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Envisioning A Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic: Artivism in the Twenty-first Century

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Angelica Isai Becerra

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Envisioning A Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic: Artivism in the Twenty-first Century

by

Angelica Isai Becerra

Doctor of Philosophy in Chicana and Chicano Studies and Central American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Maylei Blackwell, Chair

This dissertation is a Chicana feminist analysis of the work and visual tactics of contemporary Chicana/o digital artivists—artist/activist, according to the work of Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre—in California from 2000 until circa 2016. Given the growing body of artivist work being produced today and its distribution via digital means, my research theorizes the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic (CRDA) as praxis and theoretical lens to analyze how new digital artivists are changing contemporary social justice efforts. I focus on six artivists: Elizabeth Blancas, Jesus Barraza, Melanie Cervantes, Jessica Sabogal, Julio Salgado, and Favianna Rodriguez. I center their work and knowledge as key actors in a current Chicanx twenty-first-century digital arts movement exploring the digital realm as a space of production, distribution, and reception of a new generation of Chicanx artivism spanning national and transnational social justice movements. I continue the growing scholarship on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-made graphic arts that connects the rich tradition of graphic art from the

1960s–1970s civil rights era to contemporary digital art practice. Drawing on my experiences as both an artivist and an active participant in contemporary Chicanx art communities, my methodology combines oral history interviews, visual analysis, and collaborative artmaking. I theorize the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic (CRDA) in order to trace the political poster from the printed material object to digital graphic artivist tool. In Chapter Two, I focus on the practice of self-portraits, and portraiture more broadly, through analysis of Julio Salgado and Jessica Sabogal's work. Chapter Three links the internationalist roots of Chicanx art between 1965 and 1995, as well as the contributions of Chicana feminist printmakers from the post-Vietnam period to contemporary internationalist themes in digital work. Chapter Four examines how Melanie Cervantes and Favianna Rodriguez employ a strategy of embodiment on multiple scales—their own physical bodies as well as their larger environment and the "digital" spaces they inhabit. Chapter Five details what I term "Networks of Care" among Chicanx/Latinx artivists online and the myriad resources they share in digital community. I conclude by discussing the ways Latinx/Chicanx artivists have engaged with the growing concerns of a racially biased algorithm and new directions that result from this work.

Keywords: artivism, Chicanx art, Internationalism, political graphics, Latinx art, digital turn, shareable graphics, digital art

The dissertation of Angelica Isai Becerra is approved.

Gaye Theresa Johnson

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DEDICATION

For Angélica María García

& all immigrant mothers who carried us across borders

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Last but not least, to Benjamin Kolder, this project would not be possible without your encouragement and love. Thank you for building a home with me.

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INTRODUCTION: THE ART IS THE MOVEMENT, THE CHICANX POLITICAL POSTER
AND ITS DIGITAL TURN

This dissertation is a Chicana feminist analysis of contemporary Chicanx art production

in the United States that explores the visual tactics of contemporary Chicanx digital activist-

artists in California from 2000 until circa 2016. It centers on a community of six contemporary

artist-activists, also known as artivists. The practice referred to as "artivism" is a "hybrid

neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art

and activism."[1] Grammy award-winning musician and scholar Martha Gonzalez builds on earlier

conversations on artivism, notably adding that the word "artivista" captures the ways artists

leverage their artistic skillset to manage the demands of a capitalist market system.

In this project, I am interested in how the digital mediates older (1960s and 1970s)

aesthetic practices, and bridges contemporary (post-2000) art and politics. Also, I examine the

role of community and collectivity in digital art-making practices, as well as how digital artivism

aligns with previous generations of activist-artists and their community-centered practices. In an

effort to identify the similarities between past generations of artivists and those working today

within digital spaces, I theorize the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic (CRDA) as an interpretive

framework and lens that identifies the intergenerational[2] qualities of current artivists. I use the

CRA to analyze the artivist practices of six individuals: Jesus Barraza, Elizabeth Blancas,

Melanie Cervantes, Favianna Rodriguez, Jessica Sabogal, and Julio Salgado. The CRDA

embodies a set of principles that undergird and guide the work of Latinx artivists including: 1)

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[1] Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color," *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media* (2008): 81–108.

[2] The six artivists in this study represent at least two generations. Barraza, Cervantes, and Rodriguez belong to "Generation X" born 1965-80, while Sabogal and Salgado are born well into the "Millennial" designation of 1981–96. Blancas was born on 1996, the last year of the "Millennial" generation, however her digital habits and practices also resemble those of the "Generation Z" designation.

internationalism; 2) feminist and queer themes; and 3) the use of text and image—a graphic style that includes a limited color palette—that honors earlier Chicanx, Black, and Latin American printmaking and muralism practitioners, as well as an emphasis on collective production and development. Throughout this work, I aim to point to the abundance of Chicana feminist contributions to how we think about Chicana/o art and the growing efforts of artivists themselves writing about their work and thus demystifying the artistic process.

My positionality as a self-identified queer Chicana artivist and academic allows me to see the possibility of bridging Chicana feminist knowledge with research methods that center the work and words of creators themselves, undoing the power dynamic between academic researchers and community cultural workers. My role as an active participant in Los Angeles and online artivist communities keeps me accountable as a researcher and artist, as well as obliges me to ground my experiences in Chicanx art history scholarship and digital activism studies. This project is both a collective offering and collaboration between me and six artist-activists: Jesus Barraza, Elizabeth Blancas, Melanie Cervantes, Favianna Rodriguez, Jessica Sabogal, and Julio Salgado. The collaboration went beyond the interviews I gathered, and materialized into art. I painted a watercolor portrait of each artist, and corresponded with them via email through the process, thus creating a digital rapport in place of a formal sitting for a portrait. I wanted to incorporate the reciprocity that occurs in artivist communities for this project, and the portraits provided an opportunity for me to thank each artist with artwork, and to draw their likeness from my perspective as a fellow artivist. I am a scholar, educator and artivist of political graphics, and I have balanced an engaged arts practice with my scholarship. In my work I utilize an interdisciplinary, multimethod approach that combines: the histories of visual cultures within social movements; deep visual analysis of artwork, both visual and textual; in-depth interviews

with artist-activists; and a collaboration with all six artivists in the form of a portrait series titled "Give Us Our Flowers."[3] The portraits are featured in the conclusion of this dissertation, and formed part of the programming for UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center's fiftieth anniversary in 2019. They became a mini exhibition titled *Give Us Our Flowers: Latinx Artivist Portraits*.

Chicana/o Art Movements and Shakers

The political poster is a key medium used by Chicanx artists; it is a significant part of the visual culture Chicanx artists have created in conjunction with the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. According to art historian, feminist and activist Shifra Goldman, "it must be viewed as a movement rather than simply as a collection of individuals making posters."[4] This collection of individuals created imagery that is associated with the Chicanx struggle for liberation and self-definition within the US nation-state. As Chon Noriega states, it is key to look closer at the images to gain further insight,

> But do these images amount to something more than just another poster? Can art express and help build community? Can artists create a visual language that is both self-reflexive and rooted in cultural difference? To say yes to these questions is only the first step toward an answer. The next step involves looking closely at these posters.[5]

In this introduction, by looking closely at posters created during the height of the Chicana/o Art Movement in the 1970s and '80s, as well as explaining the concept of the digital turn, I heed the call Noriega beckons to in the quote above. The digital turn signals a revolution

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[3] The exhibition's title was inspired by the work of trans artist B. Parker, who incorporated the phrase "Give Us Our Roses While We're Still Here" into a poster created for the International Trans Day of Remembrance in 2015.

[4] Shifra M. Goldman, "A Public Voice: Fifteen Years of Chicano Posters," *Art Journal* 44, no. 1 (1984): 50, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1984.10792520.

[5] Chon A. Noriega, "Postmodernism, Or Why This Is Just Another Poster," *¿Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* (2001): 20–23.

of methods, yet the visual vocabulary and message of these posters remain as defiant as ever. I argue that the 1990s signaled a shift in Chicanx political poster production and dissemination, as artists began to utilize digital means to produce work and use social media to bypass or reach the gallery and museum walls. I contend that work produced during and after the digital turn has retained the characteristics of the silkscreen poster that has incited generations to political action. Political digital graphics of the twenty-first century have a rich, deep history, specifically those produced by Chicanx artists today, it is my intent to carry these roots and connect the analog with the digital as part of a continuum of Chicanx radical artmaking. Since the shift in production and distribution after the 1990s, digital political graphics have varied in graphic style, yet the major representational choices are similar to their predecessors, for example the use of portraiture and bold text.

Chicanx art sought to bridge the gap between "radical politics and community cultural practices."[6] Art Historian Tatiana Reinoza has linked the production of printed materials to the actions enacted by community. Her analysis of the printed images that emerged out of the 1969 trial of "Los Siete de la Raza" youth in San Francisco's Mission District demonstrated the influence of "images on paper that worked to politicize the Latino residents of the Mission District"[7] and resulted in artwork that reframed the youth as victims of police brutality and abuse of power.

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[6] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (1991), 167.

[7] Tatiana Reinoza, "'No Es Un Crimen': Posters, Political Prisoners, and the Mission Counterpublics," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 42, no. 1 (March 15, 2017): 239–56.

The Chicano art movement sought to "extend meaning beyond the aesthetic object to include transformation of the material environment as well as of consciousness."[8] According to Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, the Chicano[9] art movement's aesthetic guidelines included: 1) the elimination of strict traditional art boundaries such as "fine art" and "folk art"; 2) the privileging of representations that included practices of daily life, such as the home or community spaces; and 3) a mixture of handcrafted visual objects from Mexican aesthetic traditions with US mass culture representations. However, it is important to note that these aesthetic guidelines, similar to the Chicanx student movement and the field of Chicanx Studies, were not officially drafted and distributed to social actors in these movements; rather, they developed inside of the community engagement and political practice of activists at the time.[10] Nevertheless, Chicano Art Movement work falls in line with community cultural developmental work, which Goldbard asserts "inevitably responds to current social conditions: the work is grounded in social critique and social imagination. The precise nature of this response always shifts as social circumstances change."[11] Although both phases of the Chicano Art Movement maintained a social critique, the centering of masculinist, heteronormative iconographies limited its ability to shift as social circumstances changed. The work of Chicana feminist artist and critic Amalia Mesa-Bains inserts the Chicana back into a canon dominated by men and hyper-masculine iconography. She contends that Domesticana, a rasquache Chicana art sensibility, accomplishes three things: 1) it speaks back to sexism and gendered narratives that limit women's participation; 2) it focuses on

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[8] Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," 175.

