

# *Galería 4.0*

A Retrospective

Exhibition Catalog\_TEXTS

{ a w o r k i n p r o g r e s s }

Galería de la Raza, San Francisco  
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Xavier **Viramontes**, Rene **Yañez**, Rio **Yañez**, and many others.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Carolina Ponce de León, Curator and Raquel de Anda, Associate Curator**

Born of the legacy of resistance of the Chicano civil rights movement, el Movimiento, Galería de la Raza was founded in 1970 by a group of artists and community activists —Francisco X. Campblis, Chuy Campusano, Graciela Carrillo, Rolando Castellón, Luis Cervantes, Jerry Concha, Rupert García, Robert González, Carlos Loarca, Ralph Maradiaga, Gustavo Ramos Rivera, Peter Rodríguez, Manuel Villamor, and René Yañez—whose original vision has continued to shape Galería’s identity to this day.

Galería’s history tells the story of Latino/a artists’ commitment to building community, creative activism and cultural pride, social justice, and speaking out and talking back. For the past 40 years, Galería has been actively engaged with Chicano/Latino and Latin American artists and community life within the Mission District. From its early days to today, Galería has maintained a strong artistic vision. Its exhibition history reveals a mix of traditional, experimental, and educational formats that feature a wide spectrum of art making, from abstract to figurative art and from folk traditions to conceptual practices. It has never shied away from mixing high and low art, formally trained and self-taught artists. It has successfully combined museum quality exhibitions (like the 1972 Diego Rivera, Jose Clement Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros exhibit that Rene and Ralph curated with works from the SFMOMA collection, or the 1987 Recuerdos de Frida exhibit), with Latino street culture (Low Rider art, prison art, graffiti and tattoo art), grassroots struggles and contemporary art practices. Multiple perspectives have always been present, always revealing many artworlds that are not often acknowledged by mainstream institutions. And while the mainstream artworld has slightly opened its doors in the past two decades, Galería’s main purpose very much remains the same: to give Latino artists a space to create and exhibit their work, and to define Chicano/Latino art history in their own terms.

Mixing original artworks with documentation drawn from Galería’s archives and from the personal collections of a few artists, Galería 4.0, A Retrospective seeks to shed light on this history of cultural resilience, self-discovery and affirmation, while revealing the evolving nature of Chicano/Latino art in California. Despite its broad chronological scope, the exhibition does not aspire to be a general survey of Chicano/Latino art. Instead, it is a work in progress, an initial point of entry towards further discovery of a rich and multi-layered history. The exhibition was conceived around seven basic tactics that Chicano/Latino artists have used across generations: converging, asserting, voicing, domesticating, imagining, diverting, and subverting. While these categories have porous borders, they are an organizing strategy to show the innovation and vitality that has characterized Chicano/Latino art and the nurturing role Galería has had with artists over the past four decades.

# Foreword

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto

## **Conocimiento, Confianza, Convivencia:**

### *The Legacy of La Galería de la Raza*

The founding of La Galería de la Raza in the Mission district of San Francisco on July 1970 stands as a watershed moment in contemporary Latino cultural history. From its inception, la Galería functioned as a “zone of refuge,” a site for nurturing and protecting Latino/a artists and for promoting and safe keeping their work.

As a “store front” community-centered exhibition space, the Galería’s pivotal aim has been the presentation, documentation and distribution of Latino visual culture. Its vitality rests on a reciprocal relationship to its constituency. Galería staff has been consistently engaged in neighborhood events while the community over time has become invested in defending Galería projects for their capacity to augment collective pride and group solidarity.

When the Galería moved to its present location at 2851 24th Street in 1973, it became one of the first professional galleries available to Latino/a artists. Concurrently, it functioned as the pioneer archive and purveyor of information about raza art. Catalogues, posters, brochures and slide programs created at the Galería are among the foundational documentary texts of the Chicano art movement.

The very nomenclature; La Galería de la Raza encodes the cultural milieu of the period circa mid 1970's. La Raza is a vernacular term affirming unity among Spanish speakers throughout the Americas. Moving beyond national identities, as an Argentinean, a Colombian, or a Mexican all recognize each other as raza, especially among the working class sector.

As a trope of cultural affirmation, la raza derives from an important Mexican cultural essay "La Raza Cósmica" published by Jose Vasconcellos in 1925. Vasconcellos' message is that Latin America could become the geographic space of a future glorious civilization whose development, aided by racial mingling would result in *la raza cósmica*. The Vasconcellian ideal was promoted in the Americas as a unified consciousness defined by a shared historical identity and destiny. This utopian vision of cultural coherence and predestined greatness found ready acceptance among Bay Area cultural activists who were searching for a point of unity among the diverse Latino communities living in the barrios of the Mission District of San Francisco. La raza became an inclusive term suggesting connection to an inter-continental cultural dialogue. The Galería de la Raza from its origin situated itself as a bridge between the Americas.

To make ancient symbols speak in new languages and give new meanings to venerable rituals were the primary goals in the reconstructions of cultural memory. La Galería pioneered the creative adaptation of particular genres, such as murals, graphic arts and artes populares. Between 1973-1977, it commissioned artists to design *calendarios* (calendars) based on yearly themes such as food or the history of Chicano Californians. The illustrations for each month were issued as a graphic art portfolio that could be bought inexpensively. Eagerly awaited and proudly displayed in many households, the Chicano *calendarios* were a conscious effort to vitalize and make accessible a venerable graphic tradition. Calendarios were first shown on the walls of the galleria and then flowed out to the larger community.

Perhaps, the most profound and durable intervention of La Galería de la Raza in its persistent efforts to maintain and reconvert Mexican traditions have been its revitalization of El Día de los Muertos. (All Soul's Day on November 1st). After several decades, this yearly celebration has gained broad public acceptance nationwide. The spiritual roots of the commemoration have been maintained but simultaneously a festive carnivalesque spirit has evolved. The commingling of the sacred and the profane characterizes the essence of the Día de los Muertos when the living laughingly remind themselves that their sojourn in life is brief compared to the eternal companionship with the legions of the Dead. Political elements have also been fused in the re-articulated tradition. Día de los Muertos revelry also addresses issues such as gang violence, pesticides and AIDS which are constant and real death agents in Latino communities.

Through invigoration of vernacular art traditions, the Galería solidified group consciousness and cultural memory as a basis for social reconstruction and collective regeneration. Extracting visual strategies from vernacular expressive forms, raza artists evolved an expanded repertoire of styles and symbols that were fused with modernist and avant-garde forms of contemporary art.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a new cohort of artists/activists are fomenting a Re-generation Project to critically assess and re-envision La Galería in the global present. Today when 45 million plus Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the country, a new pan-Latino cultural project is in process. This cultural and dynamic Latin Cultural Project posts a socio-cultural configuration of strategic new alliance, coalitions and new formats for affirming *conocimiento*, *confianza*, and *convivencia*. (Knowledge, confidence, and cohabitation) among all U.S. Latinos.

**Conocimiento (Knowledge):**

Continuing to document, interpret and archive Latino/a art, “tenemos que conocernos y llegar a comprendernos”. Latino communities have never been monolithic. There is immense diversification and variation in racial, class and political persuasions among and between Latino groups. “*Conocimiento*” begins with knowledge sharing, but must move beyond mutual recognition. We need to create networks of institutions and mobilize the recent cohorts of art historians and curators to activate hemispheric and global dialogue and promote mutually enriching cultural exchanges. Symposia, exhibitions and shared research and writing projects will help broaden and deepen the reciprocity of world-wide exchange of intellectual and cultural “*conocimiento*.”

**Confianza (Trust):**

As United States Latinos begin to recognize and affirm historical facts that bind them together such as colonization, immigration and racialization artists begin to mobilize artistic strategies from sedimented layers of shared experiences. *Confianza* (confidence and trust) emerge as artists forge cultural discourses and artistic practices that bind them in common bonds of sentiment and loyalty across diverse U.S. Latino communities as well as hemispherically. Overall, there is a confident sense of maturity authority and simultaneous affirmation of cultural continuity and change.

**Convivencia (Living Together):**

Moving beyond the nation state, Latinos of diverse gender, age and political persuasions begin to imagine and feel things together. A new communitas of shared aspirations communicating through virtual and real-time encounters. The social process of translocation creates nascent circuits for possible new forms of community. North-South intertwined economies, intersecting social systems and negotiable identities open vistas for diasporic cultural production, circular exchange of traditions and more flexible forms of citizenship.

For nearly half a century the venerable Galería de la Raza has articulated *conocimiento*, built *confianza*, and affirmed *convivencia* as requisites for building and expanding the Latino intellectual commons. Fomenting, nurturing, and defending Latino/a visual culture, La Galería has been a national public forum for persistent civic dialogue about the role of the artist and the function of art in the public sphere.

A fundamental and lasting legacy of La Galería de la raza has been to validate the transformative powers of the imagination and affirm Latino/a self determination in art. *¡Sí Se Puede!*

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New York City, and San Antonio, Texas 2010.

# A Spirituality of Resistance:

Día de los Muertos and the Galería de la Raza

Tere Romo

*The visual narrative being articulated is an emerging discourse of recollection and invention, of tradition and change, of conversion and survival.* Tomás Ybarra-Frausto<sup>1</sup>

As cultures come into contact and more often than not into conflict with each other, concepts of spirituality change. The Americas have undergone contact through conflict for over 500 years and the *mestizo* (mixed race person) is by definition a new culture in the making. A new culture, which the Mexican anthropologist, Miguel Leon Portilla attributed to these "children of the encounter" marked by trauma, with open wounds and scars tattooed on its cultural corpus.<sup>2</sup> The result was a unique syncretism—a hybrid spirituality that was greater than the sum of its parts and "the most complete intellectual manifestation of cultural mixing."<sup>3</sup> Within this *mestizo* continuum, Chicano spirituality evolved from multiple sources by way of Spanish Catholicism, Moorish mysticism, African beliefs, and a Mesoamerican indigenous worldview—all filtered through an American-lived experience. As expressed by Chicana writer, Gloria Anzaldúa:

We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward. Nuestra alma el trabajo, the opus, the great alchemical work, spiritual mestizaje...<sup>4</sup>



In Chicano spirituality there is a natural coexistence of Catholic *quinceañera* masses with indigenous *curandera* healing rituals. As a result of the Chicano Movement, artists freely transverse the multiple corporal and spiritual spheres and produce spiritual artwork with a seamless incorporation of political statements, cultural affirmation and personal imagery. According to Chicana artist and cultural critic Amalia Mesa-Bains, “serpents and pyramids are routinely combined with Christian crosses, sacred hearts and other Catholic symbols in Chicano art”<sup>5</sup> However, not widely known is the integral role that certain Mexican spiritual traditions had within the Chicano political resistance and cultural reclamation movement, especially the Día de los Muertos. With its inherent spirituality, Pre-Conquest imagery, and elaborate rituals, the Day of the Dead in Mexico appealed to the Chicano artists of San Francisco’s Galería de la Raza who were eager to create a political sense of community built on ethnic pride and self-empowerment. Ironically, in choosing a personal, familial practice and transforming it into a public community event, the Galería artists changed the tradition in Mexico as well. Equally important, the Galería’s introduction of Frida Kahlo and creation of a new art form—the altar-as-installation—would change not only Chicana/a art, but also American art history.

### **El movimiento Chicano**

*Resistance is an alternative way of conceiving human history.* Edward W. Said<sup>6</sup>

The Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s initiated a period of political ferment, cultural renaissance, and spiritual exploration. “It was a rare and intriguing period,” according to artist Rupert Garcia, “where artistic flowering was fused with a sense of historical inevitability, the consciousness that artists were assisting in the renewal and affirmation of a cultural legacy.”<sup>7</sup> During this period of intense idealism, many Chicana/o artists chose to abandon individual careers and join collective efforts aimed at responding to the racism, educational neglect, and economic inequality prevalent within the Chicano communities. An important goal towards political unification was the formation of a cohesive cultural identity. Art became an important tool in the struggle for social and political self-determination. It was best expressed in the seminal *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán), drafted at the 1969 Chicano National Liberation Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado: “We must ensure that our writers, poets, musicians, and artists produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture.”<sup>8</sup> It ended with a declaration that “El Plan Espiritual is the plan of liberation,” thus unifying art, culture and spirituality with political struggle. This very powerful doctrine seeped within *indigenismo* (Mesoamerican indigenous philosophy) was adopted and promoted by many Chicana/o artists.

Chicano art evolved from the same foundations as the Chicano civil rights movement of the sixties. The mystique of a spiritual nationalism contained within the concept of Chicanismo unified a heterogeneous movement made up of students, farm workers, artists, and community activists. The concept of *indigenismo*, of acknowledging and owning an indigenous heritage proved important to the unification effort. The affirmation of the Chicano's *mestizo* origins as the product of the Spanish and native peoples of this continent not only brought ethnic “brown” pride, but also established a Chicano identity rooted in this continent. The value placed on the Chicano’s indigenous heritage also provided an important link to the contemporary indigenous peoples of Mexico and their traditions. However, the neo-indigenists of the Chicano Movement viewed the adoption of Mexican rituals and ceremonies as integral to the larger political agenda of cultural resistance. Thus, the Chicano nationalist, anti-assimilationist tenet, which was an important foundation of the Movement, was based on an integration of culture, spirituality, art, and politics.

As part of its ideology, *indigenismo* sought to re-establish linkages between Chicanos and their Pre-Conquest Mexican ancestors by re-introducing indigenous spirituality through its ancient philosophy, literature and ceremonies. Many Chicanos disillusioned with the Catholic Church's role in the conquest and forced conversion of native peoples throughout the continent sought a cultural alternative to western European religions. Participation ranged from formal establishment of Mixteca and Conchero groups led by Mexican indigenous leaders who provided instruction on Mesoamerican dance, rituals, child rearing and daily social conduct, to artist's simple inclusion of indigenous glyphs in their artwork. Poets such as San Diego's Alurista wrote tri-lingual poems utilizing English, Spanish and Nahuatl. *Indigenismo* was practiced to some extent throughout the state, but its impact was especially strong in the establishment of the Día de los Muertos observances in 1972 by Self Help Graphics in Los Angeles and the Galería de la Raza in San Francisco.

### **Al principio: The Chicano Movement in the Bay Area**

In keeping with its long history of political activism, the San Francisco Bay Area of the mid-1960s became a strong center for the student strikes and civil rights movements sweeping the nation. Its university and college campuses, especially San Francisco State University, California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in Oakland and the University of California at Berkeley, became magnets for the growing number of Chicana/o artists who sought an art education within a political context. From this volatile mix came the seminal collective known as the Mexican American Liberation Art Front (MALAF, pronounced mala-e-fe). Organized in 1968, it was an important historical precursor to San Francisco's Galería de la Raza and the Rebel Chicano Art Front (RCAF) in Sacramento.<sup>9</sup>

MALAF's core group consisted of visual artists Esteban Villa and René Yañez (both attending the CCAC), Malaquias Montoya from UC, Berkeley, and community activist, Manuel Hernandez. Formed for the purpose of "organizing Chicano artists who are interested in integrating art into the Chicano social revolution sweeping the country,"<sup>10</sup> their Friday night meetings grew to include artists from different disciplines. The group filled a need on the part of Chicano artists to critique their work, to discuss relevant social issues, and to strategize their role as artists. It was also an opportunity to rediscover their indigenous heritage. Hernandez, who had traveled and studied in Mexico, introduced the group to Pre-Conquest imagery and philosophy. He also brought in the work of José Guadalupe Posada and the Taller de Gráfica Popular, which influenced all the artists greatly.

MALAF developed a manifesto of cultural nationalism that compared the Chicano movement of the mid-1960s with the Mexican Revolution of 1910, which had also sought to reject western European influences in art in favor of a more indigenous "Mexican" expression. In March 1969, MALAF held their first exhibition entitled "New Symbols for La Raza Nueva" at Oakland's La Causa Center. In the exhibited artwork, MALAF sought to fulfill their mandate that artists serve el pueblo (the community) and create a sense of pride. "It was a call for us to look at ourselves as be proud of who we were," Montoya recalled, "including our indigenous heritage."<sup>11</sup>

This historically significant exhibition of paintings, sculptures, drawings, silkscreen and woodblock prints, was a great community and professional success and planted the seeds for future collective efforts. After the group disbanded later that year, Montoya and Hernandez formed *talleres* (workshops) in Oakland to

teach mural painting and printmaking. Villa joined José Montoya (Malaquias's brother) in Sacramento and formed the Rebel Chicano Art Front at Sacramento State University. Yañez joined Latino artists' efforts in San Francisco to establish a community gallery.

### **La Galería de la Raza en la Misión**

*We are not here to sell art, but sell the idea of art.* René Yañez<sup>12</sup>

In 1968, while MALAF was holding their meetings in the East Bay, visual artists were forming a collective within Casa Hispana de Bellas Artes, which was primarily a Latino literary group. Under the direction of Carlos Loarca, a painter from Guatemala, the group sponsored exhibitions of local artists. The following year, Francisco X. Camplis became the director and instituted drawing classes for all age groups and continued the exhibitions at various public spaces, especially libraries. It was at an art exhibition reception that Yañez met Camplis and Ralph Maradiaga, another visual and film artist working at Casa Hispana.

Seeking their autonomy, the visual artists formed their own group, ALAS, in 1970. Under Camplis' leadership, they organized a group exhibition and conference featuring Chicano artists from throughout the Southwestern United States. Though ALAS disbanded after the completion of the project, Camplis and five other artists formed Artes 6. They rented a small storefront gallery and artist studio space on 18th Street near Dolores. About five months later, the group moved to a larger space on 14th and Valencia and the Galería de la Raza was born.<sup>13</sup> That same year, Yañez left the CCAC to attend the San Francisco Art Institute and to work for the city's Neighborhood Arts Program, where he quickly became involved with the gallery.

The Galería de la Raza was founded in 1970 by a group of artists that included Camplis, Maradiaga, Yañez, and Rolando Castellón, Rupert Garcia, and Peter Rodriguez (who went on to establish the Mexican Museum). Castellón was elected the first director. At this location, the collective exhibited local artists and continued to lobby mainstream art institutions to accept Latino art. After tremendous pressure, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art hired Castellón as a curator in early 1972. Yañez and Maradiaga were elected co-Directors and that same year moved the newly named Galería de la Raza to its site at 24th and Bryant streets.<sup>14</sup>

### **Ahí Vienen los Muertos**

Artist and educator, Yolanda Garfias Woo had incorporated the Día de los Muertos observance as part of her teaching since the 1960s. Initially she had wanted to be an artist and had secured a scholarship to attend the School of Arts and Crafts, but decided to become a teacher. Garfias Woo had learned to construct *ofrendas* (altars) from her Oaxacan father and included them in her curriculum as a way for students to cope with the violence and death in their lives. Though the students embraced the practice, other teachers were hostile, some accusing her of witchcraft. Educating others about Día de los Muertos became a life-

long mission for Garfias Woo, who continued her efforts after she retired from teaching. She wrote public school curricula, conducted teacher workshops, and even convinced some of the bakeries in the Mission to bake the *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead) for the schools.<sup>15</sup>

In the late 1960s, Garfias Woo met Maradiaga through Casa Hispana and they became good friends. Later, Maradiaga brought her to the Galería while it was still on 14th and Valencia. During the same time period, Garfias Woo was assigned to mentor Amalia Mesa-Bains, an education student within the Teacher Core program. Though Mesa-Bains held a painting degree, she was not satisfied with the medium as an appropriate artistic outlet. "I felt that I didn't have any sense of attachment to it," recounted Mesa-Bains. "Yolanda introduced me to traditional cultural practices. She was the first person who brought me into a sense of Mexican history and the world of Pre-Columbian culture."<sup>16</sup> It was also Garfias Woo that taught Mesa-Bains how to make altars, as well as introduced her to Maradiaga and the Galería.

In 1972, Yañez and Maradiaga held discussions regarding additional programs the Galería could offer to the community. They decided to organize an exhibition focused on Día de los Muertos that would include altars and an educational component to teach the community about the Mexican tradition. Yañez had seen an observance as a young boy when his father took him to Oaxaca.<sup>17</sup> According to Yañez, "We spoke about ritual, spirituality--what we felt was lacking. I had been to Mexico, and...I had pictures of altars. So we had a meeting with the artists and we spoke about the Day of the Dead. How it was celebrated in Mexico, how we could make a hybrid here and get people involved. We noticed we hit a chord, so we decided to make it an annual event."<sup>18</sup>

The majority of the artwork in the Galería's first Día de los Muertos exhibition was two-dimensional with some sculptures. Most of the participating artists were from the Bay Area, including some of the Galería's founding members. However, they also invited artists from Sacramento's RCAF collective, including Montoya, Villa, and Armando Cid. All of the artworks incorporated a skull or skeleton as the central image. Maradiaga also referenced the very Mexican tradition of the calavera in the exhibition's announcement poster.

