[Mundo] said, ‘Do you remember the first time we met, Robert?’ and I said, ‘No.’ And he said, ‘I was a little kid and was on top of my father’s shoulders, and your father and my father were drinking friends on First Street in East L.A., and they—your father was walking with us three boys.’ And it must have been me and my other brothers and he [Mundo] was on his father’s shoulder and they stopped to talk, and that was the first time we met, it was when he was almost a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 36.

baby.”<sup>9</sup> Meza’s recollection and this seminal first meeting somehow resonated with Legorreta. It was indicative of their instantaneous and unexplainable bond. His impassioned commemorative measures to remember Meza seemed fitting within this context.

Legorreta posits that Meza was born in Mexico in 1955, although he does not remember the exact date or location. He recalls that Meza grew up around a few sisters and a mother in Huntington Park, a predominantly Mexican American barrio in East Los Angeles. Meza attended Griffith Junior High School and “looked like Jimmy Hendrix.”<sup>10</sup> In grammar school, Meza grew out his hair and unlike most young Chicano men, he started wearing hippy accoutrements: a striking bead necklace and, later, patchwork handbags, tie-dye pants, and platform shoes. According to Legorreta, his self-fashioning was overtly feminine and roused public reaction by pushing against gender conventions and the masculine detachment from fashion conscious expressions. Though Legorreta was three years older than he, both young men felt a sense of estrangement, an otherness generated by their shared attractions toward other men. Legorreta offers, “We had this mutual attraction of both being homosexual[.] [L]ike maybe the only two in East L.A.”<sup>11</sup> As I rehearse more completely in Chapter 3, this alienation coupled with a reciprocal feeling of sexual difference fueled Legorreta’s and Meza’s anti-masculinist visual provocations and street performances. This counter-image and play with style elements of self-

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<sup>9</sup> Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, tape recording, 15 September 2004. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>10</sup> Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 5 June 2005. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

representation was most assuredly attributed to a youthful Meza, his creative spark, and his “very, very feminine” composure.<sup>12</sup>

Object Study #2: The Exhibition Record

In Figure 5.3, we see an artist biographical statement, typewritten and authored by Robert Legorreta, dated in 1989. Retrieved from “The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte” Cyclona Art Collection at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives in Downtown Los Angeles, the biographical statement is a rare find. This document typifies a dimension of Legorreta’s archival work as curator and collector. The statement itself provides not only an interpretative frame of Meza’s artistic biography but also unabashedly promotes his friend’s unquestionable and influential role as “the Garest [sic] influencer and artis[t] of East L.A.”<sup>13</sup> However, the statement itself inflates Meza’s biographical narrative and artistic training. According to Legorreta’s interview, he contends that Meza was born in Mexico in 1955, but Figure 5.3 indicates that he lived in Tijuana as a child, moved to San Diego, and later, grew up in East Los Angeles in the 1960s. Meza received little professional art training, according to Legorreta. His foundational skills in painting and drawing were developed by Mrs. Hawes, an art teacher at Griffith Junior High School. “[Hawes] was the teacher that taught him and gave him the foundation for his art.”<sup>14</sup> Later, Meza was mentored by Tangie Gorge, another art teacher at Huntington High School in Huntington Park. Though Legorreta would later claim that Meza was a “master

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Legorreta, “Ed-Mundo Meza,” Biographical Statement, [1989], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

painter,” a self-taught gifted artist, we learn Meza attended the prestigious Otis School of Art in the Spring of 1974, a detail unexplored from his interpretative statement. Moreover, though acknowledging Tangie Gorge, “who help[ed] get him showings and scholarships,”<sup>15</sup> we learn little about Meza’s record of exhibition, much less any documentation or inventory of specific art objects.

However, these historical inconsistencies are remedied, not through the interpretative writings of Legorreta, but through a comparative analysis of a recovered exhibition statement dated October 1973 retrieved from Legorreta’s ONE Institute collection. In this announcement of his first solo show at the East Los Angeles public library branch, we learn that Meza is just 18 years of age and paints large scale canvases “expressing a strong social comment while depicting an art style reminiscent of master artists from the late 1800s and early 1900s.”<sup>16</sup> The statement reconfirms Legorreta’s contention that Meza was born in Mexico and identifies his creative self-discovery from the age of three, “using the art medium to communicate his own environment and experiences.”<sup>17</sup> While we might presume this conflation of Mexican master painter and child prodigy as exemplary of a familiar self-aggrandizement or perhaps hyperbolic conjecture, it is a familiar trope in retellings of Meza’s art historical achievements. This observation is significant when paired with Legorreta’s earlier argument that Meza was an “old spirit” and an extraordinary child capable of remembering foundational childhood experiences. Mundo Meza as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Unknown, “Edmundo Meza,” Exhibition Statement, [1973], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

mythologized genius painter is a recurrent tenet undergirding how he has been memorialized in the “afterlife” of his art.

According to a rare record about the self-titled show, the exhibit included a collection of large-scale paintings of rock and roll icons, but unfortunately the entire set of work was unexpectedly stolen, foreshadowing the role of thief and confiscation that would trail the artist for the rest of his career.<sup>18</sup> While this exhibition was Meza’s premiere solo exhibition, his first group show may have occurred at the Mechicano Art Gallery in East Los Angeles in 1971. According to the Chicano newspaper *El Chicano*, Chicana painter and performance artist, Patssi Valdez, 20, planned a two-person show with a 16-year-old Meza just prior to her turn in the ASCO art collective.<sup>19</sup> Though this age disparity is quite remarkable and a testament to Meza’s natural gifts, we must keep in mind that his mingling with Valdez most likely occurred at “Ca-ca Roaches Have No Friends” in November of 1969 where Meza performed with Cyclona on stage, arranged the set design, and painted the grotesque masks.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Meza was just 14 years of age at the time. Clearly, these formative exhibitions solidified his eventual trajectory in contemporary art, which included performance art, installation, and design. These artistic expressions will be more fully investigated later in my exhibition. In June 1973, he received a scholarship

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Legorreta, “Ed-Mundo Meza,” Biographical Statement, [1989], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>19</sup> Eddie Ytuarte, “Chicano Art Lives in East L.A.,” *El Chicano* newspaper clipping, [1972], 9 (Box 2, Folder 7) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>20</sup> According to Jennifer Sternad-Flores’s interview with Legorreta, Meza is only credited with drawing masks for the performance. However, in personal communication with the author, he claims that Meza also painted the sets. For more see Jennifer Sternad-Flores. “Cyclona and Early Chicano Performance Art: An Interview with Robert Legorreta.” *GLQ*. 12.3 (2006): 482.

from the L.A. Junior Chamber of Commerce in the Future Masters Program.<sup>21</sup> By spring of 1974, Meza attended Otis Art Institute, joining the ranks of other distinguished Chicano artist alumni, including Carlos Almaraz, Frank Romero, Mario Castillo, Roberto Gil de Montes, and Patssi Valdez.

Object Study #3: Photo Fossils

On Sunday, January 20, 1980, the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* ran a feature story entitled “Gay Photo-Art,” an article about photographer Anthony Friedkin’s provocative mediation of homosexual life and culture in California, entitled, “Gay: A Photographic Essay.” Collected from 1969-1972 throughout Los Angeles and San Francisco, the series recorded hustlers in Hollywood, vice cop raids on homophile bars along Santa Monica Boulevard, gay civil rights leaders on Wilshire, and even homosexual barrio youth in East Los Angeles. Friedkin’s first exhibition of the photographs was in 1973 and resurfaced at the Cameravision gallery in Los Angeles in 1980. In Pam King’s exhibition review for the *L.A. Herald Examiner*, one photo from the collection was selected and reproduced to accompany the story, a piece entitled, “Jim and Mundo” (1972).

While “Gay: A Photographic Essay” seemed to be a reflection of the burgeoning gay and lesbian public identity in Los Angeles, its genesis might be traced to Anthony Friedkin’s childhood. Born in Los Angeles in 1949, his father moved from New York after a successful career in radio. Following the advent of TV in 1948 and serial TV programming, Friedkin’s father worked in some of the earliest

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<sup>21</sup> Unknown, “Edmundo Meza,” Exhibition Statement, [1973], *The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004*. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

episodic programming as a TV writer. His mother was a dancer contracted under Paramount Studios and eventually left her career to raise Friedkin and his brother. Both parents' close connection to gay people in the arts was an intimate dimension of his childhood. In fact, a couple he calls "Freddy and Steve" were family friends. Freddy was a dancer who worked with Friedkin's mother. This experience with L.A.'s homosexual creative class exposed homosexual couplings not as a political identity per se but as an extension of his home life. Friedkin recalls, "So for me growing up, the idea of being exposed to gay sensibilities, I was introduced to those as a child because we had many gay people coming into our home all the time."<sup>22</sup>

He shot his first photo at age 8 and entered the dark room when he was 11. After studying photography throughout high school, he attended the Art Center School of Design and he was very much taken by photojournalism and the social role of the "concerned photographer." After traveling Europe, Friedkin gave himself a self-assignment to push his professional and personal limits and stretch the social significance of photo-realism for social transformation and political equality. By adapting the photo essay for its sincerest commitment to one subject matter, he could fully investigate and represent the everyday lives and ordinariness of homosexuals, a maligned and vulnerable community in 1969. He recalls, "I wanted the photographs to document in a sincere genuine way, at the time, what the gay community as a community was doing . . . . Even though I was only 19, I'd been shooting for so long, I had a sense of how to approach the story. Just the way that a traditional journalist would approach any story which is: do your research thoroughly, make contacts in the

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<sup>22</sup>Anthony Friedkin. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 4 September 2010. Los Angeles, California.



community, follow through with those contacts and let the story kind of unfold on its own.”<sup>23</sup>

Friedkin approached Los Angeles Gay Community Services Center founders Don Kilhefner and Morris Kight about his earnest efforts. Accordingly, they were receptive, even encouraging, and offered possible subjects for the study. One suggestion resonated with Friedkin, and later, proved to be an important source for remarkable images, characters, and narratives. Kilhefner and Kight recommended Trouper’s Hall, an old auditorium located at 1776 La Brea Avenue. Every Friday night, the space was converted into a gay and lesbian dance club. Friedkin’s initial foray into the club proved technically difficult, as the low light levels were impossible to work under. After Friedkin requested that the house lights be brought up, the unnatural quality and peculiar reaction of the attendees panicked the photographer. Uncertain how he was going to tackle the challenges of this environment, he discovered the only possible light source in Trouper’s Hall. Each restroom had an adjoining lounge lit by a 75-watt bulb where people would congregate. It was here that he captured a rare dimension of gay life and observed noticeable throngs of gay and lesbian Chicana/o youths.

As a young man from a wealthy family in West Los Angeles, Friedkin’s perceptions of Chicana/o culture were shaped by popular discourses of Mexican hypermasculinity, violence, and criminal intimidation. His experience had included a mixed student population in his high school including Chicanos, and the Cholo (gangster) archetype representing a defiant and “tough” exterior, acting as an impenetrable and virile reflection of L.A.’s urban dystopia. In turn, Chicano

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

homosexuals at Trouper's Hall were an unexpected or startling sight, rupturing his inclinations and visual imaginings of Chicano male fraternity. He remembers, "Suddenly I'm in Trouper's Hall and all these young Chicano kids are coming in to this gay dance. And they're coming into these restrooms and they are so expressive not only did . . . the women and the men have fantastic fashion and wardrobe and make-up, but they were open about who and what they were. It was . . . like really exciting to be first of all accepted on my own level as the photographer being allowed to be in that room in those moments and clearly felt comfortable with me photographing them and I think part of that was my own age because I was young and my sincerity and they also felt, I think people could feel I was a really good photographer – that I knew what I was doing."<sup>24</sup>

In this cluster of club goers, he witnessed a young Chicano man in the restroom consoling his friend, Valerie, brokenhearted and betrayed by her girlfriend's love affair. His name was Jaime Aguilar, a young man from Montebello in East Los Angeles. Aguilar was a creative fuse, an unexpected and exceptional figure. Friedkin was struck by this "extraordinarily beautiful" boy.<sup>25</sup> His delicacy, vulnerability, grace, and refined movement symbolically countered the inherent contradictions of homosexuality and effeminacy within a hypermasculine barrio culture. After taking several photographs, he introduced himself to Aguilar who was accompanied by other homosexual men, including Mundo Meza. In 1972, Friedkin travelled to Aguilar's home in Montebello. The resulting East Los Angeles series in "Gay: A Photographic

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<sup>24</sup> Anthony Friedkin. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 4 September 2010. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Essay” is the product of these visits, photojournalistic recordings of Aguilar, his home life, friends, and ordinary experiences in the barrio.

Figure 5.4 from the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* is a product of this exploratory documentary work. Jaime Aguilar poses to the left of Mundo Meza. The two young men are photographed at a hot dog stand in Montebello. The portrait represents a visual reconciliation of homosexual Chicano subjects confounding the compulsory heterosexual repertoire in popular discourses of the Chicano masculine image. This “honest” portrayal conveys a vulnerability and conviction from these young men in their direct posturing and intense gaze. They resist smiling and disinvite any unwanted or leering objectification. Their performance defies any recognizable bodily expression cognizant with Cholo muscularity and streetwise aggression. Rather, we are drawn to their fitted coats, scarves, belts, gilded detailing, and smooth pristine faces. Aguilar’s fingers intertwine his silky hair in a subtle feminine motion. Comparably, Meza’s long diminutive fingers rest close to his body, tranquil, composed, and unrestricted. Friedkin’s portrait “Jim and Mundo” strives to interrogate a Mexican macho imaginary through an antithetical composition of feminine signifiers. Again, even as Legorreta explained, Meza himself was already proposing a repudiation of masculine dress from an early age. By 1972, the time this photo was taken, he had already embarked on his cross-dressing provocations with Cyclona, teasing Cholos and vice cops along Whittier Boulevard.

This tension was not lost on reviewer Pamela King in the *Herald*. Regarding Friedkin’s East L.A. series, King was also captivated by Aguilar, “who chose to be a homosexual instead of a barrio gang member. He has beautiful, delicate features and

long brown hair, a contrast to the harsh barrio graffiti in the background of many of the pictures. His eyes brim with tears of loneliness in some pictures and in others he appears proud, confident and beautiful.”<sup>26</sup> Recognizing that King is indeed writing in the social and political context of 1980 and her loaded application of the term “choice” is indeed fraught, her coded re-reading of Aguilar’s “beautiful, delicate features” against the “harsh” spatial qualities of the urban environment grasps Friedkin’s visual articulation of Chicano homosexuality, a desire racialized by the East L.A. spatial aesthetic. After all, connoting Chicano homosexuality assuredly perplexed the photodocumentary lens, complicating a salient and coherent image of race and sexuality. Rather, the barrio itself was one interrogative strategy rectifying a paradoxical social portrait of homosexual *and* Chicano men.

This is perhaps more clearly evident in the photo “Jim” (1972). In Figure 5.5, his back is pressed against a stucco textured wall surface. His face is quarter turned, looking off frame with what King called “eyes [that] brim with tears of loneliness.”<sup>27</sup> Her condescending view, however, overlooks a more contemplative and unified subject position as his body bisects the picture plane. The graffiti staining the wall to his right connotes a barrio urbanism and hypermasculinity bleeding off the visual field. Jim’s head turns away from the unmarked and unstained wall to the left, perhaps foreseeing and challenging the forlorn urban realities ahead. His forward-looking gaze, however, troubles King’s assertion that he is a passive and resigned protagonist. Rather, he confronts the impending threat of the “harsh” realities in the barrio. Jim’s central configuration in the frame traverses the divides of

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<sup>26</sup> Pamela J. King, “Gay Photo-Art,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, January 20, 1980, G8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

homosexuality, race and identity, a body divided pictured at the borderlands. For Friedkin's East L.A. series constructed a visual language for Chicano homosexuality, placing signifiers of male effeminacy against racialized landscapes and spatial markers of sexual difference. This important visual emulsion constitutes Friedkin's social portrait, within which Mundo Meza as well as Jim are typified: a Chicano male homosexual characterization encoded by their elegance, delicacy, beauty, and poise.

Friedkin's photo archive becomes one of the few image repositories where we can remember and recollect Mundo Meza's likeness, particularly in the early 1970s. From here we are capable of seeing his handsome allure, cool composure, and stylish self-expressions. His self-confidence even in the arresting hostilities of the barrio cultural landscape was not lost on Friedkin, who remembered, "One of the things I found interesting was that the gangs actually accepted the gay guys . . . I mean from what I could tell. I mean, I never interviewed any of the hard-core gang guys but from what I could tell it was like you know that's where they were coming from it's like 'leave them alone,' like 'it's okay.'"<sup>28</sup> These queer remains of Meza, mined from the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, provide rare insight into East Los Angeles homosexual subjectivities, self-representation, and a photographer's efforts to visually convey a social portrait of Chicano homosexuality. As Friedkin suggests to the *Herald*, the photograph "create[s] fossils of my time."<sup>29</sup> In many ways, Figure 5.4 constitutes a fossilized memory, the bone and flesh of Meza's archival body recovered from the pages of the newspaper and the photographer's image bank.

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<sup>28</sup> Anthony Friedkin. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 4 September 2010. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>29</sup> Pamela J. King, "Gay Photo-Art," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, January 20, 1980, G8.

Object Study #4: The Window Display

In Figure 5.7 we view a critical artistic expression in Meza's later work: his growing interest in department store window design. Reproduced in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* on August 30, 1981, this installation photograph represents one of the few surviving images of Meza's tableaux. As I restore a Mundo Meza Archive by reimagining his oeuvre from fragmented parts, it may seem odd that artwork is minimized. Despite my best efforts, I recovered few of Meza's acrylic paintings or documentation of them in photographs or slides. Though we gain some insight from another Friedkin portrait of Meza in his garage studio in 1972, the framing of the shot reveals an incomplete portion of an untitled androgynous nude hung on the wall over his left shoulder. While this object symbolically encodes Meza's portrait as painter, a familiar generic strategy dating back to the fifteenth century to project the self-image of the sitter, it is difficult to derive any finite conclusions about his aesthetic or stylistic influences. Our glimpse of the acrylic painting is hardly sufficient for extensive inquiry, something also recurrent in Meza's exhibition history, which consisted of small, minor, or alternative arts spaces such as the East L.A. Public Library or the Mechicano Art Center (see Figure 5.7). Later in the 1970s, he showed a series of dessert inspired acrylic paintings at Restaurant Hama in Venice,<sup>30</sup> and on December 6, 1978, he was in the inaugural group show at the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in Downtown L.A.<sup>31</sup> Without object inventory

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<sup>30</sup> Unknown, "Dessert: Acrylic Paintings by Mundo Meza," Gallery Postcard, [1970 or 1981], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>31</sup> Unknown, "Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions," Exhibition Announcement, [December 6 – December 20, 1978], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

lists, sales guides, much less catalogue publications, any effort to comprehend Meza's two-dimensional work is frustrating and challenging. This magnifies the importance of this window display identified and recovered from the pages of the *Herald*.

Figure 5.6 shows one of his first designs, a polemic expression of his creative and conceptual scope in the early 1980s.

According to Legorreta's artist biography, in the mid-1970s Meza started working for designer Fred Slatten.<sup>32</sup> Established in an old pet store between San Vicente and Santa Monica Boulevard, the Slatten boutique gained national interest and popularity among Hollywood trendsetters for its hip brand of platform shoe wear. Eye catching and spectacular in design, the shoes contained striking embellishments and outrageous exaggerations including paintings, lighting, live birds, and even fish aquariums embedded into the platform.<sup>33</sup> These must-have accessories caught the attention of several celebrities including Cher, Sonny Bono, Tina Turner, and Elton John. According to Slatten, even Barbie Benton, a model who defined Playboy in the 1970s, popularized the brand. Meza was a designer painting Slatten platform shoes. He recognized his work covering the feet of the Hollywood elite sometimes reproduced in news stories and Fred Slatten advertisements.<sup>34</sup>

Meza's work continued to evolve. Though the exact catalysis is unknown, he entered department store window design in the early 1980s. Meza worked for the trendy women's clothing store Melons at 8739 Melrose Avenue. Owners Judy

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Legorreta, "Ed-Mundo Meza," Biographical Statement, [1989], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Compo, "Living on the Wedge: When Platform Shoes Ruled Tinseltown," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2002, <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/mar/10/magazine/tm-32055> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Robert Legorreta, "Ed-Mundo Meza," Biographical Statement, [1989], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

Greitzer, a self-proclaimed shopping aficionado, and Barbara McCoy, a buyer for Federated Department Stores, opened the 4,000 square-foot fashion boutique in March of 1981, showcasing local design firms and emphasizing California style.<sup>35</sup> In 1982, the business expanded and they opened Melons shoes, which carried designer legwear, hosiery, belts, and purses.<sup>36</sup> Shocking, controversial, and taboo window designs were becoming an industry standard as Neiman-Marcus and May Co. were joining the trend; Meza's installations allowed Melons to compete with other contemporary and theatrical designs at nearby competitors on Melrose such as the Donghia Showroom and Aardvark's Vintage.<sup>37</sup>

On August 30, 1981, Meza's display was published in the California Living section of the *L.A. Herald Examiner* in a brief story about these striking commercial and artistic designs overtaking the shopping experience. In fact, even the reviewer remarked that these "stagey presentation[s] and social drama"<sup>38</sup> incited new relationships with private consumption. Indeed, these windows guided the eye back from the merchandise to the theatricality of the storefront. Meza's provocative installation for Melons boutique covers the entire page opposite the article (see Figure 5.6). Depicting four female figures painted onto spherical columns, they are bound and gagged with rope, the exquisite clothing and fabrics peering out through the rugged cords. The window constructs a polarizing tension as the unorthodox mannequins grate against their aggressive confinement. Looping and tightening around their bodies and necks, the masochistic suggestion creates a perverse and

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<sup>35</sup> Unknown, "Store sells clothing, shoes, accessories," *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1981, M10.

<sup>36</sup> Unknown, "Melons, Melons Shoes to celebrate new hours," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1982, W5.

<sup>37</sup> Unknown, "Just Looking," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, August 30, 1981, 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*



shocking narrative, collapsing hyperfeminine beauty and delicacy within the imposed and tangled restrictions of gender conformity. We can observe a similar re-adaptation of rope material in Meza's collaborative performances with Robert Cyclona Legorreta from the "Frozen Art" series in 1982.

Shot at Meza's home in Hollywood Boulevard, this photo-documentation exercise opens a postmodern window onto Cyclona's amorphous and transmutable embodiments in variegated designs, costuming, and object arrangements. In Figure 5.8, we see Meza's re-employment of the gilded rope knotted and tangled, now engulfing Cyclona. Unlike the subservient models in the Melons window display, Cyclona resists and reaches out beyond the bonds of social restriction, rebuking the impositions of a lateral system of gender duality and institutional discipline. In the "Frozen Art" collection we can see Meza's self-reference to his own installation repertoire observed in the disordering and interrogative possibilities of performance art, artifact arrangement, and spatial expressions. Whereas the rope binds in the Melons window display, the rope threads by way of Cyclona's embodied choreography, gender mutability, and visual permutation. This is an aesthetic exercise for Cyclona that is greatly indebted to Meza's forays in art installation, manipulated spatial settings, and merchandise displays. That is, "Frozen Art" becomes a performative cohesion of mutually constitutional object relations, something I have previously explored as "artifactual performance" in Chapter 3.

In Figure 5.6, upon closer examination, we see the article is hand signed by Meza who writes, "Not too bad for one of my first windows" over the photograph. Just below the copy in the marginal white space, Meza playfully exclaims, "Fancy

you buying the herald exam!” The newspaper clipping itself collected and preserved in Robert Legorreta’s papers becomes a memento of Meza’s career achievement and contemporary art production. From the inscription, we can discern a dialogic relation between custodian and record. “Fancy you” is likely a playful recognition of Legorreta through Meza’s sarcastic wit. In this rare moment, we might imagine Meza’s discovery of the article kept among Legorreta’s personal keepsakes (“Fancy you”), and accordingly, Meza’s own abbreviated self-reflection of his installation art (“Not too bad”).

Later, Meza also worked for Maxfield Bleu at 9091 Santa Monica Blvd, where he met and collaborated with Simon Doonan, the head window dresser.<sup>39</sup> Born and raised in Reading, England, Doonan’s introduction to window design was fueled by mod, *The Avengers*, Susan Sontag’s writings on camp, and his eclectic upbringing with a partially lobotomized grandmother and schizophrenic uncle. In his effort to flee his hometown, he entered Manchester University, but his government grant could not cover all of his expenses.<sup>40</sup> During the holidays, he returned back to Reading and found work in retail. His foundational encounter with two outrageous window dressers sent Doonan down a different life course. He left Manchester, moved to London, and eventually landed a job in the display department of Aquascutum and developed a contractor design company for other retail stores.

In 1977, Tommy Perse, owner of Maxwell’s in Los Angeles, saw one of Doonan’s installations at Nutter. Carelessly grasping at the punk sensibilities of the

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Legorreta, “Ed-Mundo Meza,” Biographical Statement, [1989], The Gay, Chicanismo in El Arte Cyclona Art Collection, 1964-2004. The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Doonan. *Confessions of a Window Dresser: Tales from a Life in Fashion*. (New York: Penguin Studio, 1998), 23.

time, his taxidermy display of jeweled rats resonated with Perse's "subversive aesthetic." A maverick experimenting with the window form, Doonan was hired to continue these controversial and offensive displays at Maxwell's. By January of 1978, he moved to West Hollywood, seeking a progressive bastion of fashion-forward liberated people conversant with the shock subculture of British punk.<sup>41</sup> Doonan experienced quite the opposite. Under the patronage of Perse, he developed a range of window designs ranging from the bizarre to the macabre. Based on contemporary local and global affairs, his twisted environments reflected a L.A. urban dystopia and "the endless stream of unsavory aberrations that feed the collective paranoia."<sup>42</sup> It is little wonder that Doonan would find an affinity with Chicano avant-gardists, many of whom were similarly compelled by barrio glamour, urban alienation, art world ostracism, and urges of outrageous self-expression.

Together, Meza and Doonan's partnering fostered several important professional collaborations, displays, and personal affect for each other. They were roommates for a period of time, sharing a Hollywood apartment. According to Doonan's memoir *Confessions of a Window Dresser*, he and Meza were also lovers. Meza and Doonan's work in window installations gained them access to L.A.'s fashion elite, facilitating their entry into parties and events with designers, photographers, and stylists. However, this fusion of creative and artistic exchange was cut short. By 1985, Meza had grown ill. Doonan recalls, "Mundo was one of a blizzard of close friends and ex-boyfriends who dropped like flies over the next ten years of my life. 'Dropping like flies' is not the best analogy, since most of them

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 40.

died horrifying, protracted deaths, often without medical or family support. I have no clear perspective on the complete and utter doom of this AIDS holocaust.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, Doonan’s departure from Los Angeles and eventual relocation to New York may have been caused in part due to Meza’s death. His friends artist Sara Richardson and photographer Stephen Arnold imagined that a change of scenery was needed especially given his “recent trauma.”<sup>44</sup> Doonan’s departure in September of 1985 led to his apprenticeship with fashionista Dianne Vreeland and an important encounter with the Pressman family, where he would become Barney’s creative director and a pillar in the fashion industry.

#### Object Study #5: The Merman

The next record I want to consider in this collection is an un-stretched canvas, tightly rolled and stored in the dark vestiges of Jef Huereque’s hallway closet in his Los Feliz residence (see Figure 5.9). It is during my interview with Huereque on August 23, 2007 that our conversation strays; his retelling vignettes of his life history in Chicano art is punctuated by memories of his ex-boyfriend/partner, Mundo Meza. Huereque grew up in Los Angeles and studied painting and drawing at California State University, Long Beach in the 1970s. After ending his five-year marriage to a woman, Huereque lived in San Francisco.<sup>45</sup> He worked as a flight attendant and continued to show his work at the Galeria de la Raza in the Mission District and even took part in the historic Chicanarte show at the L.A. Municipal Gallery at Barnsdall

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 47-8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Jef Huereque. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

Art Park in 1975.<sup>46</sup> Later, he worked as a tailor and designer in men's fashion. After moving back to Los Angeles, he met Meza.

As Huereque recalls, when Meza started getting sick, few protocols existed to palliate the disease. The experience was wrought with isolation, desperation, and panic. Most of his friends and family abandoned him, an inference even Doonan makes. He remembers, "So few people knew how to deal with it [AIDS]. It was like, a lot of friends and family, kind of disappeared because it was so unknown, you know, how you caught it, how it was transferred and stuff. Anyways, so I kind of financially nosedived taking care of him, but its something I had to do."<sup>47</sup> When Meza was admitted to the hospital, he did not want news of his illness to spread. Horrified by his altered appearance, he routinely denied visitors. Huereque, his lover, friend, and caretaker, cared for him when no one else would. According to Legorreta's recollection, Meza slipped into a coma for thirteen hours.<sup>48</sup> When he died, he was just shy of his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The events following Meza's family involvement are unclear; for Huereque, he believed that he was a source for their anger, hostility, and grief. The family was quite likely reeling from the social and cultural attitudes toward people living with AIDS at the time; they may have felt ashamed, fearful and embarrassed, and forced to confront a mystery disease quarantining their transformed and disfigured son.

Without a will, memorandum, or legal recognition of his relationship, Huereque was

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<sup>46</sup> *Chicanarte* Exhibition Poster, [1975], (Box 6, Folder 16) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>47</sup> Jef Huereque. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>48</sup> Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 5 June 2005. Los Angeles, California.

denied any formal claim to the home they once shared. All Meza's personal belongings including his artwork were confiscated and repossessed. Objects that were jointly owned were seized. Paintings that were personally gifted to Huereque were claimed, despite his protests. He remembers one such incident erupting over a piece of artwork gifted by Meza to Huereque, "His one sister who wouldn't even visit him in the hospital, she was the most aggressive. She says, 'he didn't tell us that!' and I was already in bits and pieces already. You know, just my spirit. I missed him. You know, and the sooner they left the better. To me they were just objects but they took most of the stuff . . . And their anger was that I'm alive and their son died."<sup>49</sup>

In what might be considered one of the gravest travesties of AIDS on the Chicano art world, the seizure of Meza's entire visual corpus marked an act of archival body violence, i.e., the retaliatory destruction of objects enacted a Mexican family's anti-gay hostilities onto the artifactual surrogate. By refusing to honor Huereque's right to object ownership vis-à-vis the "queer remains," the family both invalidated his relationship and severed his claims to Meza in material, visual, and corporeal terms. In this violent fallout, these were not "just objects" but a convoy of his body and cultural memory. Hence, Meza's paintings were deployed in an orchestration of archival and ocular assault. Denying Huereque's rights to see while simultaneously looting Meza's exteriorized self, the family confiscated the only material traces from his partner's home.