[9] I use the word "Chicano" only when quoting sources or discussing organizations that use the term.

[10] Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," 175–77.

[11] Arlene Goldbard, *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* (New York: New Village Press, 2006), 4.

the private and gendered spheres such as the home and the body and views them as political

space for building new ways of knowing, honoring ancestral knowledges; and finally 3) Chicana

art emphasizes coalition- and community-building while remaining grounded on the personal

narrative.

The political poster is a part of the toolkit Chicanx activists use to disseminate a critique

of US intervention and imperialism. In her essay chronicling the development of the poster as the

preferred method used by Chicanx artists since the 1960s, Chicana curator Teresita Romo

identifies this graphic art form as an important mode of knowledge production and dissemination

then and now. Romo also makes a clear connection between artistic labor and community

activism, detailing that Chicanx artists have enacted this dual role for generations, often due to

the political climate and challenges of their community. She states, "Chicano artists were

expected to respond to the brutal living conditions of Mexican Americans in this country:

inadequate education, lack of political power, a high fatality in the Viet Nam war, farmworker's

economic servitude, and institutional racism."[12] In other words, artivists have been active

participants in their communities through their arts practice and have a hand in changing both the

community environment and consciousness of those who come into contact with their work.

Other works focusing on the Chicana/o political poster include Shifra Goldman's *A*

Public Voice: Fifteen Years of Chicano Posters, and Tomás Ybarra Frausto's *Hablamos! We*

Speak Contemporary Chicano Posters, written in conjunction with a traveling art exhibition

titled "Contemporary Chicano Posters" at Evergreen State College in 1989. However, I observed

that the transformative political work that Chicana/o artists make for multiple communities, not

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[12] "Points of Convergence: The Iconography of the Chicano Poster," in *¿Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* (2001), 94.

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just their own is facilitated and made more visible by the digital turn of political graphics. Opening the scope of Chicanx political art enables a richer analysis and reveals the role of Chicana/o artivism in coalition with various causes. These graphics have continued and extend the sensibility of solidarity in social movements to produce art with and for other communities, often in real time or as an immediate response to current events, the digital lends itself to this constantly.

One of the defining characteristics of Chicanx art is its political intention, Chicanx artists have for generations, developed work that is both deeply personal and politically poignant. This can be seen in Malaquias Montoya's *Viet Nam Aztlán, (*1973) (Figure 1), one of the numerous posters supporting anti-war efforts in the United States, with two closed fists, one yellow and brown meeting in the middle, this image repeats at the bottom as well, Montoya visually aligns the Chicanx and Vietnamese communities against US imperialism and intervention. Montoya also includes the word "*fuera*" to indicate the political goal of this solidarity, which is to get US armed forces and the United States "out" of their respective communities. Interdisciplinary scholar Maria Ochoa intentionally foregrounds the political nature of art within various liberation movements that took place during the 1960s, and thus multiple sites of Chicanx activism; namely, those dealing with farmworker rights (Figure 2), education, and antiwar efforts, of which Montoya's is an example.

Figure 1. Malaquias Montoya, *Viet Nam Aztlán*, 1973, offset serigraph, Chicano Vietnam Project

Figure 2. Linda Lucero, *La Raza Silkscreen Center*, 1976, silkscreen.

Furthermore, Ochoa centers the role of Chicanxs in the production of socially conscious art. Linda Lucero's *Viva La Huelga* (1976) was made specifically to commemorate the United Farmworker's Delano Boycott that took place from 1965 to 1970, a coalition of Filipino and

Mexican farmworkers who sought better working conditions through unionization. Lucero foregrounds what appears to be a nuclear farmworker family, with a woman, man, and child carrying a UFW flag. Their expressions are serious and determined as they look at the fight ahead; the left side of the poster juxtaposes the words "Viva la Huelga/Long Live the Boycott" with a sun setting on a green field, where farmworker figures are working away.

Montoya and Lucero form part of the first generation of political graphic artists, whose work was in direct response to social injustice against multiple communities. Ochoa reminds us, "socially conscious artists do not view their work as separate from movement politics, it is crucial to emphasize the indivisibility of Chicana/o artistic production from Chicana/o activism."[13] Therefore, the predecessors of the contemporary digital political poster were involved in movements themselves, and did not see their politics as separate from their visual labor.

The first book-length studies dedicated to the political poster itself, *¿Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California,* edited by Chon A. Noriega in 2001, provided an in-depth look into a format of art-making that has been dismissed within the art world. The exhibition traveled to three university art museums across the United States and two non-academic affiliated art museums, respectively.[14] The accompanying catalogue[15] is a rare collection of essays by historians, curators, and social movement artists discussing on a formal level the internationalist vein of the political poster archive. In particular, the visual strategy of

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[13] Ochoa, *Creative Collectives*, 5.

[14] *¿Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* traveled to the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art (Austin: University of Texas), University Art Museum (UC Santa Barbara), the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, the Merced Multicultural Arts Center, and the Jersey City Museum.

[15] An art catalogue is a list of the contents of an exhibition or collection, and often includes full color reproductions of the works in said collection. It is a lasting reminder of exhibitions that are often ephemeral and temporary, the catalogue is the physical object that represents the event that was.

solidarity is one of the main findings of this comprehensive and interdisciplinary effort to excavate and analyze over thirty years of political posters. It was this catalog that catalyzed my interest in political graphics, as a medium and movement that continues to influence contemporary artivists.

In 2020, following the precedent of *¿Just Another Poster?* the Smithsonian Museum of American Art's announced the opening of *¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now.* The exhibit was organized by E. Carmen Ramos, curator of Latinx art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, with Claudia Zapata,[16] artist, curatorial assistant, and doctoral candidate at Southern Methodist University. The accompanying catalogue includes essays by Ramos and Zapata, as well as contributions by Terezita Romo and Tatiana Reinoza, leading scholars of Chicanx and Latinx graphics.[17] Zapata and Ramos spoke and corresponded with numerous scholars, curators, and artists who "shared their advice and vast knowledge of Chicanx graphics." The exhibition was a result of the Smithsonian American Art Museum's continued commitment to Latinx art and was catalyzed by a donation of sixty Chicanx posters by Ybarra Frausto in 1995. This exhibition is significant for two reasons, its initiative to collect contemporary work, including graphics by *Dignidad Rebelde* (Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes), Favianna Rodriguez, and digital illustrations by Julio Salgado. Secondly, it opens a new path, one that "affirms Chicanx art integral to the history of American art."[18] The exhibition's deliberate inclusion of civil-rights era artists alongside contemporary

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[16] Zapata's positionality as both an artist and scholar like my own, reflects an opening within Latinx arts scholarship, that allows for multiple modalities and scales of engagement.

[17] Tatiana Reinoza, "War at Home: Conceptual Iconoclasm in American Printmaking," in *¡Printing the Revolution!: The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

[18] Carmen E. Ramos, "Printing and Collecting the Revolution: The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now," in *¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 15.

younger artists marks an acknowledgement of the "strong intergenerational links" among older and younger political graphic artists, and their subject matter. Inside the exhibition catalog, the connection continues.

Zapata's essay on the digital shareable graphics is a groundbreaking and comprehensive history of Chicanx artists and their engagements with the digital, not just as a tool but as a "dialogue between artists and their chosen media"[19] and of the expanding field of Chicanx digital graphics as a whole. With the use of the Spanish exclamation points to signal a connection to the groundbreaking *¿Just Another Poster?* catalogue, Ramos and Zapata identified not just Chicanx graphics as a major point of study—they also extended the focus to digital graphics. The exhibition description states that *¡Printing the Revolution!* will be "the first to unite historic civil rights era prints alongside works by contemporary printmakers, including several that embrace expanded graphics that exist beyond the paper substrate."[20] The act of this inclusion is not only the first but signals to the growing importance of looking beyond the analog, to include digital means of art production, exhibition, and distribution in art.

For example, Zapata reached out to myself and others during the development of their essay, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age."[21] In it, Zapata mentions my work on theorizing the caption space of a digital post as an artivist, *autohistoriateoria*, a method I expand on at the end of this introduction. The publication and dedicated work of Ramos and Zapata for *¡Printing the Revolution!* is a welcome addition to the intersecting fields of Chicanx and Latinx art history and the digital humanities. The catalogue features artivists in this dissertation, namely Melanie

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[19] Claudia Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," in *¡Printing the Revolution!: The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 129.

[21] Reinoza, "War at Home," 129.

and Jesus Barraza of art collaboration Dignidad Rebelde, and Julio Salgado and Favianna Rodriguez. I will refer back to this catalog as a touchstone throughout this project, as it is the most recent comprehensive survey of Chicanx and Latinx political graphics in recent years.

The Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic

The Chicanx visual strategy of the poster has undergone a digital transformation in the twenty-first century, it is used by contemporary artists to disseminate messages of empowerment in the face of unprecedented state repression and racism both online and offline. My interest lies in these strategies and tactics, as well as the motivations of contemporary artivists, to imagine social justice alongside Black, Asian, and Arab communities. I argue that utilizing the Chicana Radical Aesthetic as a lens and framework makes visible the legacies of both the 1960s Chicana/o art movement and the intergenerational networks established subsequently. Thus, while I am engaging with the ways contemporary artivists use the digital, I am also considering the continued conversations, relationships, and inspirations that continue to occur and shift after the digital turn, or the advent of the internet post-2000. While art has been central to Chicanx and Latinx social movements since the 1960s and 1970s, scholars rarely connect the rich tradition of graphic protest art to contemporary digital art practice. Yet, the connection between the analog political poster and the digital offers new perspectives for the twenty-first century.

The Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic (CRDA) is a theoretical framework and lens through which I analyze digital political graphics made at the turn of the twenty first century and beyond. With the advent of the internet and the emerging availability of digital tools and online platforms like websites and social media, this framework makes visible the deep influence of the analog political poster tradition on contemporary artwork by Chicanx and Latinx artists. This framework also makes visible the continuity with 1960s and 70s Chicana/o Movement

representational choices and political commitments. In this section, I will explain the impetus for this research, share the research questions that guide this project, and outline the elements of the CRDA, their significance and purpose as a theoretical framework.

The artivist practice of making work in conjunction with social justice movements and organizations is not a new phenomenon, especially in Chicana and Chicano Studies. A notable example is the cover art for the flagship publication *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*. Chicana feminist artist and activist Judithe Hernández made the "journal's covers and illustrations until 1975, as well as a logo in use from 1972 through 1983"[22] since then, the cover of the journal has become a space to showcase emerging Chicanx artists, with each cover artist writing a short essay inside the issue describing their motivations for the work. I chose to focus on the development of the political poster medium, and its connection to digital political graphics to further emphasize the ways past generations of artivist practices continue to influence and impact contemporary art making.

Although at the beginning of this project there was little research on how Latinx creatives utilize the internet, in the years since the field has expanded to include scholarship on digital shareable graphics by Claudia Zapata and digital repositories to preserve feminist movement memory, such as the "Chicana Por Mi Raza Project" led by Maria Cotera.[23] More broadly, research on Latinx art and artists has historically centered painting and muralism[24] during the

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[22] Charlene Villaseñor Black, "Judithe Hernández, Aztlán's First Cover Artist: Fifty Years of Chicana Feminist Art," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 45, no. 1 (March 15, 2020): 1.

[23] "Chicana Por Mi Raza," accessed May 20, 2021, https://chicanapormiraza.org/.

[24] An important reason for the focus on the practices of painting and muralism, is the influence of Mexican muralists David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco on the work of Chicanx artists making work in the 1960s and '70s. Significant contributions include Holly Barnet-Sánchez and Eva Cockcroft's *Signs from the Heart.*

California Chicano Murals (1990), Shifra Goldman whose decades of scholarship were captured and honored by Charlene Villasenor-Black's edited book of her writings, *Tradition and Transformation: Chicana/o Art from the*

1960s and has more recently shifted focus to thematic and groundbreaking exhibitions at major US museums.[25] While much of the existing literature deals with traditional formats of artmaking, the growing body of work on how the internet has changed the way artists produce, display, and engage with online communities is encouraging, and speaks to the inclusion of the digital in our understanding of Chicanx and Latinx art.

The work of artist-activists in the twenty-first century is my focal point of the study; I have observed that the print format of their work has remained an important technology for their survival and self-preservation, with roots in the print cultures of the 1960s and '70s. Notably, there had been a heavy influence from Cuban, Central American and Chicana/o print cultures.

Seeing the output of contemporary Latinx artivist art practice in this way is what I call the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic (CRDA), a praxis preoccupied with creating images that raise awareness for both national and transnational movements for social justice. It is artwork that takes on geopolitical issues in the US and abroad, challenging the social conditions of oppressed communities locally and globally. It is work that reclaims self-representation and uses it to highlight bodies not usually seen in traditions like portraiture. It is work that considers the collective, both past and present.

1970s Through the 1990s (2015), Amalia Mesa-Bains, whose works as a curator, author, visual artist, and educator contributed to the inclusion of Chicanx art in subsequent major exhibitions. Additionally, María Ochoa, *Creative Collectives: Chicana Painters Working in Community* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2003). Also, Ed McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

[25] As discussed earlier, the exhibition of Chicanx and Latinx art has been facilitated by strategic partnerships between museums and research institutions as was the case for Pacific Standard Time, and the key role of Chicanx art advocates such as Dr. Chon Noriega and curators, museum administrators like Terezita Romo, Holly Barnet-Sánchez, Rita Gonzalez, and Pila Tompkins-Rivas, among others. While major exhibitions originate along the US coasts on major venues, these exhibitions travel to multiple locations along the US Southwest and Midwest, and internationally as well. For example, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) organized *Los Four* in 1974, and *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* (1987) and continued to exhibit Chicanx and Latinx art through the 2000s, with *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (2008) traveled to the Tamayo Museum of Contemporary Art in Mexico City, the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston, and El Museo del Barrio in New York City.

The CRDA also connects the artivism and solidarity of Latinx graphic artists from the 1960s and 70s to the current internationalist vein of digital artivism, to assert that this is a practice that has a documented history of connecting struggles in the U.S. to the legacies of imperialism domestically and abroad. Another defining characteristic of this framework is collaboration, and the networks that create pathways for artivists to share resources and care for each other. Finally, this framework is one that takes both inspiration and honors the politics and work of Chicana feminist artivists of the 1960s and 70s. Chicana feminist artivists such as Ester Hernández, Judith F. Baca, and Yolanda López and others were the first to experiment with emerging digital tools, and whose mentorship of those who came up after them combatted the toxic masculinity that dominated Chicanx art movement spaces. It is their inclusivity and continued work that informs this framework and lens.

My project is guided by the following questions:

1) How does Chicanx and Latinx art enact change in a digital world?
2) What is the role of Chicana feminist and queer ways of knowing in contemporary graphic art?
3) How do Latinx artivists use art to engage in the political landscape of the US and abroad?
4) How do artivists create networks of care that create forms of *Convivencia* and mutual aid?

My own theoretical and artivist intervention has three distinct "roots." First, it is inspired by Dr. Theresa Gaye Johnson's theorizing of a "Chicana Radical Imaginary,"[26] which builds on

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[26] In a recent lecture titled "Materializing the Imaginary: Comparative Studies, Relational Action, and the Futures of Chicana Radicalism," Dr. Johnson introduced the overarching concept of her forthcoming work. A "Chicana Radical Imaginary" is a theoretical intervention that builds on decades of Chicana feminist scholarship as much as it draws from Black radical thought. Gaye Johnson's assertion that the strategies of relational activism are developed and grounded in Chicana feminist scholarship and the Black Radical Imagination speak to the work of a new generation of Chicana/o visual artists. Scholars such as Gaye Johnson are spearheading a direction in scholarship on Chicana/o popular culture and cultural production.

the work of Cedric Robinson's "Black Radical Imagination,"[27] Robin D.G. Kelley's *Freedom*

Dreams[28] and Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary*.[29] Second, it draws from the work of a

multigenerational group of Chicana artists, including muralist Judy Baca, Ester Hernández, Alma

López, and Amalia Mesa-Bains (1960s–2000s). Third, it builds on the Chicanx art criticism and

scholars such as Shifra Goldman,[30] Charlene Villaseñor-Black,[31] and Karen Mary Davalos.[32]

These three roots provide the foundation for my theoretical analysis of contemporary Chicanx art

production, which I call the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic.

Just as the word "art" is embedded in the Chicana/o Art Movement of the 1970s, the

word "Chicana" is embedded in the CRDA, due to the deep influence of Chicana feminist artists

such as Ester Hernández, Judith F. Baca, and Yolanda M. López. Indeed, their collective work,

with themes spanning feminism, body autonomy, sexuality, and women's roles, played an

instrumental part in mentoring the generation of artivists that followed, all three continue to work

today. Despite the influence of Chicana feminist artivists on both the work and the collective

artivist community, gender and sexuality are often addressed separately, or as an added

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[27] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[28] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

[29] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[30] Goldman, "A Public Voice."

[31] Charlene Villaseñor Black, "Sacred Cults, Subversive Icons: Chicanas and the Pictorial Language of Catholicism," *Speaking Chicana* (1999): 134–174; Black, "New Fronteras," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 41, no. 2 (2016): 13–22; Black, "Introduction: P'adelante, P'atrás," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 1 (2015): 115–123.

[32] Karen Mary Davalos, "Anthropology and Chicana/o Studies: The Conversation that Never Was," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 23, no. 2 (1998): 13–45; Davalos, "The Art of Place: The Work of Diane Gamboa," *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (2012): 73–93; Davalos, "Sin vergüenza: Chicana feminist theorizing," *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1/2 (2008): 151–171.

characteristic, as opposed to being a central part of how we have come to understand an artivist practice as one that considers Chicana feminism from the beginning.

The Chicana in the CRDA is both a recovery of Chicana feminist artivists and a continuation of the work Hernández, Baca, López, and many other Chicana artivists have done. In fact, I argue that the work of these artists in the 1960s and '70s produced arts that created and centered Chicana feminist ways of knowing. By linking the theoretical work of Chicana feminist scholars with that of art historical scholarship, my purpose is to view the work of Chicanx and Latinx artists alongside the work of scholarship on art and feminism as interwoven bodies of artistic and political labor. Thus, I see the work of Chicana feminist theorists and activists coincides with Latinx artivists and their practices.

Secondly, the "Radical" in CRDA refers to the long history of Chicanx and Latinx artivists making work in solidarity with domestic and international struggles for freedom from oppression. This project was born out of a desire to both include the digital and trace the thread of internationalism in Chicanx and Latinx art. The influence and inclusion of international struggles for liberation has been a staple of political graphics from the 1960s to today. Cultural historian Cynthia Young traces the impact of liberation movements on the US left.[33] She refers to this phenomenon as a "time-space compression[34]" that helped "bridge geographic, ideological and experiential gaps" between US and Third World populations during the 1960s and early

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[33] According to Young, "Nearly thirty countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America declared formal independence in the 1960s alone. This wave of decolonization to U.S. activists has been vastly underestimated." Cynthia Ann Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

[34] The term was coined by David Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity an Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 1989. He mobilized it to describe the collapse of spatial barriers. Neil Smith takes up the term in "Geography, Difference and the Politics of Scale," in *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*, ed. Joe Doherty, Elspeth Graham, and Mo Malek (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1992), 57–79, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-22183-7_4.