As one of the key icons associated with Día de los Muertos, the calavera was derived from Mexican indigenous imagery and transformed within popular art. The skeleton had as its source the ancient death rites of the Pre-Conquest civilizations, which regarded death as part of the natural life cycle and placed a high value on sacrifice in their religious practices.<sup>19</sup> The great Aztec deity associated with death was Mictlantecuhtli. Depicted as a skeleton, he and his female consort, Mictēcacihuatl ruled the nine levels of the underworld, including Mictlán. The manner in which a person died determined their spirit's final destination. Those persons who died of natural causes spent four years traversing through a series of "magical trials" until they finally reached Mictlán and could rest for eternity.<sup>20</sup>

These solemn origins of skull and skeleton imagery had been tempered by the Mexican engraver, José Guadalupe Posada's humorous and political applications in the early 20th century. His calaveras populated Mexico's urban centers and rural settings, acting out the everyday occurrences of ordinary people. Posada's caricatures related moralistic tales replete with humor, irony and political satire. They also served to remind the viewer of life's fragility and death as the great equalizer all people regardless of their social status, appearances or age. In fact, Posada's influence was so great that in 1974, the Galería featured his prints in their Day of the Dead exhibition.

Subsequent Day of the Dead exhibitions incorporated a wide variety of media and art forms, from traditional ofrendas to room-size installations and Mexican popular art to mixed media constructions. Exhibited artwork included paintings, drawings, *papier maché* masks, sculptures, box constructions, wooden toys,

ceramics and photography. A good example is the 1983 exhibition, which included ceramic sculptures from Ocumicho (Michoacán), Posada broadsides, Ester Hernandez's Frida Kahlo's Bronze Death Mask, and Yañez's Altar for Unknown Chicano Nontraditional Artists. In 1980 Yañez began including non-Latinos in some of the exhibitions. Always the innovator, the 1997 exhibition, "Electronic Memories" featured *ofrendas* that incorporated elements of electronic media. Though the community's response was largely positive, there were some people who had mixed reactions to the idea of death as subject matter for art.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, Galería staff decided to develop free educational materials annually. The publications were initially self-produced, folded photocopied pages containing information on the history of the Galería event, descriptions of the *ofrendas*, and a checklist of the art work with sale prices. For one of the early observances, the Galería adapted a chapter on Día de los Muertos from Frances Toor's book, A Treasury of Mexican Folkways. In 1978, Lomas Garza designed an eight-page booklet for their exhibition "Homenaje a Frida" that included Mesa-Bains's essay on Kahlo, an exhibition checklist, and a list of lenders. The most elaborate of these publications was created for the 1989 "Annual Día de los Muertos Celebrations," the Galería's collaboration with La Raza Graphics, Mission Cultural Center, and Mission Arts Consortium. Along with essays by the Galería's Artistic Director, Enrique Chagoya, Mesa-Bains, and Ricardo Reyes, the catalogue included black and white reproductions of selected artworks.

Almost from the beginning, the exhibitions were supplemented with related public programs, such as films and videos on Mexico's Día de los Muertos. In 1975, Garfias Woo received an offer from the de Young Museum curator, Kathy Berrin to exhibit her Día de los Muertos collection. As part of the planning process, Garfias Woo met with Galería staff to discuss collaborative activities between the two organizations. As a result, the Galería began offering free exhibition tours to schools that year.<sup>22</sup> In 1980, the Galería augmented their programming with workshops on creating sugar skulls and *papel picado* (tissue paper cut-outs). This not only allowed the Galería to increase public participation, but also promote master artisans.

### **The Procession**

In 1981, the Galería initiated a small procession with about 25 people (including staff) who walked around the block holding candles. Upon returning to the Galería, the participants were invited to have cake and hot chocolate.<sup>23</sup> In 1984, Yañez secured a parade permit from the city police department and Galería artist and staff member, Sal Garcia invited the Mexican *danzantes* XipeTotec to participate in the procession. "Pageantry and spectacle, which have long been a part of the cultures of the Americas, were transformed in an urban idiom," noted Mesa Bains. "Street processions, tableaux, *danzantes*, indigenous blessings, candlelight ceremonies and sidewalk offerings have become part of a portable, ephemeral spontaneous expression."<sup>24</sup> In subsequent years, the procession was transformed from individuals walking in honor of deceased family members to large contingents commemorating those killed in the wars in Central America, and locally by the AIDS epidemic, youth gang violence and domestic abuse.

The procession grew quickly to thousands of participants within the first five years. The strain of the large numbers of people and cars that descended on the Mission caused major problems. Many of the residents began to stay away and business owners complained about the garbage. One year, Yañez was sued by a resident who claimed his car had been damaged by one of the procession participants dancing on the hood.<sup>25</sup> Not only were the majority of participants from outside the neighborhood, but they were dressed in Halloween costumes looking for "the parade." According to Galería staff member María Pinedo, they distributed pamphlets explaining the meaning of Día de los Muertos and reminded everyone "this is not a parade, but it had reached the point where it had

lost its intent and people were confusing it with a fun Halloween party. They didn't even know that it had to do with remembering your ancestors."<sup>26</sup> Finally in 1992, the procession was cancelled.

Given their decision to forego the processions, the Galería's billboard and neighborhood storefront displays kept the observance very public and helped support the Galería's educational focus. They had "liberated" the billboard located on the Bryant Street side of their building soon after they had moved into the building. The Foster Company finally gave it to them in 1975. Painted by different community artists, the Day of the Dead billboard murals reflected the variety and range of artistic expressions incorporated within the celebration. The Galería also utilized their storefront area for Day of the Dead window displays and altar installations. In 1993, the Galería expanded its storefront exhibitions to other businesses in the neighborhood. By contracting with artists and matching them up with local businesses, they extended Day of the Dead further into the community.

### **From Altares to Art Installations**

*A dimension of transcendence is then revealed where images of personal inventory and history appear in a discourse with the imperative to transform reality.*  
Victor Zamudio-Taylor<sup>27</sup>

The Galería's greatest and most significant contribution to Día de los Muertos and Chicano art history has been the *ofrendas*, the altars in honor of deceased loved ones. The 1972 exhibition only included one altar, which was created by an artist from Mexico, Flash Fondo.<sup>28</sup> However, in 1975 Yañez and Garfias Woo created altars that were to exemplify the directions that altar making would take in their evolution at the Galería. Though sharing some of the "traditional" elements, including flowers, food and the use of photographs, the two altars were very different conceptually. Garfias Woo's *ofrenda* incorporated the customary aspects of her Oaxacan heritage, though adapted to the materials at hand. Yañez's was individualistic and contemporary in its aesthetic. The simplicity of Yañez's design and its scarcity of objects were in stark contrast to the lush, baroque quality of Garfias Woo's.<sup>29</sup> The Galería would remain committed to supporting the traditional altar form as the inspirational source, however, Yañez's aesthetic experimentation pushed the *ofrenda* into the realm of contemporary art installation.

The following year's exhibition was also historically significant. According to Mesa-Bains, "I mark 1976 in my exhibition career as the beginning of my form, my altar form."<sup>30</sup> For her first *ofrenda*, she chose to honor five women: her two grandmothers, Mariana and Amalia; her aunt Angelina; her best friend from college, Susan; and Frida Kahlo. That altar sparked fellow artist, Carmen Lomas Garza's interest in Kahlo. In July, 1977 Lomas Garza created a window display to commemorate Kahlo's birthday. She also decided to curate an exhibition in honor of Kahlo for the next year's Día de los Muertos.

In 1978, the Galería presented the seminal "Homenaje a Frida Kahlo" exhibition, which consisted of artworks created in memory of Kahlo, a group altar, and an installation by Yañez. "This is the value of institutions like the Galería that reject the mainstream cultural canon," declared Yañez, "Frida was not known before the community ground-swell."<sup>31</sup> Not only did this exhibition mark the introduction of Frida Kahlo to an American audience, but Yañez's site-specific installation also initiated the transition from the traditional altar to the altar-as-art-installation prevalent today. Within a corner space, Yañez included all the traditional elements of an altar, including flowers, candles, water, and a life-size cardboard cut-out of Kahlo. In an effective transformation of the altar format into an

environmental space, Yañez not only created a poignant tribute to Kahlo, but also an “altar installation”—an aesthetic reinterpretation of the traditional altar format.

Over the years, the Galería has incorporated *ofrendas* by artists that reflected the full traditional to contemporary spectrum. In 1985, it paid homage to Maradiaga, who died suddenly, with a traditional group altar. In other exhibitions, it included an altar created in the unique “birthday cake” construction of the nahua people from outside Mexico City and a group of *papier maché* figures by master artisan, Pedro Linares. Some years, the Galería chose a theme, such as the 1991 “Ex-Votos y Ofrendas: A Woman’s Point of View.” Usually, the invitational exhibitions included paintings, box constructions, masks sculptures and two-dimensional collages that functioned in the spirit of *ofrendas*. The Galería also continued its support of experimentation by Chicano/Latino artists creating altars as art installations. “Yet there remains in these works a sense of the spiritual vision within the critical voice of the artist,” according to Mesa-Bains. “Memory and nature are united and ensouled in the practices of a political, historical, cultural and geographical investigation.”<sup>32</sup>

Some Día de los Muertos exhibitions made a direct connection between devotion and social content, rendering the artwork a powerful communicator of both. This was exemplified by the 1992 “A Quincentenary Recorso: Redeeming our Dead” exhibition. Utilizing various artistic media and religious formats, the exhibition marked the Columbus “encounter” as sacred space and reformulated a chilling social statement into devotional art. The main “altar” was created in on the floor in the form of a floor mound. While it incorporated the elements of remembrance, grief, and honoring inherent in the altar tradition, it clearly functioned as an indictment on genocide in the Americas. In the 1997 “Electronic Memories” exhibition, altars were created within non-traditional formats of video monitors, computer screens and Internet web sites. Here each *ofrenda* contributed to a rich personal narrative and formed part of a very poignant tribute to deceased loved ones and ultimately, the Day of the Dead’s ability to adapt. What remained constant within all the exhibitions was the root belief that memory and the act of arranging material objects in a ceremony of faith can tap into another dimension and in effect bring the deceased and the spiritual world into this corporal realm. Also constant was the Galería’s commitment to the inclusion of one traditional altar, which served as a source of inspiration and a reminder of the true basis of the observance.

As a result of the Galería, *ofrendas* crossed into and began straddling the line between personal homage and art installation. While the majority of traditional altars were dedicated to an honored member of the family or community, these altars-as-art were created as sites of homage that also functioned as art installations. Within this dual purpose, the artist balanced the aesthetic considerations with a sacred intent and the final product reflected a site-specific intentionality. The altars continued to function as sites of remembrance and homage, yet the quality of the sacred was sharpened by an aesthetic focus.

## Conclusion

*It is a special gift of the religious imagination that allows a people, after 500 years of colonialism, dependency oppression and resistance to turn to the ancient Mesoamerican past for symbols of a cosmovision that help make a world meaningful, give it a standing center, and provide for social and spiritual renewal.*

David Carrasco 33

Día de los Muertos draws from Pre-Conquest indigenous philosophy and Spanish Catholic beliefs to form a very distinct Mexican tradition. It has been this syncretism that has allowed the observance to evolve and maintain its relevance through hundreds of years. However, key to its vitality has been its ability to retain its core concepts of duality, of the inherent union of life and death, of the spirit and corporal worlds. This adaptive nature of Day of the Dead continued within the Chicano observances, drawing on Mexican rural and urban traditions, while incorporating American cultural references, such as the use of English and even more recent electronic technology.

In reclaiming a historical identity, cultural practices and basic civil rights, Chicanos set out to build a future on their own terms. However idealist this endeavor was, and thus not fully achieved, it did instill in Chicanos a sense of ownership over their cultural heritage. Spirituality was a very important component of that heritage. The Día de los Muertos observance became a focal point in the socio-political reclamation process that was the Chicano Movement. But a strictly transplanted Mexican version proved to be unrealistic and too removed, especially for Chicano artists who played a vital and very active role in the civil rights movement. In solving this dilemma, the Galería transformed Día de los Muertos within a *mestizo* sensibility that maintained spiritual ties, incorporated a sense of humor and irony, yet was still very much rooted in the political agenda of Chicanismo. More importantly, within Día de los Muertos, the Galería de la Raza constructed a viable and contemporary laboratory for the exploration and formation of a living tradition that continues to serve the community and its artists.

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10. Eva Cockcroft & Holly Barnet-Sanchez, ed. *Signs From the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Venice: Social and Public Resource Center, 1990), 27.
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12. Juan Gonzalez, "Our People Deserve the Best," *Nuestra*, May, 1977, 56.
13. Author interview with Francisco X, Camplis, October 26, 2000. The other members of Artes 6 were Antonio Gabriel, Rafael McNeill, Manuel Palos, Miguel Ruiz, and Pilar Sanchez.
14. Timothy W. Drescher, *The Galería de la Raza/ Studio 24, Culture and Community*, unpublished manuscript, 1983, 5.
15. Author interview with Yolanda Garfias Woo, June 26, 2000.
16. Amalia Mesa-Bains, transcript of interview with Olivia Armas, December 17, 1994, 1.
17. Suzanne Shumate Morrison, Mexico's Day of the Dead in San Francisco, California: A Study of Continuity and Change in a Popular Religious Festival, unpublished manuscript, 1994, 368.
18. René Yañez, transcript of interview with Olivia Armas, January 17, 1995, 13.
19. For a more detailed discussion of this important aspect of the origins of Día de los Muertos, read David Carrasco's *Religion of Mesoamerica and City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*.
20. Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 60.
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22. Olivia Armas, "Día de los Muertos Timeline," August 1, 1995.
23. Maria Pinedo, transcript of interview with Olivia Armas, December 17, 1994, n.p.
24. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "A Chicano Ceremony of Remembrance and Reclamation," exhibition catalogue for *Annual El Día de los Muertos Celebration*, (San Francisco: Galería de la Raza, 1989), 4.
25. Author interview with René Yañez, June 27, 2000.
26. Maria Pinedo, Armas transcript, 1994.
27. Victor Zamudio-Taylor, 18.
28. Author interview with René Yañez, June 27, 2000.
29. This was articulated in the gallery brochure for the 1983 exhibition as follows: "The essential nature of *ofrendas* and *altares* changes when extracted from the socio-cultural nexus of their origin. Although still functioning as shrines, their creation in the structured setting of an art gallery, museum, or community hall transforms the *altares* and *ofrendas* into a more formal aesthetic statement."
30. Amalia Mesa-Bains, Armas transcript.
31. Author interview with René Yañez, June 27, 2000. *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* by Hayden Herrera was published in 1983.
32. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Spiritual Visions in Contemporary Art," in *Images and Histories: Chicana Inspired Art*, (Medford, MA, Tufts University Gallery, 1999), 7.
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## converge

*to tend to a common result*

In the early 1970s Chicano/Latino artists started organizations and *Centros* like Galería throughout the state of California. If 'white' institutions didn't open their doors to Latino artists, then creating their own cultural spaces, in their terms, became the urgent expression of cultural survival. 'Converging' thus refers to the building of temporary communities through artistic, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial and other affinities. It refers to the efforts of taking artists out of the isolation of their studios to share, reveal their thoughts, discuss ideas, collaborate, learn from each other, find/develop common codes, common purposes, and to serve as a positive force for their community.

# CHRONOLOGY

## 1969

An artist collective known as the Mexican American Liberation Art Front (MALAF, pronounced *mala-efe*) is formed to bring together Chicano artists who are interested in integrating art into the Chicano revolution. The core group includes visual artists Esteban Villa and René Yañez, who were attending the California College of Arts & Crafts; Malaquíás Montoya from UC Berkeley; and community activist, Manuel Hernandez. The group organizes the first Chicano exhibition ever, *La Raza Nueva*, in Oakland. The exhibition marks a historical precedent to Galería de la Raza in San Francisco and the Rebel Chicano Art Front (RCAF) in Sacramento.

“I saw the force of the strong movement [in the late 60's] when working with Manuel Hernandez, Malaquíás, Montoya, Esteban Villa, and also José Montoya. A group was formed called the Mexican American Art Liberation Front. [...] People have different visions and different ideas, yet all of those people have contributed, have sparked and fanned a fire that has reached people up and down California and all over the United States.”

—René Yañez, Interview for *The Fifth Sun: Contemporary / Traditional Chicano & Latino Art*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, October 12-November 20, 1977

“MALAF was originated about four months ago for the purpose of organizing Chicano artists who are interested in integrating art into the Chicano revolution. The artists meet every Friday to present, criticize, and comment on each other's work. [...] Long range goals of MALAF are the following: to set up a traveling art show; to exhibit in the Barrios in towns like Tulare, Visalia, Delano, etc.; to establish a Chicano art print shop so that we can produce our own posters, graphics, and art magazine; to encourage young artists from the barrios to enroll in good art colleges; to encourage all the other artists in photography, drama, and dance.”

—Bronze, March 1969, Volume 1, n°1

## assert

*to maintain or defend (claims, rights, etc.); to state as having existence*

‘Asserting’ refers to the strategies Chicano/Latino artists utilized to claim a public space for community and cultural rituals, reclaiming the right to a public identity of difference. As such, ‘asserting’ is a tactic artists used since the early 1970s to create a safe-haven, a time and space, for cultural expressions such as Lowrider culture, community rituals like the processions in honor of those who have passed, or for festivities like *Carnaval* and *Cinco de Mayo* that celebrate cultural pride. ‘Asserting’ also refers to the ability to occupy public space, through murals and billboards, and engage in a public dialogue with the neighborhood community in its own terms.

# 1970

**July:** A group of Chicano artists and community activists in San Francisco's Mission District found Galería de la Raza and start to operate in a storefront at 425 14th Street. The original group includes Rupert Garcia, Peter Rodriguez, Francisco X. Camplis, Graciela Carrillo, Jerry Concha, Gustavo Ramos Rivera, Carlos Loarca, Manuel Villamor, Robert González, Luis Cervantes, Chuy Campusano, Rolando Castellon, Ralph Maradiaga, and René Yañez. Peter Rodriguez gave Galería de la Raza its name. The name literally means "The Gallery of the People." Rolando Castellón was elected Galería's first director; he is succeeded by Ralph Maradiaga, Administrative Director, and René Yañez, the artistic director. The collective exhibited local artists and continued to lobby mainstream art institutions to accept Latino art. The first exhibition in July 1970 is a solo show of drawings, paintings and constructions by Esteban Villa.

"Villa is a most forceful and virile artist, and his show is a promising beginning for the Galería de la Raza."

—Art Forum, October, 1970

"This is a participating gallery where we are going to deal with people who have something to say and say it. The Galería wants to do anything relevant to the community in terms of cultural education for them, for example, workshops and experience in meeting with others who have had previous contact with art."

—Jay Ojeda quoted in 'El Tecolote, *Raza! Arte! Raza! Arte!* Newspaper clipping, n.d., Galería Archives

"The Galería's existence has made it possible for other groups to get started. We broke the ground and through the murals, posters, and exhibitions, created an interest among the audience. There is now the Mexican Museum, and there is the Mission Cultural Center. The Galería de la Raza has set some standards, both in installations and the quality of the work we have had in our exhibitions. Although we are unpopular with some artist whose work, due to circumstances or timing of funding, we could not show, we have served a true purpose. We explore a lot of different avenues and ideas, and even if we have to close down tomorrow, we will have left our mark.