While tragic, it is important to note here that the destruction of Meza's collection is not unusual. Stories of families routinely denying the surviving partner's

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<sup>49</sup> Jef Huereque. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

rights including visitation and property ownership were commonplace in the AIDS crisis and of late, resurfaced in the context of same-sex marriage debates. This symbolic dissolution of history and memory reaffirms a grander discourse of violence enacted upon cultural heritage. Such imperial and colonial actions were even cause for Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* to pronounce, “There is no political power without control of the archive.”<sup>50</sup> For example, during the French revolution on October 5, 1789, the royal archive building was set ablaze. By symbolically destroying and erasing monarchic rule, the French contested royal authority through the obliteration of the archive. As archive scholar Adrian Cunningham attests, “the fate of the archives of the *ancient regime* testify to the fact that no archive can assume an eternal mandate . . . they are forever ‘subject to the judgment of the society in which they exist.’”<sup>51</sup> More contemporaneously, after invading Iraq in 2001, the U.S. military obliterated the monument of Saddam Hussein in an act of political, cultural and psychological aggression. As Erika Doss explains, the authority given to these markers of political power “acknowledge the ‘symbolic capital’ of memorials and the fundamental roles they play in shaping and directing perceptions of social order, national identity, and political transition.”<sup>52</sup> I argue that the Meza family’s alleged reaction demonstrates a micro-scale example of archival assault.

Despite their effort to reorder and omit the past, the family reconstituted a paradoxical logic. Even as they sought to control, conceal and destroy these objects, they simultaneously recognized and affirmed the queer cultural significance of this art

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Adrian Cunningham. “Archival Institutions.” In *Archives: Record Keeping in Society*. Eds. Sue McKemish, et. al. (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, 2005), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Erika Doss. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 10.

collection. Hence, it is possible to ascertain an alternative archival formation or “queer archive” constituted by anti-gay social hostilities, violent cultural realities, and assaultive behaviors, conditions that are not universally applicable to all marginalized heritage records. The result anticipated a queer heritage, conserving, stewarding, and commemorating the remains away from the ideologies justifying their destruction. In the case of Mundo Meza, just one painting survived.

Out of the ruins of this archival destruction, Jef Huereque holds one piece in his care. Untitled and undated, the unstretched canvas dwells in the cavernous corner of his hallway closet. Once unraveled we see a large-scale painting of a merman sculpture, a homoerotic re-visioning of “la sirena” statuary seen throughout Mexico City. The piece represents Meza’s agile brushwork and expedient artistic labor, capable of producing life size acrylic paintings in a matter of hours. Over the years, Huereque would sometimes display the canvas in his home. The image became what consumptive behavior theorist Russell Belk called a “seed object”<sup>53</sup> or keepsake that fuelled a collecting addiction and ritualized practice. Huereque started collecting mermaid collectibles, a fact not lost on his friends who added to his collection on special occasions. In fact, the homoerotics of merman iconography entered his visual lexicon, something he attributes to Meza and I would argue, honoring the “queer remain.”

Since Meza’s death, the image itself became a type of commemorative visual language memorializing his partner’s queering of a Mexican art icon. This was evident in his submission to the exhibition, “VIVA’s Mexico: Too Many Centuries of

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<sup>53</sup> Russell W. Belk, “Collectors and Collecting,” In *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. Ed. Susan M. Pearce (New York: Routledge, 1994), 318.



Denial, Invisibility and Silence,” the VIVA organization’s first major show at Beyond Baroque in Venice. As I explore more completely in Chapter 7, over 200 art organizations planned shows, plays, and public programs in a citywide celebration of Mexican art, which coincided with “Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries” opening at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1991. “VIVA’s Mexico” opened on September 15, 1991 featuring 22 visual artists as well as readings and performances on tape. For curator Guillermo Hernandez, the show was an act of cultural preservation in the face of erasure, an exhibit “dedicated to our hermanos y hermanas who died of AIDS due to cultural and governmental indifference.”<sup>54</sup> Huereque’s piece “Anguish” (1991) was conversant with the mission of the show.

In Figure 5.10, the pencil-charcoal drawing of a chiseled merman has collapsed in agony and fallen to the sea floor.<sup>55</sup> His head hangs low and his outstretched right hand grasps empty space. It is difficult to discern what the merman struggles to clutch or what grief has paralyzed him. The drawing is a visual expression of intimate memory, perhaps crying for all that he once had and all that he has lost. “Anguish” is a commemorative piece perhaps supplanting the missing objects and artifactual voids. It acknowledges what was given to him and yet taken away, manifesting the upset of archival violence and the ruptures the confiscation caused. And, yet, Huereque’s drawing also performs an act of remembrance and conciliation resolving the wounds of AIDS devastation and loss across the paper. Enduring the death of his partner, denial of ownership, and disregard of his

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<sup>54</sup> “VIVA!’S MEXICO: Too Many Centuries of Denial, Invisibility, and Silence,” September 15, 1991, The VIVA Papers Collection. Box 3. Folder 6. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

<sup>55</sup> “VIVA!’S MEXICO Price List,” 1991, The VIVA Papers Collection. Box 3. Folder 6. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

relationship, Huereque visually resuscitates the merman, extending the duration of Meza's image and, in turn, bringing him back to life.

### Queer Conservation

Nearly ten years after his death, some of Meza's art recirculated (although briefly) in local AIDS art exhibitions or shows in honor of artists who died of AIDS in the 1990s. It is important to consider that even following Meza's death, Huereque and Simon Doonan adapted the comprehensive exhibition format to honor the artist immediately following his death. According to Huereque, the family reluctantly lent the collection for the show at Otis School of Art and Design in Downtown Los Angeles.<sup>56</sup> This was the last time this work was publically exhibited or seen again.

In 1993, Huereque submitted the "Merman" painting to TranscEND AIDS. Curated by VIVA board member Guillermo Hernandez, the show was an exhaustive undertaking. The multimedia arts festival included three concurrent art exhibitions, theatrical performances, literary readings, dances, and panel discussions.<sup>57</sup> Meza's piece was included in the McGroarty Arts Center show, a small art space in Tujunga. Its inclusion in the show gave Meza's "queer remain" a second life beyond the dark cloak and static frame of Huereque's archival space: the hallway closet (see figure 5.11).

As mentioned earlier, Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta also continued to advocate on behalf of Meza as a pseudo-estate executor lauding the significance of his friend's

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<sup>56</sup> Jef Huereque. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>57</sup> *TranscEND AIDS: A Series of Art Exhibitions, Readings and Performances By and About People with HIV/AIDS* Exhibition Brochure, [1993], Private Collection of Guillermo Hernandez.

influence in Chicano art. Legorreta lent two of Meza's pencil studies to the Robert D. Farber Living Arts Project curated by Cirilo Domine on May 2-June 21, 1998 at the Village. Legorreta's role as conservator and archivist shaped the historical discourse about their relationship which was indicative in the catalogue entry about Meza. His art and cultural memory is simultaneously intertwined with Legorreta and the inference of archival loss, recovery, and custody. "Mundo Mesa's [sic] work exists as a few notebooks filled with drawings and notations given to Cyclona, a Latino performance artist. According to Cyclona, Mesa's [sic] work included record covers, site-specific installations, paintings, and volumes of drawings."<sup>58</sup> Again, referencing the "few notebooks" and scant traces of Meza's collection, he is evoked in an AIDS artist exhibition only to be reconstituted by destruction, ruin, and debris. As we can observe from the queer afterlife of his art, Legorreta as heritage purveyor insures that it is the collaborative conceptual art pieces of Cyclona and Meza that endure within a curatorial framework such as the Farber show.

Also, Legorreta developed two major collections of Meza related materials, including sketchbooks, works on paper, and figure studies to the ONE Institute Gay and Lesbian Archive in 2001. Later, in 2003, Legorreta gifted The Fire of Life Collection to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, which contained significant photographic materials on Meza's early career and details his participatory role in street interventions and performance art pieces with Cyclona and Gronk in the late 1960s and 1970s. Over 25 years since Meza's death, Legorreta's archival

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<sup>58</sup> Photocopy of Legorreta's Biographical Sketch, undated, in "Cyclona" (unpaginated booklet of autobiographical materials and press kit compiled by Robert Legorreta), undated, The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

collections continued to expand the reach of his art-historical influence beyond the art exhibition, and extend AIDS memorialization within the commemorative dimensions of the archive collection.

This said, the totality of my object studies offers a reconceptualization of not only the social and artistic portrait of Mundo Meza but also the ways in which archival assault and ocular regimes generated other ways of keeping, conserving, and caring for Meza's archival body. As gay heritage purveyors, Huereque and Legorreta demonstrate how archival destruction generated memorializing aftereffects in the treatment and care of things. Let us not disregard that the merman canvas is bathed in shadow and sheltered in Jef Huereque's storage closet. Photographs of Meza's performance art collaborations were collected, collaged, and displayed in Robert Legorreta's scrapbook. Representations of Meza's window display design and formative exhibition experiences were catalogued and gifted by Legorreta to a grassroots gay and lesbian repository. These practices elucidate the custodial dimension of cultural survival typifying queer possibilities in object care and conservation.

By which I mean Meza's custodians made a decision to withdraw these queer remains from the art marketplace, which further removed the object from profitable channels of the museum industrial complex and commercial gallery system. These documents and artifacts are stationary and placed in archival spaces insuring their sustainability and preservation, protected from further loss, decay, or demolition inside private containers. Though the building of personal archives in time capsules, memory boxes, or file cabinets is not explicitly unique to gay and lesbian material

culture, my thinking of “queer conservation” interprets what modes of object care are employed to assure and sustain queer cultural memory. The gay heritage purveyors’ distinct curatorial and interpretive choices select the ways in which these objects must be removed and housed due to heteronormative power, violence, and sexual difference. This illustrates a type of object care that is conversant with the very real and tangible stakes involved in the life of a queer archive. Hence, there are other spatial and temporal considerations that must be considered: the way they live, dwell, and non-circulate outside the threshold of institutional systems of American cultural heritage.

We can observe one strategy in Robert Legorreta’s deed of gift to the ONE Gay and Lesbian Archive. Legorreta developed a systematic inventory list for his collection, organized according to three principal sets of artists: Mundo Meza, Gronk and Roberto Gutierrez. Each record, art object, or artifact was numbered with a corresponding entry on his exhaustive list. Handwritten on three-ring loose leaf paper, Legorreta’s content descriptions of the items elicited biographical detail ranging from inferences of the sexual, ethereal, anthropomorphic, and the art-historical. These records are implicated in a conservation strategy not only to preserve the object but the variant relationships with the Cyclona figure and art production. In this registry of object histories, ranging from the strange to the mundane, the inventory list constitutes a postmodern processing procedure wherein the cataloguing of papers is mutually interpreted and intricately reliant on the queer biographical qualities of the collector (Legorreta) and the collected (Meza). Hence, Legorreta evades the neutrality of “normal” records administration and imposes his

own “deviant” interpretative schema, shaping queer ways of knowing the artist, object and social biography. Ultimately, the queer conservationist tactics of Huereque and Legorreta unveil variant strategies to care, commemorate, and sustain the cultural memory of Mundo Meza from devastation and archival destruction

*Conclusion: Looking for Mundo Meza*

Throughout this chapter I have presented a series of object case studies to comprehend and reconstruct an archival body formed out of annihilation. The residual Mundo Meza archive that I have shown consists of oral traces, scant exhibition records, scrapbook albums, and newspaper clippings. The esoteric conditions constitute a counter to the archetypical artist archive in its comprehensive, intelligible, and documentary form. These disassembled object pieces, however, restore a biography of an artist from marginality. It is a restorative operation shaped by void though nonetheless important. As we see from this excavation, Meza continues to survive in Huereque’s closet, Friedkin’s photographs, and Legorreta’s recollections. This dimension of queer memory, conservation, and care strategies were absent from the appropriation and provenance of Meza’s photographic portrait iconocized at the UCLA symposium. By foregrounding an archive eradicated by violence, they overlooked the invariable ways in which the archival body survived and endured by custodial initiatives and gay heritage purveyance outside the threshold of institutional heritage organizations. It is an archiving process prompted by sexual difference, acts of personal rescue, and unlikely spaces from which these “remains” dwell.

The Mundo Meza Archive that I am proposing is a convergence of these acts of cultural survival. This restorative investigation adjudicates ways Meza has been remembered and under what visual, material, and spatial practices. Clearly, this excavation is a partial piece of the archival puzzle. For we may never know what happened to his things, if growing curatorial and art-historical interest in Chicano contemporary art may lure a family confession, or if the resurfacing of his paintings is even a sufficient or necessary outcome. Each object study reveals a biography of artifacts from which we gain only a glimpse of this East L.A. artist and the extent to which his art influenced and functioned within the Chicano avant-garde. However, this archival body configuration I exhume here demonstrates how the AIDS crisis generated a range of alternative archival strategies and how Meza's memory has persisted in the protection and care of queer conservators. Though these records are subdued within domestic zones of display and preservation, in the following chapter I will discuss the commemorative strategies in a site-specific public art installation. The resulting design, construction, and execution of the piece expand the AIDS memorial lexicon and concretize other display venues to remember and demarcate the art and influence of Chicano ceramicist Teddy Sandoval.

## Chapter 6: Teddy Sandoval

### *Butch Gardens and Queer Cabinets: The Corazon Herida of Teddy Sandoval*

On April 28, 2003, local Highland Park residents joined Los Angeles first district councilman Ed Reyes and Southwest Museum Executive Director Duane King to celebrate the grand opening of the Southwest Museum Station on the Metro Transit Authority Gold Line. Designed by the La Canada Design Group, a regional architecture firm based in Pasadena, the station marked the completion of a project ten years in the making. Offering resident commuters in nearby Pasadena mass-transit access to dense downtown Los Angeles, the Gold Line rail brought some order to the disordered and decentralized urban sprawl of Los Angeles. The celebration surrounding the inauguration of the Southwest Museum Station was well-deserved. Framed by a backdrop of gold balloons, food, and bands, Councilman Reyes and his colleagues were evidently pleased with this \$700 million dollar accomplishment. Through the Art for Rail Transit (ART) program, each of the five stations<sup>1</sup> featured original public artwork designed by regarded L.A. artists including Chusien Chang, Roberto Delgado, and John Valadez. Teddy Sandoval, the artist behind “the gateway to Highland Park” was not there to see the fruition of his work, however. In 1995 at age 45, just two years after being awarded the public art commission, he lost his battle with AIDS.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Southwest Museum, other stations on the Gold Line included stops at Avenue 26, Chinatown, French Station, and Avenue 57.



Posthumously completed in 2003, the piece served as a major milestone for the artist's career. The commission had been a rare opportunity, one bestowed on few in Los Angeles, giving Sandoval the platform to expand the reach of his work and the opportunity to permanently redesign the image of the neighborhood, a place he had adopted as his home. However, Sandoval's public art installation almost did not weather the numerous budget cuts, financial setbacks, and political controversies besieging the project. These setbacks, along with his AIDS-related death, nearly put an end to Sandoval's installation even before the MTA broke ground. The story behind this accomplished art piece is a rarely-examined dimension in local L.A. art history and Chicano public art. Suffice it say, the execution, completion, and conservation of Sandoval's vision, plan, and aesthetic innovation would not have been possible without the dedication of one person: Paul Polubinskas. Due to his efforts, the Southwest Museum Station became the only Gold Line art project "true" to its original design.<sup>2</sup>

Though lauded as an achievement of L.A. urban planning and public transit advancement, this celebration was also a recognition of the life and work of gay Chicano ceramicist, painter, and printmaker Teddy Sandoval. And yet, the public art installation has remained misattributed and misinterpreted, befuddling the circumstances behind its commission and completion. For instance, Polubinskas is often mistakenly credited as a fellow ceramicist, artist, or business associate of Sandoval on websites about the station. His personal relationship remained undefined, further obfuscating the fact that he was Sandoval's life partner of 18 years. This homosexual cultural context was seemingly lost on that opening day on April 28,

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Nakagawa. Personal communication to author, Washington, D.C., 6 April 2007.

2003, indicative of the way Sandoval's sister was awarded a proclamation for the Sandoval family and Polubinskas was recognized under the premise of artistic achievement.<sup>3</sup>

By now, this obscurity is a familiar one. Polubinskas's efforts to complete the station have yet to be taken into account and remain unexamined. At this point, I must wonder how might we understand Polubinskas's initiative under the broader auspices of object custodianship and within a broader archival and preservationist impulse? By this, I mean, through his efforts he sought a proper means to remember his lover in the public art installation – an exquisite collection of postmodern sculptural and decorative art pieces reflective of Sandoval's oeuvre. And yet, the installation surpassed the finite trappings of monument landmarks and configuring other alternative memorial possibilities, made tangible in the ceramic arrangements and tile paintings. This cannot be underscored enough for it demonstrates how gay male heritage purveyance constituted other curatorial and commemorative possibilities archiving Sandoval's art innovation into the cultural landscape. As such, the large-scale display of his ceramics, tiles, and decorative motifs imparts the grounds from which our excavation begins. From these items, we may derive insight into the traces of a Chicano artist negotiating his AIDS diagnosis and mortality. This is just one archival space uncovered for this investigation.

The other is a collection of rare objects that now live under the protective frame of Polubinskas's private house interior. What I find most profound in both examples are the ways in which Polubinskas conserved and protected Sandoval's

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Perez, "Reyes Joins Community to Dedicate Southwest Museum Station" Press Release, <http://www.lacity.org/council/cd1/> (accessed April 1, 2007).

”queer remains.” This impressive range of Sandoval ceramics, decorative arts, silk screens, monoprints, watercolors, and paintings in the domestic environment exemplify a dimension of his “queer archival afterlife.” Unlike the confiscation that obliterated the remains of Sandoval’s friend, Mundo Meza, his “archival body” would have a different ending.

Throughout this essay, I attempt to locate, retrieve, and assess the “queer remains” of Sandoval from two central though unlikely repositories, the Highland Park neighborhood and the private home-site. I argue that these disparate but related grounds indicate a range of Polubinskas’s queer commemorative measures ensuring the longevity of Sandoval’s cultural memory through the conservatorship of his things. This sheds further insight into the ways in which these art objects’ custody, display, and even storage reveals a queer conservationist strategy. My analysis discerns the ways in which we find Sandoval’s “archival body” living and dwelling under variegated commemorative practices and different conditions. This encourages a more precise analysis into the storage of things and conservation techniques used to treat, restore, and prevent loss.

In particular, I am interested in Polubinskas’ own archive custodial methodology, a nuanced set of collection management practices that complicates how private art collections, documents, and personal records operate in the domestic environment. This sheds light on the Southwest Museum Station art installation in relationship to his grander schema of queer archival custody – another repository where Sandoval’s remains are found. By contesting the bounds of mere art collaborator, artist assistant, or even art collector, Polubinskas’s role is actually one of

the archive curator as he selects, assesses, and reproduces Sandoval's artifacts, documents, and stylistic referents into creative archive productions and documents his lover's art historical significance. As such, my excavation within these repositories expands the alternative archive formations as we have considered up to this point and the places from which this archival body is kept and preserved.

### *Shifting Sands/Shifting Tides*

Theodore "Teddy" Sandoval was born on September 15, 1949 in East Los Angeles. Though better known for his ceramic art, unbeknownst to many, he was a printmaking major in the studio art program at California State University-Long Beach in 1972-75. At first, ceramic art was an incidental medium, something that was not a direct expression of his artistic imagination. While working in the art department, he would experiment at the potter's wheel. His earliest piece, an untitled hand thrown hanging flowerpot in a milky Japanese glaze, is dated from 1974. Also from the same year, another three-dimensional flowerpot adhered to a cloud wall plate indicated his daring negotiation of scale and dimension. For Sandoval, the Cal State-Long Beach art department would play an important role facilitating key relationships with a major network of other young Chicano artists-colleagues, among them: Jef Huereque, Marcos Huereque, John Otero, and Maria de la Rosa. Sandoval was likely influenced early on by an emergent Chicano art conceptualism in East Los Angeles. In fact, while he was still a student, ASCO members Harry Gamboa, Jr.,

Gronk, and Willie Herron were exhibited in the “Gronk, Gamboa, Herron” group show at Cal State-Long Beach’s student union gallery in March 1974.<sup>4 5</sup>

This contingency of Long Beach-based Chicano art students redounded to the momentum of the growing Chicano Art Movement. For instance, in 1975 they were exhibited in the historic shows “Chicanismo en el Arte” at the Vincent Price Gallery at East Los Angeles College and “Chicanarte” at the Barnsdall Art Park in North Hollywood.<sup>6</sup> Visually more aligned with the emerging Chicano avant-garde language at the time, and lying somewhere between the protest art of Chicano political ideologues and the street interventionist actions of ASCO and Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, these artists, some of whom were homosexual, circulated conceptual and mixed-media pieces, negotiating a sexual subjectivity that detracted from a restrictive cultural nationalist agenda. Whereas Jack Vargas would premiere his sexually suggestive image-text pieces at “Chicanarte,” Sandoval showed intaglio prints, life drawings, and mixed-media collages, introducing a provocative homoerotic iconography to Chicano audiences like his piece, “Dear Ted” (see Figure 6.1). In his emerging visual negotiation, Sandoval showed an unusual ease with explicit phallic imagery and a fetishistic “penchant”<sup>7</sup> for jock straps, leather chaps, and garter belts. Among the 100 artists included in the comprehensive exhibition, Sandoval’s controversial work must have been striking. As we might recall from

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<sup>4</sup> S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas, “Harry Gamboa and ASCO: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971-1987.” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1988, 174.

<sup>5</sup> Sandoval’s attendance to the Cal State-Long Beach show is unknown. However, it is not a stretch to speculate this possibility given his enrollment in the studio art program during this timeframe.

<sup>6</sup> Chicanismo en el Arte Exhibition. Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, September 14-October 15, 1975. Box 2. Folder 6.16, The Tomas Ybarra Frausto Collection of Chicano Art and Research Material, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

Chapter 4, it was at “Chicanarte” that Joey Terrill observed “Nude #5 with David,” taking note of its confrontational imagery of same-sex desire.

This was more explicitly observed in an early Sandoval work on paper, “LB-12: 8<sup>th</sup> Place Palms, Long Beach, Calif.” (1974). In Figure 6.2, we see the color pencil drawing depicting three palm trees against an emptied background. The expressive graphite strokes construct a flat two-dimensional scene. Our attention is drawn to the abstract illustration of trees. Set atop the branches, we see an unusual arrangement of coconuts. Sandoval substitutes the tropical fruit with erect brown penises, a surprising treat dotting the skyline of the pictorial field. As the title indicates, “8<sup>th</sup> Place Palms” is no ordinary beach but a fantasy playground where homosexual male desire breeds dangling from the highest stretch of the coastal landscape. The title itself references the famed homosexual cruising area in Long Beach. His reverence for the place indicates Sandoval’s unapologetic representation of the Chicano phallus and homoerotic desire.

In fact, by 1976, Sandoval fabricated an art installation with several plastic bags containing embossed picture postcards of semi-nude sunbathing men or grazing camels. Each clear container was partially filled with sand from 8<sup>th</sup> Place Palms, whereby the installation extended the gay beach within the bounds of the gallery space. Sandoval pressed the viewer to consider the sexual encounters propagated by and within the material. His early foray into the erotic potential of sand portends his later aesthetic investigations with dirt, tarnish, ruin, object patina, and faux-finishing.

After graduating in 1975, Sandoval was a fixture among an emergent cohort of East Los Angeles Chicano art provocateurs. Ranging from his participatory role in

Terrill's mariconographic portraiture (1976) and "Homeboy Beautiful" performance collaborations (1977-9), Sandoval also developed a close friendship with conceptual artist, muralist, and ASCO co-founder, Gronk. He and Sandoval were roommates at the time, sharing an art studio space in Downtown L.A. prior to the area's fashionable appeal to affluent, bohemian city dwellers. This resulted in the "No Movie" performance piece entitled, "La Historia de Frida Kahlo" in 1979 (see Figure 6.3). Sandoval embodied the famed Mexican modernist painter fashioning himself in a gown, rebozo, and the iconic mono-brow. Eschewing cosmetics, wigs, and body pad forms, Sandoval's interpretation of Frida evaded female impersonation and imposed an absurd masculine representation onto the famed painter. Flaunting his unshaven chest and signature moustache, Sandoval partakes in an intimate dance with Gronk channeling Diego Rivera.<sup>8</sup> The photo-documentation reveals a performance that deconstructs Chicano idolatry of the tragic artist-couple now resuscitated as rock-n-roll musicians within the context of homosexual parody and ironic pun.

Sandoval's work continued to reflect the generic and experimental language of California contemporary art, and the political theatre of Chicano social protest and gay and lesbian sexual liberation. Of particular note is Sandoval's participation in the mail art movement. Borrowing on early Futurists experimentation with international art sharing, this correspondence-based art movement adapted the distribution mechanism of postal delivery to circulate and complete the conceptual piece. Mail art's functionality would simultaneously disseminate information while implicating the mail carriers within the artistic process. Revived by New York-based pop artist Ray Johnson in the 1960s, the genre's popularity as a means to network with artists

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<sup>8</sup> Max Benavidez. *Gronk*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 52.

expanded among Chicano avant-gardists in Los Angeles. As we have discussed earlier, this resulted in the distribution and exchange of ASCO's "No Movie" performance art. It also triggered other Chicano conceptualist strategies.

Famously signing each mail art piece with his moniker, Butch Gardens School of Fine Art, Teddy Sandoval rose in popularity and status. Similar to Johnson's signature, "New York Correspondence School," Sandoval fathomed a comparable network among east side artists. Although there is speculation in contemporary Chicano art criticism conflating Butch Gardens with a physical alternative art space or gay bar,<sup>9</sup> it was actually an insignia that paid reverence to a real gay bar in Silver Lake. However, it was not a venue that hosted Chicano art production like Score Bar in Downtown, which would play host to the famed "Terrill/Gronk" show in 1984. As Joey Terrill retells, "[Butch Gardens] was Teddy's signature name for all the mail art that was going out. That was sort of the thing to do. At the same time you were undermining or critiquing the whole concept of the institution like a school of art by doing mail art, which was the total opposite of the precious art object sitting on a pedestal somewhere. You named your whole concept after it."<sup>10</sup> Early precursors for Sandoval's artistic strategy can be traced to his 8<sup>th</sup> Place Palms series in 1974. Much like Jack Vargas's "Le Club for Boys," Sandoval's conceptual school of Chicano art simultaneously correlated mail art's experimental distribution and networking methods with a subversive bar associated with sexual perversion and deviance.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Max Benavidez. *Gronk*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), or Chon Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me: Early Asco 1971-75," *East of Borneo*, November 18, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 23 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.



In another extension of his mail art practice, Sandoval also adopted the infamous drag persona, “Rosa de la Montana” sometimes embellishing his pieces with images of himself cross-dressing. Inscribed with the moniker “Butch Gardens School of Fine Art” on behalf of Ms. De la Montana, recipients started corresponding to the mail art celebrity. Her mystique captured in a mail art print by Sandoval conveys her effeminate form refusing markers of facial identification and social recognition (see Figure 6.4). Contesting the generic conventions of portraiture where detail and specificity add the necessary traits to identify and record the sitter, Sandoval’s “Rosa” remains an all-allusive figure in the East L.A. avant-garde. She undermines the audience’s desires to see and know the icon. Similar to Marcel Duchamp’s female alter-ego, Rose Selvay, Sandoval’s audacious flirtation with female impersonation cites a neo-Dadist defiance and assault on sexual and gender propriety.<sup>11</sup> That is, unlike other Chicano avant-gardists, Teddy Sandoval’s overt explication of homoerotic self-expression impressed sexual divergences and gender play among possible Chicano conceptualist strategies. This dimension of the mail art movement is quite telling and demonstrates how specific East Los Angeles homosexual sensibilities encountered and negotiated these streams of contemporary artist exchange.

Sandoval’s personal and professional circumstances were soon to change. It was at the Valentine’s Day Dance in 1977 at Circus Disco, a homosexual dance club in West L.A., where Paul Polubinskas first set eyes on Sandoval. Having just

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<sup>11</sup> Rose Selvay first emerged in collaborative portrait photographs taken by Dada artist Man Ray of the cross-dressing Marcel Duchamp in 1921. Selvay became an art piece, moniker and byline inscribed on art pieces. It is not a coincidence that Sandoval’s alter-ego also went by the name “Rosa,” a Latin American version of the French “Rose.” For more, see David Hopkins. *Dada’s Boys: Masculinity After Duchamp*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

relocated to L.A. from New York City after ending a relationship, Polubinskas's accidental cocktail over-consumption and debauchery led to this predestined encounter. With the fog of the night's events still unclear in his head, he awoke the next morning in Sandoval's apartment. According to Polubinskas their connection was instantaneous and inexplicable. "[The relationship] worked for both of us and we were never apart for 18 years. We lived together. We worked together. We socialized together. We vacationed together . . . . All in all, we had an idyllic relationship."<sup>12</sup> Soon thereafter, Polubinskas was thrust into Sandoval's boundless self-expression and creative compulsion. In one such instance, he was even cajoled to drive the get away car as Sandoval stenciled graffiti art pieces on derelict buildings in Downtown (see Figure 6.5). His uses of guerrilla street art and spontaneous art happenings were an unusual though exhilarating addition to Polubinskas's ordered life. News of Sandoval's relationship started to circulate, ripe with rumor and criticism, among a network of East Los Angeles Chicano artists. This mixed reception culminated at the art show, "Corazon Herida."