1970s. Young contends that this "time-space compression" enabled US Third World Leftists to remain deeply engaged in the liberation struggles of Latin America, Africa, and Asia despite geographic and ideological distances. I would like to apply this notion in my work, to explain how digital platforms enable contemporary US artivists of color to be profoundly affected and engaged in international social justice causes, thus compressing notions of time and space via digital engagement, even leading to image-making that addresses these causes directly and in real time.

The" Digital" in CRDA is the impetus of this project, and the space and place where I apply the framework. Digital artivism provides a platform for artists to engage with multiple communities using a mixture of digital and printmaking methods that reveal the potential of cyberspace to disseminate a radical politics of difference. As I began to build my art practice in collaboration with other artivists online, I realized very quickly that Latinx artivists were using digital platforms to display their artwork and so much more. They were educating others on pertinent political and social issues, sharing concrete ways others could get involved via protest and event information, and shedding light on their creative process, giving viewers unprecedented access to their process. Most research on Latinx art and artists has historically centered on painting and muralism during the 1960s and has more recently shifted focus to thematic and groundbreaking exhibitions at major US museums. recently Claudia Zapata's "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age" inside of the catalogue for the exhibition *¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now* at the Smithsonian. Zapata connected the rise of digital methods with Chicanx graphic traditions. While a growing body of research has examined ways that Latinx creatives utilize the internet, much of the existing

literature does not address how the advent of the internet has changed the way artists produce, display, and engage with online communities.

Finally, the "Aesthetic" in the CRDA is the visual thread that connects the representational choices of graphics made in the 1960s and 70s, and after the digital turn (post 2000). I note that contemporary digital graphics contain similar aesthetics to those of their analog political poster predecessors. Notably, the use of a small quantity of vivid colors and black outlines, an inherited choice from printmaking, that in the digital has continued on. Also, the use of the human figure and portraiture, carries on the visual narrative of representing those most affected, contemporary digital political graphics continue the heavy use of the portrait and directly confront their viewers with the human figure. The aesthetic choices of contemporary digital artivism also either directly reference or are inspired by the previous generations of Black, Indigenous, Chicanx and Latinx artivists, for example, Jessica Sabogal's recent mural commission in San Francisco was partly an homage to Yolanda López, and her work with the Black Panther Party. Sabogal included the now iconic Black panther graphic by Emory Douglas from the party's newspaper masthead and juxtaposed it with a portrait of López. The aesthetic choices of contemporary artivists working with the digital realm are an active act of remembering and paying homage to previous iterations of political graphics. I discuss the aforementioned mural commission in detail in Chapter one.

In relation to art in the Chicano Movement, Maria Ochoa reminds us that "[t]he artwork produced by the artists in this history is embedded in the struggle for social justice, just as the word "art" is embedded in the Chicana/o Art Movement."[35] I examine how artivists respond to

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[35] María Ochoa, *Creative Collectives: Chicana Painters Working in Community 9* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 10.

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political issues nationally and internationally in real time using the digital realm. Using Chicana feminist ways of knowing, I document and understand the online and offline activities of all six artivists in this project. Online, all six artivists share their work, and also engage with those who follow their social media accounts, whether in the public comments section or in private messages. They also encourage and give feedback to other artivists and their work, as well as document their own creative process, at varying capacities. Offline, all six artivists continue to engage in art production and exhibition, and some continue to build and nourish the relationships to each other outside of the digital. For example, Barraza and Cervantes share a home, Rodriguez, and Salgado work within the same organization, and Sabogal and Blancas have been part of several mural painting commissions. These activities echo Ochoa's reminder of seeing the work as embedded in the Chicana/o Movement of the 1960s and 70s, in short, the CRDA enables us to see a continuity of commitment and collective work after the Chicana/o Movement. While the technology used to enact collectivity has changed, the ethos has remained embedded in the struggle for social justice and community care.

Furthermore, these practices continue into the digital space, as I will discuss in this project. I began to engage in what I term artivist networks of care, which I discuss in Chapter Five. Networks of artivists can be mindful and engage in what Gonzalez terms "Convivencia": "an aesthetic and moral philosophy in and around artivists organizing approaches, and art practice."[36] These ways of engaging with other artivists in "mind, body, spirit via participatory art practice"[37] online is the impetus for this research. They were educating others on pertinent political and social issues, sharing concrete ways others could get involved via protest and event

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[36] Gonzalez, *Chican@ Artivistas*, 106.

[37] Gonzalez, *Chican@ Artivistas*, 107.

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information, and shedding light on their creative process, giving viewers unprecedented access to their process.

In this project, I take a closer look at the digital turn, and how artists are creating communities online where their work is supported and shared, as well as the work of a digitally savvy generation of Chicanx political graphic artists. These artists, I argue, are creating and disseminating work digitally and utilizing digital platforms to amplify their work at an unprecedented scale. Thus, this requires a deeper look into the digital realm and its relationship to artivist practice.

The Digital Turn

At the turn of the millennium, it was easy to recognize the imperializing nature of transnational capitalism: it crosses all borders; it colonizes and subjectifies all citizens on different terms than ever before. Consequently, it is also imperative for us to not lose sight of the methods of the oppressed that were developed under previous modes of colonization, conquest, enslavement, and domination, for these are the guides necessary for establishing effective forms of resistance, under contemporary global conditions: they are key to the imagination of "post-coloniality" in its most utopian sense.[38]

I want to take up the thread of critique to think about how privileging some forms of intellectual production (texts) over others (collections)—and writing itself as the preeminent object and method of recuperation—renders an inmense body of Chicana intellectual labor "absent." While this privileging of writing over other forms of praxis has helped us to construct a

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[38] Cotera, as quoted in Espinoza et al., *Chicana Movidas.*

geneaology of texts that form the canon of Chicana Feminism today, it also constricts both our

understanding of the past and the practices through which we might recover that past.[39]

Although written almost two decades apart, Sandoval and Cotera's demands echo each

other, to continue to look for a multiplicity of methods and strategies of resistance, to not lose

sight of the methods (plural) that are used to imagine what a "post-coloniality" moment can look

like. Cotera's work of recuperating Chicana feminist collections, in the form of oral histories and

ephemera, became the "Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Collective," a project that began as

"a digital repository of oral histories and documents from women who were active at the nexus

of multiple movements in the long civil rights period"[40] to an active practice of collecting. To

borrow Cotera's language, I would like to pick up the thread of calling out the privileging of

writing as the dominant form of knowledge production, and of understanting not only our past

but also our present moment. How artivists use digital repositories of their artwork, as well as

how they choose to engage in political education and labor online, is as much a part of our

present as it is our future. By documenting and delineating this labor, I am privileging forms of

praxis that are not "texts" in the traditional sense of books, and the written volume—they are the

caption spaces of an online post, they are the comments section of a political graphic, with an

attached call to action and they are of course the graphics themselves.

How social movements raise awareness and call others to action have dramatically

changed with the use of social media platforms. This digital turn has also changed the scope of

distribution for the political poster, from a material object often produced for and handed out at

protests and rallies to an image shared by thousands on social media and printed in limited

quantities by artists themselves. What I mean by the digital turn is the shift from analog and

physical forms of making political graphics, to what has become Web 1.0 and later Web 2.0.

Whereas Web 1.0 was characterized by websites as static repositories of information, Web 2.0[41]

introduced a user-friendly social component, where websites and online spaces became places

for connection, conversations, and dynamic content building. Social networking sites, a

cornerstone of the Web 2.0 era, made their appearance in the mid-2000s, with the creation of

Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006, and later Instagram in 2010. The Web 2.0 moment signaled a

deep shift, one that Matthew Allen claims made Web 2.0 "the "in thing" in the heady re-

emergence of software and internet investment after the dot.com crash and before the far more

dramatic upheavals of the global financial crisis."[42]

   While much of my dissertation deals with the engagement of Chicanx and Latinx artivists

using Web 2.0 platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, there is an emerging use of Web 3.0

in the form of augmented reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) software in conjunction with art

practices, that I intend to be observant of for future directions of this work.[43] In sum, the

emergence of the Web as a whole, introduced a new platform for Chicanx artivists to display,

and distribute work, and has led to incredibly effective political graphics that have mobilized

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[41] The term Web.20 was coined by Tim O'Reilly, and is defined loosely by him as "the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an 'architecture of participation,' and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences." See Tim O'Reilly, "Web 2.0: Compact Definition...," October 1, 2005, http://radar.oreilly.com/2005/10/web-20-compact-definition.html.

[42] Allen, 177.

[43] Claudia Zapata discusses the use of AR in the work of Zeke Peña, and names it a part of Pena's "evolving transmedia practice, part of a legacy of experimentation with AR technology among Chicanx graphic artists." Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 145.

many towards action. One of the ways these graphics drive action is in the act of sharing and reposting. As Zapata explains, "sharing is a common practice among Web 2.0 artists, where the image exists in artists websites, blogs, social media channels, and often in print form."[44] By sharing images both within social media channels and making the image file accessible via their websites and blogs, artists create "open-source artwork" by "allowing their images to be shared and supplemented."[45]

The ways in which Chicanx artists heed the call of social movements and currently perform what Sandoval calls "effective forms of resistance, under contemporary global conditions" comes with a digital toolkit of programs like Photoshop, photo editing software and social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to deliver the images to the communities in need. This is what Latorre and Sandoval call a "Chicana/o twenty-first-century digital arts movement."[46] The creative digital work being done by contemporary self-identified "artivists"—artists who intentionally combine the word artist and activist as part of their practice, and whose creative labor includes graphic art, muralism, film, and music to name a few—form part of the lineage of the Chicana/o Art Movement." The combination of artist and activist is not exclusive to one genre of art or form of expression, but it carries an assumption that the work produced is primarily political and engages communities online and offline. My intention aligns with that of artists working in the twenty-first century: to bridge digital art, artivism, and the influence of Chicana feminist theories on contemporary art practices. The practice referred to as

[44] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 144.