—René Yañez, interview for *The Fifth Sun: Contemporary / Traditional Chicano & Latino Art*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, October 12-November 20, 1977

**Galería continues to organize exhibitions that bring together a wide range of artists addressing a variety of interests. *Chicanos, Cuba y los 10 Millones* (7/26-8/23). The three exhibitors Jay Ojeda, Roberto Perez-Diaz and Gloria Osuna, have just returned from working in Cuba as**

***Venceremos Brigade* volunteers. In addition to Ojeda, Perez-Diaz and Osuna, Cuban silk screener, Medero will also presents his works. Casa Hispana de Bellas Artes and the Neighborhood Arts Program of the San Francisco Art Commission support the exhibition.**

"[Chicanos, Cuba y los 10 Millones] contains works by three young Chicano photographers who were among a group of local people who spent two-and-a-half months early this year harvesting sugar cane in Cuba. By and large, however, they have photographed within rather narrow bounds and missed —declined to take advantage of— the chance to document what's happening in Cuba. In the case of Jay Ojeda, one doesn't mind, since his photographs of children, shabby houses and country roads are done with a fine intimate feeling; moreover, he has the rare ability to make the artificial qualities of color photography work to expressive advantage.

The most unusual part of the display is a group of posters by a Cuban artist, Rene Medero, designed for postage stamps commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Ho Chi Minh. The silkscreens depict Vietnamese coolies, scenes of battle and destruction, in boldly stylized forms and patchworks of vivid, brilliant y harmonized colors and are first-rate examples of poster art."

— *Three Chicano photographers*. Newspaper clipping, n.d., Galería Archives

**Other exhibitions this year include a solo show of abstract paintings by Gustavo Rivera (9/1-9/30); and an exhibition entitled *Arte del Barrio* (10/1-11/8) that features work by Laurence Martinez, Carlos Loarca, Rolando Castellon, Adolfo Rodriguez, Gustavo Rivera, and Robert Gonzalez.**

**December 12: On the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Galería hosts a memorial exhibition in honor of Chicano L.A. Times journalist, Ruben Salazar, who was killed by a sheriff's deputy during the National Chicano Moratorium March against the Viet Nam war on August 29, 1970. Participating artists include: Jay Ojeda, Rene Yañez, Mike Ruiz, Gustavo Rivera, Peter Rodriguez, Ralph McNeil, Carlos Loarca, Ralph Maradiaga, and Rupert Garcia.**

Jay Ojeda, new director of the gallery says the show is dedicated to the memory of the late Salazar because, "Salazar synthesized so much of what the Chicano is in the way that he lived. He was a practicing Chicano in his sincerity to himself and to our people."

—Raza Art, Vol.1 No.8 Monday, November 30, 1970

## 1971

**Galería starts the year with a solo exhibition of paintings by Peter Rodriguez. The exhibit confirms Galería's major role in identifying and promoting the most relevant contemporary Latino artists in the Bay Area.**

"There isn't a lot of sunlight in Peter Rodriguez' paintings at the Galería de la Raza, 425-14<sup>th</sup> St., but there is a tremendous lot of humanity. Not to speak of craftsmanship. Rodriguez' work ties in with the great modern tradition of California landscape painters using "action painting" techniques or somewhat less heated variants on same. There are several other local virtuosi to be spoken of in the same breath, but Rodriguez has his own artistic

personality, his own soul. [...] The Galería de la Raza is, if you remember, a co-operative of 15 Spanish-speaking artists, and receives small but helpful financial aid from the Art Commission's Neighborhood Arts Program. With more shows like the present one, it certainly won't be needing any artistic aid."

—Arthur Bloomfield, *Art of Nature on Move*, newspaper clipping, n.d., Galería de la Raza Archives about the Solo exhibition of paintings by Peter Rodriguez (1/1 – 2/1)

**June: Galería presents the exhibition “Chicanos del Valle: RCAF Tortilla Show” by Jose Montoya, one of the founders of the Rebel Chicano Art Front (later known as the Royal Chicano Air Force), an artists’ collective internationally known for its mural and poster work and for its synthesis of creative expression and community activism. Considered the originator of tortilla art, José Montoya states that he came up with the idea by pure accident in 1970.**

“I was making tortillas when the phone rang. In the middle of my conversation, I smelled the smoke, knocked the flaming tortilla off the grill, and saw a powerful image on the burnt tortilla lying on the floor.”

—Jose Montoya quoted in Robynn Takayama, *Art Review*, *El Tecolote*, April 2008.

**July: Galería’s organizes a show entitled “Cartelones del Cine Mexicano,” featuring Mexican film posters, which reflects its intent to integrate popular Mexican culture into its exhibition programs.**

## 1972

After tremendous pressure, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art hires Rolando Castellón as a curator in early 1972. Yañez and Maradiaga were elected co-Directors and that same year moved the to its current site at 24th and Bryant streets.

Three exhibitions held this year reveal the vast array of the Galería’s exhibition programs: “Gráficos de Rupert Garcia y Ralph Maradiaga” an exhibition of graphic works by two artists known for the political power of their work; “Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros: Original Drawings and Prints,” which presents works by the three major artists of the Mexican Muralist movement on loan from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the first exhibition celebrating the Mexican tradition of the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Throughout the years, Galería will bring first hand experiences of some of the main influences that have impacted Chicano Art, such as the three masters Siqueiros, Orozco and Rivera, and later on the great Mexican artists José Guadalupe Posada and Frida Kahlo. These influences have played a key role in the art made during the *Movimiento*.

“I was doing research on (Diego) Rivera, (David Alfaro) Siqueiros and (Jose Clemente) Orozco, and I was going to the SF Art Institute, the Stock Exchange, SF City College, where they had his murals, and one of the (supporters) Emmy Lou Packard, suggested that I should check at the SF MOMA. At first they didn’t know. Then they looked and looked and then they found them — Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco prints — in the basement! So I got some money to have them framed and restored. Then I put them up in Balmy Alley as part of the outreach outdoors. We had them up on easels. This was in 1973. It was part of the Chicano movement, trying to forge an identity, because of the murals and the popular approach that Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco had taken, it was important to bring them up to the light and discuss them. They were shown in the Galería. Lots of people came. This was hundreds of thousands of dollars we had hanging. I remember we had this guy sleep in the Galería to protect the prints. The Mission then was... if you can imagine, about 100 Chicano-Latino artists living in the Mission with a lot of energy, the civil rights, breaking down barriers, questioning the galleries.

—René Yañez quoted in “Los Veteranos” by Rose Arrieta, *El Tecolote* August 26, 2006

“In September, Galería will exhibit works by Mexico’s three more important artists —Orozco, Siqueiros, and Rivera— which have mostly been in private collections, unseen for the past 15 years. Also Galería artists teach in the schools, and prepare the exhibit to be seen at factories and other places where people work. “Its taking art to people who don’t normally go to museums or galleries to see it,” explains René Yañez, who wears his hair longish, plus mustache. The hip style.”

—*Troubled Mission Still “Pretty Special”*, *SF Examiner*, Fr, June 23, 1972

“It’s been a long time since most of these works have been dusted off and displayed within the [San Francisco Museum of Art]; they take on new dimensions and even an unexpected topicality from their present location in the midst of the City’s Chicano’s community.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle* 45, Tues, Oct 3, 1972

**For the first time in the history of United States Southwest, Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) was celebrated at The Galería de la Raza, in a show mixing traditional Mexican with contemporary forms. Despite the fear of some Anglos who thought the Galería was developing a new death cult, this celebration has since become a popular citywide cultural celebration.**

“[...] In 1972, we had the first of our Día de los Muertos exhibitions at the Galería de la Raza. We had very little information at that time on this traditional celebration, but we suggested the idea for this exhibition to some of the artists we knew, and they responded by participating in the show. This first exhibition was somewhat crude, but the succeeding shows have been more successful. There seems to be a natural instinct for Chicano, Latino, and even other people from other cultures, to want to participate in this show. In the show we examine what the image of death is and also what the counter image of death is. Is it life? We try to compare both life and death, very much like they do in Mexico.



The thing about altars is that they are an art form. An altar is part of yourself. You put objects on the altar that you use, objects that you make, objects that you like, and you explore a lot of different avenues. In my work as an artist, I keep going towards new mediums: an altar is just a medium.

Some people see Day of the Dead as a negative thing because it deals with death. I don't agree with them, and I hope these exhibitions continue. El Día de los Muertos has been celebrated for hundreds of years in Mexico and in other Latin American countries: it goes back to the Indios (Indians). There is a natural inclination in Chicano and Latino artists to create the calavera image, the skull image in different forms. Sometimes they poke fun at it; sometimes they make a political statement with it; sometimes it comes up involuntarily. So I think Día de los Muertos is growing in popularity in this country. I think we haven't explored it enough, and when it really starts happening in people's homes, that's when I think we will have succeeded in promoting our culture.

A celebration like El Día de los Muertos is looked down on in the Anglo culture. Death to them is Forest Lawn and its funerals. They have a different approach, and I think we have a more wealthy approach. El Día de los Muertos is just part of our culture, part of our heritage, and we keep expressing it in different ways. I think the celebration is going to grow in popularity, that it is going to grow to fit our way of life in the United States."

—René Yañez, interview for *The Fifth Sun: Contemporary/Traditional Chicano & Latino Art*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, October 12-November 20, 1977

**August: After an argument with its landlord, the Galería found itself without a building. To keep the group together and active until a new space could be found, the Galería artists begin a series of wall painting projects. The first, by Spain Rodriguez, is at Horizons, an educational clearinghouse on 22<sup>nd</sup> and Folsom. Then, with the help of Graciela Carrillo, and the Neighborhood Arts Program, René Yañez manages to get more funds to continue the beautification of the neighborhood through painted murals.**

"Photographer Adál Maldonado designed photographic murals for the inside of the Real Alternatives Program. Jerry Concha used a brilliant hard-edged sunburst from one of his paintings to envelop an entire room at the Center for Change youth program. And together with Tom Rios, he created a new atmosphere for every room in the building- and for the rest and playrooms at the Mission day care center. Chuy Campusano took charge of the job with the Mission Rebels, and in keeping with the mural philosophy, he and Yañez talked at length with Mission Rebels kids before deciding what to paint. What came of it was an enormous cartoon of the kids painted by underground comic man, Robert Crumb.

— *Short Strokes*, newspaper clipping, Galería Archives, n.d.

"We want to see ourselves, the kids told the professional artists, and for laughter as well as pride the first floor has a mural designed by Robert Crumb. Youngsters of all sizes, colors, hair lengths, and cultural commitments walk together. Everyone's there, including Honeybunch Kaminski. In fact, there's someone with three eyes and green skin, which means either there's an ethnic group in the Mission I really don't know about, or Crumb is taking on chances of having his mural outdated by the next wave of immigration."

—*"Honeybunch Kaminski joins the Mission Rebels,"* Newspaper clipping, Galería Archives, n.d.

## voice

*to give utterance or expression to; declare; proclaim: to voice one's discontent.*

'Voicing' refers to Chicano/Latino artists' solidarity with the plight of others, to breaking the silence with images and words that defy denial, oblivion, and rejection. In this section artists across generations give voice to a variety of issues, from farmworker labor rights, to gentrification, racial injustice, indigenous movements, war crimes, and intolerance towards alternative lifestyles and sexual orientation.

## 1973

Galería continues to propose unexpected exhibitions of the artists who later became the most recognized artists: Adál and Jose Ramos participate in the exhibit “Una Amenaza y Una Promesa;” Carlos Loarca and Ralph McNeil present their drawings and radiographs in “Loarca-McNeil: Recent Paintings;” “Mujeres de Aztlán: Third World Women's Art Exhibit” brings a women’s perspective to the Chicano arts movement; and, finally, “The Peter Rodriguez Collection of Santos from the Mexican Museum” gives the public the opportunity to (re)discover popular art from Latin America.

1973 is also a year of special political and social commitment. Galería organizes a Nicaraguan Earthquake Relief show to collect funds and materials for artists in Nicaragua and the exhibit “Por Chile: Silk-screens from the President Allende Cultural Campaign,” which is organized to support the newly elected president of Chile.

## 1974

Galería continues to work in close relation with the neighborhood. Galería co-director René Yañez encourages artists to beautify the neighborhood through murals. Muralist Michael Rios paints the walls of a park for children, giving birth to the 24th Street Minipark, whose walls have been painted by a dozen of muralist artists since then. Among the many artists working within the early mural movement in the Mission were: Las Mujeres Muralistas (Graciela Lopez, Irene Perez, Patricia Rodriguez, Consuelo Mendez Castillo), Michael Rios, Tony Machado, Spain Rodriguez, Domingo Rivera, Gilberto Ramirez, Ruben Guzman and Chuy Campusano. Artists paint at least 25 murals in the Mission District, including children' centers, playgrounds, housing project walls, schoolyards, the inside wall of Bank America (23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Mission St), alleys, community buildings and restaurants. Galería artists take over a Foster and Kleiser billboard and transform it into a community mural.

“Two months ago [...] an experienced muralist “liberated” a neighborhood billboard. He painted a bright scene celebrating Mission life over a liquor ad. When the billboard company quickly covered the mural with yet another ad, he retaliated by tearing it down and uncovering his mural beneath.

By using a mural this way, the artist aggressively challenged businesses' environmental encroachment in poor neighborhoods [...] The action also raised the issue of who is to control public spaces —businesses or the people who use those spaces. [...] Clearly, the mural movement is growing in numbers of participants and supporters (both community and commercial). [...] Keep an eye on the Mission and keep an eye on the billboard out your window. You may wake up one day and find it's a mural.”  
—“Finding a site.” Newspaper clipping, Galería Archives, n.d.

Galería supports the expansion of the Mission muralist movement, and presents the exhibition “Soñar Despierto,” with works by Graciela Carrillo, one of the founders of the movement Mujeres Muralistas, an alternative to the predominance of male artists at the beginning of the Chicano arts movement.

## 1975

Artist Peter Rodriguez founds the Mexican Museum in 1975.

“I knew from my own experience that Raza artists were not getting shown in the nation's galleries. I felt it was important for Chicanos and Mexicanos to have a showcase, and for all people to know about our rich heritage.”

—Peter Rodriguez quoted in “In Action for Hispanics: Art in San Francisco.” Newspaper clipping, Galería Archives, n.d.

## 1976

The Galería continues to provide alternative perspectives about Latino life with exhibits such as “Los Sembradores,” a documentary show with photography by Angel del Valle; “The Return of the Cisco Kid,” an exhibit of movie posters, comics, coloring books and other memorabilia on the Legend of The Cisco Kid; and “La Gente de California: A Historical Perspective,” an exhibition produced by Rene Yañez, Ralph Maradiaga and Jose Antonio Burciaga, in collaboration with the California Historical Society. This exhibition strikes on the transformation of the California landscape with the introduction of Chilean miners. The inclusion of mythological figures such as Tiburcio Vasquez, Joaquin Murieta and Zorro sheds light on the ways in which Latino icons have historically been depicted. Galería is at the forefront of reclaiming images and practices from popular traditions that not only reflected but formed El Movimiento.

## 1977

Galería kicks off the year with an exhibition that displays the vast production of calendars Galería artists have created over the past three years. The exhibition features works by Jose Montoya, Graciela Carrillo, Patricia Rodriguez, Ralph Maradiaga, Rupert Garcia, and many others. Launched in 1973, and coordinated by co-director Ralph Maradiaga, each year ten to twelve Raza artists collaborate to produce a unifying theme with twelve individual pictures. The 1977 calendar is dedicated to “La Gente de California.”

# 1978

**February:** Galería de la Raza presents an exhibition of “Pachuco Art” by Sacramento-based RCAF artist, poet and teacher José Montoya whose work lays the foundation for Chicano artistic iconography and practice. Montoya’s work depicts everyday barrio life and urban types through drawings, paintings, and poetry.

**November:** Galería de la Raza re-introduces Frida Kahlo's work to the American public with the highly emotional group exhibition entitled “Homage to Frida Kahlo,” curated by Chicana painter Carmen Lomas Garza. It is held on the occasion of the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead.) Participating artists include: Alfredo Arreguin, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Miranda Bergman, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Jose Antonio Burciaga, Michael G. Burns, Ignacio Canales, Graciela Carrillo, Yreina Cervantes, Kate Connell, Daniel de los Reyes, Daniel del Solar, Lucienne Block Dimitroff, Pele de Lappe, Rudy Fernandez, Ellen Felcher, Enrique Flores, Juan Fuentes, Mia Galaviz, Rupert Garcia, Salvador Garcia, Carmen Lomas Garza, Rafael Jesus Gonzalez, Xavier Gorena, Blanca Gutierrez, Ester Hernandez, Nancy Hom, Lisa Kokin, Consuelo Kurz, Louis LeRoy, Ralph Maradiaga, Raul Martinez, Sue Martinez, Gloria Maya, Hugo Mercado, Emmanuel Montoya, Jane Dorling, Maria Pinedo, Xesus Guerrero Rea, Mike Rios, Teresa de la Riva, Jose Romero, Patricia Rodriguez, Esteban Chavez Sanchez, Joseph M. Sanchez, Herbert Siguenza, Beryl Landau/Nina Serrano, Teddy (ASCO), Calvin Barajas Tondre, Manuel Villamor, and Rene Yañez.

“The guest book was on a table, near the door of the gallery. Emmy Lou Packard blinked at the pages and wrote, “Frida was here, I know.” Frida Kahlo's image was all over the walls: Paintings of her, drawings of her in charcoal, pastel, oil, lithographs, silkscreens, wood constructions. Artists born after she died had painted self-portraits with Frida. She was alive this Saturday night in the Mission; in the small gallery on Twenty-fourth Street. [...] People brought their own gifts and ceremonies and remembrances for Frida. They brought color and kisses and toys. “Frida embodied the whole notion of culture for Chicana woman,” Amalia Mesa Bains of the Galería said. “She inspired us. Her works didn't have self-pity, they had strength.”  
—Memories of Frida Kahlo, by Ira Kamin, California Living, May 6, 1979

# 1979

**July:** Galería plays an important role in presenting the visual vibrancy of Raza street life. It introduces Teen Angel's original art to the world in the exhibition “Low 'n Slow,” an exhibition of drawings, photographs, graphics and low-rider bikes organized in collaboration with Lowrider Magazine, and curated by René Yañez and Carmen Lomas Garza. Local car and bike clubs brought together around two thousand people who came to take part in this historic art celebration.

“For most of us, it is the first chance we had to see Teen Angel's original art. One of his sections is recent artwork that has been published, and the other is made up of Angel's earlier art (the drawing that made him famous as a Lowrider Artist). Gilbert Lujan's drawings of plebe and carruchas show

the fine drawing style that has set him apart as one of Aztlan's most creative *artistas*. Luis Jimenez showed his versions of Nuevo Mexico Lowriders in his colorful drawing style. Ramon Cisneros' KiKi and the Cruiser are there, and they shine with class, under glass! [...] The art is not just in the Galería. There is a "Low 'N Slow" billboard/mural right outside, and it is SO hot it even stops traffic. On the day of the reception, the street in front of the Galería was reserved for the Low Creations Car Club. This classy Car Club made the event complete; there was a fine art show inside, and a firm car show outside. Fine summer weather and lots of beautiful people made the arte exhibit an event that will be long remembered."

—Juan Carlos Garza, *Low 'N Slow Arte Show*. Newspaper clipping, Galería Archives, n.d.

## 1980

Galería's gift shop, Studio 24, is founded by Maria Pinedo as an alternative fundraising resource in face of cuts in federal funds for arts, and as an experiment in community entrepreneurship. The Galería also offers a retrospective of the works of the famous Mexican photographer Agustín V. Casasola (1874-1938) from the Collection of Minerva and Gilbert V. Martínez which allows the public to know more about the journalist who founded the first Mexican press agency, Agencia Fotográfica Mexicana.

The art gallery holds as well an exhibition of self-portraits by René Yañez, Irene Perez, José Trevino, Rudy Cuellar, Carmen Lomas-Garza, Gloria Maya, Alfredo Arreguín, Blanca Gutierrez, Ricardo Mendez, Calvin Casrajas, Tondre, Ray Gayatan, Patricia Rodríguez, Peter Rodriguez, Victor Ochoa, and Ester Hernandez. The 9<sup>th</sup> Día de los Muertos exhibit is organized around the theme "Calacas Huesudas" (Boney Skeletons).

## 1981

In its intent to change the preconceived ideas around the Mission District's Latino youth, the Galería holds the exhibit "La Otra Onda" that features photographs by Lou Dematteis, Robert Wallis and Joe Ramos depicting the Cholo lifestyle of Mission Youth. The exhibit later travels to the Humboldt Cultural Art Center in Chicago.

"René explained this is the first exhibit of its kind, featuring the Cholo life-style. 'Chicago is very excited about the exhibit,' he added."