The mid-1970s was a peculiar moment among Chicano avant-gardists. With representational figuration in Chicano painting and muralism the art form of choice for gallery dealers and museum curators, alternative street happenings, performance art, and installations occupied the margins of public art museums. Available commercial and mainstream art venues were rare, which generated alternative art spaces, guerrilla installations, and informal barrio salons in homes, bars, and studios. The exhibition, "Corazon Herida" (Wounded Heart), at Sandoval's studio on Banning

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

Street was one of these shows. Officially hosted by “Madame Rosa De La Montana” and the “Butch Gardens School of Fine Art,” the show included five of Sandoval’s artist-friends including Joey Terrill, Bill Hernandez, Claudine Anderson, Jack Vargas, and S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas.<sup>13</sup> At this show, Polubinskas was thrust into a cadre of emergent contemporary artists where he met Joey Terrill, Patssi Valdez, Roberto Gil de Montes, Leo Limon, Chaz Bojorquez, Jack Vargas, and even, Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta. However, Polubinskas realized that he and Sandoval were also being scrutinized. He remembers, “I was discussed. Some of the people will show up early and help set up and these are your close friends and they can’t wait to meet this one! This one was me! I was the art piece of the night even though they had artwork. I realized that night I was the art piece everyone wanted to see. I got Teddy. I was the new boy on the block.”<sup>14</sup>

As Polubinskas continued to accompany his lover to Chicano art gatherings in East L.A., he faced resistance from artists intent on insulating and shielding even temporary art spaces for particular barrio viewing publics. This behavior was not an uncommon one and surprising still, relayed by other Chicano homosexual artists. Polubinskas recalled, “I had people coming after me! But nevertheless, there were some people that were a little antagonistic. ‘You belong in West Hollywood, Bitch not East Los!’ I’m like, ‘[Teddy’s] the one that can tell me to go to West Hollywood!’”<sup>15</sup> Though these attitudes would shift as Sandoval redefined his artistic and social community, these moments are revealing. They elucidate not only the

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<sup>13</sup> Corazon Herida, Flier, [September 15, 1979], The Estate of Teddy Sandoval.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

hostility which mixed raced same-sex couples faced internally but, also, the conditions that infused the very beginnings of the relationship. In this way, “Paul and Teddy” were set apart in the racialized context of East L.A. Chicano art and occupied a paradoxical arrangement by which Polubinskas – a white gay man – confounded Chicano social barriers and artist networks. This is something quite possible given Sandoval’s exceptional position as artist, curator, and renegade. By the late 1970s, Sandoval briefly retreated from the Chicano art scene of shows, parties, and juried exhibitions to concentrate on his relationship with Polubinskas.

In 1982, Sandoval joined a friend in San Francisco who was opening a record store. During his brief hiatus in the Bay Area, Sandoval also explored window display design and merchandise arrangement. However, he persisted with his work in ceramics. It is important to note that, while he did not reach the commercial success among mainstream art museum institutions that other Chicano contemporary artists of his time enjoyed (Gronk, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Patssi Valdez, Roberto Gil de Montes, Carlos Almaraz, and Gil “Magu” Lujan immediately come to mind), he engaged in a medium where he was unsurpassed by any other L.A. Chicano artist of his day: ceramics. As a result, Sandoval was favored by art collectors – Chicano, gay, and mainstream – who were receptive to his postmodern eclectic style and versatile sculptural forms.<sup>16</sup> His forays into pottery, decorative arts, and tile work demonstrate

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<sup>16</sup> This is evident in the predominance of Sandoval ceramic pieces in the exhibition, *East of the River: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous*, Santa Monica Museum of Art, September 15-November 18, 2000. It is worth noting that there was a discernible queer presence in pieces by Miguel Angel Reyes and Roberto Gil de Montes. In turn, this suggested a favorability among Chicano art collectors for more homoerotic and sexually suggestive work. However, Sandoval had some of the only ceramic art pieces in the show, which mainly consisted of two-dimensional works on paper, photographs, and paintings. This indicates the distinguished place for Sandoval within the broader trends of Chicano art collecting. For more see, Chon Noriega, ed. *East of the River: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous*. (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2000).

his creative and artistic capabilities to perhaps better apprehend the barrio sensibility, surrealist fantasy, and homoerotic promise of L.A.'s urban environment in a matter unforeseen by his Chicano and Chicana contemporaries. This unexplored dimension in the Chicano art market culminated in the formation of Artquake, a decorative art design business founded by Sandoval and Polubinskas in 1989. Firing pieces in his kiln at the Highland Park residence he shared with Polubinskas, Sandoval generated an impressive array of commercial art pieces, such as: wall sconces, candlesticks, vases, plate ware, bowls, serving dishes, cups, and commemorative plates. Designing pieces under his own name as well as the Artquake brand, Sandoval had only one solo show at the Wild Blue Gallery on Melrose Avenue in 1989. This is quite surprising given the vast production of his art spanning nearly three decades.

The commercial success of Artquake facilitated his foray into AIDS activism and cultural politics in the area. Sandoval joined the Board of Directors of VIVA, the first gay and lesbian Latino art organization in Los Angeles (1987-2001), and rejoined a familiar contingency of artist-friends and past collaborators, among them: Tony de Carlo, Roberto Gil de Montes, Jef Huereque, Miguel Angel Reyes, Luiz Sampaio, and Joey Terrill. As a result of VIVA's rigorous exhibition schedule and budget restrictions, Sandoval's illustrations, pastels, and pen and ink drawings were a cornerstone of the VIVA Arts Quarterly Journal and were frequently featured in brochures, fliers, and performance art announcements. Sandoval continued to attend Board of Directors meetings even as his AIDS prognosis worsened. In 1995, he passed away at his Highland Park home across the valley overlooking the Southwest Museum. His art station commission had yet to be built and budgetary setbacks

shelved the project indefinitely. Sandoval's dream remained unfulfilled and unmarked on the horizon. Reeling from his lover's death, Polubinskas had dedicated himself to see the project to fruition. It was not until the completion of the Southwest Museum Station nearly ten years later that Polubinskas made the difficult decision to part with his and Teddy's home. Officially closing Sandoval's studio and removing a vast collection of his finished and unfinished pieces, he eventually retired to Palm Springs in 2003.

### *Archive Elicitation*

It is inside the home of Paul Polubinskas in Palm Springs, California where our restoration project begins. Upon entering the house, we confront the queer remains of Teddy Sandoval dwelling within an orchestration of display, containers, and storage compartments organized throughout the perimeter. Three central repositories emerged composing the archival space of the home and, in turn, the grounds housing Sandoval's remains. These object environments include the wall installation of the domestic interior, ceramic closets and cabinets, and the garage storage site. In this section, I carefully examine these spatial arrangements discerning the queer curatorial, custodial, and more importantly, the commemorative practices within these grounds.

To do so, I adapt what I call "archive elicitation," a strategy that models my interpretative strategies as well as the transgressive processing and depositing procedures by Paul Polubinskas. This line of inquiry, which borrows on ethnographic strategies of oral history interviews and life writing, strives to exact the "sexual

agency of the Chicano art collection” in terms of a collection-based interview with the collector-custodian. This research strategy is one familiar in cultural anthropology and visual and material culture analysis, where photo albums or family heirlooms are used as mnemonic prompts during interviews, for instance.

However, the totality of objects under examination, which are diverse in size, type, genre, and medium, expands object-based analysis and implores a greater totality of material, aesthetic, and spatial expressions. As such, “archive elicitation” must allow for variegated archival formations, seizing insights not only from record and provenance but also from spatial and conservationist givens. Guiding my approach through a collector-custodian house tour, I apprehend this alternative archive configuration and in particular, the “archival body’s” place within the mappings of the home. Although “archive elicitation” is not exceptional on its own, its use within the interpretative framework outlined in my interdisciplinary queer archival methodology distills how queer cultural memory survives in the archival practices and conservationist tactics of the custodian. This allows us to distinguish the particularities of this alternative archival formation from the words and practices of the collector-custodian himself.

### *Archival Spatial Analysis I: Walls That Speak*

The walls of the Polubinskas house form the initial grounds of our investigation. Based on his navigation of his personal collection, our tour takes us to four central archival loci spatially organized in the home. They include: master bedroom, hallway corridor, living room, and garage. Whereas some of Sandoval’s

objects occupied the guest bathroom, patio, and office, these objects are not considered at length here, as they do not detail *custodial* meaning and are likely installed for decorative effect. As a result, most of my spatial analysis will account for these primary sites revealed in my tour. This preliminary analysis of the domestic wall space reveals an expansive art collection taking advantage of the home's open, airy mid-century desert architecture, light-filled interiors, and vaulted ceilings.

From the outset, we see that the walls are embellished with mostly traditional two-dimensional pieces including works on paper, acrylic and oil paintings, pastel drawings, and photography (see Figure 6.6). These pieces are not entirely by Sandoval, however. The collection, on par with any other, holds a significant compilation of key Chicano artists, including Carlos Almaraz, Elsa Flores, Roberto Gil de Montes, Gronk, Leo Limon, Miguel Angel Reyes, Joey Terrill and Patssi Valdez. Dynamic as they are legendary, their presence in the home attests to Sandoval's position among this defining cadre of artists. Polubinskas reveals that most of these works were collected in a process of informal trade and exchange, a by-product of Sandoval's relationships. Accordingly, he would often barter with his artist-friends, developing what we might observe as a rich and disciplined chronicle of the Chicano Art Movement. These pieces are interspersed with Polubinskas's latest acquisitions including a growing assembly of Ann Chamberlin paintings (the largest private collection held outside the artist herself), Deni Ponty, Greg Gorman, and a treasured pencil study of a Paul Cadmus male nude.

Although several of Sandoval's prints and paintings are installed throughout the house, few of his ceramics hang on walls or suspended in shadow boxes. This is



in contradistinction to a painted plate by California painter and ceramicist Michale Courney, which occupies a narrow stretch of wall preceding the master bedroom. Sandoval's works are not treated by this display technology, which suggests a different set of considerations in object care. For example, these ceramics are arranged on open tabletops, cabinet surfaces, and inset wall mounts, demonstrating a differential relationship between display, space, and medium. The object organization effected by Polubinskas makes use of the tactile and corporeal nature of ceramic art by creating a domestic space unified, and yet, distinct from the placement of the art lining the wall perimeters and adorning home furnishings. Sandoval's vases, candelabras, and bowls – miniature landmarks punctuating the object environment of the home – are signposts for this archive, enclosed and guarded by a pantheon of Chicano artists from above. As we can observe from the living room setting, large-scale prints and paintings by Almaraz, Gil de Montes, and even Sandoval are individually framed with considerable attention to their look, matting, and location on the wall. The pictures do not overwhelm the perimeter or saturate the white space. The walls are neither overcrowded nor clustered, suggesting Polubinskas's restrained and refined curatorial hand. He hints at a style in his domestic environment that observes post-minimalist characteristics in its gridding, simplicity, and uninterrupted empty space. Hence, the two-dimensional wall display honors the competing exponents of diverse media, styles, and interior design without visual distraction or exhaustive detail.

Despite the preciousness of these ceramics, they are not static within the living environment, shedding additional insight into the “queer afterlife of Teddy

Sandoval.” By this I mean we see his remove from more institutional art networks of consumption, a system that extends the longevity of his art within forums of public display and cultural discourse. Instead, these things are operational with informal mechanisms of male-male custodianship particularly in the context of AIDS, memory, and bereavement. The “mixed-use” condition of ceramics is not unusual in ceramic art studies where utility and function betray these vessels’ legitimate aesthetic and sculptural qualities. This tension also surfaces in Polubinskas’s domestic arena where Sandoval’s plates, cups, and bowls are used for everyday purpose.

In Figure 6.7, we see a hand-painted mug of a homoerotic cholo archetype not resigned to a glass box or exhibited on a pedestal but, rather, carrying hot coffee and resting on the living room table. Following Sandoval’s passing, the cup is a queer remain and distinctive dimension of his oeuvre in queer Chicano decorative art. The limited edition of this piece elevates its status. We can assess that it is non-reproducible and therefore, valuable to the artifactual record of Sandoval’s body of work. However, the cup’s unique function within the walled perimeters of the home-site still permits its use, although under Polubinskas’s custodial protection and inside his repository.

While the barriers inside the home threshold are not unique to a homosexual cultural context – the precious object is not uniquely “gay” – the articulation of “mixed-use” objects in the homosexual male heritage purvey reveals how this artifactual surrogacy creates other mobilizations of the archival body. For instance, following Sandoval’s death in December 1995, and Polubinskas’s relocation to Palm

Springs in 2005, some ceramics were returned by other homosexual men in a posthumous recycling of his art. This included the re-gifting of a pair of Sandoval's candlesticks (see Figure 6.8). These objects were reunified within the custodial setting of the home in a reversal of art exchange. Here a "queer afterlife" for these remains is outside formal systems of art patronage and is reconstituted through the protective domicile of male-male custody. By recognizing the functionality of these objects within the emotive and symbolic relations of homosexual partnering, these men practiced a type of art exchange contrary to familiar art market relations. The "circular migration"<sup>17</sup> of a Sandoval's candlestick makes it less the desirable collectible accruing status and exclusivity, but, instead, a cherished artifact that is part of a broader restorative impulse to reconcile AIDS-related loss with the very space, permitting shelter and most importantly, commemoration. In Polubinskas's home, the candlesticks suggest a memorializing possibility across the ordinary landscape of the living room tabletop. Its restoration within this archival space remedies the physical passing of Sandoval through object substitution. Such archival networks provide a window into a broader understanding of queer commemoration at work between Polubinskas and other homosexual men.

Hence, the permeability of these walls and the multidirectional flows of Sandoval's "queer remains" elucidate alternative uses and purposes for his "archival body." Polubinskas takes care to stress: "This isn't the museum. If you're going to

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<sup>17</sup> I borrow this term from Puerto Rican scholars observations of new migration pattern phenomena, including new economic structure facilitating returns back to the island. Though mine is a material culture adaptation of the term, I do so in an effort to understand Latino migratory flows through not only bodies but also things. For more see Jorge Duhany. "Common Threads or Disparate Agendas? Recent Research on Migration to and From Puerto Rico." *Centro*. 7.1 (1995): 60-77.

live with art then live with it. Don't just look at it. Live with it.”<sup>18</sup> His adage circumvents familiar strategies deployed among private art collectors where luxury objects and opulent relics become symbols of status and wealth. In museum studies criticism, the private art collection in the home-site externalizes wealth and connoisseurial distinction, adorning the home and attesting to the collector's canniness and refinement.

Quite similarly, Polubinskas promotes a collection constituted by careful curatorial choice and artistic friendships. It actually seems that Sandoval's things are bonded to the walls, bounded by the home. The static frame where the remains dwell is seemingly the result of his custodial responsibilities. However, Polubinskas's custodial and curatorial methodology is elastic, allowing some pieces to leave the walled threshold. During our tour, he reveals that some of Sandoval's works are loaned to a close friend who lives nearby in Palm Springs. His friend supplements his own small art collection with Sandoval's pieces, in what appears to be a mutually shared visual and emotive experience by both collectors. This informal art arrangement surpasses the functionality of these pieces as collectibles, permitting an afterlife within a closed circuit of homosexual men. This lending system enables communion with the “archival body,” and a visitation of personal memories. In fact, this study's archival elicitation operation was partly shaped by both men.

Polubinskas extended an invitation to his friend to also look through Sandoval's oeuvre, discovering pieces so rare that they have not been viewed even by Polubinskas in nearly a decade. This art exchange arrangement maximizes the reach

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

of Sandoval not only between collectors but also through a queer commemorative strategy mediated by the temporary custody and display of “queer remains” between homosexual men.

This is quite evident in the guest bedroom. Here we see the classic Sandoval print, “Angel Baby” (1995) on loan to Polubinskas and installed next to the small-sized scale of the watercolor “Angel Baby” from which the silkscreen was based. The print was borrowed from his friend, performing a reconciliatory zone between the artifact placement. The convergence of dual lending art collections suggests how the walls of Polubinskas’s home reflect the informal and unexpected preservation and care for Sandoval’s queer remains. I contend that these pieces are not affixed to the domestic interior but to an alternative archival circuitry shaped by sexual difference and queer cultural memory. It is a shared reciprocity between homosexuals in the indescribable relations of AIDS, loss, and material culture. These alternative mixed-uses yield important insight into the sexual agency of Chicano art dwelling within the home, and how these walls are reinscribed by the temporary staging of this archival exchange.

*Archival Spatial Analysis II: Queer Cabinets of Curiosity*

The queer afterlife of Sandoval’s archival body surpasses the wall interior and also resonates within what I have termed “containers of desire.” By this I mean that the domestic environment of the house setting permits an archival architecture, protecting the visual and material record from deterioration or loss. Polubinskas’s process of depositing Sandoval’s remains illuminates not only the locations where the archive exists but also the specific conservation practices operating here. For

example, Polubinskas leads me to a cabinet in his garage where other Sandoval ceramics are stored. These items are classified for their “non-daily use” and are therefore, withdrawn from sight, contact, and touch. In Figure 6.9, we see each ceramic carefully treated in a cardboard “ante-skin” and labeled only by its title but not its year. This lack of object information does not worry Polubinskas who can recall its history upon first glance. Individually arranged and submerged in an ambiance of plastic sheaths, styrofoam chips, and packing tape sealants, each box reflects his extensive care and management efforts. He tells me, “I do everything I can so they don’t get broken because they’re irreplaceable. If Teddy hadn’t died they could be replaced.”<sup>19</sup> In the way, his procedural and meticulous method is one shaped by AIDS related loss. It is a conservationist practice that comprehends these artifacts within a broader archival methodology to insure the longevity of his memory and the sustained treatment of his things.

Reaching back between the boxes into the dark confines of his cabinet, he retrieves a Sandoval sketchbook of ceramic illustrations with specific notes about glazes, color, and design embellishment. A gay pornographic magazine clipping falls out between the pages revealing source material for his more sexually explicit work. Like an informal archival guide, the booklet grants insights into the queer remains enclosed behind the door of the cabinet and dwelling inside these cardboard cubes. Its enclosure in this archival space unveils another aspect of Polubinskas’s collection management process, reconciling mere storage with an art-archival inventory. This registry is revealed in the practice sketches, insight into his artistic process, and his

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

continuing attention to homoerotic imagery, and the male form in pornography. Polubinskas's method illuminates how sexual difference constituted the classification and ordering in archive storage.

Yet, this secluded environment for the remains within the dark archival chiaroscuro of the garage is quite different from another type of container within the home-site. Based on my archive elicitation activity, Polubinskas excavates a central wood cabinet in his master bedroom where a rarefied arrangement of Sandoval's ceramics is stored (see Figure 6.10). Placed across from his bathroom next to the closet's edge, it is an armoire striking in its size, height, and carved wood construction. In contrast to the modern materials such as the glass found throughout the rest of the home, it is visually distinct. Set against a long flat wall, the cabinet punctuates the wall plane. We find that it is one more object set against a bedroom gallery space adorned with paintings by Elsa Flores and Roberto Gil de Montes, and a photograph of Harris Glenn Milstead (aka Divine) by Greg Gorman, as well as a decorative white mantel ledge displaying a set of five vases from Sandoval's "Atlantis" series. A postmodern nod to fragmentation, deterioration, and archaeology, Sandoval fathomed relics rescued from this mythical civilization. Though it was a commercially disappointing venture for the artist, the series was nonetheless special to Polubinskas.

Upon closer examination of the cabinet, hints of Sandoval's art appear through the glass windows perforating the belly of the chest. The field of light reveals the exceptional qualities of these pieces. Unlike those objects openly displayed throughout the rest of the home, for some reason these pieces are sheltered

differently, perhaps for their distinct and precious qualities. Opening the cabinet, we see three rows of glass shelves cradling Sandoval vases, vessels, and framed works on paper. According to Figure 6.11, the pieces are symmetrically organized along the plate. Each object is given individual place within the repertoire of mementos and keepsakes. This container unit represents objects of a deeply personal nature that more fully records an intimate liaison with the collector-custodian. After all, the cabinet's location within Polubinskas's bedroom perimeter suggests that it, too, is a private place where internal retreat, dreams, desires, and fantasies reside.

This affective assignment is evident in the two drawings arranged in the cabinet installation. Polubinskas draws my attention to a work on paper displayed in a gilded ornate frame. The untitled pencil study shows the nude buttocks of two men in jock straps. The repetitious lines of the straps entangle their hips and waists conveying symmetrical relations between the figures. Pairing their legs and thighs in a mirrored composition, the couplet is perfectly in unison. Attending to the piece, Polubinskas relays that the sketch is the first illustration Sandoval ever made of the both of them. Its placement within the cabinet suggests its documentary function as a deeply personal record of their relationship.

Located just beneath this image on the lower level of the cabinet cavity, Polubinskas points to the other framed illustration. Taken from a series of Christmas greeting cards produced by a VIVA: Gay and Lesbian Latino Artists of Los Angeles holiday fundraiser in the early 1990s, the hand-colored black ink drawing shows the backsides of two women similarly paired in black fishnet stockings, matching garter belts, and heels. The framed pictures create a complementary pairing between two



oppositional images. Polubinskas's installation underlines Sandoval's contradictory but related preoccupation with the jock strap's hypermasculine celebration of male buttocks, and the garter belt's hyperfeminine exploration of erotic self-fashioning and the female form. Historically, such artistic expression shaped the foundations for Sandoval's iconography, which persisted throughout his career, entering the designs and glazes of his decorative arts. Much like the jock strap guerrilla street art from his youth, this provocative visual lexicon inscribed ordinary domestic furnishings with depictions of homoeroticism and underwear fetishism. This inclusion of framed works on paper within the cabinet of queer curiosity explains Teddy's aesthetic preoccupation and artistic evolution. These materials archive his participation within Latino AIDS activism and art production, as well, and therefore indicates an important dimension of his biography.

Interspersed throughout the case, we see six Sandoval ceramic forms and one delicate martini glass, re-stocked from the kitchen for fear of damage or mishandling. The vessels are secured with an anti-shock earthquake applique, a preventive measure that has fortunately spared his collection from possible destruction. In fact, Polubinskas even boasts that just one piece in Sandoval's studio was lost during the Northridge Earthquake in 1994. His self-confidence is such that he even places an exquisite Sandoval heart-shaped ceramic at the top tier of the display case.

Bathed in a cerulean speckle glaze, the vessel rests on its side conveying a dreamlike quality in the form. This lucid, aesthetic experimentation in Sandoval's ceramic and two-dimensional work makes materially manifest buoyancy, fluidity, drifting, and dissolve. The twisted rotation conveys an object in restful repose. But

like human subjects, even Sandoval's ceramics must withdraw. Perpendicular to the base, the piece is topped with a flaming crown signifying the sacred heart of Jesus Christ in Catholic art, burning with eternal love for all of humanity. Given Sandoval's private battle with AIDS, the piece manifests a divine expression within the context of his own mortality. For it is no ordinary heart-shaped vessel but rather, a personal allegory for compassion, altruism, and sacrifice. The flames construct a small lid sealing the narrow cavern of the ceramic body. Too shallow to be a vase and too delicate for daily use, this heart is situated in the aesthetic, as opposed to the functional, realm.

However, with this in mind, Polubinskas reconciled art and function in his appropriation of the piece. Revealing that the heart ceramic was a temporary urn for Sandoval's ashes, he carried the vessel with him to the Huntington Library in Pasadena and to a friend's home in San Francisco. Undertaking Sandoval's final wishes, Polubinskas took custody of his ashes spreading his physical remains across cultural landscapes of deep personal significance. This commemorative process occurred through his appropriation of the container. His remains enclosed in the shell of one of his own art pieces incorporated the corporeal with the artifactual. In this way, the heart ceramic's location within the arrangement of Sandoval decorative art pieces literally places his physical body within the constellation of things kept in private repose. The cabinet-container is not merely a display of precious Sandoval collectibles but rather a memorial where his body lies. It is this embedding of body, ceramic, personal memory, and AIDS that complicates how we see and experience this display case, particularly within Polubinskas's commemorative procedures.

Broadly speaking, this staging creates a convoy with his remains spatially distributed and thus, capable of performing sacred and intimate experiences for the heritage purveyor. The interface between body and archive resurfaces in the public art installation of the Southwest Museum Station, a site that memorializes Sandoval through the completion of his artistic vision and the surrogacy and adoption of his objects.

### *Creating an Urban Landmark for Highland Park*

Sandoval's commission for the Southwest Museum Station was no easy task. In 1993, the Metro ART program selection panel fielded a shortlist of five candidates from a registry of 800 possible contenders. They sought candidates knowledgeable of public art, capable of designing within certain strictures of aerial structures, alignment features, and most importantly, a familiarity with team projects. After all, the commissioned artist would necessarily collaborate with several stakeholders, including the City of Los Angeles, the architectural design firm, structural engineers, community leaders, local residents, and the Southwest Museum administration. Sandoval's profile was persuasive in light of his aesthetic versatility, his established design business located nearby, and his long-term residency in the Highland Park area.

However, Sandoval's commission was contingent upon attaining grassroots community support for the initial public art concept. According to Polubinskas, Sandoval attended exhaustive hearings organized by the MTA where he convincingly explained his artistic vision and lobbied local business owners. Relying solely on sketches, he allowed his vision to speak for itself. By maximizing the skillful quality

of the ceramic medium, he introduced community members to his visual daring and innovation. Sandoval engaged viewers unveiling a peacock candlestick appended to an ionic Greek column base (see Figure 6.12). People were excited by what this contemporary urban landmark would mean for the look and image of the neighborhood. That is, the public art commission stood to dispel, in part, the area's connotation with gang violence, and in turn, spur tourism at its cultural heritage resources. For Sandoval, the piece had all the potential to become the "Watts Towers" of Highland Park by creating a distinct visual and spatial experience unlike any other neighborhood in L.A.

The Watts Towers or "Nuestra Pueblo"<sup>20</sup> (its original name), constructed in 1921 by Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant and tile worker, was a modernist interpretation of the city (see Figure 6.13). Built on a triangular lot in downtown Los Angeles, this handmade art piece comprised of seven towers narrowly escaped demolition and ruin at the hands of urban renewal projects in the 1950s. Sold by Rodia to his Mexican neighbor in 1954, this steel and concrete public art sculpture of found materials, crushed glass, shell, and tile became imbued with new meaning after the Watts Rebellion in 1965, a race riot propelled by social, cultural and economic impoverishment and police violence. In "Picturing the Watts Towers: The Art and Politics of an Urban Landmark," Sarah Schrank argues that "The Watts rebellion forever changed national perceptions of American urban race relations, dulled Los Angeles's sunshine image, and reoriented how Rodia's creation would be publicly

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<sup>20</sup> Sarah Schrank. "Picturing the Watts Towers: The Art and Politics of an Urban Landmark." In *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, eds. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein and Ilene Susan Fort, 372-386 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; University of California Press, 2000), 373.

represented: The Watts Towers now emerged as a symbol of the black community.”<sup>21</sup>

As Schrank further elucidates, photography, film and even commercial advertisements discursively reconstituted associations between Rodia’s modernist sculpture, Black L.A. history, and cultural identity. Sandoval sought a similar end attempting to consolidate his postmodern ceramic forms with Highland Park’s largely Mexican and immigrant communities.

Aesthetically speaking both public art pieces could not be more dissimilar; they do, however, symbolically redefine and monumentalize parts of urban ethnic Los Angeles through sculptural (Rodia) and ceramic (Sandoval) elements. For Sandoval this installation was his opportunity to alter the cultural landscape, and restore a distinctive place history for Highland Park, an area overshadowed by nearby Pasadena and Mount Washington. This intermediary valley where the Arroyo Seco River once flourished shares varied ethnic, labor, and design histories. In particular, it is home to the Southwest Museum, the oldest museum in Los Angeles. Founded by archaeologist Charles Lummis in 1907, the collection of mostly Native American artifacts was moved to its Spanish Revival style building in Highland Park in 1914,<sup>22</sup> but in the years following Sandoval’s commission in 1993, financial mismanagement, low attendance, and structural damage threatened to close its doors.<sup>23</sup> These conditions worsened over the duration of the Gold Line project.

Just two years into the planning concept and design process for the Southwest Museum Station public art installation, Sandoval’s health declined. Before his death,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 379.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Reynolds, “Southwest Museum’s Future at Heart of Tussle,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2006, E6.

<sup>23</sup> James Sterngold, “New Travails for a Struggling California Museum,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 2002, 28.

Sandoval signed over power of attorney, property of his estate, and the copyright of all his images and trademarks to Polubinskas. This arrangement insured the integrity and protection of his assets including any and all uses of his art. In part, this legal maneuver was a direct result of the archival violence that affected their friends Jef Huereque and Mundo Meza just one decade prior.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the queer remains of Teddy Sandoval would find asylum and preservation in the care of his lover and not his family. This had powerful ramifications for the City of Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Due to the contractual obligations with Sandoval and the conservatorship of the estate, Polubinskas assumed the legal right to oversee the production of Sandoval's station design and execute details of its construction, scale, and aesthetic.

#### *Guardian Tops/Column Bottoms*

The resulting public art installation is a history of place, visually historicizing the competing pasts of an area with a rich Latino and Native American cultural identity, heritage sites, and significant architectural facades. For visitors departing the train they are overcome by three towering winged figures set atop white neo-classical Greek columns on tile bases. These “gate guardians” of the neighborhood triangulate the space surrounding the Gold Line station creating a directional frame (see Figure 6.14). Each guardian points visitors to nearby and distant locations connected by the Gold Line railway: Pasadena, Union Station in Downtown L.A., and to the Southwest Museum looming just overhead in a Spanish colonial revival tower

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

on Mount Washington. The frame guides visitors and local commuters to their intended destinations. The enormity of the columns and towering guardians visually orchestrates a spatial and historical encounter between people, places, and aesthetic styles. Plotting three points of distinct localities, Sandoval's columns and guardians organize multiple geographic and historic relations in Highland Park, Pasadena, and Mt. Washington.

Adapting a postmodern fragmentation of patterns and motifs, the “guardians of the gateway” are anthropomorphic mosaic figures. Perched above passing commuters in crowns and wings made of steel, their sculptural human arms outstretch from ceramic torsos suggesting the object's personification (see Figure 6.15). They are not inanimate and static decorative art pieces but rather actors assuming a powerful role on the column pedestal. Within the museum environment, this display technology lends authenticity and credibility to the artifact, indeed setting the object apart for its art-historical and cultural value and significance. This self-reflexive commentary is only amplified when we situate the guardians within the vicissitudes of the Southwest Museum's cultural landscape. The ionic capital, a familiar architectural referent in museum architecture is appropriated in the installation to display and buttress the work of a Chicano artist. Might these animated Chicano art figures symbolically conquer or succeed the museum as the new keepers of local culture and place identity?