[45] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 145.

[46] Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color," *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media* (2008): 83.

"artivism" is a "hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism."[47] I use the word *artivist* to refer to the work of contemporary artists who advance political struggles for liberation, by race, class, gender, and sexuality.[48]

Thus, the work of digital artivism and by extension, the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic, has Chicana feminist epistemologies as its very foundations. The CRDA is a praxis preoccupied with creating images that raise awareness for global movements for social justice, retaining ancestral knowledges, and politicizing the social media landscape. As much a part of the cultural and social movement practices, I propose that it is also an interpretive framework or lens of analysis that I theorize to analyze those practices. It builds on uses of Chicana feminist scholarship to analyze the revolution of social media for the distribution of visual culture. This praxis and theoretical framework also seek to shed light on an entirely different context of reception for political art. The use of social media to disseminate work is not only much more immediate; it has changed how it is received. The reception and praise for digital artivism are immediate and engages a broader audience, and embodies the interdisciplinarity of this project, as scholar Genevieve Carpio exclaims, the digital "has created a critical ground for American studies and ethnic studies students to apply engaged practice in order to investigate the power relations embedded in the digital realm."[49]

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[47] Sandoval and Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism," 82.

[48] Mobilizing of the word "artivist" has also been done by Chicana feminist scholar Martha Gonzalez, in her book about East Los Angeles artist-activist musical communities. See Gonzalez, *Chican@ Artivistas*.

[49] Genevieve G. Carpio, "Racial Projections: Cyberspace, Public Space, and the Digital Divide," *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no. 2 (2018): 174–190.

The political poster has changed over time from printed material to digital graphic artivist tool. My focus is this very transition of the political poster form and the second life the images live as they become pixels shared by others, thus filling the gap between the work of Chicana/o Movement-era poster arts and the work of contemporary graphic artivists distributed across multiple digital platforms.

One of the key artists to this digital turn is Alma Lopez, whose digital prints and collages, I argue, signal a shift in methods for Chicanx artists. Lopez's work has been identified by Chicana scholars Maria Herrera-Sobek and Guisela Latorre as a "Chicana feminist visual discourse that thrives on the flexibility and dynamism of digital expression."[50] The medium of the digital collage allows Lopez to remix old and new iconographies with her original work. There is extensive work on Lopez's digital and painting-focused works,[51] including writing by Lopez herself on the controversy of her piece "Our Lady,"[52] and its ensuing censorship in Santa Fe, New Mexico. For this project, I am especially interested in advancing the contributions of feminist scholars Cristina Serna and Catherine Ramirez. Serna connects the work of Lopez to the work of artists remixing iconography in Mexico. Serna argues that "Art-based Encuentros are particularly productive sites of transborder dialogue"[53] between Chicana and Latina feminist

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[50] María Herrera-Sobek, Guisela M. Latorre, and Alma Lopez, "Digital Art, Chicana Feminism, and Mexican Iconography: A Visual Narrative by Alma Lopez in Naples, Italy," *Chicana/Latina Studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 68.

[51] Lopez's work has been the focus of numerous articles, and art anthology chapters such as Martin-Baron, Michelle." Our Lady of Controversy: Alma Lopez's Irreverent Apparition," *Hemispheric Institute* 11, no 1 (2014); Luz Calvo, "Art Comes for the Archbishop: The Semiotics of Contemporary Chicana Feminism and the Work of Alma Lopez" and Jennifer A. Gonzalez, "Introduction to Part III: Bodily Aesthetics and Iconologies," in *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Jennifer A. Gonzalez, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega, and Terezita Romo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 177–181.

[52] Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Alma López, eds., *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's "Irreverent Apparition"* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

[53] Cristina Serna, "Locating A Transborder Archive of Queer Chicana Feminist and Mexican Lesbian Feminist Art," *Feminist Formations* 29, no. 3 (2017): 49, https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2017.0030.

artists. This transborder analysis supports this project's focus on the internationalist praxis of

Chicanx and Latinx artivists, whose work is both influenced by artivism beyond the nation state

and influences other artivists abroad as well. Serna argues that Lopez's work and that of Mexican

art collective *Las Sucias* are "within and against the borders of Mexican and Chicana/o social

movement rhetorical dialogues."[54] It is the playfulness with which Lopez handles these rhetorical

boundaries that I take as my departure for this project on digital tools and strategies. Secondly,

Ramirez's seminal article on Chicanafuturism[55] in the work of artist Marion C. Martinez and her

mixed media sculptures serves as another departure point for us to consider the Chicana artists

whose use of technology—both as material and tool to make art—laid the foundation for a

contemporary digital Chicanx arts praxis. In the next section, I go into detail on how Chicanx

and Latinx artivists used technology at the advent of the internet.

It is Lopez's use of digital methods such as Photoshop, email, and website building that

enables her practice to evolve and become a key tool in her arsenal to create new visual

vocabularies. As Zapata details, her praxis results in a form of "digital rasquachismo"[56] and her

"digital collage integrates digitized postcards, photographs, and digital graphics."[57] Thus, Zapata

created a distinct style that emerged out of the use of software such as Photoshop, a raster

graphic manipulating program.

Lopez's *Ixta* (1999) is a key example of this remixing, and Lopez's self-described

"queering" form of digital editing.[58] Through a queer retelling of the Aztec legend that surrounds

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[54] Serna, "Locating A Transborder Archive," 76.

[55] Catherine Ramírez, "Deus Ex Machina: Tradition, Technology, and the Chicanafuturist Art of Marion C. Martinez," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 29, no. 2 (October 1, 2004): 55–92.

[56] Luz Calvo qtd. In Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 137.

[57] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 137.

[58] Lopez qtd. In Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 137.

Mexico City's twin volcanoes, Lopez's collage references one of the most familiar images to Mexican-Americans, which depicts the Aztec warrior Popocatepetl and his bride Ixtaccihuatl, who took her life because she believed Popocatepetl would not return from battle alive. Lopez saw this image growing up, and as she recalls, the image was "usually printed in calendars and given at the end of the year. The calendars were given as gifts by commercial establishments such as restaurants, bakeries (*panaderias*), and other places."[59] This image made Lopez wonder about how heteronormative ideas of marriage were used to socialize her and other women at a young age. Instead, Lopez used digital means to retell the legend: "Popo has left, and now we have another Ixta. Depicted are the picture of my two friends, Cristina, and Mirna. They are situated on the border between the United States and Mexico, looking from Mexico to California." By replacing the romantic protagonist of the story, hyper-masculine warrior "Popo" with a woman, Lopez allows for a new story to come to the fore, one that can affirm queer love in a contemporary moment, with the border as the site of contact.

Herrera-Sobek cites Lopez as part of a generation of Chicanx artists who use digital means to create and disseminate work, such as Judy Baca and Patricia Rodriguez.[60] Baca, a muralist, uses digital means to create large-scale digital murals via her direction of her non-profit arts organization, Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), as well as UCLA's digital mural lab, a "research, teaching and production facility…devoted to the creation of large-scale digitally generated murals, public art productions, and community cultural development practices." [61]The mark of this generation of Chicanx artists is their use of digital means for

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[59] Herrera-Sobek et al., "Digital Art, Chicana Feminism, and Mexican Iconography," 85.

[60] Herrera-Sobek et al., "Digital Art, Chicana Feminism, and Mexican Iconography."

[61] "About the Digital Mural Lab – SPARC Digital/Mural Lab," accessed July 23, 2021, https://digitalmurallab.com/dml/about-the-dml/.

production of their artworks. This generation uses digital means to further their art practice or process. However, they do not use social media for the dissemination of their work, which is due in large part to the limitations of social media in the early 2000s. I argue that artists such as Lopez and Baca laid the foundations of the current engaged digital artivism of Yañez, Salgado, and Cervantes, who in addition to remixing iconography, use digital means to disseminate and exhibit their work.

Figure 3. Alma Lopez, *Ixta*, 1999, digital print. Special thanks to Cristina Serna and Mirna Tapia.

Techie Collectives of the 2000s

Sitting at the juncture of what media scholars have dubbed Web 2.0*,* the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic, and a blatantly racist, white-supremacist administration, US-based Chicanx artivists must act and produce work in response to these dire circumstances. In showcasing the digital means that Chicanx artivists use to communicate the ideas of their work and extend their political consciousness to others online, I do not seek to perpetuate what Morozov calls *cyber-*

utopianism or the inability to see the internet's negative impacts on society and the assumption that online communication is inherently emancipatory—and Internet-centrism—a tendency to consider all political and social changes through the prism of the internet."[62] The latter is an impetus for my framing of the political poster as a technology born out of the 1960s Chicanx Civil Rights Movements—I situate the generations of artists who have worked with analog tools to produce political graphics, in order to avoid the totalizing nature of Internet-centrism. Rather my aim is to highlight the ways in which Chicanx artists are remixing and harnessing the medium of the political poster to respond via social media platforms.

One of the initiatives that remixed the skillset of printmaking and the emerging coding language of HTML and graphic design was the Oakland-based design firm "TUMIS," founded in 2000, by muralist Estria Miyashiro and visual artist Favianna Rodriguez. Described as "a people-of-color owned company with a vertically integrated team of planners, designers, artists, and computer programmers."[63] TUMIS focuses on providing "high-quality graphic design for socially engaged nonprofits and youth organizations."[64] This initiative utilized Rodriguez's background as a student organizer and collaborator and "merged digital design skills with fine art print technologies (particularly serigraph, relief print, monoprint, and letterpress)."[65] The firm also enlisted Rodriguez's vast network of community artists like Jesus Barraza, who would later found "Taller Tupac Amaru" with Rodriguez. In our interview, Barraza, an Oakland-based

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[62] Evgeny Morozov, "The Dark Side of Internet Freedom: The Net Delusion," *New York: Public Affairs*, 2011.