—El Beto de Tejas, Newspaper clipping, Galería Archives, n.d.

## domesticate

*to take (something foreign, unfamiliar, etc.) for one's own use or purposes; to make more ordinary, familiar, acceptable*

‘Domesticating’ is a common artistic practice adopted by Chicano/Latino artists that speaks of ingenious creativity drawn from modest means.

It is best exemplified by the transformation of the familiar, by finding poetry and beauty in ordinary, everyday objects and gestures, in the homemade aesthetics of popular culture, and enhancing it through art.

## 1982

Since its founding, the Galería has been on the cutting edge of ideas and new forms of Chicano/Latino artistic expression in California. This is reflected in the exhibit "In Progress," which features the work in progress of a group of artists who have transformed to gallery into an open studio. Over the span of five weeks and under the eye of passersby, the artists create large-scale works addressing a variety of themes. Artists include: Miranda Berman, Tony Chavez, Juan Fuentes, Daniel Galvez, Rayvan Gonzales, Nancy Hom, Lisa Kokin, Yolanda Lopez, Raul Martinez, Regina Mouton, Emmanuel Montoya, Jane Norling, Ray Patlan, Michael Rios, Patricia Rodriguez, Spain Rodriguez, Herbert Sigüenza, Xavier Viramontes, and Rene Yañez.

"The artists of In Progress are Subjects controlling their art and simultaneously the Objects they paint. Admission that the process occurs in a group of determinate contexts, including a social one, unifies the Subjects and Objects, giving strength to the artworks and pertinence to their community.

[...] Herbert Sigüenza's piece, "The Border" changed entirely from his original conception, which was to reproduce a wall from, say, El Salvador, and have the process of the show be the process of transformation of the wall - new graffiti, stains, posters, crumbling plaster, perhaps some bullet holes. [...] What he did was create a large US flag out of plaster with the white stripes yellowed and the plaster adding texture "to give some hardness." About four feet in front he placed a chain link fence with barbed wire on top and a sign saying "United States of America – No trespassing: Immigration and Naturalization Service." The unveiling of Sigüenza's piece provided the afternoon's only theater, for when the paper was torn away from the fence it revealed Herbert standing with his back to audience. Turning to the crowd as if embarrassed for being caught urinating, he fastened his trousers, pointed to us and said, "Look at all the illegal aliens." The irony of his words and the meaning of the piece were made instantly clear when one read the inscription on Herbert Sigüenza's tee shirt: "A legal alien." the piece and the theatrical moment were thus extended from a tiny part of the border to a metaphor for all the divisive "fences" in our lives."

—In *Progress in progress* by Tim Drescher, a catalog of the exhibition *In Progress*, May 4 through June 12, 1982

## 1983

**January:** Galería supports the American Indian Movement and features a photo documentary exhibition with works by Michelle Vignes, Michel DuBois, and Myron Thomas entitled "Images of the American Indian Movement.

**April:** Galería exhibits "The Santos of New Mexico," an exhibition of carved wooden saints and retablos of Saints. Organized by Ralph Maradiaga and René Yañez. With its wide-ranging exhibition programs, Galería serves both an exhibition space for progressive and traditional exhibitions of Chicano and Latin



**American art of all styles and persuasions, and as a community center for the teaching and appreciation of art and culture.**

“When does the spirituality vanish from religious art? It is a loss, perhaps, that can be experienced only after the fact, like the old king in “Hamlet” discovering he can no longer pray. But the question is unavoidable in a current exhibition, “Santos of New Mexico,” at the Galería de la Raza, 2851 24th Street, which contains work that connects to one of the great traditions of Christian religious art and attempts, with varying approaches and degrees of success, to bring it into the present.”

—Thomas Albright, *A Revival of Sacred Art*, San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, April 16,

**June: Galería brings back for the second time the L.A. based Chicano collective ASCO [Nausea]. The exhibition is called “Stages” and features simultaneous performances in a gallery setting.**

“On occasion, art galleries are turned over to theater people to present an intimate play or performance piece. But the Galería de la Raza/Studio 24, in association with the San Francisco International Theater Festival, came up with a much more ambitious idea: the presentation of seven playlets in one program at its small space at 2851 24<sup>th</sup> Street. How this feat was accomplished for the presentation of the anthology show “Stages” is nothing short of an engineering wonder, as every inch of the gallery was used. Focus was established by having the audience shift four feet to the left and look at that wall, turn around and aim your attention there, and so on. It's an ingenious staging concept, and the Galería, having had such success this time out, already is considering another go at it, as well as possibly moving “Stages” (which closed Sunday) to another, larger location.

The seven pieces varied widely in style – some more musical, some dance-oriented, some more verbal, some more visual – though each revolved the central theme of the artist and success.”

—Bernard Weiner, *'Stages': An Ingenious Use of Space*, San Francisco Chronicle, Wed., August 10, 1983

## 1984

**Galería presents the exhibition “New Dimensions in Realism” that explores the work of artists working with realist traditions, such as Davis Maes Gallegos, Daniel Galvez, John Valadez, George Rivera, Ignacio Gómez, Christine Dawson, and Linda Hanson.**

**May: René Yañez produces “Comedy Fiesta” for an irreverent celebration of Cinco de Mayo. The revue features an outrageous repertoire of humor, skits, impersonations, and rap. Original members include Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas, Herbert Siguenza, Monica Palacios, Marga Gomez and José Antonio Burciaga. The group is known as Comedy Fiesta.**

## imagine

*to form mental images of things not present to the senses; use the imagination.*

The artworks in the section 'imagining' reveal creative processes inspired by the unknown, by metaphor and fantasy. Its roots lie in Magic Realism, a perspective of the extraordinary in daily life, an aesthetic often associated with Latin American art.

# 1985

With the exhibition “Border Realities,” the artists of the Border Arts Workshop (Isaac Artenstein, David Avalos, Jude Eberhard, Michael Schnorr, Sara Jo Berman, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Victor Ochoa) use all the artistic modes of expression (video, painting, performance, sculpture, and outdoor mural, panel, discussion, photo, conceptual installation) to explore the cultural implications of the Border between United States and Mexico.

Still questioning the mainstream vision of Latinos, the Galería features a benefit comedy performances by the ex Comedy Fiesta now called Culture Clash, in reference to the culture clash of the Latino against conventional America, as well as the culture clash between different Latino ethnic groups.

July 19: Ralph Maradiaga, a pioneer of Chicano art and co-founder of Galería, passes away. As an artist, he crossed many boundaries and gained, as well as applied, many skills to his works. He was an artist as well as a teacher and worked with graphic design, photography, silk-screening, printmaking and filmmaking. The latter included an educational film called " A Measure of Time" which was narrated by Luis Valdez, playwright and founder of El Teatro Campesino. Humberto Buitrón Becomes the Administrative Director.

"The images I use in my work are a reflection of our culture, its people and its tradition. As artists we must all share customs, lifestyles and imagery with one another. It is only through artistic, social and political ideologies that we ascertain and retain a place in history and document it for our children."

—Ralph Maradiaga

“Ralph Maradiaga was an important person. We worked well because he was an artist but also did administration. We wanted to establish our own history and put it into perspective. We (brought) the Huichol images of the Southwest in '77. We were making contact with the Southwest. We had a lot of contact with ASCO from Los Angeles in the 70s through the 80s, people who did visual and performance art. We explored the Vietnam War through posters, photography. We brought the Santos (carvings) from New Mexico. When the lowrider scene came out we had lowrider shows. We kind of fostered some of the young lowrider artists and we had conflicts with then-SF mayor Dianne Feinstein, who thought we were promoting delinquency.

—René Yañez quoted in “Los Veteranos” by Rose Arrieta, El Tecolote August 26, 2006

The exhibition, “Women by Women,” curated by Amalia Mesa-Bains and María V. Pinedo, explores a feminist perspective through works by Amalia Mesa Bains, Dolores Cruz, Celia Rodríguez, Patricia Rodríguez, Linda Vallejo, Judy Baca, Juana Alicia, Yolanda Lopez, Santa Barraza, Barbara Carrasco, Diane Gamboa, Lorraine Garcia, Carmen Lomas Garza, and Ester Hernandez. Lydia Mendoza performs.

## divert

*to turn aside or from a path or course; to draw off to a different course, purpose, etc.; to distract from serious occupation; entertain or amuse.*

‘Diverting’ refers to the many ways that Chicano/Latino artists utilize humor as a critical device. It can be a survival skill that follows the motto “Laugh now, cry later” often depicted in Cholo art, or a sharp tool for political satire. ‘Diverting’ is also a strategy used to visually synthesize a difficult issue to make it more palatable for viewers, yet with a sharp wit to spark reaction, reflection and debate.

## 1986

**May:** During the “Everchanging Exhibition,” Eva C. Garcia and the oil painter Ramiro Martinez present a changing selection of their works created on location.

**June:** An exhibition is organized in collaboration with Mexican conceptual artist Felipe Ehrenberg to raise relief funds for victims of the 8.1 earthquake that hit Mexico City in September 1985.

**July:** “South Africa: State of Emergency” is a group exhibition that features the work of Juan Fuentes, Juana Alicia, and Sal Garcia in solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement. **Billboard Artist:** Emmanuel Montoya

## 1987

**Galería de la Raza presents “Recuerdos de Frida”, a mixed media exhibit of rare photos and original paintings, videos, films, and memorabilia of the legendary Mexican painter Frida Kahlo organized conjunction with the Mexican Museum.**

“Kahlo's outpouring of intensely personal and highly original images in oil has attracted an avid worldwide following since her death in 1954. [...]

Frida Kahlo's work as a painter was antithetical to the work of her husband, Diego Rivera, in both scale and content. Whereas his grand murals were public arts of a social dimension, hers were small paintings of a private nature, reflecting on her personal experiences as a woman. Often autobiographical, they were a frank and courageous exploration of her physical suffering. Her work was also a living record of the volatile life with Rivera – a feminine diary, often excruciating in its honesty and clarity.

In their content, her works were self-portraits, often expressed with popular arts forms such as the *retablo* or *ex-voto* style of religious painting on tin or wood. Interpreted by the Surrealist as one of their own, Breton described her work as “a bomb with a terrible charge wrapped in tissue paper and decorated with colored ribbons.”

While Frida's work did include fantasy, they were based on feelings and events in her life. Frida said, 'They thought I was a Surrealist but I wasn't, I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality. The Only thing I know is that I paint because I need to and I paint whatever passes through my head without any other considerations.'

[...] Frida's importance rests not simply in her work, but in the way she sought to balance her life. She struggled against limitations of her physical ailments limitations of her physical ailments and she depicted the feminine biology of motherhood, birth and loss. She painted the sorrow and torments of her love battles with Diego, and she maintained in her private life strength and *alegría*. All these qualities have meaning for contemporary Chicana/Raza women struggling with changing women's roles and cultural allegiances. Certainly the concepts of endurance have had meaning for Chicanas in this society. Despite all her struggles and her eventual loss, Frida leaves a legacy of work expressing the world of the Mexican Woman."  
—Amalia Mesa-Bain, *Frida Kahlo Chicano Inspiration*, Galería de la Raza Studio 24, Volume 1, Number 2, April-May, 1987

**July: After 17 years of serving as Artistic Director, Galería co-founder, René Yañez, leaves the Galería. He is replaced by a young artist from Mexico City, Enrique Chagoya. One of the first exhibitions Chagoya organizes is "Art From Jail," a show of work by inmates at the San Francisco County Jail where he is an artist-in-residence. This exhibit allows their works to be shown to the public for first time.**

"[...] Since 1979 the Arts Program in the San Francisco County Jail has offered one of the most comprehensive arts programs ever developed for incarcerated men and women. The Arts Program, supported by the California Arts Council and the San Francisco Sheriff's Program, bring together skilled artists from a variety of disciplines to a population for whom participation in the arts can provide creative expression as well as development of skills and talents.

The diversity, talent, energy and spirit of creation so evident in the work make "Art From Jail" an exciting exhibit, which the Galería is proud to present."

— *Art From Jail*, Galería de la Raza Studio 24, Volume 1, Number 3, Summer 1987

## 1988

**January: Faithful to its tradition of political commitment against the mainstream opinion, Galería presents "From Behind Prison Walls: Art of Puerto Rican Patriots" a mixed-media exhibit of paintings, drawings, photographs, sculpture, copper works, crafts, poetry and prose and videos by men and women who are imprisoned for their part in the struggle for Puerto Rico's independence from US control.**

“The exhibit is sponsored by Friends of Elizam Escobar, an organization founded to support the art of Escobar, the most well known artist of the group. The artists (among them educators, media producers, administrators and social workers) consider themselves prisoners of war in their struggle with the US government and are serving 40-100 year sentences in US prisons. The passion and direction of their commitment to the cause of Puerto Rican freedom is evident in their art – art which, as Escobar says, ‘...is an act of liberation.’

The talents and diversity of this group of men and women are evident: they include the vibrant oils of Escobar, the intricate hammered copper pieces of Adolfo Matos, the warm portraits of Puerto Rican community life captured in the videos of Dylcia Pagan and the vivid poetry of Haydee Torres and Carmen Valentín. Dispersed in federal prisons across the US, far from their family’s communities and colleagues, their rare circumstances have made the merging of their art and their lives a daily reality. They are connected to each other and to the Puerto Rican community through the efforts of such groups as Friends of Elizam Escobar in the Puerto Rican Information Center, Juan Antonio Corretjer in San Francisco. Through the work of these organizations, these artists and their work have found an audience.”

– *From Behind Prison Walls*, Galería de la Raza Studio 24, Volume 1, Number 6, Spring 1988

**June: Ester Hernandez presents her first solo exhibition, “The Defiant Eye.” Her artwork documents Raza life with both a national point of view and a personal sensibility. One of the key works in the exhibit, “Sun Mad,” becomes an icon of the early Chicano Art movement.**

“There lies below the surface of the Sun Mad Raisin image a sense of defiance, a questioning of the social context. Ester Hernandez brings to her work a defiant eye, a view of human relations and meaning that draws the participant into the familiar.

[...] Hernandez reframes age, time and memory in her ongoing homenaje to Norteña musician Lydia Mendoza. Embodying for Ester the commitment and devotion of the artist, Lydia Mendoza becomes a multiple image of age and integrity. The use of the feminine figure positioned over time allows the artist to recollect and in some respects incorporate the very power she honors. [...] Her aesthetic tradition is forged within both a national movement and a personal sensibility. The intense presence of the spirit is communicated in cultural figures. The setting, arrangement and detailing of the portraiture tells us of their values and beliefs. Put simply, the personal in Hernandez’s work signifies a hope for change; an uplifting of the everyday that serves a community in an age of activism. »

— Amalia Mesa-Bains, PhD, Ester Hernandez, *The Defiant Eye*, June 7-July 2, 1988, Artist Monograph Series

**September: Yolanda Lopez presents her work in an exhibit called Cactus Hearts/Barbed Wire Dreams, which questions racist stereotypes of Mexicans as portrayed in the media. The installation “Things I Never Told My Son About Being A Mexican,” displayed advertisements, food wrappers, toys, souvenirs and articles of clothing that reproduce the ubiquitous ‘sleepy’ Mexican as well as other stereotypes of Mexican men and women. The multi-media installation is co-curated by guest artist Yolanda Lopez and Artistic Director Enrique Chagoya.**

“In this forceful exhibit [Yolanda Lopez] holds common objects such as dishes and lamps; food wrappers and commercials; toys and clothing motifs for scrutiny by the public. Mythical figures created by non-Mexicans in the fields of entertainment and advertising are also brought under spotlight. Lopez presents a visual analysis of the stereotype “good” Mexican versus the “evil” illegal Mexican. To what degree these images have penetrated into the subconscious of our society, influencing the perceptions of the average American when it comes to their views of Chicano and Latino people, is the question to be asked and answered by the serious viewer of ‘Cactus Hearts/Barbed Wire Dreams: Media Myths and Mexicans.’ To those concerned with racism in America, the answer to this question is critical, and it measures the importance of our next exhibit. Visitors to the Galería de la Raza can look forward to receiving a subtle education while visually feasting on the fascinating installation constructed by the Galería team.”

— *Cactus Hearts/Barbed Wire Dreams*, Galería de la Raza Studio 24 Volume 1 Number 8 Summer 1988

## 1989

**Galería continues to counter the male predominance in Latino Art by featuring an exhibit of paintings by Juana Alicia and Barbara Carrasco called “Pinturalista: Vermillion Blues Spelling.”**

“Color and form have attracted us to this art, made us take a step forward to examine closely and pushed us back to see the totality of Juana Alicia's work. Taking the step back we can see symbols and themes of time, life, culture, gender, contemplation, death and the urgent struggle for survival. Woman as a character in Juana's art becomes a metaphor for life and not just a portrayal of women's condition. Juana Alicia's passion for life exudes onto her work, her concern for humanity urges us, the viewers, to reflect on our personal quest for justice.”

— In *Pinturalista: Vermillion Blues Spilling, Reflections on the Works of Juana Alicia*, by Margarita Luna Ribles, poet writer in residence at Platano Flats Jazz Conservatory, Iowa City, Iowa, Artist Monograph Series

“Carrasco's visions of truth clarify many falsehoods, which infect elemental interrelationships between the self/individual, heterogeneous/impersonal society, history/amnesia, perception/phantom sensations, and sub/sur/subservient reality. Her work reveals an astute comprehension of the intricate complexities that are involved in the simulation/subversion of truthful images/emotions/intentions. There is implicit danger attached to her moral affirmation of truth. The threat of banishment/ punishment by those who fear illumination and enlightenment is countered by the strength of her commitment to produce works that comment on personal/political contradictions. Carrasco has emerged in the '80s as a leading artist who challenges the viewer to see beyond the façade of authority/authenticity/acceptability.”

— Harry Gamboa, Jr., 9 January 1989, East Los Angeles, Artist Monograph series, Number 3, January 1989



**May: “Dos Mundos,” an exhibition of monoprints, bas relief sculpture, paintings, and photos brings together the work of two artists, Enrique Vidal and Lorraine Garcia.**

“[Vidal’s] oil paintings on view in ‘Dos Mundos’ reflect his passion for rich color as well as his returning to the motif of geometric juxtaposed with the human figure. Vidal talks of experiencing a freedom when painting his still life work; of experimenting with and intuitively deepening his knowledge of color and texture. »

— By Sylvia Mullaly Aguirre in Artist Monograph Series, Number 5, May 1989

“As an artist nurtured and responsive to the tenets of the Chicano art movement, Lorraine Garcia has maintained a consistent critical stance toward its more prescriptive doctrines. Her work is internal and personal yet neither hermetic nor idiosyncratic; it is cerebral and conceptual but with a clear and focused message. Consistently there are references to time, repetition and succession. [...] Through verbal-visual elements, the artist sequentially unravels some of the most precious yet persistent images of ethnic representation.”

— Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, “So, Do You Want The Truth Or Do You Want To Stay Happy” Galería de la Raza, Artist Monograph Series, Number 6, May 1989

**August: Galería de la Raza hosts Graciela Iturbide's “Juchitán de las Mujeres.” Her photos invite the viewer to travel to Juchitán, a town in the state of Oaxaca where the social organization, a matriarchy, follows a sense of life and engagement that seems to pervade daily existence there.**

"As one of, if not the most important of Mexico's current photographers, Iturbide has built a reputation for precise, understated images rooted in a sense of ancient community but also often revealing the changes and surreal juxtapositions of contemporary life. [...] In her exhibition at Galería de la Raza, Iturbide focuses specifically on women who live in Juchitán, a town in the state of Oaxaca on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. To use a worn-out expression, if Juchitán did not exist, it would have to be invented, probably by the likes of Isabel Allende, Julio Cortazar or Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Juchitán is a matriarchy, but that term does not describe the overwhelming sense of life and engagement that seems to pervade daily existence there. [...] What these images powerfully portray is a community that is generous, tolerant and creative. [...] One final description: an older woman stands in front of a paint-splattered wall, one of her hands is placed upon her chest, fingertips to sternum, and the other is over the belly, the original site of creation. The paint splattered on the wall creates a field of energy behind her, an electric aura, making her at once iconographic and palpably human. It is this combination of undogmatic religiosity and tenderness that is quietly overwhelming in Iturbide's photographs."