For example, the guardians' bodies illustrate the formal influence and significance of Victorian architecture, an embellishment familiar throughout Sandoval's design. They share similar scrolling curvature motifs on the crown,

wings, and the mosaic tile. In Figure 6.16, this is further seen in the station's canopy composed of Victorian-inspired ironwork lining the platform and aluminum cast fern armchairs, objects purchased from the Smithsonian's Victorian garden collection. On the platform, the chairs are quarter turned to preclude vagrant loitering especially overnight (see Figure 6.17), creating an estranging experience for the commuter. The inspiration for Victorian-inspired forms in the art installation cites the nearby Heritage Square Museum.

Founded in 1969 by the L.A. Cultural Heritage Board, Heritage Square Museum in Montecito Heights is a collection of eight restored Queen Anne and Mansard style homes that were removed from Downtown L.A. in the late 1960s (see Figure 6.18). Preserved and restored by the L.A. historic preservation organizations as a living history museum, Heritage Square anchored Sandoval's vision of the neighborhood.<sup>25</sup> His deployment of Victorian architectural elements and decorative arts visually represents the significance of this history for Highland Park and its residents. This rearrangement of form is further demonstrated in Sandoval's use of tile painting.

Each column base contains a set of tile paintings showcasing representations of local historic landmarks. The bases themselves are a mixture of geometric forms suggesting Sandoval's play with shape. One base is triangulated and the other is rectilinear, yet they depict a regional mountainous landscape, a Native American textile design, a flaming heart and dice aimlessly floating beneath a watchful crescent moon, and a painting of the Los Angeles Police Historical Society Museum (see Figure 6.19). The base displays make direct connections to the cultural heritage

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<sup>25</sup> Alan Nakagawa. Personal communication to author, Washington, D.C., 6 April 2007.



resources, historic sites, and monuments that articulate the area's "Museums of the Arroyo" which include: the Southwest Museum, Heritage Square Museum, the Lummis Home, and the Pasadena Museum of History.

This is a process of archival documentation. In one image, Sandoval replicates a Native American textile pattern, which frames two young Native American men canoeing. This image is a nod to not only the Southwest Museum but also Sandoval's recognition of the regional native people, the Gabrielino Tribe. According to Polubinskas, the studies for these images were not completed before Sandoval's death. As a result, he was given full access to the Southwest Museum permanent collection and archive to use any piece for the installation. Like a curator, Polubinskas discerned textiles and photographic images of the tribes that originally settled in Arroyo Seco. He explains, "They let me loose in the basement and with no restrictions! I spent weeks in the basement and they were gracious and caring and concerned. I don't even remember their names. The director said show him anything he wants. In the basement there were thousands upon thousands of Indian artifacts. I photographed and I used images of family life from 100 years ago. When you see canoes and huts it was how indigenous people lived in the area."<sup>26</sup> This creative reuse of archival materials embedded the museum's material record within the display of Highland Park's ethnic heritage. This was pivotal to Polubinskas because Sandoval had developed a close personal relationship with the chief. So much so that she was able to influence and change his initial design concept to embed submerged heads within the station's platform. By recalling documents from the Southwest

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

Museum Station's collection, Polubinskas sought to not only commemorate the museum's importance to the area but also recognize the role of indigenous culture, identity, and history in Los Angeles.

Whereas the influence of Victorian architecture directly indexed the built environment in Highland Park, the presence of tile painting represents an additional consideration of content (elements of L.A. museum culture) and form (ceramics and tilework). Again, it is curious that Sandoval depicted museums and landmarks on the tile surfaces at the base of his ionic columns. This hints at the way these bases of local history become the basis for the guardians posturing as keepers of the past. Sandoval's vaulted figures reveal a neighborhood identity in the images beneath their feet. However, his conscientious use of tile surfaces illuminates another important stylistic reference point in addition to Victorian inflected design. Tile production, in particular, shares a nuanced relationship with Pasadena.

In 1909, Ernest Batchelder, arguably the father of American tile craft and design in Southern California, left the Summer School at the Handicraft Guild of Minneapolis and moved to Pasadena. Establishing a two-story bungalow on Arroyo Drive, his tile works production company operated, at first, out of a single kiln in his backyard<sup>27</sup> and later in business partnership with Lucian Wilson, out of a factory in downtown L.A. in 1920.<sup>28</sup> Introducing decorative and sculptural tiles of Dutch life, Italian and Byzantine patterns, Art Deco, and even Pre-Columbian Mayan art, Batchelder defined tile works introducing new methods to treat, mold, and glaze clay. In 1925, he received a commission to design the lobby for the Fine Arts Building in

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Winter. *Batchelder: Tilemaker*. (Balcony Press: Los Angeles, 1999), 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

Downtown L.A. While much of his inspiration drew upon the Spanish Renaissance, he included a number of custom made pieces for the installation including several large female guardians kneeling atop columns overlooking the lobby. Each woman represented an allegory for the arts.<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that there is a direct parallel between Sandoval's guardians and the female sculptures in Batchelder's Fine Arts Building, but it is worth considering the significance of Pasadena tile art in the formal elements of the Southwest Museum art installation.

As stated earlier, Sandoval's selection for the public art commission was largely due, in part, to his artistic versatility and ceramic art innovation. Much like Batchelder, Sandoval also operated his own kiln out of his basement studio in Highland Park. While he and Polubinskas produced commercially viable ceramics under the Artquake company brand, his kiln was also popular among Chicano artists (mostly painters) experimenting with the medium and glaze techniques. For instance, former Los Four art collective member, Gilbert "Magu" Lujan consulted Sandoval using his kiln to generate pieces for an art exhibit. While in residence at the Artquake studio he even molded and cast a giant erect penis for couple's backyard garden, a token of friendship and appreciation. Similarly, artist Roberto Gil de Montes also worked closely under Sandoval's mentorship producing several three-dimensional tiles for another MTA public art commission at the gateway transit center's Paseo Cesar Chavez fountains in Downtown L.A.<sup>30</sup> Although Sandoval is not credited with his advisory role in this public art piece, it demonstrates how the Sandoval kiln in Highland Park was regarded as a major epicenter for Chicano art ceramic production

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

in much the same way Batchelder was able to promote ceramic craft in the area decades before. This is not to conflate Sandoval with a defining Arts and Crafts figure such as Batchelder, although according to Polubinskas, Sandoval was familiar with his work. It does suggest, however, how Sandoval reconstituted Highland Park as a center for ceramic design and tile construction among Chicano artists. This aesthetic and art-historical citation may have been clearer had the MTA approved an early Sandoval proposal to include a wall of tiles painted by area school children and retirement communities. The predominant uses of tile itself in Sandoval's art installation suggest a historical recalling of Batchelder as both a Pasadena-based artist but more importantly, the role in the Arts and Crafts Movement in Southern California. This is further indicated in Sandoval's tile painting of the Lummis House representing Southwest Museum founder Charles Lummis's stunning river rock home, an important architectural exemplar of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic. Sandoval's remaining tile canvases therefore not only visually portray landmarks and museums along the Arroyo River but implicitly consider these monumental spaces' interconnections to the natural architecture in the urban environment.

This is conveyed in the visual referents to water in the piece. Though the above station platform canopy is lined with Victorian-inspired black iron, sections of the lower railing alternate between normative linear bars and those that are curved in wave-like motion. This iconography is more clearly observed on the platform itself. Constructed out of crushed blue pebble aggregate, the station floor design imitates a raging river in which the seating area itself is submerged in the flow of the stream. With the Victorian fern leaf arm chairs partially turned, perhaps due to the force of

the current, embedded dice and Ionic column capitals surface from the aggregate, creating the illusion of objects breaking the rushing motion of the brook (see Figure 6.20).

Early sketches for the platform confirm the artist's intent to represent the flooding of the Arroyo River. In his early pencil study, he rearranged the fern leaf chair placing it next to a pair of buoyant dice and one river rock boulder (see Figure 6.21). Distantly, two column capitals stand in the right foreground of the illustration outside Sandoval's initial seating arrangement nearly swallowed whole by the flooded riverbed. The Southwest Museum Station art installation represents the local area in not only its built environments, architectural, and aesthetic forms, but also in its natural resources. While fluidity and buoyancy are expressions Sandoval often explored in his ceramic work, his investigation of dice iconography suggests something quite different.

Throughout Sandoval's "gateway to Highland Park," dice function as the base for one of the guardian columns, seating for the station, and symbols in one of the tile paintings. It is a distinct aspect of his visual lexicon conveying chance, luck, and risk. For the public art piece this suggests the serendipity of life. By this, I mean, the dice signify the random and unpredictable qualities of the human condition. This has profound implications in the installation, perhaps implying the haphazard and unpredictability of the past. Are the artifacts and heritage sites we find and recall American historical landmarks just the arbitrary luck of the draw?

Though this is one possible reading, the dice also signify differently within the context of his AIDS diagnosis and the posthumous completion of the piece. In this

way, risk and chance connote the arbitrary nature of HIV transmission. No matter how cautious one might be, any anonymous or spontaneous sexual encounter is a gamble. The dice become an allegory for his mortality and articulate an AIDS visual strategy to represent and explain the disease. In this way, the art piece situates itself closer to Sandoval's personal narrative. It is an alternative means of documenting AIDS within the material arrangement of his archival body.

For this reason, it was perhaps shocking that Polubinskas was embroiled in controversy with the Southwest Museum's administration. Complaints and outcries from the Native American communities condemned the use of dice in the station for its symbolic connotation with gambling casinos. This struck a nerve with the museum, which also happened to be in financial negotiations with the Pechanga Band of the Luiseno Indians. The deal would have built a Southwest Museum gallery at the Pechanga casino in San Diego bringing hundreds of thousands of dollars to the maintenance of the museum building in Highland Park.<sup>31</sup> However, the alteration of Sandoval's design was unacceptable to Polubinskas. To do so would not only alter the integrity of the original design but also compromise Sandoval's vision and concept. By citing the historic use of the dice iconography in Sandoval's oeuvre over three decades, Polubinskas deflected these racially hostile accusations. Fortunately, community members, business leaders, and Native American activists defended the dice pieces. It was an important reflection of not only Sandoval's art but also the way he endeared himself to key figures in this debate before his death. Eventually, Polubinskas acquiesced and offered to include a disclaimer at the station further

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<sup>31</sup> James Sterngold, "Museum Joins With Tribe to Expand Exhibits," *The New York Times*, May 16, 2002, 20.

contextualizing the dice within Sandoval's artistic strategies, one that had nothing to do with casino money in Native American culture. The Southwest Museum dropped its formal complaint. Polubinskas was free to fulfill Sandoval's installation as he wished.

### *AIDS and the Counter Memorial*

As a result, this striking urban landmark reconciled local histories, museum culture, and the multiple ethnic histories of Highland Park while also commemorating Sandoval within the piece itself. Assuming the role of curator and heritage purveyor, Polubinskas sifted through an archive of Sandoval paintings, which included the reproduction of two images for the tile boxes. For Polubinskas, this was an opportunity to exemplify and exhibit artistic accomplishment in the neighborhood. How better to represent the rich production of painting, sculpture, and ceramics in the area than through the display of his lover's art?

Located on the base of one of the gateway guardian columns, we see the untitled painting in Figure 6.22 depicting an open sea beneath a night sky. High in the upper left hand side of the visual plane, a crescent moon overlooks two dice and a flaming sacred heart wades in the still surface of the sea. The painting discloses Sandoval's private negotiation with his health. The disembodied eye suggests a surveillance that is always at work watching, observing, and seeing. Though it is difficult to ascertain if it is a malevolent eye, this visuality would have important meaning for the AIDS crisis where government ineptitude, religious judgment, and medical examination constituted an ocular regime inspecting diseased homosexual

bodies wasted by disease. This is further conveyed in the dice floating in the sea, somehow allegorizing the gamble of homosexual sex, personal risk, and erotic anonymity. In the right foreground, we see Sandoval's insertion of heart imagery, by now a familiar expression in his ceramic work. Although I have considered this icon within the Catholic art tradition, it is important to consider its re-signification within AIDS cultural activism and self-expression.

For example a similar work on paper entitled "Passion" by Sandoval was used on the cover of the VIVA organization's arts quarterly journal in 1995 (see Figure 6.23). As I explain more fully in Chapter 7, VIVA garnered awards and public recognition for its groundbreaking AIDS educational programming ushering visibility for homosexual Chicano and Latino artists living with AIDS. Sandoval's work visually represented and cohered a particular artist experience with the disease, reflecting on spirituality, desire, and human mortality. In "Passion" we can see a familiar artistic strategy: that of adapting a sacred heart wrapped in a crown of thorns and roses, bobbing beneath a watchful moon, and a disembodied eye bearing witness among the stars. This pictorial strategy connects Sandoval's AIDS visual language with the art station tile painting and, thus, enfolds his signature iconography within the broader Latino AIDS visual culture in L.A. at the time.

This has profound implications when we consider the hand of the curator, Paul Polubinskas. The selection and reproduction of the Sandoval painting followed the artist's death. It was not in the original design plan and as a result, it must have been an exponent of Polubinskas's own curatorial decision-making. Hence, the heart icon serves a commemorating function, as the flaming heart object also became the



container and urn for Sandoval's physical body. The sacred heart's reproduction in the public art installation cites this association and, in turn, implants Sandoval himself within the piece. Polubinskas was sure to stress that the Southwest Museum Station was not to be a frozen monument, and that it would, instead, commemorate his life, work, and cultural memory.<sup>32</sup> By resisting this type of public art construction, he, in fact, broadens the memorializing possibilities of this installation searching for other opportunities to remember Sandoval beyond the finite resolve and hero worship of the monument genre. Thus, it recalls that the AIDS crisis was (and remains) an ongoing battle for visibility and, henceforth, has the "tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate."<sup>33</sup>

The station itself performs the archival body of Sandoval countering a fixed memorializing process whereby Sandoval is recalled merely to be forgotten.

Polubinskas's resulting counter-memorial strategy expands the AIDS memorial lexicon beyond the granite confines of the Las Memorias-AIDS wall in honor of the Latino AIDS experience in Lincoln Park<sup>34</sup> or the racial and class implications of the

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Polubinskas. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 13 May 2011. Palm Springs, California.

<sup>33</sup> James E. Young. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 96.

<sup>34</sup> The Wall-Las Memorias is a circular sculpture including six murals, two granite walls, and name etchings of 2,000 Latinas/os who have passed away from the disease. During fundraising efforts, it was said to be the "only memorial of its kind dedicated to Latino/a victims of AIDS" (A-5). The memorial opened in 2004 after a ten-year campaign for public funding. It is worth noting that it took both Las Memorias and the Southwest Museum Station the same length of time to be completed. Both public art installations opened within the span of a year from each other and yet, the Southwest Museum Station is not regarded within the AIDS memorial and public artworks in the city. This omission is an important one and must be explored further. For more information see: Harry McCann, "The Wall/Las Memorias Builds Momentum," clipping from *Update: Southern California's Gay & Lesbian Newspaper*, [February 9, 1994], A-5 (Box 2, Folder 22), The Fire of Life: Cyclona Collection, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Library.

famed Names Program's National AIDS Quilt on the National Mall.<sup>35</sup> By embedding and rearticulating Sandoval's distinct visual metaphors regarding the disease, the site itself re-affirms his image archive among the documents and records of heritage and museum culture in Highland Park. Circumventing any grave demarcation, Polubinskas presents the public with traces of his own memory floating and submerged within Sandoval's metaphorical sea of movement, ruin, change, and sexual risk. This allows for a different rendering of AIDS memorialization where the fluidity and dissolve of the structure resists didactic and literal public transcriptions of AIDS concretized in monument structures. In the Southwest Museum Station there would be no AIDS ribbon or engraved name to read, enunciate, or associate with this cultural trauma. Instead, the Highland Park neighborhood as an archival space would become the opening or gateway to a wondrous and fantastical experience shaped by queer remains--Sandoval ceramics and paintings reproduced at life-size scale. This enveloping interaction with his archival body surpasses the stationary designs of AIDS memorials and touches the MTA gold line traveler through the deposits of Sandoval's melting dice and flaming heart--his *corazon herida*. Much as the sacred heart urn was kept in the sanctity of the bedroom cabinetry only to reach Polubinskas, the Southwest Museum Station replicated objects exteriorizing Sandoval's body, art, and disease touching an unknowing commuter public.

An extension of the ceramic arrangements and conservationist strategies in Polubinskas's house, the Southwest Museum Station became another archival space. It is a repository where Sandoval's archival body is found in an *mélange* of personal

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<sup>35</sup> For more on this point see, Marita Sturken. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

memories, artistic expressions, and commemorative possibilities plotted onto the urban landscape, changing the neighborhood's image, and geographic identity. This counter-memorial work asks us to understand how AIDS engendered artistic alternatives for one to keep, conserve, and protect the archive and the unusual spaces where queer remains are deposited and found. As my findings suggest, alternative archive configurations can even emerge within the cultural geography of the barrio neighborhood. This archive spatialization figures more predominantly in my next excavation. Here I will discuss the queer place-making strategies and museum imaginings of VIVA: Gay and Lesbian Latino Artists of Los Angeles.

## Chapter 7: VIVA: Gay and Lesbian Artists of Los Angeles

### *Museo VIVA: Queer Geographies of Chicano Art in Los Angeles*

Perhaps no other post-World War II American Art movement has been more affected by its urban surroundings than Chicana/o art in Los Angeles. Influenced by the revolutionary impulses of the Mexican Mural Movement in the U.S., and the Taller Grafica Popular founded by Mexican printmaker Jose Guadalupe Posada in the 1930s, Chicano art was intimately defined by its political sensibility, public display, and in particular, its spatialization. From community murals lining East Los Angeles thoroughfares to the graffiti placas inscribing everyday life on streetscapes, the coterminous relationship between Chicano visual culture and place is undeniable. The mural as art and artifact captures a barrio sensibility, or what Raul Villa calls “barriology” typifying an empowering sense of Chicano place.<sup>1</sup>

It is surprising how muralism – a quintessential Mexican American artistic expression – has captured the imaginations of Chicano art historians, urban planners, and cultural geographers alike. According to Villa, the mural signifies the creative mode of self-preservation and self-representation resisting social stigma, cultural amnesia, criminalization, and the police-state. Symbolically, Chicano muralism demarcates the physical boundaries of Villa’s barrio project and in turn, concretizes a

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<sup>1</sup> Raul Homero Villa. *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 6.

dispossessed and displaced people with a sense of place.<sup>2</sup> Without question, the spatial utility of the mural is an explicit dimension of Chicano art and yet, little attention has been paid to its geographic orientation of art and sexuality. Though the Chicano mural comes to define the physical boundaries of barrio neighborhood formations, competing artistic modes from Chicana feminists, lesbians, and, in particular, homosexual men were “un-placed” within this repertoire.<sup>3</sup> My argument is not to suggest that all Chicana/o murals were confined to the barrio perimeters of, say, East Los Angeles. This is just untrue. Yet, the mural’s symbolic constitution of “geographical identity” consolidates race, geography, and visual culture with little consideration of gender and sexual difference in this ethnic enclave.<sup>4</sup>

The heteropatriarchal predisposition in the study of both Chicano art criticism and Chicano urbanism crudely perpetuates ocular and spatial regimes privileging the perspectival eye of the disembodied cartographer and Chicano muralist. This unusual pairing undergirds my study. I intend to present cultural geography and urban planning in tandem with Chicano art, exhibition history, and museum culture in Los Angeles. This paper enfolds these seemingly disparate areas. By analyzing its spatial occupancy, I want to understand Chicano art not solely as an aesthetic object but as a migratory and commuting record. I attend to this productive tension, bringing the

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<sup>2</sup> As I stated earlier in Chapter 2, I am referencing the deterritorialization of Chicanos or Mexican Americans in the Southwest as a result of war, land squatting, and land grants and treaties invalidated following the Mexican-American War in 1846 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. For Raul Villa these moments of dispossession plague the Mexican American experience with the dislocation and demolition of barrio neighborhoods in Los Angeles in the 1930s. This is what he calls “barrioization” the reciprocal dialectic of “barriology” precipitating acts of resistance and cultural survival.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Mexican muralism and its presence and function in the United States, see Anna Indych-Lopez, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). For an excellent overview of the Chicano mural movement see Guisela Latorre. *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Villa, 5.

cityscape into relationship with the politics of display, installation, and the racial and sexual politics of place-making. These interrelationships allow us to consider a more ambitious interdisciplinary project at work here: queer geographies for Chicano art in the urban landscape of Los Angeles.

Inserting sexuality and desire as primary modes of analysis, I ascertain the queer places of Chicano art beyond the paradigmatic “straight,” linear, and appropriate lines of East Los Angeles in what we can grasp as an alternative archival formation. By this I mean the cityscape itself becomes a “mammoth” artifact – a public record constituted by the built environment. From this cartographic perspective it is possible to “countermap” this art into the urban landscape and restore a resistant exhibition history through the curatorial practices and art displays of *VIVA: Gay and Lesbian Latino Artists of Los Angeles*. This cartography reflects an unusual repository or what I term “archival space,” one generated by the dwelling and housing of object arrangements in the cultural landscape: a queer archive spatially attributed and, thus, outside the Chicano art and heritage circuits in the East Los Angeles barrios.

Up to this point, I have focused on excavating and reconstructing the individual “archival bodies” of Chicano artists; my attention to a formal art collective is an important one. After all, as I will elucidate later, artists such as Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, Joey Terrill, Teddy Sandoval, and Jef Huereque, among others realigned within this visual arts circle, an unsurprising maneuver given that these artists had previously collaborated in Chicano art movement networks, salons, art spaces, and gay bars just decades prior. Founded by Guatemalan gay community

activist Roland Palencia in 1987, VIVA thrived, becoming the first formal gay and lesbian Latina/o art organization in the city. Yet, little is known about its vastly ambitious exhibition schedule, curatorial methods, and collaborations with mainstream museums, commercial art galleries, and alternative art spaces throughout the city. This is particularly profound given the organization's founding within the volatile fear, paranoia, and stigma of the AIDS crisis. All things aside, the restoration of this archive spatially presents a competing narrative troubling the stratified polarities, which separate Chicano art and mainstream art museum relations in L.A. In fact, although earlier studies of Chicano museum culture have vilified these storehouses as ideological apparatuses for the state-elite, I argue that the museum instead became the imaginary site for a geographical identity, queered in its deviation from familiar Chicano art exhibition trends and art spaces such as Self-Help Graphics, Goetz Gallery, Mechicano Art Gallery, or the broader corridors of the barrio environment.

In what I term “museumsclaping,” VIVA generated new racially and sexually inscribed spatial relations through transgressive designs, displays, and hangs within the urban landscape. Beyond the traditional architecture of the museum building, this art collective reused and readapted the “museum idea” for its own community empowering ends. Though temporary and fleeting, VIVA's art exhibits participated in neighborhoods outside the barrio's proximity, demonstrating a profound counter-mapping to the insider/outsider binary in Chicano art-museum institution relations. When one differentiates queer geographies for Chicano art, one can distinguish how VIVA concretized a recognizable spatial identity through museum-

enacted place. In part, my introduction of “archival space” expands the very definition of “barrio urbanism” and reveals how museum-making cultivated a recognizable image and spatial identity for VIVA and gay and lesbian Latinas/os in Los Angeles, in general. My analysis details significant curatorial trends, exhibition approaches, and spatial practices that elucidate how these installations produced a legible “gay and lesbian Chicano art,” and defied the devastation of AIDS, while establishing a museum-going public beyond East Los Angeles.

This chapter principally excavates these neglected artistic and spatial productions beneath the city surface through an interdisciplinary archival methodology. That is, I attempt to reconcile voids and restore VIVA exhibition history through a countermapping document plotted with markers of cultural programs and art shows, the product of which visually renders the “Museo VIVA.” Rather than complete an exhaustive chronicle of exhibition history in the catalogue raisonné tradition in art history, my interest in the cartographic yielded other critical insights from the urban landscape as an archive unto itself.<sup>5</sup> Using digital GIS mapping technology vis-à-vis Google.com, I visually designate VIVA cultural activities throughout the cityscape and restore the impermanent and temporary conditions of Chicano art placement and installation. Admittedly, the following exhibition history is by no means complete; it does, however, propose a broader cartographic consideration of VIVA art programming, however. Despite my best efforts, the organization’s exhibition schedule was extensive and some less regarded

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<sup>5</sup> Here I am inspired by the early writings of cultural geographer Peirce Lewis. For more see: Peirce Lewis, “Common Landscapes as Historic Documents,” In *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*. Eds. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 115.



VIVA events may not be included here. This will, I hope, spur the next scholar to retrace my archival footprints, reinterpret the records, and recover those more obscure happenings remaining in the repertoire.<sup>6 7</sup>

*Under House Arrest: Chicana/o Art Inside/Outside the Museum*

From Chicana feminist philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa's first footsteps into the Denver Museum of Natural History, she is confounded by rage, furor, and disorientation. Upon encountering "Aztec: The World of Moctezuma" exhibition, her private pilgrimage is stopped short when she is unable to get past the abhorrent view of Pre-Columbian artifacts on display, torn from their sacred spiritual tradition and cultural practice. This is particularly palpable when she confronts the tourist experiences of the show. She remembers, "Around me I hear the censorious, culturally ignorant words of the Whites who, while horrified by the bloodthirsty Aztecs, gape in vicarious wonder and voraciously consume the exoticized images. Though I too am a gaping consumer, I feel that these artworks are part of my legacy –

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<sup>6</sup> The distinctions between archive and repertoire are critical to performance theorists' discussions on body transference of embodied memory. For more see, Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> I base my primary findings on extensive archival research in the records of the VIVA organization. Donated to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center in 2007, the VIVA Papers include meeting minutes, fliers, grant narratives, exhibition photographs, press releases and three-dimensional objects including t-shirts, awards, and artwork. Due to the sometimes incomplete gaps in administrative files, poor recordkeeping and undecipherable note taking, oral histories with former VIVA board members including Ruben Esparza, Jef Huereque, Guillermo Hernandez, Roland Palencia, Monica Palacios, Miguel Angel Reyes, and Joey Terrill were indispensable sources of information. In fact, some participants willingly shared personal holdings from their private collections including souvenirs, scrapbooks, and photo albums from art exhibitions, anniversary dinners and social events. Secondary source materials for this study included periodicals, scholarly articles, gallery websites, and artist homepages that closed gaps in my initial findings from the VIVA Papers at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

my appropriation differs from the misappropriation by ‘outsiders.’”<sup>8</sup> Anzaldua emphasizes the colonial gaze of “ignorant” white museum-goers and observes how museum “wonder”<sup>9</sup> has the potential to sight Meso-American civilization as racial fetish and exotic artifact.

As a Chicana viewer, she argues that her sight is free to view this exhibit through the eye of a decolonial feminist subjectivity. She later suggests that it is through the creative production of Chicana feminist art that it is possible to rescue the brutal loss and theft of Indigenous cultures by museum curators (an indirect but implicit culprit in her analysis). Heretofore, Chicana artwork visually reflects the borderlands and depicts an iconographic reconciliation between colonizer and colonized. Though Anzaldua does not consider the complex visual productions of Chicana contemporary artists in gallery site-specific installations like the altars of Amalia Mesa-Baines<sup>10</sup> or the image-text installations of Celia Alvarez Munoz,<sup>11</sup> we presume that women’s collective creative interventions disarm an otherwise complicated or violent museum encounter.

Anzaldua’s movement through the gallery space upsets the presumed white, family-oriented, and heterosexual visitor central to the archetypical “museum

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<sup>8</sup> Gloria Anzaldua, “Chicana Artists: Exploring *Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera*,” In *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy & Society*. Eds. Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 163.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Eds Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Amalia Mesa-Baines altar installations, see Jennifer Gonzalez. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For more on Celia Alvarez Munoz, see Roberto Tejada. *Celia Alvarez Munoz*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

audience” and undermines the “resonance” and “wonder” of the Montezuma show.<sup>12</sup> Such a framework – popular in new museology – could not be any less applicable than for the lesbian and racialized feminist subject. In Chicana feminist theory, Anzaldua’s alienation in the museum environment might be better termed by what Alicia Gaspar de Alba calls “alter-nativity” or “the life practices of an ‘Other’ American culture which is both indigenous and alien to the United States.”<sup>13</sup> Though Anzaldua finds transgressive possibilities at the end of the Chicana artist’s paintbrush, the technology undergirding object display and care is unaddressed, perhaps the inherent product of First World museum colonial order. She does not elaborate on the seemingly impossible way that even the painting’s hang might undermine the transgressive possibilities of Chicana works of art. In fact, for all of the liberatory possibilities Chicana border art represents, the Chicana artist is never culpable with the museum institution. She is therefore always an “outsider.” Though Anzaldua acknowledges the trepidation for young women artists to participate “inside” the museum, she urges them to resist the temptations of the mainstream art market.<sup>14</sup>

The currency of the “insider/outsider” discourse in Chicana/o art-museum institution relations encapsulates Gaspar de Alba’s groundbreaking cultural study of *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (CARA), the first commercially successful traveling Chicano art exhibition in the U.S. The transgressive, organizational structure of the national CARA governing board, as Gaspar de Alba details, contests

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<sup>12</sup> For more see, Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Eds Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>13</sup> Alicia Gaspar de Alba. *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master’s House*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Anzaldua, p. 167.

mainstream museum authority by insisting that all installation arrangements and exhibit designs remain consistent with its own curatorial dictums. Hence, both Anzaldua and Gaspar de Alba insist that Chicana and Chicano artists and their curatorial interventions are inherently outside or trespass the mainstream art and natural science museum. Similar to what urban studies scholar Mike Davis calls “the third border,” this invisible but finite threshold distances contact between different racialized bodies, places, and things.<sup>15</sup> This elusive border crossing brokers “politically tainted” Chicano protest art from the sanitized “skin” of “neutral” white walls. However, this is a relationship that I find too simplistic and reductive for the complex and intricate channels that mediate Chicano art, display technologies, curation, and mainstream museum institutions.<sup>16</sup>

As such, we are left with the impression that Chicano and Chicana art is always under house arrest – too confrontational and didactic for curator aesthetes.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the very installation of these objects grates against Anglo curatorial authority, colonial eyes, and agitates the museum environment. Again, if Chicana/o art is arrested inside the museum, then exhibition design, object display, and installation practices are little more than technologies of a power-elite. The implications of this “house arrest” metaphor in Chicana feminism suggest that the museum site, the hang, and the curator-gate keeper are uncompromisingly oppositional to the “outsider”

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<sup>15</sup> Mike Davis. *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City*. (London: Verso Press, 2000), 69.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Jennifer Gonzalez’s thoughts on racialized discourses applied to the material surface of objects. See Jennifer Gonzalez. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>17</sup> See Alicia Gaspar de Alba. *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master’s House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

status of Chicano art collectives, community cultural centers, or ethnic-specific art galleries.