[63] "TUMIS – About," n.d., accessed March 18, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/pg/tumisinc/about/?ref=page_internal.

[64] Dylan A. T. Miner, *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 183.

[65] Miner, *Creating Aztlán*, 183.

artivist and longtime collaborator of Rodriguez, explains the interest in coding and website

building around the time of TUMIS's founding as a community interest. He stated:

> If we go back to 1995, my friends Jose Lopez and Marco Palma, we were learning
> html from our friend, Daniel Santillano and he was like doing a class on html. So,
> we learned all this html. So, we became really interested in technology and the
> Internet like early on and we, for "La Voz de Berkeley," the newspaper. We had a
> shitty, but we had a website, and were trying to put all their stuff online. And Favi
> [Rodriguez], like when you look back. she was doing a lot of stuff online. And in
> 1999, right around that time, the reason me and Favi were working together, cause
> we were also working together with, Jose and Marco and we had this thing called
> "10/12" and that name came from October 12th, the date of invasion. That was
> the name of our techie collective. And so, we were doing graphic design and we
> had this whole mission of like "How do we bring technology to the hood?" And
> so that's kind of what sets us up to also do graphic design. So, when Favi was
> starting that business TUMIS we have that client base, but it was also, it became a
> digital, like we were also like in the digital world, we have this design firm, we
> started making websites, we offered these services to nonprofit organizations
> mainly.

Barraza's reflections on the turn of the twenty-first century reveal a collective desire to harness

digital tools for the benefit of "the hood," the Oakland community in which Barraza and his

collaborators resided and worked. Also, Rodriguez and Barraza were introduced to coding via a

friend and did not undergo formal training in HTML or other coding languages. Technology

initiatives such as "TUMIS" and the tech collective "10/12" enable us to see the ways in which

artivists leveraged their own fine-art skillsets with emerging technologies and built a digital

presence via website building and graphic design prior to the emergence of social media

platforms. This pre-social media digital activism is key in understanding the intergenerational

efforts of the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic.

I highlight the technologies that artivists like Barraza and Rodriguez engaged in prior to

the late 2000s to resist the notion that older generations of artivists lack the technological savvy

to leverage social media platforms for their work. Instead, what my interviews revealed was a

deeply varied set of expertise, and vastly different levels of comfort with social media platforms across all six artivists.

Digital media scholar Daniel Punday identifies the two most significant trends in internet scholarship. First was a cyber-utopianism, which was then reinforced by the second wave of scholarship on online discourse. Punday contends that critics have "lost confidence in the socially transformative possibilities of online discourse"[66] instead of pessimistic theorizing. In relation, Lisa Nakamura examines the ways in which race is constructed in cyberspace, and how it is deployed in what she calls "creative coalition-building that creates a sense of community and racial identity online."[67] Nakamura's contributions frame my analysis of the twenty-first century's generation of artivists; I draw upon her notion of the internet as a space where 1) racial inequity persists, and 2) as a discursive and rhetorical space, a place where "race" is created.[68] I do this to advance the notion that the internet is a necessary venue for research in regards to race, for the fields of art history and Chicanx studies alike. Scholarship of digital media-making practices within the field of Chicanx Studies is a small but growing body of work.[69]

Most notably, within the space of the Artist Communiqué of *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies,* where Rio Yañez reflects on the social media influence of his work and that of his peers, and how their own fashioning of themselves online leads to socially transformative potential. The format of a communiqué allows artists to bring the politics of social media into a

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[66] Daniel Punday, *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (New York: Springer, 2003), 204.

[67] Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xiii.

[68] Nakamura, *Cybertypes*, xiii.

[69] Sandoval and Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism"; Arturo J. Aldama, "Millennial Anxieties: Borders, Violence and the Struggle for Chicana/O Subjectivity," *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 2 (1998): 41–62; Carlos Francisco Jackson, "The Chicanx Poster Workshop: A Space Where Subjectivity Is Produced," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 42, no. 1 (2017): 257–72.

space such as the academic journal. In his own communiqué for the journal's Spring 2013 issue, Yañez took the opportunity to address the use of digital platforms in Chicanx art: "As I came to master the language of Chicano politics, art and culture I also tried my best to keep my tongue sharp with the latest Internet short hands and memes. Yet, there was a collective lack of engagement of Chicano activism in this quickly growing culture. There was no concerted effort to spread ideas and activism utilizing the semiotics of social media."[70] Yañez exclaims the lack of interest in using digital tools to articulate Chicanx activist bodies of knowledge, a project he sought to do in his own digital works.

Yañez's piece *Batman and Anzaldúa* (2014) is a concerted effort in this direction. With famed superhero Batman confidently standing atop what appears to be a skyscraper, the image depicts a night sky, with Chicana lesbian feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa standing boldly beside him, her hands set into closed fists, on her waist. Behind each of them is a projection of the "bat signal"—Batman's on the left, Anzaldúa's on the right. Her "bat-signal" is a reproduction of illustration of Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, which formed part of the cover of her groundbreaking work, *Borderlands: La Nueva Mestiza.* There is a small body of text at the bottom left of the image that reads "Smashing crime and borders with Mestizaje!" (Figure 4). Using what he calls "internet short hands," Yañez places Chicana theorists on the same plane as comic superheroes, elevating Chicanx iconography to popular icons for social justice. Yañez's work meets the criteria of the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic*,* it is created with social justice in mind, retains ancestral knowledges (such as that of Chicana feminist epistemologies via Anzaldúa) and politicizes the social media landscape with Chicanx representations.

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[70] Rio Yañez, "Aztlán on Blast: Social Media Art," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 38, no. 1 (2013): 255.

Figure 4. Rio Yañez, *Batman and Anzaldúa*, 2014, digital media.

Furthermore, the text on the image signals to solidarity with contemporary immigrant rights social movements, who call for the abolition of borders that deeply affect the Latinx community, in the form of state and legal violence.[71] Chicanx artivists use their own work to reimagine ways to make Chicanx political consciousness legible to a rapidly changing digital environment. I contend that the work of Yañez and Salgado portray what Belk theorized as an "extension of self" in a digital world. Belk posited that "knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves."[72] The article posited that our individual selves are extended by our possessions, from ideas to actual goods, Belk argues that a person has "an inner core self as well as aggregate selves ranging from family to neighborhood to nation. Enhancing these self-constructions are various possessions, which are regarded by their owners as having different degrees of centrality to one or more of their

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[71] Cecilia Menjívar and Leisy Abrego, "Legal Violence: Immigration Law and the Lives of Central American Immigrants 1," *American Journal of Sociology* 117, no. 5 (2012).

[72] Russell W. Belk, "Extended Self in a Digital World," *Journal of Consumer Research* 40, no. 3 (2013): 477–500.

individual or aggregate senses of self."[73] Artists working within the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic engage in an extension of self that includes their ideas around Chicanx cultural iconography and ancestral knowledge. It is this very repository that allows them to have large followings on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Thus, the space of the image caption, the blog entry that accompanies images, and the social media status updates become an extended self, part of the possessions of the artivist in a digital world. It is in these liminal spaces of the caption that artists can speak back to the very racial inequity Nakamura calls attention to, this can be seen in Julio Salgado's *Destroy White Supremacist Thoughts* (2015), a piece that depicts a young woman smashing a computer with a baseball bat. Inside of the screen, Salgado included a screen capture of hateful anti-immigrant comments. The large graphic letters on the image read: "Destroy White Supremacist Media, Laws, Beliefs, and Actions Now!" (Figure 5). Calling attention to the ways in which the work of artivists shows the frustration with racism in the United States and hate-speech online is a way to resist cyber-utopianism and bring forth richer multidimensional experiences of artivism. In the following section, I look at the work of Salgado closer, and the ways he uses social media platforms to build community.

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[73] Belk, "Extended Self in a Digital World," 478.

Figure 5. Julio Salgado, *Destroy White Supremacist Thoughts*, 2015, digital graphic, Oakland, California.

The turn from analog to digital affected the way artists, especially artivists, engaged in their work. While early adoptees of internet technologies and software were Chicanx and Latinx artivists looking to achieve greater access to information for themselves and their communities, the gap widened over time due to pre-existing inequalities along race, gender, and class. The 2000s and 2010s were transformative for Chicanx and Latinx artivists, who used social media technologies to both create shareable art and gain further exposure, as well as eliminate the gallery space as the only place where their work could be sold and seen. Through the lens of the CRDA, this digital turn is made legible to show how social media was integrated into an intergenerational artivist practice. Thus, the aesthetics of the work changed slightly to

accommodate the digital format, but the graphic traditions remained, mainly in the form of vivid colors and black outlines, as well as the use of figures and portraiture to convey political causes. The digital thus provided a visual archive and thereby created a visual cut-and-mix style, and an intergenerational aesthetic conversation.

Methodologies

From 2012 to 2015, I served as outreach coordinator for the UCLA chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, a Palestinian solidarity organization comprised of undergraduate and graduate students from diverse backgrounds whose goal was to raise awareness to the campus community of the Israeli occupation and the conditions under which Palestinians and the larger diaspora endure. It was in this organization that I was able to use my creative skillset to coordinate and create visual campaigns, as well as give over sixty presentations to campus and Los Angeles organizations on the points of solidarity between Latinxs and Palestinians. I did this work in conjunction with doctoral coursework and graduate program demands. This experience led to the current iteration of my portraiture-based art practice, as I was often called to create flyers for events and speaking engagements. I began sharing my artwork online via social media in 2014 shortly before I left the organization, and over time, developed relationships that vary in closeness with all artivists in this project. I approached the interviews with each artivists as an opportunity to discuss their work and as a chance to speak about technical aspects of their creative process.