— In *The Tender, Laughing Women of Juchitán* by Mark Alice Durant, Artweek, September 9, 1989, Volume 20, Number 29

**October: Seventeen years after its first edition, the Galería organizes a series of Día de los Muertos events such as a procession, a visual arts exhibit, *altares*, and *papel picado* illustrations, The participating artists —Herminia Albarran, Ann Chamberlain, Mia Gonzales, Lawrence Herrera, Gonzalo Hidalgo, Amalia**

**Mesa Bains, Karen Nuñez, Lalo Obregon, Eva Garcia, Victor Zaballa—pay tribute to the historical roots of the Día de los Muertos in Mexico.**

“Día de los Muertos is a theme that has inspired many artists in the creation of theatre, literature, dance, film, painting, sculpture, printmaking, installations, music, infinite possibilities for creation in all art forms, from the most traditional forms to the most experimental directions. This year the Galería de la Raza offers a great variety of artistic and cultural events in which many of the festive and ceremonial elements of Día de los Muertos can be appreciated. We cordially invite the public to participate and help in celebrations listed in the calendar.”

– Enrique Chagoya, Artistic Director, *The Day of the Dead*, 1989

## 1990

**February:** Galería presents “Borderwatch: Five Years Later,” a new exhibition of work by Richard Lau, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Michael Schnorr and other artists of the San Diego/Tijuana-based Border Arts Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo. In conjunction with the exhibition, Galería organizes two events: a reception for the book “Reimaging America: The Arts of Social Change,” by Mark O’Brien and “Border Brujo,” a ritual-linguistic journey across the U.S./Mexico border written and performed by artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In the guise of a cross-cultural shaman, Gómez Peña shifts into 15 different personas, each speaking a different language and representing the borders between North and South.

Celebrating its first 20 years promoting Chicano/Latino art, pushing artistic boundaries, and fostering intercultural dialogue, the Galería de la Raza presents “Recordar es Vivir Dos Veces,” an evening of remembering the people and times of Galería’s first 20 years. The Galería also pays tribute its co-founder Ralph Maradiaga (1935-1985) for years of art and film work, curatorial contributions and community activism with a Forum for Artists and the Community about Chicano Issues. Still looking toward the future, Galería collaborates with Kearny Street Workshop to hold a group exhibition of multi-media works by a group of young, up and coming artists such as Gabriel Orozco, Silvia Gruner, and Guadalupe Garcia.

## 1991

**January:** The Royal Chicano Air Force lands in San Francisco and comes to the Galería to celebrate Chicano barrio life and the farms and factories where Chicanos work. The exhibit presents themes that mix the modern with traditional Chicano/Mexicano cultures, and link past and present through posters and mixed media works. In conjunction with the exhibition, Galería organizes a musical performance by José Montoya’s Trio Casindio and the premiere of *In Search of Mr. Con Safos*, a 30-min. video on the history of the RCAF.

"Art-as-activism is the *raison d'être* for the Royal Chicano Air Force. The current show at Galería de la Raza—*The Royal Chicano Air Force Lands in San Francisco*—represents twenty years of the group's community-based poster art, but looking at this sampling of fifty-seven posters, the chicken and the egg question comes to mind. On one hand, the RCAF followed the leadership of the Chicano movement, and its posters helped mobilize many political rallies and benefits. On the other hand, the definition of "Chicanismo" and Chicano art as a genre was influenced and sometimes directly created by the contributions of the RCAF.

In any case, the presentation at the Galería could be described as a celebration. Poster art is best seen when it's placed in the context of the era and events it represents, and the Royal Chicano Air Force collective sprang from and celebrates Chicano barrio life and the farms and factories where Chicanos work. At the same time, the RCAF, a true collective, acknowledged not the individual artist but the community and its culture.

These are the generals: Jose Montoya, Ricardo Favela and Esteban Villa—the three who came together at California State University, Sacramento, in 1968 to create the Rebel Chicano Art Front. The RCAF acronym was confused with the Royal Canadian Air Force, but was naturally transformed into the Royal Chicano Air Force. They worked out of the garage of Sacramento City Councilman Jose Serna, to produce the community posters, and then expanded to enlist new recruits and begin research into the indigenous roots of Chicano culture. Their students, co-pilots flying low and slow in their "adobe airplanes," are also represented—Louie Gonzalez, Juanishi Orosco, Lorraine Garcia-Nakata and Armando Cid, to name a few.

So, naturally, the concepts and the contextual images in the posters are a mixture of Mexican celebrations—such as the Day of the Dead—and an array of indigenous themes, which parallels the use of symbolic images among Native Americans. In Stan Padilla's *Tree of Understanding*, the deep roots of a stylized tree reach into brown earth, to a blue maze that could represent the subconscious, from which they draw sustenance. Above, the tallest branch nearly touches a bright star. A native motif surrounds three figures who stand at the base of the tree; the elder teaches two youths and passes on knowledge from the tree.

Indigenous symbols are repeated throughout many of the posters. In *Fiesta Del Maiz*, by Gonzalez, a Mayan corn goddess grinds corn on a *metate* and carries a stylized cob behind her. This poster, like many others in the show, is a riot of colors: a red border, orange fading to yellow in the background, blue, red and just a hint of pink for the figure.

More often, however, themes mix the modern with traditional Chicano/Mexicano cultures, and link past and present. Gilbert Lujan's *Aztlan* is simply a portrayal of a Chevy low-rider decorated with Aztec art, driven by an Aztec character while a modern low-rider sits in the back seat. The past drives the present, and gives new identity to the warriors who ride these modern chariots. In *AZLO*, by Flasher and Louie Gonzalez, an Aztec warrior faces his modern counterpart across a pyramid and points the way to the sun. His "reflection" is a "*vato loco*," first raised high toward the same sun, bandanna pulled low, dark glasses hiding the tear that is beginning to fall. The poster represents five centuries of resistance to conquest that Chicanos have in common with Native Americans; here, the RCAF artists responded to grass roots rediscovery of the powerful symbols activated in the dances, music and art that propelled a movement for Chicanos—which was especially regionalized in California.

There are posters for the migrant workers, the United Farmworkers Union, the cannery workers, Friends of the River, and many other community struggles that sought out the RCAF posters to announce their cause. In its role as a creator and definer of Chicano art during the past twenty years,

RCAF has the respect and acceptance of its own community. But artists have always worked with and portrayed the symbols of their patrons, and the RCAF is no different."

— In *The Royal Chicano Air Force* by Maya Valverde, Artweek, February 28, 1991, Volume 22, Number 8

"In 1969 I transferred to California State University at Sacramento. That moved my entire life. I enrolled as one of the very few Chicanos in the whole art department; in classes taught by the maestros José Montoya, Esteban Villa y Eduardo Carrillo. I was immediately drafted into the Royal Chicano Air Force" por vida and into the intense days of the Chicano Movement (MEChA, UFW, Chicano Art Movement, *et al*). It was like taking a high dive into the *movimiento* and enjoying the thrill of the lifelong swim... upstream! In the early days I earned my wings, battle, ribbons, flying *chiles jalapeños* and became a four-star General (never a private!) in the RCAF by being on the picked lines, *marchas*, student demonstrations, canvassing for Chicano politicians, paintings *murales*, printing silk-screen posters, studying and teaching art at a break-neck pace that produced a lot of what we called short-distance runners who burned out fast. They were needed in those days but the *movimiento* needed long-distance runners more. It was around this time (1971-1972), that the concept for the now legendary Centro de *Artistas* Chicanos de Sacra, Califas, Aztlán was founded in my kitchen."

— Juanish v. Orosco

" If we remain true to our art, our culture and our *gente*, history will convey correctly the spirituality of our mestizaje."

—Ricardo Favela, Curator

**Upon the tragic and unexpected death of Eva Garcia, the Galería organizes the exhibition "Ex-Votos y Ofrendas / Día de los Muertos: A Woman's Point of View" in her honor. The artists featured include Cheyenne Garcia, Cristina Corrada, Cristina Emmanuel, Deborah Semel, Erin Goodwin-Guerrero, Esperanza Martinez, Yolanda Lopez, Holly Barnett-Sanchez, Kate Connell, Linda Vallejo, Margaret Garcia, Mia Gonzalez, Miranda Bergman, Nancy Hom, Jones/Curtis Fukuda, Carol Molly Prier, Cristina Fernandez, Amalia Mesa Bains, Ester Hernandez, and Karen Nuñez.**

## 1992

**February: Galería marks the Quincentennial Anniversary of Columbus in America with three exhibitions that explore the "Encuentro," through the cultural mix and transformation, the resistance and the new identity provoked by the confrontation of different civilizations in the "New World". The first exhibit, "El Caribe: First Invasion," refers to Columbus's arrival, but also calls up the ongoing great post-colonial movements of peoples. The artists Mario Brito, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Juan Boza, George Crespon, Cristina Emmanuel, Pepon Osorio, Juan Sanchez suggest that the political esthetic of self transformation has long been a condition of life in the Caribbean and each work accepts the necessarily syncretic identity of the Caribbean.**

**April: Curated by Inverna Lockpez, "Resistance and Continuity," the second Quincentennial exhibition features a group of contemporary artists from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, including Rimer Cardillo, Josely Carvalho, Alfredo Ceibal, Alvaro Garcia, Catalina Parra, and Pedro Perez.**

**July:** The last exhibition of the “Encuentro” series, “Meso-America: Resistance and Continuity,” explores the possibility that people today are all cultural hybrids. It also makes a case for a kind of cultural unity, at least among non-Europeans, which might once have been disavowed by strict multiculturalism theories.

## 1993

Liz Lerma becomes Executive Director.

## 1994

**January:** Celebrating the major contributions Chicano artists have made to American art, the Galería organizes “A World Without Borders: The Works of Judith Francisca Baca,” a retrospective exhibit of works by the activist and artist Judy Baca, best known for her “Great Wall” of Los Angeles, one of the largest murals in the world. The exhibition includes paintings, drawings, photos and a video from her “Great Wall,” “World Wall,” “Olympic” and community murals.

**March:** “Figuras y Alegoria,” an exhibition of glass and mixed media sculpture, wall pieces and installation by brothers Einar and Jamex de la Torre, plays with cultural icons and religious iconography to initiate a humorous dialogue about Mexican border identity.

"The current show at the Galería features the work of two brothers, Einar and Jamex De La Torre, who maintain studios north and south of the border. Their mixed media on hot molded glass is a joy to behold. Each piece, however beautiful or unusual, also tells a joke, which though sometimes obscure and hard-to-find, can make for great fun once you've discovered it."

– In Vamos a la Calle Veinticuatro (Let's Go to 24<sup>th</sup> Street) by Pat Christensen, Small Business Journal, San Francisco Independent, Tuesday Edition, March 28, 1994

"The de la Torres' work is a singular expression of a Mexican American Perspective. It is rich with references to mysticism and Catholic symbolism, notions of beauty, gender roles and pop culture. It riffs on familiar icons, spike heels, sacred hearts, masked wrestlers, crucifixes – and renders them in blown glass, a material that shouts of tourist trinkets (the brothers, in fact, have a business making glass animal figurines for the collectibles trade).

## subvert

*to overthrow something established or existing*

'Subverting' refers to the tactic of turning icons on their head. Whether it's the reclamation of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a feminist icon, or the irreverence or icon fatigue expressed towards imposed heroes, subverting speaks of Chicano/Latino artists claiming the right to simultaneously be iconophiles and iconoclasts.

# 1995

Gloria Jaramillo becomes Executive Director

**August: Galería presents an exhibition of paintings, graphics and archival material honoring its founders, the Chicano artists who launched a tidal wave of artistic expression in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The show, “The Vanguard of the Chicano Movement,” curated by Sal García, included works by Eduardo Carrillo, Francisco X. Camplis, Rupert Garcia, José Ramón Lerma, Ralph Maradiaga, José Montoya, Malaquías Montoya, Ernesto Palomino, Peter Rodriguez, Esteban Villa, and René Yañez.**

“In the 1950’s some of the artists showcased here, like many other Mexican-American soldiers who had paid the price for democracy, returned from the Korean War to find their communities still suffering racial bias and economic strangulation. Under the G.I. Bill, some attended colleges and universities, studying art, but upon graduating, discovered that because their art did not conform to Euro-centric ideals no galleries or museums were interested in their work. Bright colors, social content and political themes were often shunned by the mainstream, so these artists began to form their own collectives and create their own galleries.

In the 1960’s the country was in a struggle for civil rights, with demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and against police brutality. Chicanos in the inner cities organized walkouts in the high schools, demanding an education that reflected their cultural heritage and their contributions to this country, and not one that facilitated their erasure. They wanted Chicano teachers. They demanded equal rights and equal protection under the law. They also wanted to know why so many Chicanos were dying in Vietnam.

In August of 1970, groups organized The Chicano Moratorium Against the War in Vietnam. Thousands gathered in Los Angeles to protest. Many were Chicano. Police responded to the peaceful march with gunfire and batons. Hundreds were injured. Four died. Among the dead was Los Angeles Times journalist, Ruben Salazar, a man who had championed Mexican and Chicano causes. Many believed his death was premeditated murder, and not an “accident” as claimed by an inquiry. From California to Texas the streets of Aztlan filled with Chicanos of every age, shouting “*Ya Basta!*”

Raza all over the Southwest began to organize in earnest. Young and old, teachers and students, mothers and grandmothers pressed themselves into duty, organizing walkouts, challenging school boards, running for office and supporting the *campesinos* of the United Farm Workers. From these beginnings were formed cultural centers, theaters, writer’s groups, law advocacies, community newspapers, all with the message, “*Viva La Raza!*” and “Chicano Power.” The consciousness of themselves as a people in a multi-cultural world assured, Chicanos began to study their indigenous past, the history of the Southwest, the Mexican revolution, as well as the mural painters of the 30’s and 40’s.

Many of those at the forefront were artists, painters, poets and writers who realized that in order to assert their cultural beliefs, history and spirit into a society that was not reflecting them, they must become political organizers and activists.

The artist before you were part of the apex of that vanguard movement. They used their talent, wit and humor to serve that community. They said, "Enough of European models and aesthetics. We have a rich cultural history...as good as any."  
— Sal Garcia, Exhibition Curator.

**Whereas the Galería celebrates its vanguard origins, the sidewalk is the stage of another movement of self-affirmation. A group of Chicana artists organize a counter-celebration in the street in order to protest against the exhibition's male dominated representation of the Chicano arts movement. They carry a large banner that reads: "Where are the women of the Vanguard?"**

"Like the Adelitas who fought with their men in the Mexican Revolution, Chicanas have joined their brothers to fight for social justice. The Chicana cannot forget the oppression of her people, her *raza* – male and female alike. She fights to preserve her culture and demands the right to be unique in America. Her vision is one of a multicultural society in which one need not surrender to a filtering process and thus melt away to nothingness.

[...] Finally, the Chicana must demand that dignity and respect within the women's right movement which allows her to practice feminism within the context of her own culture. The timing and the choice must be hers. Her models and those of her daughters will be an Alicia Escalante and a Dolores Huerta. Her approaches to feminism must be drawn from her own world, and not be shadowy replicas drawn from Anglo society. The Chicana will fight for her right to uniqueness; she will not be absorbed. For some it is sufficient to say, 'I am a woman.' For me it must be, 'I am Chicana.'"  
— *The Chicana and the women's rights movement*, a perspective, by Consuelo Nieto.

**In the mid-nineties, artist and board member, Amalia Mesa-Bains, develops the ReGeneration Project, a program aiming to provide emerging artists with exhibition and professional development opportunities and to directly involve young Latino artists in the planning and management of Galería activities. Curated by Armando Rascón, "Lgrimas y Sonrisas: The First (Re)Generation Exhibit" marks the beginning of a 25th anniversary celebration led by The ReGeneration Project.**

"To mark its 25th anniversary, the Galería de la Raza introduces the (Re)Generation Project, a collective endeavor that will culminate during the 1995 exhibition season. [...]The established artists and staff of the Galería have recognized the absence of a current mass movement for this emerging generation and the necessity of creating a space of collective activity and developing new leadership. Therefore, the (Re)Generation Project was introduced to provided this emerging generation with support for their future commitment to socially and politically engaged art and community-building. The project will be based on an inter-generational dialogue that will develop a contemporary model of collective consciousness, community activism, and cultural production."



"The first (Re)Generation exhibition recalls the ubiquitous Mexican low-brow comic book, *Lgrimas y Risas*. The small format comic book series appeared weekly on corner news stands throughout Mexico and in many of the barrio mom-n-pop shops here in the United States in the '40s and '50s, perhaps even earlier. During the era of very few television sets in the Latin American household, "*Lgrimas y Risas*" provided the most lasting value for a few cents with its highly popular captioned *foto-novela* depictions of a world of romantic love, a steady flow of highly sentimentalized teen angst set in the world of the working class and the poor.

[...] Outside that frame of memory, in the context of the here and now, "*Lgrimas y Sonrisas*" serves as the title of an exhibition of contemporary artwork by a young generation of artists, perhaps too young to ever have seen or heard of the above mentioned Latino pulp fiction. The hard reality of the '90s is one of zero tolerance for rhapsodic notions of overly sentimentalized goo. [...] Underlying much of the work in "*Lgrimas y Sonrisas*" are the signs of a (re)generation of cultural workers that have evolved throughout the Reagan/Bush years, culminating in art forms keenly wrought from transitional states of identity – between neo-indigenist cultural anthropology and the ideological imperatives located within the empowering discourse of the Chicano/a civil rights movement – and contemporary popular culture. These are the children of the post-CETA, post-affirmative action, and post-MTV eras. Contained here is the groundwork for the student of the '90s, the New Revolutionary Class."  
— Armando Rascón, curatorial statement for "*Lgrimas y Sonrisas: The First (Re)Generation Exhibition*."

**April: Introducing the artwork of a new generation of artists, the Galería hosts "Another Life Inside Her Head", an exhibition curated by Amalia Mesa-Bains featuring work by seventeen emerging Chicana/Latina artists.**

"Maria was living two lives, one of drudgery, labored motions and another up inside her head."  
— From a retablo sculpture by Christina Huizar

"[...] The works in *Another Life Up Inside Her Head* are a reflection of artists of Chicana, Mexicana and Latina identity. The complexity of this mix makes any collective history only partially possible. What is of most concern are the issues, themes, and formal strategies of the work in relation to individual, personal and societal material. 'Another Life Up Inside Her Head' is the first presentation of these young artists in a group at the Galería de la Raza, and marks the beginnings of new careers, new images and continuing commitments to women's cultural work. In the heterogeneity of this work lies the complexity of identity and social community."  
— Amalia Mesa Bains, *Another Life Up Inside Her Head*, curatorial essay

**The Galería continues to expand the paradigms of Chicano identity in the exhibition "El Corazón Me Dió Un Salto: A Queer Raza Exhibition," the first such exhibition presented by a Latino organization in the country. Curated by Nao Bustamante and Eugenio Rodriguez through a model of collective organizing and inter-generational dialogue, the exhibition featured the work of emerging Queer Raza. It included an artist's salon and installation work, an archives segment compiled by David Contreras and Luis de la Garza, and a catalogue featuring essays by Daniel Contreras and Dolissa Medina.**

"We haven't spoken enough about love, and Queer love has been even quieter. It's as if we don't dare to talk about how we love, or perhaps it's because we can't even begin to know. But in our external quest for self and home, it is a love for our friends and family and community that remains somewhere in all of our hearts. It drives us. Indeed, it may be our artists who are the most daring of all – teaching us to take this bold action. Art is about changing how we see; like love, it is both gorgeous and difficult; like love, art can change us in irrevocable ways. We all know the experience of seeing an artwork that makes our heart stop, that heightens our senses, and leaves us with the world looking very different. Art, like love and politics have always contained utopian potential: we want everything, we settle for nothing, but often get something in between. "

— Daniel Contreras and Dolissa Medina, *My heart stood still*, exhibition catalogue.

"The current exhibition, the third and final in the series, is entitled "El corazon me dio un salto: A Queer Raza Exhibition," and features young Latino gay and lesbian artists. The title translates, "My heart skipped a beat." The exhibition's content is distinctively mixed-media, reflecting the turbulent reality that these Latinos often face as ethnic minorities, artists and homosexuals in American culture. [...] The artists — Robert Garcia, 32, Dolissa Medina, 24, Carlos Trujillo, 36, and Juan Dominguez, 38— shared their views on coming out in American society. Gay artists must often come out in two emotionally demanding ways – as homosexuals and as emerging artists."