Certainly, Anzaldúa and Gaspar de Alba are correct in their assessment of Western public art museums as bastions of Eurocentric aesthetic entitlement organized by canons, movements, nations, and periods. This is undeniable. While the art of Latin America made significant inroads in mainstream art museums, “American art” is largely under the legitimate provinces of 19<sup>th</sup> century British and French colonial influence.<sup>18</sup> Though Chicana/o art historians tout the New Spanish colonial foundations of the U.S. and extend the Mexican presence in “American Art” before the founding of Jamestown, New Spain is crudely absolved or underrepresented in permanent collections and Western art history survey textbooks.<sup>19</sup> Having said this, the insider/outsider paradigm is wholly inadequate because it perpetuates Chicana/o art as not only oppositional but antagonistic to the museum field. This overly simplistic interpretation of Chicana/o art merely reaffirms the curator as an elite connoisseur who either misappropriates or decontextualizes Chicano art when it “trespasses” the museum’s third border and mistranslates the cultural significance. The curator is merely the gatekeeper of the “master’s house” and the Chicana/o art object is a captive and, in turn, submissive artifact.

These interpretations pervade Chicano art criticism and provide very little possibility for Chicana/o artists’ symbolic adaptations and interventions of the museum institution, display technology, or curatorial method. It also severs any

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<sup>18</sup> Angela Miller provides an excellent survey text reflecting the reintegration of the New Spanish borderlands in American Art. See Angela Miller, et. al. *American Encounters: Art, History and Cultural Identity*. (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> See Rita Gonzalez, “An Undocumented History: A Survey of Index Citations of Latina and Latino Artists.” No. 2. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Research Report, 2003).

consideration of “gallery space” among a cadre of Chicana/o place-making strategies as described by Latino urban scholars such as Mike Davis, David Diaz, Michael Mendez, James Rojas, and Victor Valle. Even in the collection *Beyond El Barrio* where Latino studies contributors sought “alternative framings . . . involv[ing] careful attention to the social construction of space, the commodification of place, and a transnational approach to conceptualizing barrio life,” the museum, art gallery, and repository drops out of an expansive definition of the term.<sup>20</sup> In short, to interject these other reconfigurations beyond the insider/outsider paradigm is just not feasible, because it would complicate the presumption that when Chicana/o art crosses the threshold of the white cube it must be apolitical, tainted, or somehow complicit with cultural appropriation and the commercial marketplace (i.e. Un-Chicano art). Following what Chicana feminist theorists like Anzaldua and Gaspar de Alba argue, we are left with a view of institutional museums perpetuating First World occupation over the colonized subject much like Indigenous remains on display for fetishizing white tourists.

The place of the museum curator in Chicano art criticism fares no better when we scrutinize studies of Chicano art exhibition history. Reviewing the years from 1965-1975, art historian Jacinto Quirarte argues that the Chicano art movement sought a critical distance from mainstream art museums. He asserts that art critics, art journalists, and curators relegated Chicana/o art to the periphery. Again, the unnamed but presumed white curator’s unfamiliarity with Chicano art history indicates that he/she is unable to accurately interpret and represent the political

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<sup>20</sup> Gina M. Perez, et. al., “Introduction,” In *Beyond El Barrio: Everyday Life in Latina/o America*. Eds. Gina M. Perez, et. al. (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4.

project at the heart of the movement. This lack of cultural context makes the museum a poor and uninhabitable location. As Quirarte suggests, the mural when severed from the barrio and installed in the gallery “suffer[s] at the hands of curators.”<sup>21</sup> In art historian Shifra Goldman’s review of the exhibition “Painters of Los Angeles” at the L.A. Craft and Folk Art Museum in 1974, she denounced the wrongful extraction of murals from the street culture of el barrio, suggesting that the museum and the barrio are separate and distinct cultural zones.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, the ire over Chicana/o artists’ “border crossing” into the mainstream art museum compelled a profound declaration from the 1969 Denver Chicano Youth Conference. Attendees in the “Los Artistas de Aztlan” workshop announced “that Chicano art is an art of our people and should be exhibited namely in those areas in which our people live; the barrios, campos, etc. Chicano art should not be aimed for the sake of selling to tourism or as an ornament to please the gringos, so we therefore, refuse to exhibit our work in gringo institutions and galleries.”<sup>23</sup> Such a declarative resolution demands that only spaces constituted purely by the Chicano community harbor the militant spirit of Chicana/o art. This was seconded by an editorial from the Chicano political newspaper *La Verdad* based in San Diego where the barrio becomes an authenticating threshold from which Chicano art is spatially defined and anointed. “The message [of Chicano art] comes in many forms but the theme is basic: self-identity and struggle. Raul Espinoza, whose drawings have appeared in El Grito

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<sup>21</sup> Jacinto Quirarte, “Exhibitions of Chicano Art: 1965 to the Present,” In *Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation*, ed. Richard Griswold Del Castillo, et. al. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 164.

<sup>22</sup> Shifra Goldman. “Chicano Art: Looking Backward.” *Artweek*. (June 20, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Francisco Jackson. *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 157.

believes that a ‘dominant characteristic of Chicano is that it comes from the barrio.’ This idea is one that is shared by all of the artists I spoke with.”<sup>24</sup> This critical distance intrinsic to Gaspar de Alba’s study has a grander history in the Chicano art movement, predicating that all “community-based” artists must circumvent the museum palace outside “el barrio.” This intensified the Chicano art and museum institutional divide.

In another recurrent but significant debate in Chicano art criticism, printmaker/artist Malaquias Montoya condemned any barrio artist choosing to display art inside commercial museum venues. In his polemical article, “A Critical Perspective on the State of Chicano Art,” he famously declared, “When the doors of museums and galleries opened and invitations were extended, artists went running, despite the fact that *Raza* communities, which had been the original emphasis for the Chicano Art Movement, rarely frequented the museum.”<sup>25</sup> Montoya’s position is particularly revealing. He not only condemns the exhibition and display of Chicano art in the museum site but infers the significance of “*raza*” visual publics. In this Chicano art activist milieu, it is perhaps not the curator who restricts Chicano art to barrio perception and reception, something, nonetheless, that is an undeniable and crucial aspect of Chicano art authorship and production. What I find particularly interesting here is how early Chicano art historical writings were quite considerate of the spatial politics of display, perpetuating a heteronormative Chicano art-seeing public uncomplicated by sex, gender, or desire.

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<sup>24</sup> Unknown, “Art and the Chicano Artist,” *La Verdad* newspaper, [197?], (Box 7, Folder 29) Tomas Ybarra-Frausto research material, 1964-2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>25</sup> Malaquias Montoya, “A Critical Perspective on the State of Chicano Art,” In *Chicano Art History: A Book of Selective Readings*, ed. Jacinto Quirarte (San Antonio: Research Center for the Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at San Antonio, 1984), 121.



As a result of this alienation and critical distance from mainstream art museum institutions, the Chicano Art Movement built community art centers, ethnic-specific cultural organizations, and art activist workshops to fuel creative acts of self-determination and self-reliance. This is what Quirarte champions as “public Chicano art,” which solicits the involvement and participation of the barrio community. Though he is somewhat more tolerant of the “non-public” Chicano artists inside museums (perhaps an import from his disciplinary training in art history), his polemic perpetuates the divides that categorize Chicano art not stylistically or symbolically, but according to Chicano viewers and sites of display.<sup>26</sup> Whether Chicano art is “public” or “non-public,” it masks what is actually an exhibition history of art in *proper* places: the barrio neighborhood, the cultural center, or the walled boundaries of urban ethnic settings.

The meaning of Chicano art is inherently circumscribed by the politics of revolution, social resistance, and visual and haptic contact with neighborhood inhabitants and environmental surroundings. Therefore, the spaces composing this compendium of Chicano art exhibitions are explicitly and recognizably “Chicano,” not only in terms of visual content, but with regards to the propriety of display. Such art object domiciliation proposes an incomplete and troubling picture. For all of these “proper” geographies of Chicano art installation, how might we consider the “improper” or un-placed geographies of Chicano art beyond the barrio perimeter? How do we re-conceptualize the Master’s house when it is made manifest *inside* the very walls that purport Chicano artist authenticity? What is even more confounding is that if Chicano art is constituted by its visual public and neighborhood

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<sup>26</sup> Quirarte, 175.

environment, how might the sexual orientation of Chicanas/os destabilize this spatial arrangement and introduce Chicano art geographies constituted by queer spectators and homoerotic experiences of art objects?

In reality, the history of Chicano art exhibition describes particular directional flows of art within the bounds of the barrio urban landscape and, yet, overlooks “queer moves” in the curations and installations of Chicano art. This compulsory heterosexual orientation of Chicano art history elides how even inside the community-enabling possibilities of el barrio, the colonia, or the campo, non-heteronormative publics constituted queer mappings of Chicano art throughout the city. Undertaking the VIVA art collective as my immediate point of departure, I will consider how this organization rebuked the “insider/outsider” Chicano art-museum institution divide and regained political faith in curation and social emphasis as a museum ideal. The resulting archive of “improper” places I propose here elucidates how sexual difference stimulated a queer spatial identity in other Los Angeles neighborhoods rarely attributed to Chicano art history, Latino urbanism, and Chicano cultural geography.

*Museum Outings: The Origin-Myth of VIVA*

The origin of the VIVA organization is a popular mythology ever evolving and transforming. Records from grant narratives, press clips, and newsletters attribute the founding of VIVA to one historical actor: Roland Palencia. It is said that the vision for VIVA was born at the bottom of an Echo Park swimming pool in

1987.<sup>27</sup> Beneath ripples of shimmering water, Palencia envisioned a place to shelter the creative production of gay and lesbian Latino political activism. VIVA was the artistic outlet among a heterogeneous yet proliferating gay and lesbian Latina/o city population. Quite possibly, Palencia's idea was no doubt an extension of two major life outcomes. Palencia was the co-founder of GLLU, Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos, established in 1981. GLLU was widely involved in the development of a cohesive political presence for "gay and lesbian Latinos" and in particular, established a social network for L.A.'s Latin American immigrant communities. The organization spawned "Lesbianas Unidas," a Latina lesbian organization as well as "Bienestar," the largest Latino HIV/AIDS health organization in Southern California. Arguably, Palencia pursued an agenda of social justice and cultural belonging across his complex racial, ethnic and even national origins.<sup>28</sup>

His political outlook may have been shaped by his early experiences as a Central American immigrant fleeing the civil war in Guatemala. Palencia's father joined ranks with the Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres, one of four major leftist guerrilla groups opposing the military regime by sabotaging the country's infrastructure. The resulting Civil Wars in Guatemala lasted thirty years and involved the horrific genocide, torture, and disappearance of several hundred thousand Indigenous, Mayan, and Guatemalan subjects. After Palencia's father left the family in 1960 and was later killed, his mother fled to Los Angeles and sent for her children in 1976. This traumatic and personal encounter with government-sanctioned

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<sup>27</sup> Luiz Sampaio, ed. *Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Latino Arts Anthology, 1988-2000*. (Los Angeles, 2000), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, eds. *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 297.

genocide was a formative experience that may have provoked Palencia's defiant spirit, political activism, and commitment to cultural visibility.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, his role in the mythic origins of the VIVA organization cannot be understated. VIVA's founding presents a significant departure from the way in which Chicano art collectives are assessed and situated within the finite bounds of the barrio cultural landscape. For instance, famed collectives like Los Four, ASCO, the East Los Streetscapers or the Royal Chicano Air Force organized within the surroundings of low-income Mexican American neighborhoods.

These Central American contours complicate the homogeneity of the Chicano art collective corpus. Rarely has Chicano art history considered the breadth of Central American creative production in Chicano art making. As a result, Chicano art critics minimize the ways in which Central Americans contributed to the Latino cultural politics in the city. Palencia's social location as a gay Guatemalan and Latino activist is concealed if not entirely obfuscated. Even so, if we reposition VIVA within the immigrant milieu of Los Angeles in the 1980s, we might also consider how the mass migrations of Salvadorans and Guatemalans rapidly re-adapted and reshaped Latino identity in Southern California, and may have influenced the Chicano Art Movement on a visual, conceptual, and ideological register.<sup>30</sup> While this is a topic for another paper, it elucidates broader art-historical tendencies to gaze through the predominant Mexican American lens, further sequestering the Central American influence on gay and lesbian activism and Chicano cultural production.

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<sup>29</sup> Roland Palencia. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 3 September 2008. Los Angeles, California. Interview Conducted by the Author.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the transformation of Latino cultural landscape in Los Angeles see, Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans In Los Angeles*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

The restoration of Palencia's immigrant biography to the group's origin-mythology documents Central American abjection, and indicates how VIVA reclaimed the Chicano art collective model in service of sexual and gender difference, an unusual but important maneuver.<sup>31</sup> VIVA was not an ordinary Chicano art collective as previously described but instead, "non-rooted" or "unplaced" within the heteronormative and Mexican dominance of the barrio terrain. As the origin-myth reveals, rather than emphasizing an artist grouping based on medium, style, or training, VIVA was constituted by its social marginality, ethnic difference, and sexual exclusions.

Indeed, a careful examination of VIVA's ambiguous location within Chicano art history is much needed. VIVA's elusive role in the history of Chicano art is also attributed to the precarious status of Roland Palencia as a policy-maker, social worker, and non-profit health administrator. Palencia's lack of formal arts training hindered VIVA's perception as a legitimate artist collective in the vein of Los Four, the East Los Streetscapers, or even the Mujeres Muralistas in San Francisco. When "Que VIVA!" was first established in late 1987, Palencia's earliest compatriots were predominantly Mexican or Chicana/o gay and lesbian literary and playwright scribes. In fact, the earliest VIVA meetings took place not in a cultural arts center, artist studio, or gallery space but inside the Different Light Gay and Lesbian Bookstore in Silver Lake. This bookstore served as the de facto home for the organization and hosted gay and lesbian Latina/o reading presentations for poets and writers as early as

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<sup>31</sup> Arturo Arias discusses the sublimation of Central American signification on its own terms in U.S. Latina/o studies. For more information see his groundbreaking book, Arturo Arias. *Taking Their Word: Literature and Signs in Central America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1988.<sup>32</sup> VIVA's overt literary origins may have precluded its immediate recognition within a Chicano art collective pantheon.

By 1991, later incarnations of VIVA's governing board included established, professionally trained or educated performance artists, painters, sculptors, photographers, and illustrators. This shift presents a striking contrast in mission and vision. The initial organization under Palencia sought to "expose Lesbian Latinas and Gay Latinos to the multi-ethnic artistic and cultural life that is continuously blossoming in the Greater Los Angeles area,"<sup>33</sup> through a non-profit agency on par with the likes of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center of L.A. or AIDS Project Los Angeles.

Following Roland Palencia's departure in 1989 to assume the vice-presidency of AIDS Healthcare Foundation, the emergence of visual artists on the Board of Directors reconfigured its operations and objectives well into the next decade. Under this revised premise, VIVA "would advocate against the lack of representation in Los Angeles for artists [and] the reluctance of major cultural centers in Los Angeles to present work or engage in collaboration with artists that openly advocate" as gay and lesbian Latinas/os.<sup>34</sup> Suffice it to say, had VIVA circa 1988 met VIVA 2001 it would hardly recognize itself. The organization's original interests in cultivating talent through separate artist circles sent the VIVA membership down a different course of ideas, beliefs, and values, emphasizing an egalitarian approach to art as activism. With the new presence of artists themselves at every level of the decision-making

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<sup>32</sup> Unknown. *VIVA! Vignettes*. 1:1 (January-February, 1988), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Unknown. *VIVA! Vignettes*. 1:2 (March-April, 1988), 1.

<sup>34</sup> VIVA Grant Narrative, 1995, The VIVA Papers. Box 5. Folder 8. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

whole, VIVA became an art organization by and for artists, instead of a grassroots organization in appreciation of the arts. When we reconsider Palencia as neither a formally trained artist nor established figure in the L.A. arts circuit, his embrace of “gay and lesbian Latino” *art* appreciation and activism was a curious if not surprising choice.

Removed from the Chicano art epicenter of East Los Angeles – a bastion for Chicano arts production – Palencia was instead motivated by another unlikely L.A. cultural landscape: the museum. Again, as the origin-myth reveals, the vision for VIVA was said to be born at the bottom of a swimming pool. However, I think it is important to stress that it was also shaped by Palencia’s frequent contact with art exhibits. In an article by Karen Dale Wolman from *Frontiers* gay and lesbian magazine entitled, “Gay y Latino en Los Angeles,” Palencia appends another experience to his underwater vision. “I had been going to a lot of museums. When I went to the Latino community, not much was gay; when I went to the gay and lesbian exhibits, not much was Latino. I thought: Wouldn’t it be incredible if we had all these creative minds breaking down all these barriers?”<sup>35</sup>

Palencia’s museum encounter lies in contradistinction to Anzaldua’s troubling encounter within the museum field. Whereas Anzaldua recalled the museum exhibit as a display of colonial imperialism, indigenous theft, and racial fetishism, it was an imaginary site of community empowerment and social transformation for Palencia. The central role of the museum in VIVA’s founding complicates the stratified relationship otherwise characterizing the museum’s alienating powers in early

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<sup>35</sup> Karen Dale Wolman, “Gay y Latino en Los Angeles,” *Frontiers*, Sept 28, 1990, 25, The VIVA Papers. Box 3. Folder 1. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.

Chicano art historical discourse. Arguably, Palencia did not wholly tout the mainstream art museum as a pluralist and democratic forum but his admission that he “had been going to a lot of museums” suggests how these egregious institutions were also the impetus for VIVA’s conception. Quite obviously, he foresaw possibility in the exhibition encounter itself.

The critical influence of the museum is further demonstrated in VIVA’s earliest public programming. One of the first organizational activities for VIVA was a trip to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu on December 13, 1987. According to a press release attributed to Palencia, the *Edge* gay and lesbian newspaper reported that the trip was organized by VIVA, “a Lesbian and Gay Latino organization dedicated to appreciating and experiencing the blossoming artistic and cultural life evolving in the Greater Los Angeles area.”<sup>36</sup> From this news brief, VIVA presents a turn from the “proper” locations for Chicano cultural heritage bound by barrio grounds and, instead, voyages into the “improper” elite corridors of Getty’s re-creation of an “ancient Roman villa.”<sup>37</sup> VIVA’s early interest in fine art “appreciation” throughout Los Angeles County hints at an organizational realignment with mainstream public art museums and an emphasis on aesthetic “sophistication.” By fostering cultural experiences for a gay and lesbian Latina/o public inside the very art temples condemned by the likes of Malaquias Montoya and other Chicano art movement ideologues, VIVA sought to demonstrate confidence and cultural competence in the

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<sup>36</sup> Unknown, “VIVA Plans Trip To Malibu Getty Museum,” *Edge*, December 9, 1987, 8, The VIVA Papers. Box 3. Folder 2. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.

<sup>37</sup> Unknown, “VIVA Plans Trip to Malibu Getty Museum,” *Edge*, December 9, 1987, 8, The VIVA Papers. Box 3, Folder 2. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.



face of institutional arbiters of taste and cultural belonging. The Getty trip to Malibu was just one of several museum-centered activities.

On Sunday, March 27, 1988, VIVA organized a visit to the Huntington Library and Gardens in San Marino, CA. In an article promoting the event in the first issue of the organization's newsletter, "VIVA! Vignettes," members met in Silver Lake and drove in a caravan to "the site that houses the famous Thomas Lawrence[']s 'Pinkie' and Thomas Gainsborough[']s 'Blue Boy.'"<sup>38</sup> By promoting "famous" portraits by classic 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century English painters, VIVA hoped to instill a cultural reverence for European art. The explicit naming of Lawrence and Gainsborough inferred a shared cultural knowledge or understanding of the permanent collection. Whereas the Huntington itself shares one of the most comprehensive assemblages of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British and French art in Southern California, the selection of these two specific European painters promised potential VIVA museum-goers an enriching museum experience defined by "Pinkie" and the "Blue Boy." Both are prized possessions of their permanent collection and therefore closely associated with the institution. They are displayed opposite each other in the Thornton Portrait Gallery as a complementary couplet and sometimes referred to as the "Romeo and Juliet" of the museum. The excessive femininity of both paintings instills a queer sensibility that is difficult to deny. For instance, Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" portrays a rather effete and delicate young man in contrapposto pose exuding elegance and self-confidence (see figure 7.1).

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<sup>38</sup> Unknown. *VIVA! Vignettes*. 1:1 (January-February, 1988), 5. The VIVA Papers. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

The appeal of this portraiture and the lavish institutional setting is consistent with other VIVA formative marketing strategies promoting the Greek and Roman statuary at the Getty gardens, for instance. The homoerotic solicitations at both museums are not coincidental. These outings demonstrate how Los Angeles art museums were more than tourist sites for the group. By providing attendees with the opportunity to see “The Blue Boy,” Palencia stressed the importance of racial and sexual difference in the museum experience. That is, he sought ways to “out” the museum through a gay and lesbian Latino community “outing.” VIVA museum initiatives indicate Palencia’s base ideological framework for a gay and lesbian Latina/o art collective “expose[d] . . . to the artistic and multicultural life blossoming in the Greater Los Angeles area.”<sup>39</sup> This “blossoming” act of cultural transfer would happen through VIVA transactions in Los Angeles museum spaces.

Palencia and his Board of Directors found that there was something inherently empowering in occupying mainstream art museums. The Getty and the Huntington became settings for gay and lesbian Latino socialization and community-building. Rather than explicitly visiting other Chicano-specific art shows, galleries or museums, the “museum outing” staged communal pilgrimages inside sacred museum grounds. What new museologist Carol Duncan calls the “ritual”<sup>40</sup> continued throughout the early formation of the organization. Six months after the Huntington Library visit, VIVA organized a trip to the Southwest Museum in nearby Highland Park on September 4, 1988 and a year later, members took a road trip to New Mexico, a landscape at the heart of American modernism.

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<sup>39</sup> Roland Palencia. Undated Press Release. “Latina/Latino 24 Hour Hotline.” The VIVA Papers. Box 3, Folder 2. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

Teatro VIVA and the Disappearing Museum

Surprisingly, the central impetus of the museum remains an overlooked area in VIVA's origin-mythology. This is due in part to the proliferation of scholarly work on VIVA's groundbreaking theatrical arm, Teatro VIVA. Performing impromptu skits in Spanish and English, these humorous vignettes dispensed AIDS prevention information through culturally competent presentations for mainly Latina/o audiences in bars, clubs, and health service agencies. Compared to Luis Valdez's efforts to educate and organize migrant workers through Teatro Campesino in the 1960s, the "Divas from VIVA" adapted Valdez's guerrilla theatre tactics to combat heterosexism, homophobia, and the spread of AIDS in witty acts and improvisation.<sup>41</sup> David Roman's foundational essay, "Teatro VIVA!—Latino Performance and the Politics of AIDS in Los Angeles" astutely characterizes VIVA's subversive intervention as agitprop theatre reconfiguring Latino performance within AIDS activism and cultural representation.<sup>42</sup> Focusing on the oppositional stage productions of VIVA members Luis Alfaro, Monica Palacios, Beto Araiza, as well as Teatro VIVA skits at community fairs, private homes, and community centers, Roman describes how these performances contested, represented, and empowered an embattled L.A. Latina/o community fighting AIDS, invisibility, and social marginality.

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the history of Teatro Campesino to the Chicano civil rights movement and United Farm Workers strikes see, Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez. *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> First appearing in *Entiendes? Queer Readings/Hispanic Writings*, ed. Emilie Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), Roman's work has been reprinted in several anthologies and textbooks including *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy, and Society* (Blackwell Publishing, 1998), *The Chicano Studies Reader* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2003), and *American Studies: An Anthology* (Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009) demonstrating the reach and impact of Teatro VIVA in the fields of Chicano studies, theatre history, performance studies, and American studies.

However, I find it important to resituate Roman's work within the local context of gay and lesbian Latino activism in L.A. in the early 1990s. Though he dutifully discloses that Teatro VIVA is just one component of the organization, his study's primary interest in Latino AIDS performance art applauds the social merits and financial successes of the theatre group. Earning a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Conference of Mayors (one of several grants and awards earned after the time of Roman's writing), a major milestone for the organization, we are left with the impression that Teatro VIVA was an agitprop theatre group centrally founded by the "Divas from VIVA" ensemble. Roman does not append the organization's first theatrical productions prior to the explicitly AIDS prevention theatre programming which later characterized the organization in the 1990s. These first VIVA shows would eventually establish the collaborative precedent for the later invention of Teatro VIVA in 1991.

Whereas, Roman's study spawned scholarly attention and interest in VIVA performance art, for instance in Brett Stockdill's work on Gay Men of Color and AIDS activism<sup>43</sup> or Maria Teresa Marrero's history of gay and lesbian Latino theatre,<sup>44</sup> he gives the sense that Teatro VIVA epitomized its namesake over visual artists and curators (VIVA loosely translates "to live" in the face of AIDS and survival).<sup>45</sup> In fact, after citing Roman's essay, Rudi Bleys's study of homosexual content in the history of Latin American art argues that VIVA was of little interest to

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<sup>43</sup> See Brett Stockdill. *Activism Against AIDS: At the Intersections of Sexuality, Race, Gender and Class*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> See Maria Teresa Marrero. "Out of the Fringe? Out of the Closet: Latina/Latino Theatre and Performance in the 1990s." *TDR*. 44:3 (Autumn 2000).

<sup>45</sup> David Roman. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 201.

his research because “they consist of theatre predominantly.”<sup>46</sup> VIVA’s exhibition programming and museum origins are concealed and we are left with the lingering effects of this amnesic episode. VIVA visual arts, art workshops, art sales/auctions, and encyclopedic gallery shows are obscured by the frequent misreadings of Roman and the principal scholarly interest in Latino AIDS activism in performance art.

And yet, still little is known of VIVA’s theatre history prior to 1991. By restoring these origins, it is possible to exact the conditions contributing to the museum’s eventual obfuscation and invisibility. Founded in 1988, Teatro VIVA emphasized a neo-liberal vision of gay identity, multiculturalism, social acceptance, and civil rights equality. These organizational antecedents reveal a more assimilative and formal set of gay and lesbian Latina/o politics far removed from the AIDS specific “oppositional consciousness” that Roman observes. My turn toward regional and historical specificity is necessary to not only question Bleys’ reckless decision to exclude VIVA from a homoerotic reading of Latin American art but to expand greater insight into the disappearance of the VIVA museum.

The earliest precursor of Teatro VIVA was a fundraising event for the organization. On October 15-29, 1988, VIVA organized “Latina/o Lesbian and Gay Experiences in Theatre,” a three-part conversation with openly gay and lesbian Latina/o actors working in community theatre. The event had little to do with AIDS prevention, sexual health, or Latina/o social welfare. Instead, the forum hosted by the Theatre of Light, First Methodist Church typified Palencia’s primary mission to foster creative productivity, artist mentorship, cultural “blossoming,” and “exposure” to the

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<sup>46</sup> Rudi C. Bleys. *Images of Ambiente: Homotextuality and Latin American Art, 1810-Today*. (London; Continuum, 2000), 179.

arts. This workshop presented acting and technical skills training to curious members, encouraged participation by any member interested in the medium, and shed light on the racial, sexual, and gender barriers confronting gay and lesbian Latina/o theatre professionals. These workshop-based activities characterized the earliest events for Teatro VIVA. In “the performing arts circle” (Teatro VIVA’s original name) any VIVA member could self-affiliate with a creative art cluster and collaborate with other gay and lesbian Latinas/os of similar background. Though it’s unclear how VIVA leadership confronted artists that confounded categories like contemporary body art, these imperfect but important medium-based artist circles developed the basis for VIVA membership.

When VIVA was established under Palencia in 1987, it was a collective of Central American, Chicana/o, and Mexican writers, poets, and playwrights. Among them, Roberto Ochoa-Schutz coordinated the first Performing Arts circle and wrote and directed “Santa Union” (Sacred Union) for the organization in 1988. The three-act production portrayed a Chicana/o family in East Los Angeles grappling with their son’s homosexuality and spiritual transformation set in the time period of 1972-1979. Dubbed the first gay Latino play written, directed, and featuring an ensemble cast of gay and lesbian Latinas/os in Los Angeles, “Santa Union” was semi-autobiographical and represented the racial and sexual complexities of “coming out.” Premiering on December 2, 1989, “Santa Union” was a full-fledged production and staged one of the first Chicano same-sex weddings in Latino theatre.

The success of “Santa Union” was soon followed by a play written by the incoming Performing Arts Circle/Teatro VIVA Director Oscar Reconco, entitled

“Somos Humanos” (We are Human) in 1990. Consisting of mainly Central American actors from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, the performance ambitiously confronted a range of topics: coming out, homophobia, gay violence, and AIDS, all against poorly rehearsed musical numbers by drag queens. “Somos Humanos” proclamation for gay civility through self-sacrifice, human suffering, and tragedy verged on the excessive and absurd. In fact, reviews from the alternative press including the gay and lesbian media widely panned the show. One reviewer wrote, “Teatro VIVA! should get its act together, particularly if it’s going to tackle a subject that is rarely acknowledged in the Latino community. Then, it’ll be justified charging admission.”<sup>47</sup> This sentiment was seconded by art critic Ron Hitchcock. Unmoved by Teatro VIVA’s declarative plea for equality, he surmised, “I don’t know where to start. It was the most uniformly awful theatrical production I have ever seen.”<sup>48</sup> These reviews spurred the organizational leadership to immediately reassess its public programming, values, and goals.