As an artist, I asked questions that pertained to their motivations and choices for their work, as well as their digital presence and digital distribution and exhibition workflows. I conducted in-depth interviews with each artivists in various venues. For example, while Jesus Barraza and I were both working at Self Help Graphics in Boyle Heights, I recorded our

interview conversation in 2018 in the print studio. After each color was laid down, Barraza would use the break to chat with me. Julio Salgado, whom I first met when we were both undergraduates at California State University, Long Beach circa 2009, welcomed me into his home and did two interview sessions in 2019. I emailed my interview questions to Melanie Cervantes in the Fall of 2019, and she graciously answered them inside a Google document, taking time to edit and add to the document. The rest of the interviews (Rodriguez, Sabogal, and Blancas) were recorded phone calls in the Winter of 2019. I transcribed all interviews and kept a separate record of memos that contained observations and reflections of each experience. The act of maintaining bonds of friendship and formalizing the process via interviews, as well as discussing each artist's work and life, stems from the encouragement of my femtor Maylei Blackwell.[74] Additionally, I conducted visual analysis of works of art, and textual analysis of accompanying captions and metadata from each artists' social media posts. I posit that the space of the caption in social media posts of an artist's image or artwork are *autohistoriateorias*[75] and take the place of a formal artist statement to introduce the motivation of the work to a digital audience. Finally, I discussed with each artist logistics and ideas about their portrait mainly by email and social media correspondence and sent a picture of the final painting for their approval. I detail this process in Chapter Four.

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[74] Blackwell's piece on Chicana artist Ester Hernández inspired how I navigated the interview process and framed the work of conversations with each artist as an ongoing project that celebrates multiple trajectories of art making. See "Women Who Make Their Own Worlds: The Life and Work of Ester Hernández" in Dionne Espinoza, Maria Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 138.

[75] In her essay, "Now Let Us Shift . . . The Path of Conocimiento . . . Inner Work, Public Acts," Gloria Anzaldúa introduces what she terms *Autohistoriateoria,* used specifically to describe the "genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements—an *Autohistoriateoria* is a personal essay that theorizes" (578).

My goal is that this project urges us to think about the tangible ways in which we support artists whose work contributes to our political consciousness in the United States and abroad. In the conclusion, I discuss the process of how the portraits were made, and the ways the digital enabled myself and the artists to navigate the process of making them, from soliciting reference images to discussing color and flower choices. The production of these six artworks is not an isolated incident, but rather an intentional part of my pedagogy and research process. This work's purpose was to reciprocate and honor the labor and time each artist offered me in the making of this project; multiple artists graciously agreed to follow-up interviews, and some provided detailed written answers to my questions. While it is a more common practice to compensate participants in research with gift cards or honorariums, I wanted the offering to reflect what those in this project and myself commit to—artistic practices that transcend academic spaces. To the artists with whom I collaborated in this series of portraits, the format and concept of the "trade" within creative communities is normal and common. Thus, in painting and creating artwork that was gifted to each artist, I hope to make legible the ways in which artists make space for care and use their art as a currency alternative. While this practice is uncommon in academic research, it reflects my positionality and membership in artivist community outside of UCLA. My aim is to encourage us to honor and support artivists in life by sharing their work, crediting them for their art, and paying them fair wages for their labor, so that they can continue to do their work in sustainable ways. This approach also enriches my scholarship by providing an added layer of depth and collaboration between academic and visual ways of knowing and reflects the importance of interdisciplinary work in making legible the ways artivists use their skillsets to hold space for each other and a larger network.

Chapter Breakdown

In the introduction, "Art is the Movement: The Chicanx Political Poster and its Digital Turn," I delineate the transition of the political poster tradition of the Chicana/o civil rights era movement to what I call its "digital turn," a transition from analog printed matter to digital graphic. These twenty-first-century graphics, whose roots come from the serigraph and social movement protest poster, indicate the ways in which contemporary Latinx artivists take the graphic style of printmaking and its use of image and text into a digital-sharing landscape. This chapter also highlights the efforts of Barraza, Cervantes, and Rodriguez as early adopters of Web 1.0 technologies and digital poster making. I argue that this turn, viewed through the lens of the Chicana Radical Aesthetic, makes visible the intergenerational dialogue of aesthetic practices, and the inspiration taken from Cuban political graphics by US-based Latinx artivists.

The first chapter, "The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Internationalism Perspectives in Chicanx Art," tracks the internationalist vein of Chicanx and later Latinx political graphics. Social movement scholars such as Cynthia Young assert the effect radical print can have on a generation of US-based activists, and how it can deeply influence their tactics and self-actualization. My work and that of Young seek to examine how activists of color, primarily women and queer artivists in the US, reacted to international liberation struggles, and how this influenced their creative labor, as well as how these cultural workers understood themselves and their strategies of resistance. Thus, I argue that the political posters produced during the 1960s and beyond exemplify the relationship between the global and the local, its negotiation, and how specific strategies are used in the US but have roots outside of it.

Chapter One's discussion lays bare one of the main tenets of the CRDA—the internationalist vein of Chicanx and Latinx political graphics. This chapter also maps the

influence of Cuban and Mexican print cultures in the work of Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes, primarily in their collaboration, *Dignidad Rebelde*, a print studio that has produced hundreds of posters for the Oakland community and beyond in their more than ten years in existence.

The second chapter, "Miramé: Portraiture as Re-Inscription of Working-Class Aesthetics in Latinx Art," focuses on the self-portrait and advocates for the radical potential of contemporary portraiture made and shared by Latinx artivists. In particular, the work of Julio Salgado and Jessica Sabogal strategically uses portraiture to uplift the likeness of marginalized individuals, as well as inscribe class politics into their portrait work. Traditionally a medium that was employed by wealthy elites as a status symbol, portraiture in the twenty-first century digital landscape is mobilized by Latinx artivists to showcase bodies outside of the normative beauty standards of society at large.

The third chapter, "Bearing Witness Digitally to the Bodies of Work of Favianna Rodriguez and Melanie Cervantes," argues that one of the key characteristics of work done through the lens of the CRDA is alignment of body and art. Here, I look at the embodied practices of Favianna Rodriguez and Melanie Cervantes. I argue that their strategy of embodiment is one of multiple scales—their own physical bodies as well as their larger environment and the "digital" spaces they inhabit. Furthermore, I examine the ways their work creates what I term "digital witnessing" and strengthens the bond between artivist and online public.

The last chapter, "From the Digital to IRL: Contemporary Artivist Networks of Care," examines how the internet has helped create and develop online and offline networks of support among artivists. I focus on the case of Elizabeth Blancas and her femtor Jessica Sabogal. This

chapter uses the CRDA to look at how a Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic not only enacts a

radical politics through the artwork but extends into the relationships that neglect a capitalist

disposability politics, and instead facilitate intergenerational learning and collaboration. These

relationships, "which developed through online and offline interaction, highlight the ways in

which our current digital landscape can support working-class artists of color. Constant

communication via private messaging on social media fosters partnerships that bridge physical

distance, enabling artists of color to develop digital artivist kinship networks that provide a

system of support and increase opportunities for exposure, income, and social capital."[76]

The dissertation concludes with a reflection on the portraiture series that came out of this

study, titled "Give Us Our Flowers," The title of the series articulates my belief that artivists of

color—who work to dismantle structural oppression—should be nourished while alive, not

ignored until after their deaths. The series emerged out of a commitment to the individuals and

collaborators whom I interviewed—it is an engaged form of scholarship that centered reciprocity

and actively engaged the values of the CRDA by focusing on community care, as well as an

artivist research practice.

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[76] Angelica Becerra, "Give Us Our Flowers: Latinx Artivist Portraits," CSRC Post (blog), October 15, 2019, https://thecsrcpost.com/2019/10/15/give-us-our-flowers-latinx-artivist-portraits/.

CHAPTER ONE: THE AESTHETICS OF SOLIDARITY: INTERNATIONALISM
PERSPECTIVES IN CHICANX ART

This chapter 1) focuses on the internationalist roots of Chicanx artivism[1] between 1965

and 1995, locating the contributions of Chicana feminist printmakers from the post-Vietnam

period to the end of the twentieth century, and 2) frames solidarity as a strategy in the cultural

work of Chicana artists specifically. A survey of the literature around the Chicana/o Movement

and the Chicana/o Left during this time reveals a trove of information on the internationalist

politics of Chicanx activists during the 1960s and '70s, a period widely recognized as the birth of

the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement in the United States.[2] The internationalist vein in Chicanx

art had been a focus of several books and articles, primarily emphasizing the links between US-

based art and artists and Latin America.[3] My contribution seeks to 1) highlight how the digital

has enabled more immediate action, and 2) identify links between US-based artivists on

international issues such as sovereignty in the Middle East and immigration from Central

America.

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[1] The practice referred to as "artivism" is a "hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism." Defined in Sandoval and Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism," 82.

[2] The period between 1965 and 1975 is important to revisit for my discussion on the visual culture that developed more specifically the focus on non-domestic issues. Mariscal argues that the epicenter of this social change lies in the Southwest, where Chicanx youth demanded to be taken seriously as social actors and as a community deserving of equal rights. He calls this an exercise that will "restore historical memory" particularly for Latinx youth born after the 1970s and scholars alike. See George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975*.

[3] Scholars who do pay attention to this context include Cary Cordova, *The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Politics in San Francisco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). On the multiethnic demographics and transnational concerns of the Mission's Latinx arts movement, see Ella Maria Diaz, *Flying Under the Radar with the Royal Chicano Air Force Mapping a Chicano/a Art History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

Alan E. Gómez provides some preliminary answers with his book-length study on the cultural labor of artists and activists in the United States and Latin America.[4] In his first chapter, "Cartographies of the Chicana/o Left," Gómez takes this question to task: Could this be due to what Laura Pulido refers to as "ambivalence, at best, toward anti-capitalism"[5] in Chicana/o Movement histories? I argue that this is precisely the work that must be done to include the internationalism in Chicanx political graphics; both posters from the 1960s and 1970s as well as the digital graphics produced today by a new generation of Chicanx cultural workers reflect a long lineage of internationalist solidarity politics.