— David Pendery, *In With The New, In With The Old At Galería*, *The City Voice*, July 21-27, 1995

**September: Curated by Tere Romo, Galería organizes "A Defiant Legacy," an off-site anniversary exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, featuring work by Yolanda Garfias Woo, Carmen Lomas Garza, Ester Hernandez, Rupert Garcia, Enrique Chagoya, Graciela Carrillo, with cameo appearances by Culture Clash, Doctor Loco, Guillermo Gómez-Peña as Border Brujo, GRONK, the Sun Mad Raisin Girl, and more of established Latino/Chicano artists who have taken part in shaping Galería's identity.**

"The world can seem dismayingly transient if one is unconnected to that which provides continuity in life: faith, family and community. These themes are being sounded and celebrated by the Galería de la Raza, one of the Mission District's cultural and artistic institutions, during its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. The gallery is currently witnessing and sponsoring continuity and cooperation across generations of Latino artists and activists, in preparation for, and celebration of, generational transition. [...] Contreras, 24, is project coordinator of (Re)Generation, Galería's year-long, multi-exhibition endeavor to connect the new generation of artists to the generation that was engaged in the cultural and political conflicts of the '60s and the '70s. Artists and activists of that generation established Galería de la Raza ever since. Believing that a renaissance of previous Chicano/Latino generations is important in the current political and cultural climate, the promoters of (Re)Generation, are making an effort to "develop a new generation of Latino artists and cultural workers whose life direction...is informed by the struggles and vision of our past." We thought it was important to "remember the future," says Contreras, crediting one of his colleagues with the catch phrase."

— David Pendery, *In With The New, In With The Old At Galería*, *The City Voice*, July 21-27, 1995

## 1996

Continuing to explore the roots of the Chicano identity from an alternative perspective, Galería presents a yearlong series of exhibitions focusing on the theme of immigration. The first of the series is "Sueños Prometidos (Promised Dreams)" which features black and white photography by Virginia Benavidez, Catalina Govea, Ruben Guzman, and Antonio Tovar. The following exhibitions in the series include "Andando Lejos," curated by Claudia Bernardi that features artists who encompasses the community of political refugees and survivors of torture from Latin America; "Undocumented Passage," a site-specific installation Nick D. Gomez, Amelia Rodríguez, Joseph Sung, and Miguel Torres examining the lives immigrants have left behind to come to the United States; and, finally, "Go Unnoticed," which addresses the complex ways immigration issues are an omnipresent part of our lives. The series serves to counter anti-immigration sentiments and to provide a site where lives under attack are both articulated and documented.

"Interestingly, we seldom speak about the sadness of our memories. We say that we share a solidarity in our silence because, the most important fact of our life, is that we are here. We are creative, we are subversively happy. Whoever designed the effective systems of repression in our homelands did not manage to kill our spirit. Our art is our deepest revenge, our way to say that we are *presente*, our way to maintain our dignity."

—Claudia Bernardi, "Andando Lejos," curatorial statement

## 1997

March: Chico MacMurtrie presents "Growing Into Your Cultural Skin," a cutting-edge, site-specific installation utilizing interactive robotics and poor Latino dietary habits as a focus point for the examination of personal identity. The exhibition includes printed educational materials, guided school tours, an artist-led workshop for emerging artists, and an artist talk.

"Growing into your cultural skin is an interactive installation that centers around a humanoid machine that consumes and defecates lard. The piece confronts the viewer with what I believe is a choice – one can allow or prevent the robot from putting fat into its mechanical body – mirroring the viewer's personal choice to put lard (unhealthy food) into his or her own body. For 20 years I had been returning home to southwest Arizona Where all of my Mexican relatives had immigrated. During the last family reunion, I noticed how a lard-based diet had taken an impact on the health of my relatives, many of whom suffered from diabetes, high blood pressure, and other illnesses resulting from obesity. I sat down and drew a picture of the way I would look if I grew into my cultural skin by choosing this kind of diet. The result is this exhibition."

—Chico MacMurtrie, March 1997

“Attack of the Lard-Eating Robot. With *carnitas*, tamales, *menudo*, and other fatty food staples of his childhood in mind, artist Chico MacMurtrie examines the relationship among Chicano cultural identity, body, and mind with his robotics installation “Growing Into Your Cultural Skin.” A highlight of the exhibit is a robotic figure – made of metal, latex, and wood – eating lard out of a bucket; as Mayan-style images projected onto a nearby wall reflect the robot's thoughts, the robot's skin begins to expand and threatens to explode unless something gives.”

– SF Weekly, SF Calendar Night + Day, Tuesday March 2

**July: The exhibit “My life as a Comic Stripper” presents drawings, cartoons, prints and a mural by Isis Rodriguez whose iconography combines the Virgin of Guadalupe, comic strip characters, and sex workers in intriguing and humorous ways. Rodriguez's work rips apart feminine ideals —such as the Mexican virgin/whore paradigm— and peels away several layers of assumptions and hypocrisy, which have accumulated around gender roles.**

“The girls club started some time ago with Judy Chicago and all of the women of the '70s feminist movement and even before that. It was radical in the 70s because these women had to break through stereotypes when it wasn't popular to do so. Some of them gave up make up, some of them gave up dates, these women had to invent their own perspectives which was previously denied to them because of the patriarchal society we live in. It's a male dominated society, what are you going to do? So, the girls club was started by Judy Chicago. I'm just continuing it. I'm continuing it by working to ensure that women's perspectives, women's beliefs, how women think, what women like, the products we like, the products we invent —that we get the recognition for it, and that we are 50/50 in this society and no longer have one dominant society. So by creating artwork for women which is adventurous, fun, humorous, rebellious, independent, I'm trying to help create a base on which women can develop their own aesthetics based on their own way of thinking.”

—Isis Rodriguez in an interview with Vincent Smith

**August: Alex Donis' installation "My Cathedral", a multi-cultural pantheon of religious and pop figures, stirs a controversy in its examination of the complex inter-relationships between spirituality, cultural memory, and the sexuality.**

**On two occasions, vandals throw rocks through the gallery windows and damaged the panels of Che with Chavez and Jesus embracing Lord Rama. The damaged art is valued at \$5,000 per piece. The Galería responds by removing the display and boarding up the outside wall with black plywood and a quote from the Dalai Lama that reads, “Anyone who puts all their energy into destroying anger will be happy in this life and in lives to come.” The Galería staff also arranged a community meeting to discuss the issue of homosexuality in the Latino community and the rights of artists to exhibit controversial works. About a hundred people showed up for the lively exchange of views.**

"[...] As an artist I feel linked to the visual tradition in painting, yet it is light, sound, and an acute sensitivity towards physical space that hold my interest in the art of installation. I have long observed that both galleries and cathedrals maintain a floating space where ideas, images, and belief systems ignite. It is the intentions of this project to investigate how the suggestibility of the mind can be bound by signs of possession, or illuminated when challenged by a different approach towards faith and identity."

—Alex Donis, *Cruising the Looking Glass and other notes on "My Cathedral"*, exhibition catalogue

My Cathedral received mixed reviews. Some praise its transgressions. "Alex Donis's work trounces across the barriers that divide love from hate, black from white, East from West, the sacred from the profane, and the physical from the spiritual," writes Coco Fusco, an artist and cultural theorist.

— Bob Armstrong, *Kissing Icons*, *On the line*, December 1997

Is the image of Madonna kissing Mother Teresa art or profanity? Is a portrait of Che Guevara embracing Cesar Chavez a fresh twist on history or an insult to Latinos?

More than 200 people debated these questions at a forum at the Brava Theater Center in the Mission following two recent acts of vandalism at nearby Galería de la Raza apparently aimed at a controversial art exhibit.

The works, by Los Angeles artist Alex Donis, depict historical figures embracing. In one panel, the pope is seen kissing Mohandas Gandhi. In another, Martin Luther King Jr. kisses a Ku Klux Klansman. The provocative portraits - some of which were displayed in the gallery's windows at 24th and Bryant streets - have generated strong reactions. The exhibit has been the most heavily visited in the gallery's 27-year history, and has stirred up some violent emotions.

The artist said he has been threatened because of the plexiglass pieces, which all feature same-sex couples kissing. On two occasions, someone threw rocks and a traffic barrier through the gallery's windows, destroying two works valued at \$5,000 each.

Comments on Sunday afternoon ranged from sadness over the destruction of art to criticism of the gallery owners for not anticipating the response. Most backed the gallery in its decision to host the exhibit and its stated purpose: to "investigate issues such as gender identities, queer sexuality, cultural fantasy and the nature of our religious structures." Others asked whether that should take place in a public window, where it is likely to offend.

Rod Hernandez, a volunteer at the gallery, noted that complaints have been made about a lot of public art. While he said the exhibit was meant to be provocative, "there is a big difference between provoking thought and provoking violence." Donis attended the forum and said that although he is disappointed by the loss of two of his works, he is beginning to understand the reaction.

"People saw it as irreverent. That's not the way I saw it at all," Donis said. While he intended the pieces as images of love, "the issue people were seeing was the sex that wasn't even really there."

Bill Moreno, president of the gallery's board, said he hopes the forum will be the starting point for a dialogue on issues of art and identity. He vowed that the gallery would be responsive.

"The lesson learned is to be prepared for public response and public action," Moreno said.

—Zacary Coile, *Mission art exhibit stirs strong reactions*, San Francisco Examiner, September 22, 1997

**November: Exploring the links between Mexican traditions and new Chicano identities, artists Alma Lopez, Jacalyn López-Garcia, Juan Menzor, Renée Moreno, Cristina Ibarra, and Ray Santiesteban explores the ancient, sacred and communal essence of Día de los Muertos through electronic media, such as computer web pages, applications, software, digitized murals, or video.**

"With Electronic Memories, a circle is reunited, a merging of science and spirit is achieved and our sense of "reality" is shifted made more fluid, and in some cases, shattered. Electronic Memories represents the latest test to Día de los Muertos' ability to adapt by merging this ancient observance with the current technological tools. The result is an exhibition that attests to the strength of the Día de los Muertos to retain its spiritual core and remain relevant in our contemporary world."

—Dino Piacentini, Curatorial essay

**Gloria Jaramillo leaves the Galería; William Moreno, Board president becomes Interim Director.**

## 1998

**Galería presents "Hilos del Sol" (Sun Threads), a show of Mariana Yampolsky's powerful photography documenting the Mazahua Indians of Mexico. Samples of the Mazahua's extraordinary embroidery work by Mazahua artists Enriqueta and Juvenal complete the exhibition.**

"Hilos del Sol" (Sun Threads), on exhibition at Galería de La Raza/Studio 24 in San Francisco, is the social document captured by Mariana Yampolsky, Mexican photographer of Russian ancestry who has painted with her camera the threads bonding the Mazahua: their strong Catholic faith and their deep ties to mother Earth. "The act of discovery gives me a greater satisfaction than the final print," comments Yampolski about her labor as a popular documentarist for over 30 years. She observes, registers and above all, respects everything that passes through her lens. Each photograph reveals the artist's appreciation and affection for her subjects. With this graphic and social exposition, Mariana Yampolski carries on the narratives tradition started by Lola Álvarez Bravo that many Mexican female photographers have sustained since the Twenties. These women have been the photographic minstrels of the events and feelings that have shaped the urban and rural Mexico of the 20th Century. Even today, Yampolski's work is absolutely

documental; even when modern techniques and technologies have invaded the fields of photography, she continues gazing at the tradition and magic of reality."

— Juliana Garcia Conejo, Photographs by Mariana Yampolsky, Arts and Cultures, El Mensajero, July 8, 1998

## 1999

**January:** Carolina Ponce de León becomes the Executive Director. She inaugurates her tenure with "Little Brown Bodies," an impromptu exhibition consisting of an open-form exhibit, constantly changing and growing, that presented artworks selected from artist's portfolios and studios, as well as from Galería's archives. The commentaries on the works consisted of brief note-pad annotations to reflect the organic process of on-going encounters, conversations, and studio visits the new Executive Director held while meeting with local artists in her first months in San Francisco. Jaime Cortez is Program Manager.

**September:** Galería switches the gallery and the gift shop spaces. It inaugurates the newly refurbished and expanded gallery with the exhibition "Papel Picado: The Paper Cut-Outs of Carmen Lomas-Garza." This is the South Texas-born Chicana's first public presentation of her large-scale paper cut-outs.

## 2000

**February-June:** Galería organizes *The Brown Sheep Project* in collaboration with La Pocha Nostra, Circuit Network and La Peña Cultural Center. It is a high energy performance workshop led by performance artist, Mac Arthur fellow and All Things Considered contributor Guillermo Gómez-Peña, followed by two public performances: one at Galería (June 23) and the second at La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley (June 25<sup>th</sup>).

"Gómez-Peña assembled and schooled an intergenerational group of Latino Poets and performance artists on his cross-cultural vision for Brown Sheep Project. The group brings together words—an entirely new project perhaps; Gómez-Peña has invented a few on his own—and performance to counter cultural disappearance while affirming their own identity. While challenging cultural conceptions that give rise to phenomena like talking chihuahuas hawking "Mexican" food, the Brown Sheep tap into the fertile field of contemporary Latino culture, finding common references in African American, Asian, and Anglo pop culture, while forging a path uniquely their own."

—Todd Dayton, Raza Man Vibration, SF Weekly, July 21-27, 2000

***Amigo Racism: Mickey Mouse Meets the Taco Bell Chihuahua* presents works by 25 emerging and established artists from South America, The Caribbean, Mexico and the United States (such as Lalo Alcaraz, Enrique Chagoya, Laura Molina, Gigi Otálvaro, Isis Rodriguez, and Nadin Ospina, among others) who work in a variety of media, including video, photography, painting, cartoons, sculpture, installations, online art pieces, and tourist souvenirs. The selection of artworks presents samples of how artists of color have internalized, deconstructed, and transformed racial and cultural representations perpetuated through the media and pop culture. These artworks offer counter-images and represent the artists' engagement with larger critical issues of race, sexual politics, and history, among other topics. An "ethnic Chihuahua" fashion contest is organized in addition to the exhibition.**

"Who would have thought that all this good-looking, amigo-friendly, Latino flavor is not the result of battles won, but of battles lost. Simply, because it is symptomatic of a new type of racism. Not your everyday, discriminating, violent racism of racial profiling, police brutality, DWB, and negative media stereotypes, but its most "gracious" form... the "benign racism" of corporate & pop multiculturalism. Look at the Taco Bell chihuahua, the infantilized Mexican icon that insinuates a "safe" amigo Other – the gallant reincarnation of Speedy Gonzalez."

—Carolina Ponce de León, curatorial essay

"The exhibition provides a smart look at the tokenism of the current interest in diversity and multiculturalism. Consumerism is a snake eating its own tail; it feeds its ails with its own illusions of fair and equal representation, but in the end, racial stereotypes are alive and well and still in the service of colonial Capitalist enterprise. "Amigo Racism" reminds us not to be seduced by the "gracious form [and] benign racism of corporate and pop multiculturalism." Parity and acceptance is still a long way off."

—Alicia Miller, January/February 2001. Galería de la Raza archives.

## 2001

**April: A month after the Zapatistas marched to Mexico City to present their case to the Mexican Congress, Galería presents a history of the political ramifications of the Zapatista movement through *In the Heart of the World: Fotos, Arte, Videos y Otros Bienes de la Insurgencia Zapatista*, an exhibit focused on the visual culture and language identified with the uprising. It included photographs depicting the famous, infamous and unknown participants in the Zapatista uprising, Zapatista folk embroideries, dolls and handcrafts, and videos.**

"Walking among the art and photographs of the Zapatista movement at the Galería de la Raza's exhibit entitled "In the Heart of the World" one can find a text by the Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee with the excerpt:

Behind our black mask  
Behind our armed voice,  
Behind our unnamable name,



Behind us, who you see,  
Behind us, we are you.

The universal appeal, the humanity of these indigenous people who are struggling for their rights against the Mexican government, most notably since 1994, is well documented in 91 photographs, art and "zapatistabilia" on display through June 2.

[...] In Mexico City, more than 250 000 watched as Zapatista insurgents entered the city on March 11 2000. Among the exhibit there is a collection of items of the like sold along the route from Chiapas to Mexico City to raise money and help popularize the movement. Among them are key-chains, pins, stickers, photographs, embroidery, and miniature paintings.

The struggle is on, but these people are not unknown; to silence their voice would en the movement. Through works like the one at the Galería their voice can be heard."

**June: Galería presents a new-genre public arts project, *Los Cybrids: Tecno-Putografía Virtual*, featuring installations, video, and a series of public billboards and performances by a group of artists whose work incorporates the latest digital and web technologies while remaining intensely critical of cyber-cheerleading. The project reflects the ongoing vitality of the Mexican mural tradition and the Bay Area's leading role in the incorporation of the new technologies into the region's non-profit visual and performing arts programs.**

*Los Cybrids* give this warning: "This is not a virus, this is an infectious invasion that has permeated the dominant culture. This is a militaristic exercise in the guise of technological prowess and cultural expression. Beware: "The e-medium is the message. If you have yet to be co-opted by the digital revolution, the you've got mail."

—Artist statement, *Los Cybrids*, Galería de la Raza, 2001

"Wake up!" says Praba Pilar, one the three cultural critics that make up *Los Cybrids: La Raza Techno-Critica*, because the police and the FBI are using finger printing and biometrics databases against you. "You don't have to be connected to the web to be affected by all this surveillance and it is having a very real effect in the barrios – in this community," she says.

[...] Performalogues mix panel discussions with multi-media performances. The group interviews cultural critics and activists, such as Jerry Mander the Silicone Valleys Toxics Coalition, Raj Javadev, Jim Reden and Paulina Borsook. Each guest is an expert in one of evils that information technology has on our community. For example, Javadev has explored the lack of well-paid jobs going to high-school leavers of color. Jim Redden wrote "Snitch Culture" about militaristic and corporate surveillance, and Borsook, author of "Cyber Selfish," probed the world of the Internet and people behind it[...]

Leaños has also created a digital mural series to inform the local community. Five by five-foot vinyl panel, with images rendered on computer, are posted on the street. The “digital,” as they are called, merge the tradition of local Latino muralism, with the technology of billboard advertising. The mural at 24<sup>th</sup> and Bryant on display throughout May is a montage of circuit boards, space trash, computers, and DNA code that explores the digital divide. It looks at how corporations make charitable donations of computers to schools and poor communities, only to make the people better consumers.

[...] But in using computers to produce the art do Los Cybrids become part of the problem? Such an idea is to miss the point, says Leaños, “because we are critiquing the technology and using it at the same time that doesn't mean that there is a contradiction.”

“It's like living in the US capitalist culture and being a socialist, you can't get around it,” adds Garcia.

—Charles Hack, *Firing Warnings about Information Technology*, El Tecolote, June 2001

## 2002

**March: *Photographic Memory & Other Shots in the Dark*, brings together photography, video, and computer-mediated art by 14 artists from the diverse places, including Richard Lou & Robert Sanchez alias Los Antropolocos (San Diego), Francisco Dominguez (Sacramento), Pedro Lepe (Mexico-Bay Area), Oscar Muñoz (Colombia), Wura Natasha Ogunji (Oakland), Tatiana Parcero (Mexico-Miami), Marta María Pérez Bravo (Cuba; Monterrey, Mexico), Armando Rascón (San Francisco). The exhibition focuses on the way photos reinforce, distort, create and dissolve memory.**

"Photographic Memory is a brilliantly curated exhibition by Carolina Ponce de León that displays the photo-based work of fourteen artists from California, Chile, Colombia, Cuba Mexico and Uruguay. Pleasure, politics and techno-exploration, accompanied by insightful wall texts reproduced in a brochure, flicker and persist like memory itself turned out onto the gallery space.

[...] The exhibition includes the marvelously satirical Captives of Fate by Los Antropolocos (Richard Lou & Robert Sanchez) and the overlays of ritual practice onto the body of Tatiana Parcero's Interior Cartography series. As an installation, this group show is about the nature of representation. Its strength lies in its brave engagement with darkness, and the overlays of a translucent world that includes technology and the body, the here and the not-here. Personal memory and public history have everything to do with a sense of being there."