According to notes from a VIVA meeting transcribed by Palencia, the organization was deeply conflicted over the show’s very public debacle. Members were torn over each other’s inconsistent dedication to the show, poor cast selection, personality differences, nepotism, and the lack of training in professional theatrical production, direction, and acting. These seismic aftershocks raised internal divisions and organizational leaders were divided over the quality or quantity of the Teatro

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<sup>47</sup> Unknown. “Somos Humanos AIDS Play by Teatro Viva!” March 16, 1990, F28, The VIVA Papers. Box 2, Folder 18. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>48</sup> Ron Hitchcock. “Good Intentions, Poor Execution.” N.D. The VIVA Papers. Box 2, Folder 18. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

VIVA project.<sup>49</sup> A letter to the VIVA Advisory Board from Palencia states his position clearly. He “would like to see 2-3 major events sponsored by VIVA throughout the year and dedicate the rest of our time in looking for and securing resources that will help us to train ourselves in . . . developing quality art and . . . fatten our treasury . . . The creation of quality art [is] the only assurance that VIVA will be considered a serious player in the artistic community.”<sup>50</sup> This ideological belief in exceptional and quality works of art suggests how VIVA sought a self-image cognizant with other highly regarded art organizations in L.A. Nonetheless, the downward turn of “Somos Humanos” left the group vulnerable to public attack and self-defeat. Though it is difficult to know what the direct consequences of “Somos Humanos” may have been on the organization, Teatro VIVA was far from the transformational AIDS prevention project heralded in Roman’s later critical study. In fact, Teatro VIVA was a liability.

Indeed, it is quite ironic that VIVA is perhaps best known for its theatrical work. After the departure of Palencia in 1989 and his successor Mario Perez-Ceballos in 1991, performance artists Luis Alfaro and Monica Palacios emerged as leaders on the VIVA Board of Directors, helping Teatro VIVA to regain degrees of critical attention, commercial success, funding, national recognition, and awards. VIVA’s HIV/AIDS educational agitprop street theatre was a later development and an obvious departure from a theatre program that instead emphasized professionally produced staged plays about gay Latino acceptance, gay marriage, and human

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<sup>49</sup> Roland Palencia. *Somos Humanos* Evaluation Meeting. April 16, 1990. The VIVA Papers. Box 2, Folder 18. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>50</sup> Roland Palencia, letter to VIVA Advisory Board, November 12, 1989. The VIVA Papers. Box 5, Folder 13. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.



recognition. To its credit, shows such as “Somos Humanos” tried to elucidate just how homophobic prejudice affected Chicana/o and Latina/o communities.

By recovering and untangling these early theatrical efforts, it appears that Teatro VIVA was not the critical basis for the VIVA art collective at all. Rather, the museological vision for VIVA fostered a legible and recognizable gay and lesbian Chicano art public anchored in “improper” places. That is, VIVA embarked on a variety of transgressive place-making projects within the museum, utilizing it to create resistant experiences of gallery space. In the next section, I will turn my attention to the formation of Museo VIVA and demonstrate how the museum idea enabled community empowering ends for the organization in the Los Angeles urban landscape.

*At the Edge of the World: Countermapping Museo VIVA*

A curious but critical dimension, the museum site was largely responsible for the initial development of the VIVA art collective that cultivated a gay and lesbian Latina/o art audience. While Palencia’s museum encounter and VIVA’s museum outings inside public art institutions demonstrate the extent to which the museum inspired the art collective initially, the resulting place-making strategy consisted of exhibition formations that staged the spatial experiences necessary to sustain a racialized and sexualized artist community. Although the elite museum site and the ordinary residential conditions of the L.A. neighborhood could not be more dissimilar, Museo VIVA delimited these ideological and spatial distances establishing a corollary between the two environments.

For instance, *L.A. Weekly* journalist Doug Sadownick attended VIVA's First Anniversary show "Transcend" at Gay Liberation Front co-founder Morris Kight's house in Hollywood on April 28, 1989. Following the art exhibition, poetry readings, and a memorable performance art piece by Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta, he remarked, "Groups like VIVA prove that the artistic cutting edge can be sniffed out more in L.A.'s neighborhoods than its museums."<sup>51</sup> By discursively reconstituting a relationship between museum and neighborhood, Sadownick suggests the way VIVA's visual and literary artists collectively reshaped the neighborhood as a museum-enabling place. Hollywood in this case takes on an unseen and unmapped museum function for a "hybridic" avant-garde overlooked and hidden in the entangled urban sprawl of the city.<sup>52</sup> In Sadownick's assessment, a place such as Hollywood is read within its queer geography – an odd and unusual breeding ground for "unapologetically sexual" Chicano and Latino artist outlaws stretched across "improper" host sites.<sup>53</sup>

This is a shared adage that resonated with other contemporary art collectors and aficionados in the area. VIVA board member Joey Terrill remembers following his interview with iconic curator and journalist Joan Quinn; she even remarked that, "VIVA was where you could go to see the cutting edge or the crest of the wave of what was really smart and happening in Latino art' . . . [Joan] knew when she was going to [see] a VIVA event she going to see something provocative and cutting edge

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<sup>51</sup> Doug Sadownick, "Viva la Diferencia," *L.A. Weekly*, April 28-May 4, 1989, The VIVA Papers. Box 2. Folder 11. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

and definitely Latino.”<sup>54</sup> Reacting to how Chicano art had self-defined the barrio perimeter, both Sadownick and Quinn infer a competing picture of a Chicano homosexual avant-garde bred in the parallel reconstitution of museum site and neighborhood enclave.

The resulting “museumscape” reshaped and activated a place of belonging for racialized and sexualized artists and art audiences displaced from heteronormative art terrains. In this section, I will discern how the museum galvanized areas of the city deterred or elided from Chicano art history and Latino urban studies. Countermapping VIVA art exhibition history onto the city surface makes clear which parts of L.A. nourished gay and lesbian Chicano art production and stimulated curatorial invention in variegated museum environments. Adapting cartography as a comparative archival method, I define this spatial meaning by documenting and recording temporary art installations into the urban landscape. These discernible patterns and trends illuminate how these unlikely places concretized a legible geographic identity for Museo VIVA and sheltered Chicano art visualizing sexual difference.

In part, I am deeply indebted to the foundational work on cultural landscape studies and in particular, the influential early writing of scholar Pierce Lewis. In “Common Landscapes as Historic Documents,” he argues that the cartography of the city is “a kind of cultural autobiography that humans have carved and continued to carve into the surface of the earth.”<sup>55</sup> Whereas his privileging of the “common” architecture of America is simplistic and disregards far more complex questions of

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<sup>54</sup> Joey Terrill. Interview Conducted by the Author. August 23, 2007. Oral History Interview. Conducted in Los Angeles, California.

<sup>55</sup> Peirce Lewis, “Common Landscapes as Historic Documents,” In *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*. Eds. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 116.

site, power, and place, I do find his emphasis on reading cultural autobiography through visual magnification compelling. He readapts a macroscopic lens to visually scrutinize a totality of objects clustered and ordered in the scenery. The human artifacts under Lewis's premise are material and legible buildings which he compares to written documents: the homes, buildings, and neighborhoods constitute an archive of human culture. Yet, Lewis does not consider how this archival collection of buildings and streets is also a social product, curated, and thus shaped by the social roles and forces of the white heteropatriarchal and corporate elite. His reliance on the built environment as a stable archive foretells just how racial, gender, and sexual difference manifest counter archival possibilities beyond the tangible records certified by the hand of the cartographer and curator.

This look "beneath the city surface" is something that has fermented among some cultural geographers in recent years investigating the ideological and colonial social construction of maps to legitimate imperial and racist endeavors. Those left "off-map" – i.e. racialized and colonized subjects – are relegated to a "non-cartographic space"<sup>56</sup> or an unmapped topographic region, signifying an abundance of natural resources, spatial expansion, or real estate value for colonial conquest. The technologies of the cartographer leave some bodies in place and the others out of place powerfully organizing legitimate state bodies from the aggravating and "nervous"<sup>57</sup> moves of the illegitimate subjugated other. As a result, countermapping strategies adopt cartographic tools to produce a resistant map-making process "that

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<sup>56</sup> Denis Byrne, "Counter-mapping: New South Wales & Southeast Asia." *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3.1 (2008): 257.

<sup>57</sup> See Denis R. Byrne. "A Nervous System: Race and Space in Australia." *The Journal of Social Archaeology* 3:2 (2003), 170-193.

show[s] the real subtlety and complexity of the cultural landscapes these people construct and inhabit.”<sup>58</sup> As archaeologist Denis Byrne suggests, the introduction of GIS digital mapping programs has stimulated “alternative mapping activity”<sup>59</sup> by which we can grasp an archival record of “geographical identity” in the barriological context of self-empowerment.

Just as Raul Villa anchors his investigation in the “culturally affirming spatial practices”<sup>60</sup> of Chicano cultural production, resistant mapmaking was a critical artistic and political function of the Chicano art movement in which imagery “remapped” Aztlan, the ancient Mexica homeland imagined within the contemporary physical borders of the American southwest. As a part of a burgeoning “archival consciousness” to document and empower a dispossessed people with cartographic claim to U.S. occupied land, a visual discourse still prevalent among contemporary Chicano artists I might add, art was a tangible exteriorization of barrio identity, a record of Chicano countermapping that not only deflected racial marginalization but also reconstituted the spatial propriety for this cultural heritage. By this I mean, these protest aesthetics articulated a “culturally affirming” Chicano identity within a preferred spatial proximity, mapping a Chicano representational milieu coherent in its barrio display and presentation. Proof of this cartographic art expression is best exemplified in a Goetz gallery map of East L.A. murals from 1975 (see figure 7.2).

Without the sleek tools of flip cameras and GPS satellites, this countermap created by Goetz co-founder John Gonzalez, designed by David Botello, and illustrated by Robert Arenivar embeds art, geography, and identity within the East

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>60</sup> Villa, 8.

Los Angeles terrain. Dedicated to the “Heritage of our Ancestors,” the map registers over 271 murals in 107 locations in a cartographic layout framed by four narrative vignettes of Mexican American contributions to the founding of California, including: vaquero (cowboy) adventures, gold mining, and the introduction of irrigation, farming, and ranching practices crucial to the development of Los Angeles agriculture. Through the grafting of Chicano murals, it also mapped a nostalgic Spanish-colonial romance in the pictorial logics of the map.

In figure 7.3, we see a young man serenading a señorita fanning herself in restful repose next to a water fountain where birds bathe and dance. Beneath Arenivar’s illustration, the historical episode reads, “The Californios [sic], enjoyed a tranquil, romantic, prosperous life. They spent much leisure time playing music and creating unusual sporting events.” This juxtaposition of images visualizes a cartographic process that symbolically maps not only East Los Angeles murals but also a spatialization of art constituted by a narrative of heteronormative romance and early Chicano Californian history. The murals we see demarcating “culturally affirming” streets of the barrio also intrinsically map a “proper” sexuality in its foreground: the constitutive pairing of heterosexual romance, ancestral heritage, and art-geography. It is difficult to discern Chicano art beyond the authenticating function of the barrio and cultural memory, zones within the totality of the Goetz map – a map defined by “a neighborhood brimming with creativity and the decoration of East Los Angeles homeland with the art of murals inspired by Mexican and Spanish traditions.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, the cultural heritage so celebrated in the Goetz mapping project perpetuates a particular geographic identity, one that lays claim to a homeland

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<sup>61</sup> Glen Greason. *Los Angeles in Maps*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2010), 176.

through the murals plotted into the landscape and the heterosexual romance framing its cultural history and, in turn, rightful place in the city. In this way, it is seemingly impossible to spatialize Chicano art and sexual identities outside this neighborhood threshold, which is, we are told, a sanctified birthplace and “homeland” for the Chicano Art Movement. From this cartographic archival document, we must ask: what then happens to Chicano art practices and sexual behaviors that fall off the map? What about those artistic productions that move west of the Los Angeles River? How does this queer movement complicate geographical identity expressions in murals mapped across the “homeland”?

By looking at the urban landscape through Lewis’s macroscopic lens, I plot VIVA exhibition activities in a countermapping approach that complicates the Goetz Chicano art cartography. The residual map composed of clustered arrangements of temporary VIVA art shows constructs an archival document from which Museo VIVA crystallizes, something that illuminates a queer geography of Chicano art. Demarcating the fleeting and impermanent non-site specific installation lends a more nuanced reading of the spatio-temporal limitations of historical documents hidden and concealed outside the East L.A. barrio threshold. Hence, this “geographical identity” for gay and lesbian Chicano art as I observe was momentary, ephemeral, and complicates any finite and stationary cultural autobiography in the built environment above ground. GIS digital mapping technology reconstructs these spatial occurrences and visually recognizes how L.A. neighborhoods enacted a museological sense of place for VIVA artists clearly unmapped or untraced within the topography of East L.A. art objects (see Figure 7.4).

This countermapping practice is not exhaustive and its scale does not include public programs that were not specific art show events. It also does not reflect exhibitions of artists affiliated with VIVA but organized outside the organization such as the touring performances of Luis Alfaro or famed “Meat my Beat” show of Beto Araiza. Though the prolific role of gay and lesbian Chicana/o artists working in other parts of the city may have been an indirect result of VIVA social networks and cultural visibility, these shows are outside the scope of my analysis. This countermap documentation is an accumulation of evanescent installations as they occurred throughout bordering neighborhood regions. Viewing from Lewis’s macroscopic perspective into the urban landscape, three major zones of activity characterized the VIVA Museum: Silver Lake, Hollywood, and Santa Monica/Venice.

A careful look at the landscape reveals a considerable pattern of VIVA art exhibits placed in these Los Angeles neighborhoods. In Figure 7.5, each plotting point symbolizes a specific art exhibition and thumbnail indicates a significant art institution in the greater Los Angeles area including the Getty in Malibu, the Hammer Museum in Westwood, or the L.A. County Museum of Art in Museum Row, for instance. The pins to the far right of the map signify critical East L.A. sites in Chicano art history: Self-Help Graphics and Whittier Boulevard. From the city surface, this counterarchive records the spatial proximities between mainstream, ethnic-specific art institutions, and the museumscape of neighborhood landscapes. For example, in West Los Angeles we can observe physical correlations between commercial art spaces in Santa Monica and VIVA art exhibitions like “Floating: Art



Exhibition by Jef Huereque” (1995) or “Elliptical Figures: Drawings by Miguel Angel Reyes” (1997) at the Beyond Baroque.

Interestingly enough, VIVA art exhibitions were nearly absent in West Hollywood and East L.A. The eclipse of these areas as qualifying locations for gay and lesbian Latino art dwelling confounds how these neighborhoods are discursively affiliated within their respective racial/ethnic and sexual urban populations. This suggests that a queer geography of Chicano art reduced or entirely diminished the defining role of *el barrio* in reproducing a recognizable venue for Chicana/o art for gay and lesbian viewers. I am not somehow suggesting that East Los Angeles or West Hollywood were entirely isolated from or outside the history of the VIVA organization on the whole. In fact, as I will discuss further, VIVA’s first women-centered program, “Chicks and Salsa,” was a Christopher Street West gay pride event in conjunction with Lesbian Visibility Week and hosted at the West Hollywood Auditorium in 1992. However, these occurrences were rare and not typical of the organization’s exhibition history and urban experience.

More surprisingly, careful analysis of VIVA organizational records confirmed that East Los Angeles was remote if not entirely removed from the exhibition history, suggesting that VIVA cultural practice was “off-map.” This complicates the “geographical identity” of Chicano art and its intimate relationship within the barrio landscape. VIVA presents an art organization un-identified within the rigid strictures of what is recognizably “Chicano” or which seemingly would inhabit a Chicano art topography as charted by the hand of a Chicano artist-turned-cartographer exemplified by the Goetz map. Again, it is important to stress how this compulsory

heterosexuality created an indifferent, alienating, or uninviting atmosphere for gay and lesbian Latina/o arts.

For instance, a VIVA member anonymously referred to as “Marco” complained that “a nun who ran an ‘art space’ in heavily Latino/a East Los Angeles refused to let Teatro VIVA perform an educational theater piece on HIV/AIDS.”<sup>62</sup> Though Stockdill speaks of the theatrical arm of VIVA, his subject-informant Marco not so cleverly refers to Self Help Graphics directed by Sister Karen Bocalero of the Order of Sisters of St Francis. Though Self Help Graphics was not the only Chicano art space on the east side, the artistic and cultural exclusion from this historic Chicano organization suggests how anti-gay social hostilities may have foreclosed VIVA’s participation and spatial visibility in East L.A.

As I have maintained at length throughout this study, artists like Robert ‘Cyclona’ Legorreta, Mundo Meza, Gronk, and Joey Terrill, who were closely identified as homosexual Chicano artists in *el barrio*, were successful in part by intervening and rupturing Chicano sexual and gender propriety in the mundane conditions of the barrio in the 1970s. However, for the purposes of this essay, the VIVA place-making project nearly two decades later is quite profound because it departs from these spatial proximities and makes “queer moves” traversing city neighborhoods and reimagining museum space as a site of cultural survival and community preservation.

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<sup>62</sup> Stockdill, 42.

## Silver Lake

Considering the historic role of Silver Lake in the history of the organization, it is perhaps unsurprising that this neighborhood figured predominantly in VIVA's relationship to the urban landscape. Though Silver Lake is not necessarily distinguished as a cultural capital in the Los Angeles art marketplace, it does share a distinct role in local gay and lesbian history. Silver Lake was home to the first gay rights political organization, The Mattachine Society, in the early 1950s and included gay and lesbian owned small businesses such as bookstores, bars, and night clubs.<sup>63</sup> It was also populated by L.A.'s Latina/o constituencies, prompting the formation of the Sunset Junction Street Fair to mitigate residential tensions between gay homeowners and Latina/o immigrant residents.<sup>64</sup> Some of these spaces such as the Different Light Gay and Lesbian Bookstore hosted the first meetings of "Que VIVA!" in 1987. Also, members' residential homes in Silver Lake or nearby Los Feliz housed regular meetings for board leadership, including visual artist coordinator Mike Moreno's home on 1184 N. Madison Avenue between Santa Monica and North Virgil Avenue. The first official offices were also based out of Silver Lake, perhaps a natural evolution of its parent organization, Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos, which was based on 3938 Sunset Boulevard just a short drive away.

By 1988, 813 North Virgil Ave. #444 was the first home for the formal VIVA organization. Though records documenting this office are sparse, VIVA coordinated

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<sup>63</sup> See C. Todd White. *Pre Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights*. (University of Illinois Press, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons describe the growing gentrification in the area, and the unlikely pairing of Chicano gang member security guards affiliated with the mostly gay and lesbian population at the Sunset Junction street fair. This act apparently reconciled the street gangs, Silver Lake gay and lesbian residents and the anxious Mexican locals. See Faderman and Timmons. *Gay L.A.*, p. 299.

a bilingual hotline for gay and lesbian Latinas/os in the area. Quite possibly, the office may have been a strategic location and opportunity to be visible in a neighborhood already settled by VIVA board members and participating artists. In 1991, the organization opened a small office suite above a video rental store on 2538 Hyperion Avenue #9 in Silver Lake (see Figure 7.6). While this office could not provide a permanent space for dance rehearsals, artist workshops, theatrical presentations, or art classroom instruction, it came to be known as the “VIVA studio” and sometime later, “The VIVA gallery.”

This site was the hub for VIVA’s first significant round of solo art exhibitions, the artist reception series in 1992. VIVA presented three retrospective shows for gay and lesbian Latina/o artists, featuring printmaker/sculptor Julio Ugay, painter/illustrator Dyan Garza, and photographer/experimental video artist Laura Aguilar. The solo show retrospective typified a genre of formal museum curation and remained an important public program throughout the history of the organization. The show not only featured an accomplished VIVA artist but it also raised money for the artist through art sales. After 1992, later artist receptions were hosted in other parts of Los Angeles including the Norris Fine Art Gallery in Hollywood, the Grassy Knoll Coffeehouse, or Beyond Baroque in Venice (to be discussed later).

The installation at the VIVA Gallery suggests how this familiar museum exhibition genre – the retrospective, which typifies an artist’s definitive history in the arts over a lifespan – was readapted as a resistant place-making practice. This familiar curatorial model was necessarily employed at the VIVA Gallery and secured two major outcomes. First, the retrospective empowered HIV-positive Chicano and

Latino men who were confronting their own AIDS diagnosis and human mortality. Second, the hang arranges objects to demonstrate artistic life accomplishment as well as economic need. For an artist like Julio Ugay, the retrospective of his body of work was a poignant act breaking away from mainstream curatorial measures of life accomplishment and normative lifecycle. As the inaugural show for the “VIVA Gallery,” the impetus strove to give a show to a Latino artist, under-recognized and living with the life-threatening disease, AIDS. Opening on April 5, 1992, “Julio Ugay: Paintings, Drawings, Prints, Ceramics” retrospective featured ceramic masks, pencil sketches of male nudes, etching poster prints, and small paintings.<sup>65</sup>

Installation shots from this exhibit document how the VIVA office in Silver Lake had realized a recognizable museum setting.<sup>66</sup> Figure 7.7 shows how the everyday materials and office furniture are removed from the room center and pushed to the exterior of the gallery perimeter. The furniture is also reconfigured into the vernacular museum technology for temporary restaging of Ugay’s body of work. Desks and workspaces become the reception food tables and wine bar. The electric utility box, the water cooler, and the file cabinet construct the frame for the object encounter. Inside this museumscape, the VIVA office was capable of manifesting spectatorial engagements, object-viewer relations, and arrangements of artwork for gay and lesbian Latina/o audiences. This is a striking contrast to the Alfred Barr-inspired modernist tenets of the modern art gallery, which presents the art object suspended from contextual and visual distraction in the white cube

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<sup>65</sup> Unknown, “Gay, Latino Group, VIVA!, Presents Art Exhibit in Silverlake,” *Data-Boy Nightlife*, April 16, 1992, Issue 559, The VIVA Papers. Box 1, Folder 5. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>66</sup> Installation Photographs from *Julio Ugay: Paintings, Drawings, Prints, Ceramics*, April 5, 1992, The VIVA Papers. Box 1, Folder 5. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

Ugay's art densely packed the wall space at varying scales and heights, perhaps evoking references to the "elegant jig saw puzzle"<sup>67</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> century French artist salon tradition. While it may be argued that the clustered arrangement of the gallery was the consequence of wall length, closer inspection reveals the precise use of symmetry, scale, and genre ordering art placement. For instance, in Figure 7.8 we see ceramic masks paired and vaulted at the top of the wall stacked above other framed works on paper. This object density suggests the practical reuses of the limited office perimeter and the curatorial urgency to display a comprehensive art historical record in the face of advancing disease as well as Ugay's need for funds to meet the financial hardships of health care and drug treatments. The intense stacking of art maximizes collecting and purchasing, an economic reality for VIVA members facing HIV/AIDS. The curatorial method directs vision at object clusters from the uppermost region of the interior gallery, thrusting viewers from the "intense absorption"<sup>68</sup> expected through object allure. Rather, Ugay's pieces were united within the office frame, creating a socio-spatial experience constituted by the community activist setting. The curatorial logics of the Ugay retrospective embedded these objects within the political sensibilities of AIDS activism, community visibility, and the Silver Lake domicile. This consolidation was mediated by the familiar technologies of museological practices replete with pedestals, pseudo-vitrines, and distinct object environments. In the end, Ugay sold more than half of his collection and continued to contribute to VIVA art shows and fundraisers.

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew McClellan. *The Art Museum: From Boullée to Bilbao*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 120.

<sup>68</sup> Carol Duncan. *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 17.

Julio Ugay died one year later from AIDS related complications. He was laid to rest on Saturday, June 19, 1993 at Dignity Center in Los Angeles. He was 38.<sup>69</sup> At the funeral, a small drawing by Julio Ugay was included in the program. While its provenance is unknown, it is clearly another self-illustration. In Figure 7.9, the portrait drawing in its unpolished quality pictures a young man, perhaps Ugay, bearing a t-shirt that reads, “VIVA.” He is framed by a text border outlining the perimeter of the visual space, reading, “Human, Gay, Latino in the U.S.A.”<sup>70</sup> In what became a posthumous final exhibition, slides of his work were projected at the public eulogy. Even after death, Ugay commemorated VIVA as much as VIVA commemorated him. The organization sustained his artistic accomplishment and preserved his cultural memory, something he anticipated as he appropriated the moniker, VIVA, in his self-portrait that was used in the funeral program.

Much like a commercial art gallery, VIVA artist retrospectives ran for several concurrent weeks after opening and were made available to touring visitors. After an exhibition closed, the office returned to business as usual and, yet, the space always remained open to museumscaaping. It is important to stress how the office setting in Silver Lake was a significant locus in the organization’s spatial repertoire and concretized a recognizable location for “gay and lesbian” Chicano and Latino art otherwise un-placed. The Silver Lake headquarters, art exhibitions, and curatorial practice performed a reciprocal circuit. The organization successfully defined a distinctive place identity through its central location and Chicano art counter-mappings in the neighborhood.

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<sup>69</sup> Julio Ugay funeral program, June 19, 1993, The VIVA Papers. Box 1, Folder 5. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

For instance, by the fall of 1993, the VIVA office on Hyperion Avenue was even included in the Getty's "Visions and Voice" city-wide bus tour of art spaces in L.A.<sup>71</sup> Quite obviously, VIVA had been awarded the critical recognition that only a mainstream museum institution could bestow. This recognition not only coalesced gay and lesbian Latina/o art within the Silver Lake neighborhood but it captured Palencia's initial vision of an organization that could compete with comparable and legitimate art spaces in greater Los Angeles.

It is important to stress that beyond the walls of its office suite, VIVA assiduously cultivated ties to the neighborhood. The organization was a frequent participant and co-sponsor of Sunset Junction Street Fair at 4019 Sunset Blvd, just one block east of the Different Light Bookstore where the organization first met. Selling T-shirts, Polaroid pictures of people posing in exaggerated billboard cut outs, and other group promotion, VIVA was mutually codified within Silver Lake (see Figure 7.10).<sup>72</sup> However, a closer analysis of VIVA's exhibition history charts museum formations beyond the small office suite on Hyperion Avenue. In fact, VIVA's most controversial art exhibitions took place in nearby North Hollywood.

### Hollywood

On April 19, 1989, VIVA presented "Transcend: The First Anniversary" event at the home of Gay and Lesbian Liberation Front of L.A. founder Morris Kight, a recognized art collector and activist. Featuring an evening of literary readings, music,

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<sup>71</sup> VIVA Timeline. *Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Latino Arts Anthology, 1988-2000*. (Los Angeles, 2000), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Sunset Junction Photographs. 1994-95. The VIVA Papers. Box 17, Folder 4. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.



and performance art, VIVA showcased the cumulative results of artistic collaboration.<sup>73</sup> VIVA was capable of presenting provocative art albeit under the auspices of an iconic home-site affiliated with sexual liberation and situated in the home of a prolific gay civil rights leader. This is a house that would eventually be dubbed McCadden Place, an office extension of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, after Kight's death. Among the evening festivities, the night included a performance of "visual shock wave" from East L.A. conceptual artist Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta which met a rousing reception and also denouncements from "anti-drag" Latina lesbian feminists.<sup>74</sup>

Although the second anniversary show "Sin Fronteras" moved to the Les Freres Taix Restaurant in West Hollywood and included an awards ceremony as well as artist vignettes, "Transcend" was tantamount to establishing a distinct gay and lesbian Latina/o artist persona in the city. Though Silver Lake concretized VIVA's spatial legibility in the urban landscape in the early 1990s, Hollywood also held historic significance as a gay and lesbian district shaped by nightlife (Troupers Hall was just off La Brea Avenue) and the move of several gay and lesbian and HIV/AIDS social service agencies to the area in the 1980s (See Figure 7.11). This mix of gay and lesbian activist organizations, adjoining art galleries, and close proximity to Silver Lake converged, and permitted more controversial themes and sexually explicit museums for the organization.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Transcend Anniversary Materials. April 29, 1989. The VIVA Papers. Box 2, Folder 11. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>74</sup> This violent incident between Robert Legorreta and Latina lesbian activists is described in my book. See Robb Hernandez, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection*. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Research Center Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>75</sup> Moira Rachel Kennedy. *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 110.

For instance, one of VIVA's first shows in the area, "Safe-Sex Exhibit," was curated by Visual Arts Coordinator Joseph Malagon and VIVA curator Miguel Angel Reyes, and featured 25 multimedia artists showing "startling images of choices, needs, and sensual reflections prior to and after sex" (see Figure 7.12).<sup>76</sup> Opening on May 12, 1990 at the Studio #3 Artspace at 1650 Cosmo Avenue, the event featured art which incorporated phallic imagery, condoms, and AIDS prevention materials to increase responsibility, sexual expression, and homoerotic desire. The "Safe-Sex" exhibit displayed a collection of local gay and lesbian artists reacting to the growing anti-gay sentiment in the art world. Directly countering the National Endowment of the Arts' hostile claims that gay and lesbian art work was pornographic or morally corrupt, VIVA argued, "at a time when conservatism and Gay-themed censorship is challenging the arts, VIVA! addresses AIDS awareness with sexual celebration."<sup>77</sup> The resonating impact of the culture wars steered VIVA's curatorial agenda, image-making, and queer moves in the cityscape. In an effort to resist cultural censorship and erasure, Hollywood Avenue instilled sexually liberal possibilities in both gallery space and curatorial record.

The staging of the Safe-Sex exhibition was a Chicano art protest correlating VIVA's political mission with embattled NEA artists fighting for free speech. In an interview with *Frontiers* gay and lesbian news magazine, Palencia was prompted to argue, "We have had performances that would make the NEA blush . . . We had over 150 people celebrating safe and responsible sex. It was wonderful. We had about 40 art pieces [plus] improvisations and skits on safe sex from S/M to more conventional

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<sup>76</sup> Safe-Sex Exhibit Flier, 1990, The VIVA Papers. Box 2, Folder 12. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

sex.”<sup>78</sup> A show of this range, content, and expanse was an important curatorial marker in VIVA exhibition history.