—Mary Hull Webster, *Photographic Memory and Other Shots in the Dark at Galería de la Raza*, Art Week, May 2002

**THEY'RE TRAMPING THROUGH** the wilds of suburban Los Angeles, hunting for tribal Caucasians. Well, not really, but Chicano artists Richard Lou and Robert Sanchez like to imagine themselves as intrepid scientific adventurers – à la Marlin Perkins or Steve Irwin – who track and study "the colorless." Dressed like wild-game hunters, they pose for a picture with their captured quarry. Their faces are deadpan, but the photos are intended to be

humorous, and the captions are even funnier. They also raise serious questions, however: Is there something inherently racist about the way traditional anthropological documentarians use cameras to record what they do? How does this kind of picture taking reinforce established cultural power structures? And whose activities are really being documented in these pictures, anyway? Oscar Muñoz, another artist in this group show, takes a subtler but equally imaginative approach to image making in his work *Aliento* (Breath), a series of mirrorlike steel discs hanging on the gallery wall. As you gently exhale onto each surface, a latent image of a deceased person suddenly becomes visible then gradually fades away. It's a neat trick and a powerful metaphor – it feels like you're literally breathing life into these people as their faces blend with your own reflection into a spooky combination of alive and dead, present and past, warm flesh and cold steel. Look into the mirror, Muñoz seems to be saying, and you'll see not only your own image but also bits and pieces of your past and the collective memories of your culture. Also featured in the show are digital and photographic works by Bay Area artists Claudia X. Valdez, Armando Rascón, Francisco Dominguez, Pedro Lepe, and Susie Valdez. —Lindsey Westbrook, *Critic's Pick*, San Francisco Bay Guardian, May 2002

**September: Galería presents *Viology: Violence of Culture & Cultures of Violence*, an ambitious group exhibition showcasing artists from the Bay Area, New York, Los Angeles, as well as from Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador and Mexico whose works address issues of violence. Featuring artworks created in different mediums, *Viology* explores how artists of color respond to particular experiences of violence ranging from pervasive "commercial" media representations, to domestic, political, and institutional forms of violence. Artists include: Juan Manuel Echavarría (Colombia), Priscila Monje (Costa Rica), Arnaldo Morales (Puerto Rico - USA), Julio Morales (San Francisco), Ana Claudia Múnera (Colombia), Sergio de la Torres (Bay Area), and Gustavo Vazquez (Mexico-Bay Area), among others.**

San Francisco's Mission District, home to numerous artists as well as numerous cultural and political struggles in recent years, is also home to perhaps the most consistently innovative and provocative gallery in the city. Galería de la Raza's current exhibit, curated by Director Carolina Ponce de León, only strengthens such a claim. From documentary photojournalism to testimonial film, from experimental video to public performance, the artists in *Viology* examine representations of violence, as well as the "violence of representations" – those thorny issues of cultural politics that suffuse all representational practices. The artworks, for the most part, are not merely "about" violence as much as interrogations of the aesthetics of violence, from the "ethnographic gaze" of colonialist painting to romanticized images of violence in the contemporary media. Crucial here as well is the issue of complicity, deftly exploited by many artists in the show unwilling to settle for either victimhood or easy dichotomies of good or bad.

[...] The breadth and diversity of artists, themes, styles and outlooks included in *Viology* represent the ongoing and expansive reach of Galería de la Raza's provocative programming. Positioning itself as a crucial local center for community-based cultural struggles, as well as a dynamic space for innovative artists from throughout the hemisphere, the Galería has proven that it's possible to bridge the local/global divide while still presenting new and socially engaged work."

— David Buuck, "Viology" at Galería de la Raza, Art Week, November 2002, Volume 33, Issue 9

Two years in the making, Galería de la Raza's "Viology: Cultures of Violence/Violence of Culture" exhibit is one of the most fascinating and effective group shows you'll see this year. The topic is somber, but the contributing artists approach it in all kinds of ways, often leaning more toward the poetic than the gory. Even when you come face-to-face with a dead body, as in Claudia Bernardi's *Silently* (a photograph of the bones of a mother and her nine-day-old child massacred in El Salvador in 1981), the artist shows it to you through a plate of paraffin wax that shelters the body and keeps prying eyes at a protective distance. Several of the pieces even incorporate an element of humor, like Priscila Monje's *Bloody Day* photographs, which show her out and about in San Jose, Costa Rica, wearing a pair of pants made out of sanitary napkins. Her menstrual blood is clearly visible, and it effectively turns her ordinary day of errands into a piece of performance art by calling attention to the social taboos surrounding a woman's period. Why does the blood of violence elicit sympathy or even indifference, Monje seems to ask, while the harmless and life-giving kind is perceived as repulsive? The descriptions next to each artwork are indispensable, providing lots of useful background information about the artists and their work, not to mention a kind of crash course in the history of violence in Latin America – corpse-mutilation procedures in Colombia, corrupt Mexico City police officers, Panama's willingness to let former government torturers go unpunished. Besides the photographs, sculptures, installations, and photographs by 20 different artists living in the United States and Latin America, "Viology" also includes video PSAs by San Francisco youth and two digital murals.

—Lindsey Westbrook, San Francisco Bay Guardian, Nov. 20, 2002

## 2003

**Galería launches the Youth Media Project to provide Mission District adolescents training in the creation of socially conscious digital art.**

**In response to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and to the Bush Doctrine involving the spreading of “democracy” through the use of military force, Galería organizes “Moment's Notice,” a radically open and democratic exhibiting system: all San Francisco artists and poets are invited to bring a hang-ready 2D art piece addressing their immediate and most pressing thoughts and concerns about our times. Over a period of three weeks, any artist can chose to participate, select a spot on the wall and add their piece to the collective wallscape.**

"With so much turbulence and urgency, we felt the time was right to create a democratic forum for community expression. We are offering our galleries to all artists, Latino and non-Latino alike because artists can contribute richly to our understanding of these critical times."

—Carolina Ponce de León, *Moment's Notice* press release

## 2004

**Marc Pinate joins staff as Program Manager; Raquel de Anda comes on board as Curatorial Assistant.**

In June and July 2004, the Galería features several artists including Monika Bravo (Colombia), Bibi Calderado (Argentina), María Fernanda Cardoso (Colombia), Francisco Dominguez (USA), Felipe Dulzaides (Cuba), María Elvira Escallón (Colombia), Sean MacFarland (USA), and Armando Rascón (USA) in a group exhibition entitled *URBAN ECHOS: Wind, River, Trees, Clouds, Chickens, and Orange at the Galería*. The exhibition features photography, digital prints and videos, which look at nature and landscapes from an urban perspective. The exhibition included *9/10/2001*, a video by Monika Bravo filmed from the 30<sup>th</sup> floor of the World Trade Center on the eve of the tragic attacks; photographic prints by María Elvira Escallón of wood carvings done directly to native trees in Colombian forests; video portraits of chickens and other animals by María Fernanda Cardoso, the journeys of Felipe Dulzaides' pet orange through downtown SF, and other works that rescue fragments of nature from the harsh angularity and crowded isolation of the urban centers that shape our gaze. These works revisit the traditional genres of the still life and the landscape, while exploring the forces that shape our understanding of nature, self, place, and cultural history. Some of the works use the metaphorical power of nature to evoke narratives of loss and displacement. Others allude to the natural world using personal poetics and humor to comment on urban life. Others see the landscape critically, unearthing the politics of place.

## 2005

Galería launches a comprehensive on-line resource documenting Galería's 35-year exhibition history on its website. The online archive includes exhibition details, installation shots, artworks, curatorial essays and critical reviews. The site also documents over 200 individual artists and includes biographical information, reproductions of artworks, artists statements and link to artists' personal websites.

To celebrate its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Galería organizes a series of three thematic exhibitions: "Weedee Peepo: Icons, Portraits, Gente;" "Trazos: Myth and Memory;" and "What's Not to Love: Chicano/Latino Humor." The series revisits Galería's exhibition history and honors the artists —both established and emerging— who have contributed to making Galería the legendary arts organization it is known to be.

The first exhibition of the series, "Weedee Peepo," pays homage to José Antonio Burciaga's book: "*Weedee Peepo, A Collection of Essays*", published by Pan American University Press (Edinburg, TX) in 1988. The exhibition features a selection of artworks that portray people: community leaders, cultural icons, revolutionaries, and visionaries, as well as ordinary individuals within the context of 'we' (with an accent) —a collective 'we' that reaches across the boundaries of class, gender, sexual preference, nationalities and ethnicity. *TRAZOS: Myth and Memory* focuses on the preservation and renewing of cultural mythologies and the place of memory in shaping cultural identity. Although this exhibition does not feature drawing exclusively, it highlights the wonderful graphic quality of much of Chicano/Latino art. The third exhibition, *WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE?* reveals the many ways humor and satire have been used by artists across generations as a political and critical tool and as a means of cultural resistance.

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

— Preamble to the Constitution

Twenty-five years ago, when my parents were studying for their naturalization tests, they would ask each other in Spanish, “Have you learned el Weedee Peepo?” It took me awhile to figure out what they were talking about. Weedee Peepo was the way my parents pronounced the first words of the preamble to our Constitution. They had to memorize it. It was a happy and proud day when they went to the courthouse to be sworn in as United States citizens. My father got a haircut, shined his best shoes and wore his best suit. A snappy dresser all his life, he cherished this special occasion, especially since he changed clothes from a maintenance janitor at a synagogue in El Paso. [...] And so, despite their limited English, my parents became United States citizens. They knew what Weedee Peepo meant. It meant *Nosotros el pueblo, We the People*. Whatever language we speak, we have the same goals stated in our Constitution. If people need a translator when their children are no longer at their side and the government does not consider the job its responsibility, God help this nation.”

— José Antonio Burciaga, *Weedee Peepo*

## 2006

**The SF Weekly nominates Galería as the “Best Art Gallery” in San Francisco.**

Nestled amid several blocks of taquerias, international phone bodegas, and hipster coffee joints, Galería de la Raza is perhaps the best gauge of the Mission District's vibrant cultural legacy.

The interdisciplinary space, in which the art is more about inciting action than drawing attention to its value as cheeky commodity, features works by political and artistic lighting rods in the Chicano/Latino community. For more 30 years, the gallery – conceived by Chicano civil rights movement activists – has filled the public imagination with pieces that embody biting social polemic and artistic innovation. Expect a healthy smattering of folk art, magic realism, video, and urban art on subjects like immigration policy, war, spirituality, gentrification, and the colonization of private spaces. The Digital Mural program presents a rotating billboard on the Bryant Street side of the building, and the adjacent Studio 24 shop offers cultural crafts; every November, the store comes to life with dioramas and colorful skeleton figurines to add to the area's Dia de los Muertos processions. A seemingly endless calendar of performances, spoken word events, and multimedia presentations also make Galería de la Raza a suitable place to take in some culture and challenge the status quo.

— SF Weekly, *Best of San Francisco 2006*

May: Galería hosts *Illegal Entry*, one of its most timely and politically charged exhibitions since proposed new legislation around immigration spilled over into the nations' streets this past March. *Illegal Entry* is a multidisciplinary project based on the experience of five artists —Consuelo Jimenez-Underwood, Valerie Mendoza, Adrienne Pau, Nora Raggio, and Robin Lasser— into the San Diego/Tijuana region in October of 2005. The exhibition features the artists' multifaceted perspectives, artwork, and documentation investigating issues surrounding the Mexico/U.S. border. As the country discusses standards of territorial and economic security, this exhibition attempts to bridge pieces of the debate over the border onto the Galería's walls.

*Illegal Entry* weaves a national story of fear and displacement into material symbols that reveal the price of control and patrol of the free passage of human beings. The show's theme is of even greater relevance to Northern California where prosperous cities rely on the hardworking people who have helped make California the seventh strongest economy in the world.

August: Through the poetic rendering of literal, visual, and historic accounts, the exhibition "African by Legacy, Mexican by Birth" traces the shaping of contemporary Afro Mexican roots while exposing this under recognized segment of the Diaspora. The exhibit is a co-Presentation with the Mexican Museum.

October: *Graphic Witness*, a poignant exhibition featuring work by two Chicano master print makers: Jesus Barraza and Juan R. Fuentes, reflects the artists' unwavering commitment to grassroots struggles and social justice. Their work is reminiscent of the legacy of the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1970s but also of the history of protest and bold imagery with which artists have supported social movements throughout history.

## 2007

The Media Lab is organized at Studio 24 as a resource center providing Mission residents access to computers, printers, high-speed Internet and digital media training.

"*There's Gonna Be Sorrow*", the first solo exhibition at Galería by Julio Cesar Morales, evokes the dystopian future explored by George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eight Four* and David Bowie's concept album *Diamond Dogs*. *There's Gonna Be Sorrow* is a stunning sonic and visual landscape that includes multi-channel video, sculpture and sound to evoke the dystopian future explored by Orwell's novel and Bowie's music. To create his work, Morales employs the DJ's method of remixing elements from a variety of sources as a means to analyze the politics of culture.

Morales uses mutated sound samples of *Diamond Dogs*, language, typography, and idiosyncratic symbols from the Latin American urban landscape —such as the broken bottles that are often found embedded in the concrete atop walls to protect and define property boundaries—to create a dangerous topography that evokes issues of immigration, alienation, dystopia and surveillance.

### ***Bowie Knifed***

“Julio Cesar Morales must have experienced a glimmer of genius when he mined unlikely inspiration – David Bowie – for his sonic/visual landscape, « There's Gonna Be Sorrow. » Back in 1974 Bowie was aiming for a theatrical rendition of Georges Orwell's dystopian classic, 1984. While the vision of a glamour puss-meets-post-apocalyptic-wasteland magnum opus proved to be ill-starred, it eventually became the vastly underrated guerrilla rock concept album, *Diamond Dogs*. The name of Morales' exhibition stems from Bowie's garbled surrealism on the title track: “There's gonna be sorrow, try and wake up tomorrow.” But the purpose of Morales' creation isn't to distill meaning from history's most capricious rock bard. Morales lifts the scrim off Bowie's failed masterpiece to reveal a vista rife with danger and depravity that seems closer to home than it does to the apocalypse. A melange of fuzzy video and frenzied LED signs are visual markers of the marriage between technology and Stasi-style surveillance methods. Morales also adds sculptural flourishes, like the glass-bottle shards that often encrust fence tops in urban Mexico.”

### **No Distance Is More Awesome**

**8/5/2007 – 9/28/2007**

**Displacing again the perspective about the border, the Galería holds the exhibition *No Distance Is More Awesome*, a collective exhibit of works by 19 contemporary Latino artists which examines immigration issues from critical perspectives that counter those reflected in the media and public discourse. Poverty, social inequity, and civil wars are all local reasons that explain the massive migrations from south of the U.S./Mexico border. Featuring artworks that vary from the direct approach of documentary and activist strategies to the suggestive means of conceptually driven projects, the exhibition seeks to bring critical nuances and texture to the current discussion on immigration.**

“The 19 dementedly talented artists shepherded by curator Carolina Ponce de León in “No Distance Is More Awesome” come from points both north and south of the U.S./Mexico border, the “distance” in question. Local installation artist Julio Cesar Morales' series of watercolors, *Undocumented Interventions*, is like a horror-movie storyboard, with its depictions of people hidnig in cars in order to cross the border. Some are welded into the dashboard, some are sewn into seats, and the innocent-looking illustrations, with their pastel colors and dotted lines, knock hard against the desperate reality: The images were mostly based on photographs taken by U.S. Customs. On the slightly lighter side, *The Real Story of the Superheroes* is a group of photos taken by New York's Dulce Pinzon, showing Mexican immigrants dressed as cartoons heroes from both sides of the border. Spider-man washes your windows, Catwoman takes care of your babies, and each photo is accompanied by the subject's hometown and the amount of money they send home every week. Like the custom-baclava extravaganza *Everybody Is Somebody's Terrorist* by Andy-Diaz Hope, the images are very, very funny. The show is possessed of a fresh aesthetic and sharp perspectives on border drama, too much to fit in the gallery's usual beautiful space: For this show, the art spills into the Galería's adjoining multipurpose space, Studio 24.”

—Hiya Swanhuysen, *Totally Awesome*, SF Weekly July 30, 2007

### **Oaxaca: Aqui No Pasa Nada**

**10/13/2007 – 11/3/2007**



The Galería de la Raza shows again its will to keep in touch with the burning latino-american political actuality with the exhibition « Oaxaca: Aquí No Pasa Nada [Oaxaca: Nothing Is On Here], » an exhibition and public billboard that responds to the social-political conflict that erupted in Oaxaca between 2006 and 2007, featuring photography, visual art, videos, and a sound installation by artists living and working in Oaxaca, MX. The exhibition captures the social-political conflict that erupted in Oaxaca in the summer of 2006 when Mexican President Vicente Fox sent the army —using the highest level of military force— to silence the state’s popular uprising. The mass media have the voice to support justice or denounce injustice. Their images stay engraved in our minds. As such, the role of the media goes beyond the transmission of information. This exhibition is an attempt to open channels and fight for an alternative media.

## 2008

**The Invisible Nation, 3/7/2008**

Still questioning the mainstream point of view on United States about Latinos and, immigration, the Galería de la Raza features video, sound and sculptural installations, as well as a public billboard by Salvadorian Artist, Victor Cartagena, in an exhibition entitled « The Invisible Nation » which enhance the spiritual, dramatic, and deeply human dimensions of migration. Invisible Nation takes the portraits of the immigrants temporarily out of the dark room of memory and sheds light on the plight of the thousands who have dared to defy their fate and become an integral part of our everyday existence.

« Can you see it?

We've heard it said that the same five insults are hurled at all recent immigrants to the US, regardless of the year of where the travelers came from. The accusations are instantly recognizable and so stupid they don't even have internal logic : Immigrants are dirty, their food smells weird, they live too many a room, they're lazy and they're taking our jobs. Name a group, and all these things have been lobbed their way: Italians (disgusting garlic stink!), Irish (drunk cabbage eaters!), et cetera. At Victor Cartagena's new solo show “The Invisible Nation,” the El Salvador-born artist explores historical realities of immigration via a phrase that brings shivers of anticipation to art fans: a large-scale installation. Using video, sculpture, recorded sound, and a mural on the outside of the gallery, the longtime Bay Area resident also contemplates the current state of national immigration policy, which the gallery rather generously describes as “unresolved”. He dunks passport-photo tea bags in hot water and fills corked bottles with sinister pills and labels them “Patron” – drinkers rarely notice that the popular tequila's name indicates the golden liquor is bossing you around.? Cartagena is clever, but his aesthetic is just as strong, with its structural, vintage, iconic shapes and deep sandy colors. Think of his visual skill as the sugar that makes the exhibition's medicine (our own possible complicity in the injustices immigrants face) go down pretty damn easy.”

– Hiya Swanhuysen, SF Weekly, March 5-11, 2008

**June: Carolina Ponce de León starts a capacity-building/small grants program serving Native American and indigenous artists in the perspective of exploring the connections between Latinos and the indigenous people of the Americas.**

**MARIA: Politics. Sex. Death. Men. 6/6/2008 - 7/4/2008**

In its will to promote broader art and gender issues, the Galería features *Maria: Politics. Sex. Death. Men*, a group exhibition curated by Leonardo Herrera, which explores the defense mechanisms and survival instincts of young Latino gay men through a psychedelic showcase of Magical Realism, sex and gay iconography. Through candid photography, digital collage, costume, video installation and drawings, the artists delve into the assimilation of San Francisco's Gay community brought on by both outside forces such as politics and the media, as well as from within the gay community itself. Participating Artists include Keith Aguilar, Robert Guzman, Allan Herrera, Leonardo Herrera, Jody Jock, Jonathan Solo and Ernesto Sopprani.

If you've never been tempted to try out a glory hole, it might not occur to you that an art exhibition would test your virtue. Yet standing before Jonathan Solo's *Glory Hole* -- a wall installation of two brass handles screwed at crucifix-arm-height into the wall, and a bible with a circle cut out of its middle affixed farther down at crotch height -- I felt an impulse to fit my body into the invitation, phallus-free as I am.

« Slick and arty, unrepentantly derivative, and very much hands-on, curator Leo Herrera's **María: Politics, Death, Sex, Men** is a visual exhibition in love with the tangible embrace of queer, male sexual practice. Not for the phobic of homo, **María** isn't satisfied with acceptably distant presentations of salacious aesthetics; you must be dragged into the realm of tactile desire yourself; you must use your own body in this space.

**María** -- which opened at Galería de la Raza last weekend as part of QueLaCo's Queer Latino/a Arts Festival is not the usual nominally democratic juried show we see at this event. QueLaCo called for curatorial proposals, and Herrera's winning entry is the collaboration of a clique of artists who might represent a school of aesthetics, if their aesthetics were idiosyncratic enough. That they aren't doesn't harm the show. **María** is not a presentation of avant-garde visuals, but rather an exercise in how to make a community's images come alive to the viewer.

As such, **María** offers melodramatic, yet earnest, joy. The exhibition centers around four series of photo portraits of queer youths and men. Such portraits, intended to give the hordes of abstract queerness individuality, have become de rigueur in the community arts aesthetic; furthermore, these pieces style-check every important recent photographer from Nan Goldin to Pierre et Gilles. What's fresh here is that the artists created their series in response to each other; "dialogue" among the works is not merely a curatorial figure of speech.

In Jody Jock's **Prayers for Children**, blood and semen drawn from the bodies of adolescent boys through suicidal sexual practices (and sexual suicide practices) are represented by strings and globs of jewels. Allan Herrera's **Prayers for Children 2** fragments Jock's Catholic images into angular mandalas, injecting pathos into digital orientalism. Robert Guzman's more straightforward portraits of tattooed, painted, and masked young men seize the context to make a point about aspects of beauty, and hiding behind conspicuousness. On its own, the final series -- a mosaic of party action shots and printed bandanas from Leo Herrera, Robert Guzman, Allan Herrera, and Keith Aguilar -- would read as an anthropological study of gay nightlife. But, framed and abetted by more formal work and informed by didactic installations of Harvey Milk speeches, teenaged martyrs to homophobia, and heaps of golden poppers and condoms, the photo-mosaic acts more as a key to the rest of the exhibition.

A final piece by Allan Herrera, literally titled **Touch Me**, offers streamers of pink condoms to audience hands. They feel wonderful, and slyly twist the

perception to move condoms from the checklist of safety measures into the armaments of pleasure. They also underline, like Leo Herrera's gold-leaking condom wrappers and Jody Jock's "Glory Hole," the ultimately physical nature of the identity the exhibition has intellectually deconstructed.

Many pieces in this show are defeated by small details, such as audio interference in the video installation, or a simple bad choice such as the bludgeoning use of bible pages in a portrait of a slain youth. But, as often as its individual pieces fall short of their ambition, **María: Politics, Death, Sex, Men**, transcends its parts by containing and revealing an extended shout of creative energy. With his curatorial work, Herrera makes the argument that, in itself, a marginal community can be a hydra-headed, singular cultural force.

Or, as Herrera himself says in his fiery and beautiful curatorial statement, "We are not the sum of our political issues, pornographic images, diseases and hedonism. We are a culture, flourishing and yet asphyxiating in a sheath of latex, dying and rising at every generation, always existing as Parade and Funeral Procession."

QueLaCo (Queer Latino Artists Collective) is celebrating the 10th Annual Queer Latino Arts Festival. The festival will consist of two consecutive visual arts exhibitions, and a series of public events, such as poetry readings, film screenings, and artist talks. »

Claire Light | Jun 21, 2008, Art review, <http://www.kqed.org>

#### **Ana Teresa Fernandez: ECDISIS 10/25/2008 – 1/10/2009**

**In the line of Viology, Galería spread light on culture of violence towards women living in towns along the U.S./Mexico border in the exhibition « ECDISIS » by Ana Teresa Fernandez. Ecdysis: Ec"dy\*sis\, n.; pl. (Biol.) The act of shedding, or casting off, an outer cuticular layer, as in the case of serpents, lobsters, etc. Her works are dedicated to the women of Juárez, Mexico, where, since 1992, over 500 young women working in maquilas —multinational factories— have been “disappeared”, abused, murdered, and dismembered with total impunity. She points to the individual and collective dimensions of this tragedy; to its inextricable connection to bi-national economic tensions, as well as to the absence of justice and gender equality, and at the same time she continue to explore the diverse possibilities inherent in the female body as subject and object, as self and other.**

« Somehow it's an art-school cliché that political art is bad. We're often grateful to those who ignore such horseshit; at the moment, that artist is Bay Area Ana Teresa Fernández, aka the girl with a rocket, since she's blowing up so fast. At «Ecdysis», she shows sculptural work, not her usual paintings. True to form, though, the result is somehow both abstract and severely political, even activist. The show focuses on the ongoing, unsolved murders of women in Juarez, Mexico. Fernandez went there and made molds of some of the dead women's orphans. She then lit the resulting little forms from the wall or set them, hunched, on benches. You want to help them, but you're not sure how. The orphans are only one element; elsewhere, a large light box and etched mirrors also illuminate the issue. »

– Hiya Swanhuysen, *Watching Juarez*, SF Weekly, Nov 27, 2008

**Strange Hope: An ephemeral exhibition celebrating new beginnings & creative economies 2/6/2009 – 4/2/2009**

In its will to foster collective reflection about current society, the Galería holds an exhibition celebrating the *Strange Hope* of a new era. 40 artists (including Pilar Aguëro-Esparza, Raúl Aguilar, Juana Alicia, Sylvia Buettner, Monica Canilao, Tân Khánh Cao, Victor Cartagena, Melanie Cervantes, Jaime Cortez, Rudy Cuellar, Mabel Negrete, Txutxo Pérez, Johanna Poethig, Silvia Poloto, Juan Carlos Quintana, Rigo 23, Artemio Rodríguez, Favianna Rodríguez, Jenifer Wofford, René Yañez, and Rio Yañez ) are invited to produce 8.5' x 8.5' works on paper about the oddity of hope. Conceived soon after Election Day, November 4th, 2008, the exhibit peers into the eye of power, working with and not against a pyramidal political structure that has historically disenfranchised the communities of artists and poets, of activists and lefties, of migrants and nomads and outcasts and poor.

“Strange Hope, an exhibition that opened Friday at Galería de la Raza, illustrates the dual realities of Obama – raised expectations and an economy in free fall. “A dark cloud was lifted,” said Carolina Ponce de León, executive director of the gallery, referring to President Barack Obama's election. “I wondered, ‘How do we join in the celebration?’ ”

Mission Loc@l would have chosen to go home with an archival inkjet photograph cut titled “Detroit Dreaming” by Andy Díaz Hope. The piece shows an old-fashioned pickup truck in a field of burnt grass. The backdrop is a cutout of a skyline through which the viewer can see a photo of clouds. At first glance, it's hard to see the hope in this piece. But what first seems like a depiction of the dying car industry asks for a closer look. In front the broken truck, wild grass is growing and soft yellow blooms are coming out. This detail leaves the viewer with a feeling that there's still life – and hope. For Rudy Cuellar, inspiration came in the form of a linoleum block print of Malaquías Montoya, his silkscreen teacher.

“I've always wanted to do a tribute to him. He's one of those people who still has faith in life,” Cuellar said. When asked what he thought about 8.5-by-8.5-inch dimensions artists had to stick to, he laughed. “I didn't pay attention so they had to cut part of the bottom and the top. That's good because I had misspelled the name of the artist.”

Another piece that stands out is John Leaños's “Pues Obámanos.” A bright red digital print, it seems straight out of a cartoon strip, and for good reason. Leaños works at the gallery's youth program and used the last print from a cartoon strip he'd been working on. The pigeons are talking amongst themselves about Obama and what's going to happen now that he's president, Leaños explained. “I'm not saying that people who voted for Obama are pigeons,” Leaños laughed, “but even the pigeons don't know what to expect. They're considering what to do.”

Unlike most exhibitions at Galería de la Raza, Strange Hope includes non-Latino artists. “There are a lot of non—Latino artists that have always supported us. It was my way of thanking them,” Ponce de León said. The director said she also wanted to take this opportunity to provide an example of a gift economy, so she organized an art lottery on opening night. Each artist received another artist's piece from the show. While artists liked the idea of swapping their pieces, some people in the audience felt cheated. “There's a barrier. If you like you can't buy it,” Mariella Krause said. “I hope the person who gets it likes it.”

Our advice: Follow the pigeons to Galería de la Raza and enjoy the show.”

– Héléne Goupil, Mission Loc@l

## Dignidad Rebelde

6/19/2009 - 8/15/2009

Galería celebrates the art as a vehicle to communicate important political issues with the exhibition “Dignidad Rebelde ” which features finished works and work-in-progress by the East Bay collective comprised of Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes. The dynamic duo boldly partner their social practice and creative work, spreading knowledge on the art form of silkscreen printing and fostering an awareness of social justice issues worldwide. The series illustrates the ingenuity enlivened in times of economic instability, whereby individuals and communities pool together available resources creating alternative and often heightened forms of sustainability and inspiration.

“The silkscreen has been used by artists to make political statements, protest social injustice, and condemn civil rights inequalities since its inception.

Dignidad Rebelde, the current exhibit at the Galería de la Raza by artists Melanie Cervantes and Jesus Barraza, continues this tradition by illustrating the delicate partnership between artistic fervor and a progressive vision that can serve as a conduit for change.

The exhibit, the first in the Contraband (Smuggled Goods) series at La Galería, feature 44 prints, five of which are co-produced by Cervantes and Barraza.

Among the notable pieces is Cervantes' “Atenco Aguanta El Pueblo Se Levanta” This is a dynamic six-color print depicting machete-wielding peasants challenging corporate exploitation of their land. I was moved by this forceful piece.

Another remarkable Cervantes print captures the true guardian of the land. Titled “Indigenous Women Defending Land and Life Since the Beginning of Time,” this print depicts a rifle-toting woman with a stock of corn in her hand. Even without the words, the message is clearly evident. What a poignant statement.

He Barraza collection is equally unique. “Rebelde” is an intense portrait of a half-masked Zapatista with penetrating eyes. The rich colors and subtle details are eye-catching.

The same can be said of “Steve Bilko,” a portrait of an anti-Apartheid leader in South Africa. Using the colors of the National African Congress flag, the rich green, red, white and black color scheme made for a very striking visual impact.

Cervantes and Barraza also teamed-up to produce five prints like “EZLA Women’s Revolutionary Laws” that quickly captures your attention. The warm color scheme of teal, mustard, flesh tones, and red is appealing. Then, there’s the strong portrait of a Zapatista mother and child with other Zapatista women in the background – very striking.

When viewing the work of Cervantes and Barraza there’s no question that they have been influenced by some the best local artists of our time – Juan Fuentes, Rupert Garcia, Juana Alicia and Malaquías Montoya, just to name a few. Like the veteran silkscreen artists, they incorporate a lot of detail

and color in their drawings. Their portrait work is particularly noteworthy – simple and captivating. Cervantes and Barraza clearly capture the physical expressions of the people they draw.

Likewise, a lot of their silkscreen work focuses on liberation struggles in Palestine, the Zapatista movement, immigrant rights and youth organizing. While the world of silkscreen printing is somewhat new to Cervantes and Barraza, it is evident that they were quick learners. The 34-year-old Cervantes had her first exhibit in 2003 and she currently is a member of Taller Tupac Amaru, an Oakland printmaking studio founded in 2003. Barraza, who co-founded Taller Tupac Amaru, started exhibiting his work in 2001. He also co-founded in 1998 ten12, a collective of digital artists. He has worked as a graphic designer at the Mission Cultural Center/Mission Gráfica and he is a partner at Tumis Inc., a bilingual design studio helping to integrate art with emerging technologies.

If you value the role of the political poster, the Dignidad Rebelde exhibit is worth seeing. ”

– Juan Gonzales, *Artists continues radical printmaking tradition*, El Tecolote, Jul 29, 2009,

## 2010

### **Mad World: Messages to the Future**

Sat 5/8 - Sat 6/26 | 12:00 pm

One year after the exhibition *Strange Hope* which examined the unprecedented wave of optimism following Obama's inauguration, in the ambience of the economic collapse, continued environmental exploitation and harsh immigration laws, the Galería decided to ask artists for a creative visioning of the future of our society and the legacy we will have left behind. The variety of works presented in *Mad World* offer a whimsical and at times grim insight into the future based on concepts of consumerism, spirituality, politics and the environment. Some of the works in this exhibition rely on the use of recycled and discarded materials to shed light on habits of mindless over consumption. Other works place power in objects such as oracle cards or spiritual deities as the larger forces at work in our societal evolution. Both examples serve as compelling commentary on the human experience. Will Arizona secede from the States in 2019 as a result of political pressures? Will mechanical bees serve as a remedy for the current bee plague by 2050?

### **YTREBIL**

Sat 7/10 - Sat 8/28

Still offering a counterpoint to mainstream visions of American society, Galería de la Raza holds in summer 2010 the exhibition « YTREBIL », a solo exhibition featuring prints and drawings by San Francisco based artist, Enrique Chagoya. Known for working with concepts he terms "reverse art history" and "reverse anthropology" Chagoya utilizes icons, personas and images of a dominant mainstream culture and examines them from an outsiders perspective. The title of Chagoya's exhibit captures this "reverse" perspective in the term "Ytrebil," which is "Liberty" spelled backwards and is incorporated in his drawing by that name. His newer works explore the themes of illegal immigration, racial stereotypes, and xenophobia in a post-9/11 world, and the influences of colonialism in the present.

Watch out, there are dinosaurs in the living room. In fact, in Enrique Chagoya's drawing "YTREBIL" -- liberty spelled backwards -- the fully rendered, charcoal dinosaurs are the only things of substance in the living room; the rest of the furniture exists only as outline, a well-ordered backdrop occupied by a raging tyrannosaurus and some of its mellower relations. An allusion to the debate over immigration, YTREBIL (both the drawing and the show) is a distilled version of the rest of Chagoya's body of work: funny and, depending on your political leanings, provocative. It's not as comprehensive as the retrospective that the Berkeley Art Museum offered a few years ago, but it's a good place to start.

Chagoya is known for work that mixes European art historical references with those of American pop culture and pre-Columbian mythology, usually satirically. Most of his major hits are on display in **YTREBIL**, including selections from his print series "Return to Goya's Caprichos" (1999) and "Homage to Goya II: Disasters of War" (2003). Outside of photography, there are few formal techniques that can capture shadow and light as well as etchings, and the play of darkness and luminosity that occurs across these works is not just beautiful, but chilling, especially when the content is taken into account. For example, Chagoya remakes "Se Repulen" ("They Spruce Themselves Up") as an image of Jesse Helms clipping the talons of a demon Jerry Falwell while a Teletubby grins ghoulishly in the foreground and replaces the deluge of winged demons in "El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstruos" ("The Sleep of Reason Brings Monsters") with images of bombs and military planes.

**YTREBIL** includes some newer works as well: large lithographs like "Illegal Alien's Guide to Critical Theory" (2007) and "Illegal Alien's Guide to the Concept of Relative Surplus Value" (2009), a 5-foot-plus long codex. "Surplus Value" combines a chaotic backdrop of ink splashes with a multi-colored, more detailed ocean foreground on which a variety of figures try to stay afloat. There's an infinite number of visual references, including the Incredible Hulk, the Titanic and various Egyptian boatmen, as well as cartoon bubbles with sentence fragments like "recalls ominous moments of urban experience while subverting the relation between fantasy and reality." The codex is full of personal and cultural symbols, and yet its general themes (grasping at stability in view of immanent disaster) aren't too hard to grasp. One can choose to get lost in the details -- which makes the work more interesting -- but it's not necessary.

This is both the beauty of Chagoya and his Achilles' heel: the ease of just sticking with a surface read. The layers of humorous and pointed art historical, personal, and political references in Chagoya's work give viewers the option of plenty of food for thought, but nothing about the work forces you to go there. Perhaps another way of putting it: lazy viewers need not apply.

**YTREBIL** is on view at Galería de la Raza until August 28, 2010. For more information, visit Galería de la Raza's website.  
– Danielle Sommer | Aug 05, 2010, Enrique Chagoya's YTREBIL at Galería de La Raza, <http://www.kqed.org>, Art Review

# PUBLIC PROGRAMS

## **Panel Series: *Strategies for the Shift***

STRATEGIES FOR THE SHIFT offers the public a sampling of some of the current political trends occurring in Latin America through the critical lens of alternative artist led projects. Through two panel discussions and an evening of films, the series will bridge our efforts, broaden civic engagement and provide the public with an opportunity to receive first hand information from on the ground experienced leaders in innovative..., progressive community led projects. All of the selected participants represent organizations, which are actively engaged in re-forming the socio-political landscape in spite of a persistent opposition.

### Part One

Sat, Sep 18 4 p.m. *Directing the Shift*

Speakers: Claudia Bernardi (Walls of Hope) and Omar Foglio (Bulbo.tv)

Moderated by Josue Rojas of New American Media

### Part Two

Thu, Sep 23 7 p.m. *Strategies Film screening*

### Part Three

Thu, Oct 14 7 p.m. *Documenting the Shift*

Speakers: Alex Halcken, Carlos Martinez, and Pablo Serrano

## **Artists in Conversation Series:**

The *Artists in Conversation* series consists of intergenerational dialogues between an established Latino artist and a younger peer. The series serves both as an interactive forum of oral history, as well as a meeting ground where different generations can obtain a simultaneous glimpse of the legacy and the future of Latino/Chicano art.

Sat, Oct 23 4 p.m.

A conversation between Amalia Mesa-Bains and Jaime Cortez



# THANK YOU

*We dedicate this exhibition to each and every artist, staff and Board member who in the course of the past 40 years made Galería the venerable organization it is today.*

**Galería 4.0, A Retrospective** is an ambitious endeavor, a challenge we have embraced to celebrate 40 years of Galería's achievements with the awareness that it is an impossible feat to properly represent all those who have contributed to shaping its history. On this momentous occasion, we acknowledge Galería's former Directors: Rene Yañez and Ralph Maradiaga (r.i.p.), Enrique Chagoya, Humberto Buitron, Maria Pinedo, Liz Lerma, and Gloria Jaramillo as well as Elena Anaya, Olivia Armas, Richard Bains, José Antonio Burciaga (r.i.p.), Francisco X. Camplis, Maria Carreño, Graciela Carrillo, Anne Cervantes, Jaime Cortez, Culture Clash, Eva Garcia (r.i.p.), Rupert Garcia, Sal Garcia, Mia Gonzalez, Ester Hernandez, Carmen Lomas Garza, Carlos Loarca, Yolanda Lopez, Amalia Mesa Bains, Bill Moreno, Irene Perez, Praba Pilar, Marc Pinate, Mike Rios, and Xavier Viramontes. These individuals have left an indelible mark of innovation, passion and dedication in Galería's history.

**Galería 4.0** has been made possible through the generosity of many individuals who volunteered their time and resources. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the very committed 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition Advisory Committee: Jaime Cortez, Ana Teresa Fernandez, John Leaños, and Rio Yañez; to our interns and volunteers: Cristián Aguilera, Peggy Sue Barton, Adriana Grino, Jenn Hernandez, Kate Kuaimoku, Jennifer Nicholls, Maria Elena Ortiz, Yocupitzia Oseguera, Lisa Picard, Sabrina Ramos, Breanne Rupp, Melissa Sandoval, and Marnie Sehayek; to Rudy Cuellar, Darren De Leon, Logan Gilbert, Patricia Rodriguez, Yesenia Sanchez, Josh Short, Gustavo Vazquez, and Kimberly Verde; to Callie Bowdish and Sal Guereña from the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives at the University of California (Santa Barbara); to Hector and Omar Soto from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium Framing & Art Gallery; to our dedicated staff Raquel de Anda and Audra Ponce; and to our Board: Ricardo de Anda, Lou Dematteis, Luis Granados, Liana Molina, Juliana Mojica, Ani Rivera, Carolina Skinner, and Gustavo Vazquez.

Special thanks also to Maria X. Martinez and Olga Talamantez and to the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Honorary Committee: Tom Ammiano, *Assemblyman (D-San Francisco), District 13*; John Avalos, *San Francisco Supervisor, District 11*; Richard Bains, *Former Board President*; Peter Bratt, *Filmmaker*; David Campos, *San Francisco Supervisor, District 9*; Luis Cancel, *Director of Cultural Affairs, San Francisco Arts Commission*; David Chiu, *San Francisco Supervisor, District 3*; Ysabel Duron, *Executive Director Latinas Contra Cancer*; Sean Elsbernd, *San Francisco Supervisor, District 7*; Ester Hernandez, *Artist*; Amalia Mesa-Bains, *Artist*; William Moreno, *Former Board President, Galería de la Raza*; The Honorable Gavin Newsom, *Mayor of City and County of San Francisco*; and Jose Padilla, *Executive Director, California Rural Legal Assistance*.



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