This cultural anxiety over the NEA Four controversy and the threat of “gay art,” even compelled VIVA to combine the museum imaginary with Day of the Dead festivities. On Saturday, October 21, 1989, at La Miramba Restaurant in Downtown, L.A., VIVA presented a sexually explicit reinterpretation of the traditional Mexican folk art and festival celebrating the dead (see Figure 7.13). Though outside the geographic bounds of Hollywood, the Day of the Dead show connotes how gay and lesbian Latino artists sought a recognizable museum experience to spatially resist sexual marginalization, invisibility, and erasure in Los Angeles. Though no known records of the installation exist, ephemera promoting The Day of the Dead show promised “uncensored . . . erotic and phototropic art in the Robert Mapplethorpe tradition!!! Leave your condemnations at the door!!!!!!”<sup>79</sup> This flier seems to promise an act of curatorial solidarity. That is, VIVA realigned its spatial readaptations of the La Miramba Restaurant with the controversial art productions of the NEA Four and Robert Mapplethorpe.

Though curious, VIVA’s specific reappropriation of the “Mapplethorpe tradition” suggests how this controversial artist signified something greater for gay and lesbian Latina/o artists in L.A. Mapplethorpe’s racially and sexually controversial visual vocabulary was somehow resonant with this art collective. Of course, this curatorial declaration may have been both symbolic as well as timely.

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<sup>78</sup> Karen Dale Wolman, “Gay y Latino en Los Angeles,” *Frontiers*, Sept 28, 1990, 25, The VIVA Papers. Box 3. Folder 1. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.

<sup>79</sup> *Days of the Dead Show* flyer, October 21, 1989, The VIVA Papers. Box 2, Folder 17. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

The exhibit occurred on October 21, 1989, just months after Mapplethorpe's AIDS related death on March 9, 1989. Provided Mapplethorpe's international standing in the art world as an icon of free speech and homoerotic art, it would not be a stretch to presume how VIVA members were affected by his passing. Mapplethorpe's prominence in VIVA's first Day of the Dead show does show how the organization utilized the temporary art installation to assail invisibility and display imagery just as confrontational and unapologetic as the white gay artist persecuted for his identity and art.<sup>80</sup> Though the Mapplethorpe show happened one year before the "Safe-Sex Exhibit" in Downtown, it demonstrates how the culture wars shaped VIVA's sexually explicit curations and museumscaping in the Hollywood landscape. This residual museumscaping of Hollywood Boulevard generated homoerotic visibility, visualized Latina/o same-sex desires, and enabled provocative displays to contest government-sponsored censorship.

The sexually liberating possibility that this neighborhood allowed continued to reverberate in other VIVA installations. By July 1993, VIVA presented "Wild Life At Barnsdall in Three Acts" at Barnsdall Art Park on 4804 Hollywood Blvd. In the courtyard of the Hollyhock House designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright in 1921, VIVA presented a distinct curatorial arrangement of homoerotic Latino art installed in a fabricated public sex environment between trees, bushes, and ropes.<sup>81</sup> The overt sexual content of not only the objects but exhibition design even prompted the City of

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<sup>80</sup> For more on Latina restagings of the Dia de los Muertos, see Olivia Cadaval, "The Taking of the Renwick: The Celebration of the Day of the Dead and the Latino Community in Washington, D.C." *Journal of Folklore Research*. 22.2/3 (May 1985): 179-193.

<sup>81</sup> Miguel Angel Reyes. Email Communication to Author. November 23, 2007.

L.A. to investigate the show.<sup>82</sup> However, few were prepared for what would happen next. By 1994, VIVA closed its Silver Lake headquarters only to re-emerge in Venice.

### Venice/Santa Monica

Accepting an artist-in-residency position at Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center on 681 Venice Boulevard, VIVA's reappearance in this coastal community defied the restrictive ways in which Chicano art was authenticated by the East Los Angeles barrio (see Figure 7.14). Confounding economic or demographic determined arguments, VIVA's residency reminds Latino urban scholars, cultural geographers, and art historians how Venice successfully sustained and fostered a competing mode of sexually-derived Latino cultural expression and art production. However, VIVA's ascent in the Santa Monica area was by no means happenstance or coincidental. In fact, VIVA was quite conscious of the cultural landscape and recreated and projected a self-image through the West side context. Whereas, it would seem that VIVA's place was the consequence of an arrangement with Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center in 1994, its involvement with the area actually began as early as 1991.

Coinciding with "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries" at the L.A. County Museum of Art, over 200 art organizations, galleries, museums, and theatre groups planned exhibitions throughout the city. VIVA was one of these organizations. For VIVA curator Guillermo Hernandez, a recent graduate of UCLA art history, his efforts to secure a sponsoring gallery proved difficult. His proposal to the Cure Gallery on Melrose Avenue was denied and his request to Anne Ayers, director of

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<sup>82</sup> Luis Alfaro, "House of Chisme," *Sexy and Spiritual: VIVA Arts Quarterly*. Fall 1993/Winter 1994, The VIVA Papers. Box 16. Folder 8. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.

exhibitions at the Otis-Parson school of design, was turned down. Hernandez approached Beyond Baroque, a struggling arts space. Beyond Baroque agreed to sponsor, “VIVA’s Mexico: Too Many Centuries of Denial, Invisibility and Silence.” The opening on September 15, 1991 was well attended and included an impressive collection of 22 visual artists, performances, and readings on tape from the likes of Monica Palacios, Luis Alfaro, Beto Araiza, and Teatro VIVA. The mission of the show not only affiliated VIVA artists within a citywide arts circuit but also celebrated “unknown artists” who “address the artistic, cultural, social-political agendas which discriminate [against] us for being gay and lesbian and Latino.”<sup>83</sup> For Hernandez, the show was an act of cultural preservation in the face of erasure, an exhibit, “dedicated to our hermanos y hermanas who died of AIDS due to cultural and government indifference.” What is quite surprising is not only Hernandez’s decision to remove the show from VIVA’s headquarters in a racially and sexually diverse neighborhood like Silverlake but install it in the secluded area of Venice/Santa Monica.

This early departure from the “proper” barrio landscapes for Chicano art is implicitly captured in the Artes de Mexico news special aired on KCBS in 1991. Showcasing a variety of Mexican art celebrations throughout the city, two Anglo journalists tour the festival and interview participating artists, actors, musicians, conductors, and curators. Following a montage of East Los Angeles barrio murals by Willie Herron, Ernesto de la Loza, and the East Los Streetscapers mural collective, the broadcast turns its attention to the “gay and lesbian perspective” in Venice. Complete with interviews from Guillermo Hernandez, and artists Dyan Garza and

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<sup>83</sup> Guillermo Hernandez, letter to Phillip Miller, February 8, 1991. The VIVA Papers. Box 3, Folder 6. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library

Joey Terrill, the “VIVA’s Mexico” exhibition projects a curatorial style and self-image more reminiscent of the mainstream art institutions populating Venice than the “barriological” display of East L.A.

This contrasting “geographical identity” for VIVA is further perpetuated by the distinct musical framing in the televised special. The montage of barrio murals is circumscribed by the familiar Chicano nationalist anthems of Carlos Santana, whereas VIVA’s Mexico is presented by the delicate chords of classical Mexican folk guitar, the same folk guitar scoring the televisual tour of the Rufino Tamayo show, for instance. The distinct non-diegetic sound of both landscapes embeds an aural barrio authenticity for one and a distanced museological recognition for the other. In this way, Hernandez successfully portrayed a curatorial maturity for the organization, perhaps only made possible by the West Side venue, contact with mainstream art patrons, and application of museological techniques. “VIVA’s Mexico” attained considerable publicity from *Art Scene: Monthly Guide to Art in Southern California*, *Art In America* magazine, and an art feature in *Frontiers* gay newsmagazine.<sup>84</sup> These mainstream art publications increased the national profile and public image for VIVA, now a certifiable and noteworthy arts organization in the annals of contemporary American art and culture.

Though VIVA was closely identified with its Silver Lake environment, West L.A. presented opportunities to promote a museum image comparable to the numerous art institutions in the area, such as the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Bergamot Station, and Highways Performance Art Space. Considering the Beyond

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<sup>84</sup> Unknown, *Artscene*. 11:2 (October 1991), The VIVA Papers. Box 3, Folder 6, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

Baroque building's close proximity to Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), founded by Chicana feminist muralist Judith Baca, Venice seemed promising. In fact, West Los Angeles offered VIVA the spatial means to re-imagine gay and lesbian Latina/o art in its own way and on its own terms, something perhaps imported from the area's rich legacy and association with the feminist art movement in California.

Though some have claimed that VIVA's relocation was strongly influenced by VIVA's general coordinator, Monica Palacios, who also lived in Venice, I find such an explanation overly determined. While an organizational leader with the social capital necessary to influence the mission and direction of the group, Palacios was also a collaborative leader with the board of directors. VIVA was not under her sole province. This said, even a peripheral analysis of the intense activity of VIVA exhibitions in the landscape suggests how the organization thrived in this environment, staking claims to the area through a museumscaping project.

In a grant narrative from August 1994, VIVA was quite cognizant of its presence on the west side. Referencing "VIVA's Mexico" and "Chicks and Salsa" at Beyond Baroque in November 1994, the narrative articulates how Venice supported a new audience for art, within these secluded and contained coastal communities. VIVA argued, "In the West Los Angeles, Santa Monica area . . . perceived to be a primarily white middle to upper class region, we expose our members to another segment of our community."<sup>85</sup> VIVA foresaw how art exhibitions could disrupt common predispositions of Venice among its membership. This West L.A. venture

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<sup>85</sup> VIVA Grant Narrative, 1995, The VIVA Papers. Box 5. Folder 8. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.



presented something exciting to VIVA, the opportunity to establish a queer and racialized art identity in a largely white, heteronormative, and wealth territory of the city. This is to say that above and beyond Monica Palacios's home in Venice, they were quite aware of the cultural and spatial benefits of West Side visibility. Later in the grant narrative, they espouse, "VIVA further works to remove the boundaries within our communities by inviting the residents of Venice, Santa Monica, and the West Los Angeles area, to participate in the universal emotion of . . . art, music, poetry, spoken word and comedy."<sup>86</sup>

VIVA presented an ideological argument consistent with the mainstream arts institutions populating Santa Monica/Venice. By asserting the universal visual appeal of their artistic production, VIVA foresaw ways to present a self-image that correlated with the museum-going art public and art spaces composing the coastal landscape. This spatial identification with the region constructed another way of creating a Latino art collective that was visible and legible to multiple population centers including mainstream art patrons. A close spatial analysis of the map represents the close approximation of VIVA exhibitions to mainstream and commercial art spaces. This arrangement correlated gay and lesbian Latina/o art within parallel museum formations in intimate proximity to each other. Of course, it is unclear how VIVA membership was affected by this change. A flier from one West L.A. show indicates how VIVA reconciled gay and lesbian Latina/o audiences within this coastal terrain.

Designed and illustrated by artist Teddy Sandoval, the announcement for "Queer Hombres" featuring performance artists Ricardo Bracho and Ric Oquita on

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

February 25, 1995, listed date, time and location (see Figure 7.15). However, beneath the information for the event, the text read, “Beyond Baroque, 681 Venice Blvd at the edge of the world in Venice.”<sup>87</sup> This place-conscious comment infers VIVA’s self-awareness. Event organizers for this two man performance inferred how the cognitive geographies of working class gay and lesbian Latinas/os in Silver Lake may not voyage too far west. By acknowledging VIVA’s new grounds “at the edge of the world,” even promotional material reflected a spatial sensibility or insider knowledge among its membership otherwise resistant to the new place. VIVA intentionally drew attention to the unmapped or uncharted distance between Silver Lake and Venice. To some degree, the occupation of Venice presents a “place consciousness”<sup>88</sup> for gay and lesbian Latina/o artists reclaiming an “improper” region undefined within Chicana/o art cultural circuits. In short, the emergent museumscapes shaping the neighborhood were the intentional decisions of an art collective recoding and rectifying home for an array of Latina/o artist talent, creative production, and cultural survival.

The collaborative relationship between VIVA and Beyond Baroque endured throughout the history of the organization. VIVA readapted the solo artist exhibitions which characterized the VIVA Studio in Silver Lake for painter/illustrator Miguel Angel Reyes, graphic arts designer Ruben Esparza, and painter Jef Huereque. Unlike the retrospective shows in Silver Lake, VIVA hosted exhibitions and readings in conjunction with their popular arts and literary journal, including a launch party for *Passion and Protest* in 1994 and *Natural/Unnatural* in 1995. Though VIVA continued to host events in Silver Lake and Hollywood into the late 1990s, it is

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<sup>87</sup> *Queer Hombres* flyer, February 25, 1995, The VIVA Papers. Box 6, Folder 17. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

<sup>88</sup> Villa, 5.

important to emphasize how the museum imaginary was a discursive means of ingraining these “unknown artists” within the mainstream art spaces foundational to the area. By occupying the “edge of the world,” Venice was a symbolic metaphor for VIVA. Neither placed centrally in *el barrio* nor rooted in explicitly gay residential districts, Venice cultivated gay and lesbian Latina/o museum formations and art productions at the farthest reaches of the city.

By remapping VIVA exhibition history into the urban landscape, Silver Lake, Hollywood, and Venice yield further insights into the ways gay and lesbian Latina/o artists experienced the city and readapted the museum idea for community enabling ends. That is, the place-conscious curations of the “museumscape” constructed a legible gay and lesbian Latina/ art subject, and roused social membership through visual spectatorship. Museumsapes presented a vision of the knowable Latina/o gay and lesbian artist cultivating an audience capable of seeing and knowing a Chicano art reconstituted queerly in not only homoerotic content but museum space and display. As a consequence, the spatial experience was an undeniable element of these immersive environments installed outside the finite Chicano art barrio threshold. Through the racial and sexual coherence of art display, curatorial practice, and even interior design, Museo VIVA promoted a particular visual and spatial expression recognizable and distinct to an unplaced and dislocated gay and lesbian Latino arts public. This indicates how the queer geography of Chicano art not only reinscribed the urban landscape through patterns of temporary art shows in three distinct neighborhood settings but more specifically how the landscape was museumsaped through the microcartography of such display technologies as interior hangs, designs,

and object environments. This solicited spatial experiences in the distinct expressions of a Museo VIVA style.

*Queer Atmosphere and Spatial Design*

The earliest indicator of this atmospheric effect is evident in board meeting records. On September 9, 1988, VIVA visual arts coordinator/curator Mike Moreno lobbied for the purchase of “decorations” for an upcoming exhibition. The display would “make [the] bar look exciting and look like a celebration for Hispanic week. Also, to give VIVA an exciting image.”<sup>89</sup> Though we cannot be certain what curatorial image-making was adapted to signify gay and lesbian Latino identity in a gay bar, this board meeting discussion shows how VIVA fashioned a self-image through installation technique. Quite clearly, Moreno’s interest in the overall atmospheric resonance echoed among other Directors. Roland Palencia also agreed with Moreno and committed funds for the decoration expense. Truly, VIVA’s greater concern over organizational image and perception lasted long after Moreno and Palencia left the organization leadership in the early 1990s. Crafting the necessary “look” and “looking” was a direct outcome of these early conversations on the VIVA board in a way that strove for gay and lesbian Chicano and Latino art organization visibility – one that had not yet come to fruition for these artists in Los Angeles formally. As a result, the VIVA art collective intentionally sought a spatial identity, environmental design, and style in later public programs.

This is not to overemphasize the installation of VIVA artists as somehow incontrovertible to other marginal artists outside the formal circuits of American art

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<sup>89</sup> VIVA Board of Director Meeting Minutes, September 9, 1988, The VIVA Papers. Box 5, Folder 13. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library

and commercial exchange. After all, these museumscape are clearly the reuses and reappropriation of alternative art spaces, something particular to contemporary art collectives, self-taught artists, outsider artists, and not just gay Chicano ones. My point is to suggest how Chicano art derived by sexual difference and same-sex desire not only exceeds the bounds of a barrio geography but remapped an “improper” queer geography of Chicano art, supported and nourished in other grounds of the city. This said, Museo VIVA sought not only to present Chicano art as some static or fixed display but strove for a discernible organizational style, a design that distinguished and reconciled the look of the organization with distinct attributes of Chicano and homosexual sensibilities in the overall spatial effect.

For example, VIVA’s ten year anniversary celebration at El Rey Theatre in Hollywood on May 16, 1998 included an awards ceremony, dinner, poetry slam reading, musicians, art auction, and guest speaker, openly gay Puerto Rican actor Wilson Cruz. The organization readapted an 8,000 square foot movie palace, selling tickets through the luxury front office booth, ordering traffic with velvet ropes, and constructing a blue three panel wood triptych to display 15 donated art pieces for the live art auction. VIVA organizers suspended normative curatorial orderings of wall space, color, and texture for what Jennifer Doyle has called “queer wallpaper,”<sup>90</sup> that hung art objects to create a sexualized environment through objects of fantasy and pleasure (see Figure 7.16). Other pieces such as Joey Terrill’s “Silver Lake” placed the theatre interior with the homoerotic landmarks, punctuating an arousing encounter with museumscape surfaces, something that activates the wall with the desirous

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<sup>90</sup> Jennifer Doyle, “Queer Wallpaper,” In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

display of a young Latino man in the intimate repose of the bedroom perhaps in post-coital rest (see Figure 7.17).

The tables draped in black fabric were embellished with commemorative portraits of famous Mexican golden era actors like Maria Felix on souvenir fans, a gesture in recognition of the El Rey movie palace context (see Figure 7.18). The table setting stages a reconciled cultural experience, inferring a queer affinity and campy adoration of Mexican celebrity. This presumption illuminates the sardonic and camp sensibility of the anniversary event, an attitude that finds possibility and reconciliation for Chicano and Latino sexual difference in the place settings of the very tables forming social engagement and community interaction.

This mass media appropriation was critical to VIVA's organizational image which drew from graphic designer Ruben Esparza's pop art aesthetic. A Chicano graphic artist most renowned for his postmodern explorations of commercial logos and corporate "spin," his art proposes image-text puns of commercially endorsed and mass produced social movements, human catastrophes, or racial violence. He explains, "[The logos are] like trivializing things that are maybe heartfelt or really cultural taboos and boiling it down to an icon, something that you can look and digest and just hold itself on its own."<sup>91</sup>

As a result, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary program brochure, high quality and glossy, fashions VIVA's logo on the program cover (see Figure 7.19). Symbolically, the VIVA organizational emblem is an extension of Esparza's pop art aestheticism. Reappropriating the corporate icon from Ariel laundry detergent, a Mexican-based

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<sup>91</sup> Ruben Esparza. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 24 August 2007. Los Angeles, California.

soap company, he creates an insignia that markets a gay and lesbian art collective within the empty and artificial signification of corporate identity. Circumventing a Chicano art visual nomenclature, Esparza's contemporary art branding crudely breaks from a Pre-Columbian or Meso-American teleology. Refusing an iconographic inheritance from Chicano protest aesthetic, he defines VIVA through its synthetic attention to surface and mass consumption. It is a postmodernist contemporary art solution that signifies Mexican cultural heritage, not through dictates of Mexican modernist art but the commercial import of Mexican visual culture, corporate style, and mass-market identity.

This pop art faith in mass-produced spectacle and commodification congealed the VIVA "look" stressing artifice and veneer. However, the legitimacy and integrity of this high-design production style was at times tested. For instance, in a formal letter of complaint from the VIVA Board of Directors to Patricia Ryan and Ernest Over, co-chairs of the West Hollywood Lesbian and Gay Advisory Council, they recount hostile and racist treatment by Lesbian Visibility Week organizers in 1993. The letter recounts the lengths to which VIVA spatially reconfigured the auditorium for Chicks and Salsa, an annual women's event which included performance, stand up, and an art exhibition. Using light trees, floral sculptures, table setting designs, and pin spot lighting, VIVA had fabricated a memorable interior experience for VIVA artists and performances.

According to a grievance letter from the VIVA Board of Directors, Lesbian Visibility week members harassed VIVA volunteers, de-installed parts of the interior design in the hall, and disregarded the integrity and labor of the spatial expression no

matter how superfluous or accidental. In fact, VIVA argued that the reductive and dismissive treatment of the installation and design undermined the event, public image, and place identity. They argue, “The auditorium, we believe, has never looked better. We contracted with a Silver Lake baker who provided us with *pan dulce* and *empanadas*. We also served *jamaica* and *horchata*. We say this because it has been our policy to not only create a culturally sensitive visual art exhibition and performance, but an environment that is welcoming and familiar to our Latina community.”<sup>92</sup> Drawing on a talented creative class of make-up artists, window dressers, stylists, florists, and fashion illustrators like Jef Huereque and Dyan Garza, the VIVA membership fabricated a proscenium and reception area to “excite” community engagement.

Quite clearly, this conflict with the white lesbian planners of Lesbian Visibility Week stressed the legitimacy of VIVA spatial expression, a self-branding exercise alternatively reusing and re-placing white lesbian terrain. This letter of complaint explicates the importance of art installation, curation, and stylization, and defends how the design of “culturally sensitive” environments enabled community empowering place for queer Latinas and Chicanas (in this instance). The Lesbian Visibility Week organizers’ disregard for the atmospheric elements only magnified the ways in which museumscaping externalized and exteriorized a “familiar” racial and sexual sensibility in the smells of Mexican food and the high-end production values of the Chicks and Salsa environmental design. As VIVA coordinator Monica Palacios remembered,

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<sup>92</sup> VIVA Advisory Board, letter to Patricia Ryan and Ernest Over, December 2, 1993. The VIVA Papers. Box 6, Folder 18. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.



“[I]t wasn’t let’s just throw up things with some thumb tacks and scotch tape. No. It was always definitely about a look. That was super important. The aesthetic of it. The design of it. Does it look well? Does it look high quality? Even coming to our shows specifically Chicks and Salsa, you know, preshow music [was] super important. That’s important to me as an individual artist . . . You know, come to my show, the Monica Palacios show or the VIVA show at the time. Hey, this is exciting! All these little elements come together, you know? It’s not an accident. It’s very specific elements are put together to make a really fun, hip, happening experience to remember, you’ll remember. It was always crucial.”<sup>93</sup>

By re-inhabiting spaces like the El Rey Theatre or West Hollywood Auditorium, VIVA spatial productions instilled a sense of place and generated the necessary “excitement” Moreno, Esparza, Garza, and Palacios were hoping to convey. The curatorial fabrication of interiors, hangs, and displays shaped the ocular-social arrangements between the VIVA organizational brand, gay and lesbian Latina/o viewing publics, and Chicano art queer geography beyond “el barrio.” Retrospectively assessing the spatial outcomes and environmental reception for gay and lesbian Latina/o artists and audiences, VIVA board member and painter Miguel Angel Reyes concluded, “[these artists] belonged somewhere.”<sup>94</sup>

This explication of a “VIVA look” signals gay art historian Christopher Reed’s assertion that gay and lesbian place-making analysis must necessarily entertain art historical visual interpretations not only from “monument-making” but in other spatial expressions, such as: renovation, restoration, and the queer “high-design

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<sup>93</sup> Monica Palacios. Interview by Robb Hernandez, video recording, 14 September 2010. Los Angeles, California.

<sup>94</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 298.

space” of aesthetic representation.<sup>95</sup> Of course, Reed’s work is somewhat derailed by the racist implications of queer renovation in low-income ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods like gentrified Silver Lake and, yet, I find the symbolic and stylistic possibilities of queer spatial resistance redolent of VIVA’s museumscaping on the micro-spatial level. Rather than laud the Pacific Design Center<sup>96</sup> iconic queer image at the foreground of the West Hollywood landscape as Reed does, I ask how might the racialized “renovations” of mainstream and white gay and lesbian space empower gay and lesbian Latina/o subjectivities in transgressive designs, foodways, and scents? How does this extravagant stylization expand the corpus of Latino urbanism in mainstream gay and lesbian social spaces and rebuke the barrio as the legitimizing threshold for Chicano art authenticity and geographical identity?

Arguably, I find these malleable “renovated” environments inside white gay host venues indicative of spatial resistance in the creative power of hyperracialized queer design. Unlike the bounded “geographical” identity of fixed Chicano murals, to borrow from Reed, the “immanent” queer geographies of the museumscape rupture the fixed polarities of Chicano art outside museum institutions and point to a “place consciousness” in the neighborhoods, nourishing its art production, and re-adaptation of the museum idea. As such, VIVA artists invented museum imaginaries, which reshaped the urban landscape and found possibility, visibility, and cultural survival in the “high design space” of queer and racialized fabricated environments. With this in mind, it is possible to articulate a microcartographic curation of belonging, making

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<sup>95</sup> Christopher Reed. “Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment.” *Art Journal*. 55.4 (Winter 1996), 67.

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin Forest. “West Hollywood as Symbol: The Significance of Place in the Construction of a Gay Identity.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 13 (1995), 143.

place, and reclaiming territories that redefine conventional spatial signifiers of queer space and expand Chicano art topography.

In conclusion, the VIVA organization innovated other ways of knowing, seeing, and placing the museum. Defying the geographic identity for Chicano art in the mural laden barrio streets, sexual difference, and social marginality spurred other queer moves in a Los Angeles marked by art censorship, controversy, and the AIDS crisis. This navigation settled other centers of Latino art production, identification, and spatial experience, areas outside the East Los Angeles neighborhood revered as the Chicano art epicenter. Due to VIVA's transgressive occupation of "improper" locations or "illegitimate" spatial practices for Chicano art dwelling, the impetus of the museum in VIVA history is undocumented or precarious at best. Implicitly, my efforts to reposition Silver Lake, Hollywood, or Santa Monica/Venice disrupts Chicano art-historical forces, imposing art production in territories constituted by "proper" heterosexual bodies, visions, and spatial practices. The VIVA organization's profound grasp of the museum imaginary as more than the vile technology of white colonial imperialism presents an important and necessary counterarchive in the cultural biography of the city. These other documents mined from the cultural landscape disrupt the arcane presumptions of race, space, and desire in the foundations of Chicano art movement, art collectives, and museum institutions. From the inspired underwater vision and museum encounter of Roland Palencia to the development of museumscaping in neighborhoods that contest heteronormative geographic identities for Latina/o art, VIVA constructed queer possibilities in a

sprawling city that continue to structure the directional flows of gay and lesbian Latino art curation and exhibition today.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### *An Impossible Moment: Toward Dark Cracks in Chicano Art History*

My investigation ends where it began at the thriving epicenter of Chicano art production: Self-Help Graphics. Established in East Los Angeles in 1972, this distinguished art center, at a locale associated as much with its mosaic tiled building on North Gage Avenue as with its art, first defined the Chicano Art Movement. Suffice it to say, invoking Self-Help Graphics is to also invoke the legacy of “founder” Sister Karen Bocalero, a socially conscious art advocate and practitioner and Franciscan nun. Her widely acknowledged role securing acclaim and attention for Chicano artists places her at the forefront of Chicano art history. Not only is she known for jumpstarting many artists’ early careers in Los Angeles, but she also became a missionary of sorts, introducing printmaking and political graphics to a formative generation. In fact, it is hard to imagine any study about the nascent years of the Chicano Art Movement without foregrounding Self-Help Graphics and in turn, evoking Sister Karen’s memory, a long-held association correlating the founder and the building within the memorializing process. For instance, following Sister Karen’s death in 1997, she was eulogized in altars, prints, and portraits, perhaps the most iconic image being one by Miguel Angel Reyes in 2007.<sup>1</sup> If one is lucky enough to attend the right art opening, staff members might even retell stories of her phantasmagoric appearance, a sighting almost as legendary as a modern saint.

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<sup>1</sup> Reina Alejandra Prado Saldivar. “Self-Help Graphics: A Case Study of a Working Space for Arts and Community.” *Aztlan*. 25.1 (2000): 167.

For this alone, it is perhaps surprising for many to hear the names Carlos Ibanez y Bueno and Antonio Ibanez, names that seem more contrived than descriptive of Self-Help's foundational albeit neglected leadership. Otherwise omitted or sublimated within the grandiose narratives and laments of Sister Karen, an icon venerated at the crossroads of three major pillars of Chicano cultural identity – community-building, political activism, and the Catholic Church – these artists carry no meaning in the official history of this seminal arts institution and remain forgotten. This silence is quite suggestive. Carlos and Antonio were not only fellow artists and colleagues of Sister Karen's, but they were also homosexuals as well as lovers. Indeed, by now, this is a familiar elision in the archive of the Chicano Art Movement that empties and dissociates the critical role of homosexuality in one of East L.A.'s most beloved cultural institutions.

This is a fact largely overlooked in most Chicano art historical examinations of this space, an inconvenient reality that complicates the Catholic foundations of the organization. Though a recent publication about the Self Help Graphics collection at the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives at University of California, Santa Barbara briefly acknowledges Carlos and Antonio's role, this story is subsumed within Sister Karen's autobiography, the chief historical actor in the archival guide.<sup>2</sup> In other art-historical studies, these men are entirely omitted or simply referred to as other artists, unnamed and unspecified under the leadership of Sister Karen in the early years.<sup>3</sup> At this point in my study, this historical disjuncture is a familiar one,

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, see Kristen Guzman. *Self Help Graphics & Art: Art in the Heart of East Los Angeles*. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> In Reina Prado's discussion of Self Help Graphics' pivotal role in bridging community based art with museum institutions, she foregrounds the innovative work of Sister Karen with a brief and non-specific

recapitulating the very abridgement and concealment typifying homosexual artists' reinvestments and relocations within the archival, curatorial, and commemorative acts of resistance. Whereas many of the men principally outlined in this study were quite young and had just laid out their formative artistic courses in the early 1970s, Carlos and Antonio already acted as their more established predecessors. Indeed, they were fundamental to a sexualized Chicano self-expression that came to define the later transgressive aestheticism of men such as Robert Cyclona, Mundo Meza, Gronk, Joey Terrill, and Teddy Sandoval at the core of this study.

### *Homosexuality and Chicano Muralism*

Though the circumstances behind Antonio Ibanez's life with Bueno in East Los Angeles are little known, we do know that Carlos was born in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1941.<sup>4</sup> He moved to L.A. in 1971 (see Figure 8.1). A well-regarded painter, printmaker, and muralist, Bueno had an artistic predisposition for the seemingly perverse, offensive, and vulgar. Often portraying the disreputable in a familiar art-historical tradition as exemplified in the works of Otto Dix, Gustave Courbet, and Edouard Manet, Bueno's paintings also portrayed prostitutes, street hustlers, effete young men, and even transvestites. However, unlike the aforementioned artists, he was openly homosexual, a self-admission rare in East Los Angeles and, particularly, among Chicano muralists.

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acknowledgement of other artist-founders. For more, see Reina Alejandra Prado Saldivar. "Self-Help Graphics: A Case Study of a Working Space for Arts and Community." *Aztlán*. 25.1 (2000): 168. Similarly, in an article about the possible relocation of Self-Help Graphics, writer Alisa Walker remarks that the group's origins began in an East Los Angeles garage in 1970 charged by Sister Karen "with several Mexican and Chicano artists." She, too, resituates Carlos and Antonio within an un-cited and obscure historical location. See Alisa Walker, "Creative Outlet for LA's Latino Community," *Creative Review*, March 6, 2009, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Woo, "Carlos Bueno, 60; L.A. Art Pioneer," *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 2001, B10.

Muralism itself was a masculinist art medium, not only an import from Los Tres Grandes to the U.S. in the 1930s, but as a continuation of Mexican tradition and political conviction, it carried a self-regarding muscularity and athleticism. Enduring the unpredictable urban elements, muralists were testaments to male bravado and an exercise in virility as they scaled walls and traversed metal scaffolding, mounting towering ladders and applying blocks of color. As Chicana cultural critics like Guisela La Torre, Laura Perez, and Cary Cordova have uncovered, Chicana muralistas were also a part of this medium's popularity but they were the exception rather than the rule.<sup>5</sup> Although their achievement is predicated on this masculinist context, they broke through familiar artistic social circles. Chicano mural production was constituted by its homosocial and fraternal order, an art form influenced by its overt heteromasculine appeal and all-male collaborations.

Bueno's murals were quite exceptional. These bold and declarative statements projected the distasteful and amoral subject made manifest in barrio urban streetscapes (see Figure 8.2). His murals became a cogent surfacing of his autobiography and same-sex desire, an encoded grafting of social provocation, sexual indulgence, and personal self-revelation and exposure. Inscribing each piece with the moniker "Ibanez y Bueno," a conjoining of his name and that of his lover, the artist is reminiscent of modernist painter Marsden Hartley and his encoded abstract portraits commemorating lost lovers and relationships (see Figure 8.3).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Bueno also

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Chicana muralism and feminist art analysis, see Guisela LaTorre. *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008) and Cary Cordova. "Hombres y Mujeres Muralistas on a Mission: Painting Latino Identities in 1970s San Francisco." *Latino Studies*. 4.4 (Winter 2006): 356-380.

<sup>6</sup> See Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant-Garde*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).



wrought a cyphered schema consolidating himself and his lover with each insignia and inscription. These were no ordinary murals of Aztlan but, rather, a picture plane in which his sexuality, now forever cemented and unified with another man, could be proclaimed and circulated within the quintessential medium of Chicano art (see Figure 8.3).

Bueno is hardly the first homosexual Chicano muralist in the Chicano Art Movement. I would be remiss not to acknowledge someone like Mario Castillo, a Chicano painter conventionally associated with painting the first contemporary Chicano art mural “Metafisica” in Chicago in 1968 and who gained notoriety while an MFA student at California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles for his series of male semen paintings in 1972.<sup>7</sup> Under a similar guise, we might also revisit Los Four co-founder Carlos Almaraz, neither explicitly “homosexual” or “gay” male identified – he was married to Chicana photographer and painter, Elsa Flores – whose love affairs with other men, including Dan Guerrero and Teddy Sandoval, are a part of the public record, as is his AIDS-related death in 1989.<sup>8</sup> However, unlike Bueno, Almaraz avoided homosexual self-disclosure in his iconic mural pieces with Los Four, the portable frescos, and United Farm Workers convention banners. This is perhaps why Bueno’s profile is so profound, an East L.A. barrio muralist’s foray into same-sex desire and expression at the precipice of a Chicano masculine and homosocial art genre.

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<sup>7</sup> George Vargas. *Contemporary Chicano Art: Color & Culture For A New America*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Dan Guerrero’s personal relationship with Carlos Almaraz is a topic of his one-man show, “¡GayTino!”

### Cholo Beauty

This artistic strategy grows in importance within the vicissitudes of Self Help Graphics' historiography and archivization. Bueno is widely acknowledged among Chicano art collector circles, not only for his accomplished murals, but for producing the first print at Self-Help Graphics in 1972. In Figure 8.4, we see a portrait of an effete young Cholo. His three-quarter turned profile exudes a delicacy rare in the hypermasculine imagery of the Chicano urban male archetype. His half-rounded eyes project a sensitivity and vulnerability. It is a boyish quality that peers through the macho exterior signified by the visual arrangement of the knit cap, squared jaw, and affected facial containment. His lips are simple, red, and pursed together. A fleck of white ink on his lower lip creates a reflective, moist, and supple surface, drawing our attention to the desirous possibility of his mouth puckering, a pictorial strategy attuned more to feminine visual cues than Cholo manhood. Bueno's print collapses a constrictive interior space of the barrio, framing the young man in bold graffiti, a mesh of aerosol brush strokes and gang signage seemingly emanating from his body. This flattened perspective and shallow depth constructs a veritable halo of placas (gang calligraphy) reading "Lil Loco" and "#13" re-proposing the angelic Cholo as urban saint. As opposed to reconstituting the blind veneration of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a familiar artistic and political image in Chicano iconography, Bueno finds faith in the savior of a different kind: the untarnished beauty of the East L.A. Cholo man.

Bueno's print only recently surfaced at a Galeria Otro Vez show at Self-Help Graphics, entitled, "Eastside Connection: Works from the Gil Cardenas Collection"

(2008), a comprehensive showcase of pieces from Cardenas's private collection, considered the largest and most complete in the country. In fact, the Bueno piece was even featured on the gallery postcard, a curatorial nod to Bueno's pivotal but unevaluated role in Self-Help's institutional memory. Because the exact attribution of the print as indeed the first serigraph under the Self-Help Graphics moniker cannot be accurately verified, its place here in my assessment may be deemed invalid, inaccurate, or controversial. After all, it is a claim that many Chicano artists have made throughout the years of the organization, each clamoring for this esteemed first place in Chicano art history and the institutional archive. To validate this assertion would not only add substantial art-historical insight, but also add market value to the Cardenas-owned print, accruing to it extra influence and relevance in a major American art collection. My insertion of the Bueno print is not to lend scholarly weight to this claim, an implicit by-product even as these words mark this page, but to complicate the venerable place of Sister Karen and magnify the "dark cracks" of the Self-Help archive, and draw our attention to the concealment of Chicano art records lying dormant in the shadow of official institutional discourses. Here I speak of an organizational archive that has gained national attention over the years, especially as the foreclosing of its building on North Gage Avenue in 2011 intensified public interest in its cultural history and symbolic role in the cultural landscape. As art critic Alisa Walker astutely proclaimed, "Poking through the flat files of the [Self-Help Graphics] archives is like getting a private tour of the Chicano and Latino art movements. Some critics would say this is where the visibility of that movement

began, a movement that has now been exhibited all over the world, collected in museums and coveted by collectors.”<sup>9</sup>

This is pathos that the *L.A. Times* has made public to its readers, quoting one Self-Help Graphics volunteer’s eulogizing rhetoric, “This is a place that kept our youth together . . . When we pass by it, we know what it means, and now things will be different.”<sup>10</sup> As I have argued extensively in the previous chapter, this is a difference belying a specific Chicano art history that was always in place. That is, an implicit recognition of an art heritage that constituted a familial order and a social arrangement from which barrio residents sought a stable spatial identity, self-affirmation, and sense of belonging. This is a privilege afforded to a particular Chicano art geography and cultural memory, one that affirms a repository for “our youth,” uncomplicated by sexual and gender difference. According to reporter Esmeralda Bermudez, efforts were underway to list the former building with the California Register of Historic Resources. As Derrida reminds us, for what is an archive without its legitimating domicile? Such is a site so constitutional of Chicano cultural heritage that its space must be spared, if only to become a monument to and repository of the Chicano Art Movement.

And yet, as we have discussed throughout this study, an image such as Bueno’s print illuminates the social construction of the Self-Help Graphics archive, a representation that suppresses the ways in which Chicano same-sex desire was a significant tenet in its founding. Thus, Bueno’s “archival body” demonstrates how

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<sup>9</sup> Alisa Walker, “Creative Outlet for LA’s Latino Community,” *Creative Review*, March 6, 2009, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Esmeralda Bermudez, “Shades of Gray in Eastside Art Institution’s Move,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/21/local/la-me-adv-self-help-graphics-20110321> (Last accessed: April 26, 2011).

homosexuality defined the intimate relationship between these men and a Franciscan nun, which constituted the very venue striving for California heritage conservation. It is a paradox over these dark cracks in the archive, those places where heteronormative compliance falters in the records. I would argue that this elision of Self-Help Graphics' past cannot be reduced to an exceptional caveat or disregarded as the product of a sexually "liberal" Los Angeles, however.

*Queer Remains of Chicano Art Institutions*

As we have seen throughout this study, the elision of Carlos and Antonio from this Chicano art institutional archive is a familiar one. It is important to acknowledge how these men have historically catalyzed some of the first training grounds and alternative art spaces in major Chicano art capitals throughout the U.S., such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Antonio, and Chicago. This is suggestive of the way homosexuals were directly responsible in cultivating pivotal Chicano art venues further intertwining sexual difference and art making with ethnic-specific gallery spaces. While certainly a topic for a much-needed line of investigation, the neglect of Self-Help's homosexual foundations is comparable to another art space such as the Xochil Art and Cultural Center (formerly called the Estudios Rio Gallery). Founded in 1976 in a historic teatro building in Mission, Texas, Xavier Gorena and his lover, Enrique Flores, were present in the early careers of Texas-based artists like Luis Jimenez, Cesar Martinez, and Carmen Lomas Garza. Not only did they give some of the aforementioned artists their first solo art exhibitions but they also served as mentors, colleagues, patrons, and art dealers.

For instance, in her oral history with Paul Karlstrom for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in April of 1997, famed Chicana painter and illustrator Carmen Lomas Garza stressed the significance of these men among her formative influences.<sup>11</sup> They gave Lomas Garza her first solo exhibition entitled, “Loteria y Otros Monitos” in October of 1972, a rare achievement for a Chicana artist in the Southwest and especially, South Texas. As well, they trained her in papel picado design, an artistic expression closely associated with Gorena’s aesthetic repertoire (see Figure 8.5).<sup>12</sup> According to the book length monograph of the artist, *Carmen Lomas Garza*, art historian Constance Cortez stressed that “the close friendship that developed between Carmen and the two men over the years was very dear to her. Even after she moved to California [in 1975], she continued visiting Enrique and Xavier during the summers.”<sup>13</sup> The trace of their influence is still found in Lomas Garza’s acclaimed large-scale papel picado installations such as the metal cutout “Baile” (1999), a public art commission affixed to the San Francisco International Airport terminal.<sup>14</sup> I regard these sculptures as a memorial to Gorena who passed away of AIDS related causes in 1991, following Flores’s death in 1990. The Xochil Art and Cultural Center is just one of many art spaces indicative of a critical paradox in the Chicano Art Movement. That is, highly accomplished Chicano cultural workers have long been intertwined with gay owned and operated art spaces, galleries, frame shops, and community centers – sites often outside the historical

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<sup>11</sup> Carmen Lomas Garza. Interview by Paul Karlstrom, audio recording, 10 April 1997 and 27 May 1997. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, San Francisco, California.

<sup>12</sup> Jacinto Quirarte. *A History and Appreciation of Chicano Art*. (San Antonio: Research Center for the Visual Arts, 1996), 173.

<sup>13</sup> Constance Cortez. *Carmen Lomas Garza*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

record, but which opened, in part, as a result of Chicano political struggle throughout the Southwest.

However, as the exhibition of the Bueno print in the Gil Cardenas collection show in 2008 suggests, some attempts were made to challenge this omission. For example, in 1998, Self-Help Graphics Board of Directors chair, Armando Duron, an attorney and established Chicano art collector, urged then Executive Director Tomas Benitez and Gallery Director Christina Ochoa to extend an invitation to Bueno, seeking to repair past omissions and restore his historical place within the organization's founding. However, planning an exhibition about Bueno's East Los Angeles years was marred with ego and competing interests. In a letter dated September 29, 1998, Duron discussed the critical importance of the show while attempting to remedy an apparent "stalemate" between Self-Help organizational leaders and the artist.<sup>15</sup> Based on this correspondence, Duron "pleads" with Self-Help's leadership to extend an invitation directly to Bueno in a gesture that would acknowledge him and his unfortunate past erasure. Allegedly, Self-Help leadership demanded an official show application from the artist himself with no intention to placate Bueno as co-founder or grant him special consideration. Despite a proposed joint collaboration with the Galeria Sister Karen Bocalero at the Casa de Souza on Olvera Street, the show never came to fruition. As the letter infers, Duron, too, was reportedly puzzled by the divided tensions.<sup>16</sup> The stand-off was so great that a game of pride and institutional legacies ensued, dooming the show's reconciliatory

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<sup>15</sup> Armando Duron to Tomas Benitez and Christina Ochoa. 29 September 1998. Carlos Bueno File. The Duron Family Collection of Chicano Art.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

possibilities. Bueno would never live to see a possible rapprochement with Self-Help Graphics. He would die of natural causes in Mazatlan, Mexico on August 18, 2001.<sup>17</sup>

However, Duron's efforts were not in vain. Just months before his death, Bueno did return to Los Angeles for his first show in the city since 1977. Organized by Avenue 50 gallery director, Kathy Gallegos, "Las Lloronas y Otros Personajes de Carlos Bueno" opened on April 7, 2001.<sup>18</sup> A comprehensive exhibition of his most recent pen and ink works on paper, it was hardly the blockbuster tribute that Duron had sought to promote. The Avenue 50 exhibition, a small Highland Park commercial gallery, missed the mark by overlooking his East L.A.-based work and failed to locate Bueno's "archival body" inside the building itself, a gesture that would symbolically reunify these recovered "queer remains" within the historical and archival voids of Self-Help Graphics. Despite his reservation, Duron donated \$250.00 in support of the Avenue 50 show in hopes that it might prompt "the recognition that has eluded him for twenty-five years."<sup>19</sup>

In 2007, Duron made one last effort with Self-Help leaders to broker a posthumous exhibition in honor of the late artist, entitled, "Carlos Bueno: The East Los Years."<sup>20</sup> It was intended to correct art-historical truths and investigate his Los Angeles period, a five-year span showcasing his early aesthetic influences and his uncredited importing of El Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) to Self-Help Graphics – a decision largely entertained by Sister Karen because of his rich Mexican

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<sup>17</sup> Elaine Woo, "Carlos Bueno, 60; L.A. Art Pioneer," *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 2001, B10.

<sup>18</sup> *Las Lloronas y Otros Personajes de Carlos Bueno* Gallery Postcard, [2001], Carlos Bueno File. The Duron Family Collection of Chicano Art.

<sup>19</sup> Armando Duron to Kathy Gallegos. 25 January 2001. Carlos Bueno File. The Duron Family Collection of Chicano Art.

<sup>20</sup> *Carlos Bueno: The East Los Years* Exhibition Proposal, [2007], Carlos Bueno File. The Duron Family Collection of Chicano Art.



ties. The show stood to magnify Bueno's overlooked but influential position as the predecessor and ambassador of the first Day of the Dead festival in East L.A., an event often attributed to art collectives like Los Four or ASCO.<sup>21</sup> On a symbolic and figurative level, Duron's proposed exhibition would append a counter archival discourse against prior cultural assumptions permeating organizational "truths," the results of which would potentially destabilize the organization's archival authority, and undermine the reverence for Sister's place in the historical record. "Carlos Bueno: The East Los Years" stood to be a revelation of fact and record for an entire East L.A. community history. Submitting his proposal in 2007, Duron was unsuccessful. His hopes to "remedy this oversight"<sup>22</sup> remain unresolved and the officiating circumstances behind the Self-Help Graphics institutional archive continue to perpetuate an organizational identity that does not acknowledge the decisive role of homosexuality and documentation of its queer past.

### *Chicano Art That's Hard to Swallow*

With curatorial initiatives that were never realized even under an aegis anew, it was quite surprising that Self-Help Graphics played host to the first "gay male" themed atelier in 2008, something that Duron credited to his influence on the Board of Directors.<sup>23</sup> Entitled, "Homobre L.A.," a clever combining of "homosexual" and

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<sup>21</sup> ASCO is widely credited with precipitating Day of the Dead at Self-Help Graphics despite evidence to the contrary. See S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas. "Harry Gamboa and ASCO: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971-1987." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> *Carlos Bueno: The East Los Years* Exhibition Proposal, [2007], Carlos Bueno File. The Duron Family Collection of Chicano Art.

<sup>23</sup> The Self Help Graphics screenprint atelier program originally started in 1982 and brought together a collection of artists to produce a limited collection of prints around a thematic scope or social mission. Under Sister Karen's tenure, the topic and artist participants were privately selected according to her criteria. Following her death, the jury process opened more broadly. In its current formulation, a guest

“hombre” (Spanish for man), guest curator Miguel Angel Reyes solicited the participation of ten artists to undertake the difficult task of rendering contemporary perspectives and experiences of Chicano gay identity in a changed sexual and political climate in East Los Angeles.<sup>24</sup> Reyes was perhaps an easy curatorial selection. He was not only a significant arts leader in the VIVA organization, but he also contributed to three previous ateliers at Self-Help Graphics over the years.

Some names by now quite familiar such as Joey Terrill, Jef Huereque, Alex Donis and Ruben Esparza joined relatively new, younger heirs like Alex Alferov, Paul Sweeney, Luciano Martinez, Rigo Maldonado, and Hector Silva. As such, the atelier’s configuration reflects the syncretism of an enduring VIVA artist infrastructure, a class of homosexual Chicano artist stalwarts from the Chicano Art Movement with a new terrain of young mixed-media renegades pursuing other lines of queer signification. The product of such collaboration generated serigraph prints investigating familiar tropes, such as the negotiation of urban Chicano hypermasculine forms or the analysis of male fraternity, a fragile system of bodily distance, restrained physical contact, and violent aggression. Long term HIV-positive survivors Terrill and Huereque mediated the consequences of a shifting bio-medical moment where pharmaceutical advancements have extended life without ending transmission or the disease itself.

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curator selects the atelier topic and artist-participants but the outcome is the same. Each set of serigraphs is shared between the artist and Self-Help Graphics, in part to financially support community artists as well as generate income for the organization. The purchase of these print suites grossed attention and market value within the exchange of art collectors, art dealers, and official museum acquisition boards. Following the series completion, the suite is displayed at Self-Help Graphics gallery, Galleria Otro Vez “providing an opportunity for the community to appreciate and view works by Chicano artists.” See Reina Alejandra Prado Saldivar. “Self-Help Graphics: A Case Study of a Working Space for Arts and Community.” *Aztlan*. 25.1 (2000): 175.

<sup>24</sup> *Homobre L.A.* exhibition brochure, [June 2008], (Los Angeles: Self Help Graphics & Art, Inc.).

Younger artists like Rigo Maldonado, better known for his video art installations and “walking altar” performance pieces at El Dia de los Muertos festivals in East Los Angeles, employed a strategy of self-analysis and personal disclosure in the self-portrait, “Hard to Swallow” (2008). In Figure 8.6, Maldonado is bare-chested, forward looking, and self-exposed; a blue bird hangs from his mouth, an anamorphic gag blocking speech, words, cries, and witnessing. Maldonado allegorizes the entrenched self-disciplining of Chicano manhood, a repressive control of emotion in the swallowing of tears and pathos. The bird itself signals the aesthetic influence of commercial animation. Through its vibrant blue and hand-drawn technique, the image cites a Disney sensibility much like one of the woodland creatures from Snow White’s harmonious world. It is a stylistic referent imported from his exposure to the “hyperreal”<sup>25</sup> Disneyfication of Orange County, his hometown. Unprotected and defenseless, much like a child, the blue bird is without the whimsy of flight and song. Crushed in Maldonado’s jaws, the blue bird symbolizes a childlike fragility denied. “Hard to Swallow” exposes the throttle of childhood sexual violence, something that remains unspoken and unreported, strangling its victim.

By comparison, the work of Paul Sweeney also appropriates a familiar art historical genre, the urban landscape. His mediation of a Montebello car club is a contemplation of unseen same-sex desires in the landscape. Emphasizing the perspective from which we see this ordinary arrangement of car bodies aligned bumper-to-bumper and front to back, homosexuality is an implicit relation between

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” In *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166-184.

these drivers and their cars. Much as Terrill had negotiated nearly 25 years earlier, “homo-homeboys” are merely immanent, shielded by the tough exteriority of Cholo fashion codes or, in Sweeney’s case, the manipulated shell of a customized racecar.

“Homobre L.A.” was an impossible moment, an occurrence that could not have happened at Self-Help Graphics without the significant influence of Carlos and Antonio Ibanez y Bueno, the avant-garde artist experimentations in performance art and conceptualism, the social networks of Trouper’s Hall gay teen dances, or the “museumscares” of the VIVA organization. The execution of the first gay male themed atelier was long overdue, especially considering that the “maestras” workshop, a feminist art-based atelier, started nearly ten years prior in 1999.<sup>26</sup> However, unlike the “maestras” series, “Homobre L.A.” would have no official launching party or traveling exhibit schedule. Like the unmade exhibitions of Carlos Bueno’s lost years in East Los Angeles, even his descendants would have to wait. Like its predecessor before, this contemporary show would also exist elsewhere unhoused outside this famed chamber of phantom culture. To date, there is no exhibition scheduled for this historic atelier.

What I find most troubling is not necessarily the installation of the show for the sake of diversity and inclusion but the way its remove from Self-Help, a hallowed ground for the Chicano Art Movement, excises the aesthetic and historic relationship between these men and the archival space, a legacy that can be traced to Carlos Bueno, a forthright co-founder, although disputed proponent of the organization. Without the channels to illuminate these interrelationships, a persistent

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<sup>26</sup> Reina Alejandra Prado Saldivar. “Self-Help Graphics: A Case Study of a Working Space for Arts and Community.” *Aztlan*. 25.1 (2000): 174.

heteronormative vision continues, the result of which has a profound impact on Chicano art. These misnomers directly shape Chicano art history, curatorial agendas, and archive collections, producing presumptions that homosexuals were either crudely removed from the Chicano movement or had no significant bearing on the development of the Chicano image repertoire. The product of this practice prompted alternative heritage practices, a range of counterarchival concerns by these men resisting this erasure, censorship, concealment, and of course, the toll of AIDS. As this study has shown, my work complicates the way we understand sexuality in visual and material culture by drawing interest in the performance of these artifactual surrogacies for an individual, cultural, and social body that is no more. Mine is a recognition that these men and their stories continue to survive in other archival formations, wherein lie the “queer remains” of an unacknowledged past.

*Poking Around the Dark Cracks of Things*

My investigation is not a process of finding stable gay subjects to restore or to revise a grander Chicano art-historical narrative, a productive but misguided endeavor. It is to say that this evaluation of the “queer archive” as a variegated category need not rely on legible documents of a fixed “gay male” material culture but rather, may broach the ways power and sexual difference precipitated other methods and means to keep, preserve, and produce records that are routinely denied access and visibility within systemic forms of preservation. This draws our attention not only to what the records tell us about the life of an individual artist, a familiar archival strategy in art history, but also to how the formation itself is indicative of an archive’s life history in its curation, display, containment, and spatialization.

Hence, the archival body/archival space framework I propose here emphasizes queer meaning in the way these records exteriorize queer cultural memory and expand the reach of the repository into unusual spaces. This brings us closer to the anthropological and museological conditions of my framework, an approach that cannot solely consider the aesthetic content without elucidating the complex process of the archival body's very rescue, materialization, and form. In this study, I conducted several excavations, a recovery mission seeking out what I termed the "queer afterlife of Chicano art," removed from familiar circuits of an object's public profile. This pursuit took my study from the most visible environment of the cityscape to the most intimate displays of the private glass cabinet and house interior. From these archival spaces, we can exact other archival processes shaped by sexual difference and think through these complicated preservationist strategies withdrawn from conventional modes of commemoration. My study develops an emergent lexicon to understand these complex subject-object relations and, in particular, articulates a range of alternative archiving activities for an art community at the convergences of race, sexuality, and desire.

Moreover, the innovative theoretical and methodological approach at the crux of my study is not bound specifically to homosexuality in East Los Angeles. That is, I want this investigation to serve as a guide for other scholars conducting interdisciplinary community-based cultural heritage recovery projects without compromising the integrity of other archival forms or disregarding the way the collections' assembly and curation exteriorize sexual difference. Its value, in part, expands into new areas of public history and art-heritage ethnographic fieldwork

practices that understand the complicated ways in which power, cultural memory, and sexual ideologies can distill artifact articulations outside identity-based object analysis. That is, my investigation asks us to go deeper beyond consigns of identity on the surface of objects and consider the entangled spatial, curatorial, and cultural investments and meanings.

Heritage, archive, and museum professionals and community-based scholars must be mindful of the ways that non-heteronormative sexual identities have historically lacked access to mainstream cultural heritage institutions. These are the very institutions, which, in turn, discursively constitute national identity, memory, and American citizenry through rigid taxonomies and strict collecting policies. If anything, this study illuminates the complexity of archiving American culture, the interrelated ways that racial and sexual marginality, omission, and neglect generated important practices of cultural survival for an American artist community, one that persists even in the dark cracks of the closet, shoebox, or the table nightstand. My dissertation tells just one of these stories of survival from the unusual lens of an archive collection's perspective.

This is not to say that we must condemn or villainize mainstream archivists and preservationist workers as negligent, hostile, or careless. If anything it is worth acknowledging how many of these homosexual heritage custodians adapted established museological and archival strategies within their other personal recordkeeping functions and collection managing practices. As a museum professional and archivist myself, I am often astonished by the ways these homosexual men have kept, processed, and stored "queer remains" suspicious and

wary of the institutional goliaths I have served like the Smithsonian, UCLA, University of Maryland, or Dartmouth College, tampering with their things.

In fact, I remember gay Mexican activist and community-based historian Jose Gutierrez, founder of the Washington, D.C. Latino GLBT History Project (LHP), showing me his T-shirt memorabilia piled in his small kitchen, multiple binders of ephemera in the overcrowded bookcase, and a precious box of rare photographs hidden in the back recesses of his closet surrounded by socks and underwear. At a LHP meeting in his home, I was given permission to view all collections but the box in the bedroom closet. His panic and worry was obvious for what would happen to these rare records if they were processed, treated, and organized “off-site” and away from his house—the archive domicile? However, the photos he kept unprotected in the box’s sweltering heat had dire implications for the longevity and preservation of the record material. The solution was one that a Smithsonian colleague suggested where the photographs would be scanned on the floor of Gutierrez’s apartment with the supervision and participation of the custodian partaking in the process. This experience was another seed that shaped the residual hybridic methodology I have presented here. That is, we must strive for ways to maintain the integrity of the alterative archive configuration and confront the race, class, and sexuality power differentials in the museum and archive profession that collapse, augment, or worse yet, disregard creative archive systems and object relations. My encounter with the LHP project in Washington, D.C. is not exceptional but, nonetheless, important showing how we might infuse transgressive modes of personal recordkeeping, new archiving procedures, and private methods of collection management in our curatorial



and scholarly work. Thus, my study demands more of our repositories and disciplines and issues a new call for art-archive custodianship beyond the preoccupation of government records, corporate documents, and institution authorial know-how.

Moreover, the unearthed artifacts outlined throughout my dissertation contest the restrictive ways in which American art, visual culture, and archive studies are understood in relationship to each other methodologically and within the broader theoretical auspices of the material culture studies project. By positing the creative archival expression of homosexual Chicano artists in what art historian Hal Foster calls the “archival impulse,”<sup>27</sup> we can close distances between the subject and the object, the written and non-written visual form, and derive invaluable insights from a re-envisioning of the “document” from art-historical, visual cultural, and artifactual possibility. This expansive approach yields new insights into the performances of “the archive” as a self-sustaining resource, resistance tool, and practice of cultural survival.

My investigation is the first study of its kind to counter the compulsory heterosexual vision of Chicano art, and expose the ways that sexuality remains in the “dark cracks” and unseen remove of other archival configurations sheltered in a haze of shadow and dust. By uncovering rare and original documentary records, this study implicitly stands to be its own archival catalogue and object registry, unfettering a cadre of artists frequently disjointed and distanced from the ways Chicano art history is criticized, interpreted, curated, and taught. My intensive search for “queer remains” or the traces of these men’s lives expands the visual, material, and spatial

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<sup>27</sup> Hal Foster. “An Archival Impulse.” *October*. 110 (Fall 2004): 3-22.

perimeters of this art movement and the constrictive Chicano art taxonomy from the 1960s and 1970s. Correspondingly, I have redrawn the lines of artistic influence between the Chicano social struggle in East Los Angeles and the burgeoning furor of gay and lesbian sexual liberation throughout California. This inter-reliance fueled significant acts of creative production and pictured a sexual subjectivity from the same barrio landscapes, environments, and buildings foregrounded in the movement's protest history. This interconnection is undeniable and positions same-sex desire squarely in the Chicano Art Movement: in its archival production, institution building, and pursuit for cultural visibility. Each artist interred here stands to reveal the critical role of homosexuality in the formation of Chicano art, and its undeniable influence on avant-garde experimentation.

By no means is this compilation of objects, records, and visual material complete, for the archive is continuously in flux and a product of particular historical and cultural circumstances. The reach of sexual difference in Chicano art is vast and surpasses even the case studies presented here. For the many men recovered in the pages of this dissertation, several more are still little known. Their work is presumably lost and buried in the static frame of the garage cabinet, bedroom closet, or desk drawer. However, what I have documented and assessed is just a beginning. It is my hope that this initial investigation will coax new excavations into unknown containers and hidden crevices searching out the remains of artists we believe are no more – ones that confound, and ones that perplex how sexuality persists in the dark cracks of things.

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