As Chicanx art scholar Karen Mary Davalos contends, "methodology of Chicana/o art history has consistently turned to a binary to characterize Chicana/o art and artists in the following ways: political versus commercial art, etc."[6] Following in Davalos' approach, my aim in centering the internationalist vein of Chicanx and Latinx artivism is not to reinforce a binary analytical strain, but rather to account for the practices the digital turn has exacerbated, and to link the internationalist politics of previous generations of Latinx artists to the praxis of artivists in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Art historians such as Davalos and Reinoza[7] have spearheaded efforts to resist a binary approach, in the service of a more nuanced and complex analysis of Chicanx art practices.

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[4] Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico: Chicana/O Radicalism, Solidarity Politics, and Latin American Social Movements*.

[5] Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, 19:3.

[6] Karen Mary Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix: Art and Errata Since the Sixties* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 4.

[7] Tatiana Reinoza's essayReinoza, "War at Home: Conceptual Iconoclasm in American Printmaking." is deeply encouraging to my work, in that it links the critiques of home and homeland from artivists in the US to the Vietnam War and the rise of military dictatorships in Latin America. Thus, resisting a binary of western prosperity, and inserting the solidarity of BIPOC artivists with conflict abroad.

When locating the internationalist agenda of Chicanxs in the wake of the Vietnam War, for example, it is important to discuss how this conflict was only one of multiple issues Chicanxs organized around at the time. Cultural critic George Mariscal referred to revisionist histories that leave out political involvement during this time as a deprivation for future generations:

> Revisionist historians (some of Mexican American descent) have deprived future generations of a complete portrayal of Chicano/a activism in one of the more revolutionary periods in American history. The reality of the *Movimiento* between the crucial years of 1965 and 1975 was one of great intellectual ferment in which competing political agendas vied for the attention of ethnic Mexican youth.[8]

In *Brown-Eyed Children,* he uses two key moments in history to frame his argument: the death of Bobby Kennedy, and Carlos Santana's performance at Woodstock. Mariscal demonstrates how the 1960s were a period where Mexican American activists "developed a complex critique of traditional assimilation and melting pot discourses in order to transform themselves into Chicanas and Chicanos."[9]

In turn, this signals to the Chicana/o Movement[10] and the activism that led to the adoption of a term that was thought of as pejorative at the time, to reclaim agency and reject narratives of the Mexican American community in dominant US history. This decade presented a different type of mobilization and activism from Mexican American youth than in previous time periods. It contained what Ybarra-Frausto referred to as "mythic qualities" which were necessary for the Movement as a political project to take place. Mariscal also argues that the Chicana/o Movement lacked "an ideological focus," yet it proved to be a challenge to dominant narratives of US citizenship, and the role and place of ethnic minorities during the 1960s. What Mariscal is

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[8] Mariscal, "Left Turns in the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975."

[9] Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 3.

[10] I use "Chicana/o Movement" and Chicana/o Left" instead of "Chicano Movement" because the former is gender-inclusive and generally accepted in the field of Chicanx Studies. I use the word "Chicano" only when quoting sources or discussing organizations that use the term.

referring to is also what happened to the artwork of the 1960s. We tend to focus on specific

issues, such as farmworker activism or education; these constitute the mythic qualities that

Ybarra-Frausto references. This is felt through the handful of political Chicanx posters that have

unfortunately acted as stand-ins for more than thirty years of production.[11] Prints such as Ester

Hernandez's *Sun Mad* (1982) (Figure 6) and Xavier Viramontes's *Boycott Grapes* (1973)

(Figure 7) tend to be cited repeatedly. It is also important to note that these posters are

understood as divorced from internationalism, despite these artists having engaged with issues

outside of the United States in their work. For example, Hernandez's "Tejido de los

Desaparecidos/Weaving of the Disappeared" brought awareness to "the bodies of the

disappeared by political repression in many Latin American countries, from Guatemala to

Argentina to Chile."[12] Hernandez's work is "an expression of transnational protest and

solidarity,"[13] yet it is not a widely circulated image within the Chicana/o art movement.

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[11] Fox, "Tremors in Paradise, 1960–1980," 197.

[12] Clara Román-Odio, "Transnational Alliances, US Third World Feminism, and Chicana Mestizaje in Ester Hernández's Visual Art," *Latino Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 329.

[13] Román-Odio, "Transnational Alliances," 330.
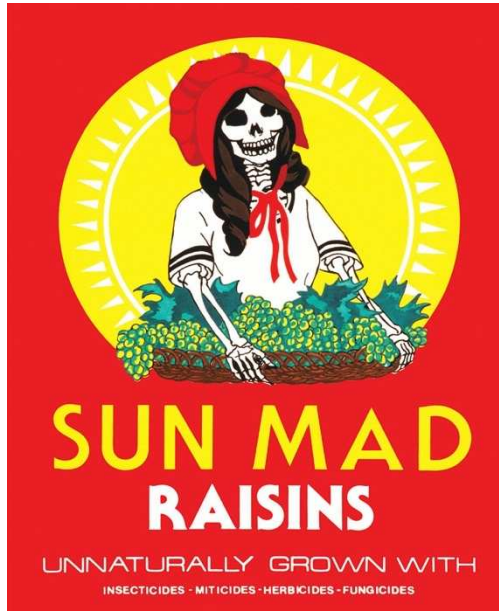
Figure 6. Ester Hernández, *Sun Mad*, 1982, silkscreen.
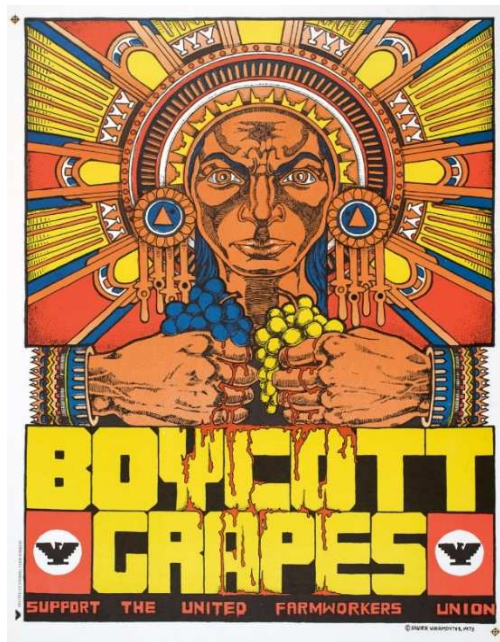
Figure 7. Xavier Miramontes, *Boycott Grapes*, 1973, offset lithograph.

Both images also reflect solidarity with domestic issues, such as the Delano Grape Strike

in solidarity with the United Farm Workers in 1965. The continued usage of iconic images such

as these does the multi-issue and internationalist agenda of the Chicana/o Left a disservice, as

well as provides an inaccurate art historical record of the issues that influenced the Chicana/o

Movement. Mariscal contends that the Movimiento and Viet Nam war produced "a complex

range of organizing strategies and ideological positions that were unknown at earlier stages of

the Chicano/Mexicano resistance."[14]

This shift from focusing on historical accuracy to instead highlighting the strategies of a

social movement is also a guiding conceptual framework in Cynthia Young's *Soul Power:*

Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left, published a year after

Mariscal's *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun.* Young contends that the way in which activists

engaged in resistance during the 1960s was in direct response to the Cold War; consequently,

this shift from "politics to culture" is the space within which Young enters the conversation. This

turn toward cultural work was not unproductive; it created innovative artworks and antiracist

critiques. It showed the influence of the global view of the Third World and spoke back to it.

What is less known from the Latinx political tradition is the international political

solidarity that emerged. In her recent essay, "De Campesina a Internacionalista," Chicana

political activist Olga Talamante reveals the struggle to be in solidarity with internationalist

movements while having her loyalty to La Causa questioned:

> In 1970 I applied to participate in the Venceremos Brigade, which was taking
> groups of volunteers to support the Cuban revolution. —After the application and
> interview process was completed, I was accepted. I was nervous but excited to
> participate in what would have been the second brigade. Upon sharing the news of
> my acceptance with close friends and fellow Chicano activists, I was surprised by
> their reactions and their admonitions. Why was I going to fight other struggles
> when we had such a crucial struggle here as Chicanos? I was desperately needed
> here, so why would I abandon our struggle?[15]

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[14] Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 7.

[15] Espinoza et al., *Chicana Movidas*, "De Campesina a Internacionalista (From Farmworker Girl to Internationalist):
A Journey of Encuentros y Desencuentros."

While Talamante's experience reveals the role of internationalism at the heart of the Chicanx struggle, it also helps us understand the key role of posters. With their capacity to travel and influence, posters that portrayed internationalist perspectives were able to show solidarity across borders and reflected the minds and hearts of activists like Talamante, who saw a need to build an internationalist approach to their work. Furthermore, it makes visible what Reinoza calls "subversive print tactics that demonstrate sociohistorical links between U.S. military interventions in Latin America and the structural violence endured by Latinx communities in the United States."[16] In her contribution for the *¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now* exhibition catalog, she names different "thematic clusters" in the work included, the first of which is Latinx artists who made the connection between the development of US military power and the Vietnam War, as a way to understand the military intervention abroad and relate it to their own experiences with home and homeland.[17]

The significance of the Viet Nam war on the internationalist agenda of Chicanx activists[18] and the Third World Liberation front's strategies of cultural work[19] are part of my grounding in alternative ways to examine historical accounts of social movements. Young's project is to destabilize the dominant historical narratives of the US activism around race and class by highlighting the influence of international liberation struggles on US leftists.

In the same way Chicanx during the 1970s, "looked to other Third World peoples in the United States and solidarity with social movements in Mexico and Latin America, as well as

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[16] Reinoza, "War at Home," 106.

[17] Reinoza, "War at Home," 107.

[18] Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, and Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2011).

[19] Young, *Soul Power*.

inwardly, to challenge the limitations, contradictions, and oppressive characteristics of movement culture."[20] I note that current art scholarship on Chicanx political graphics needs a fuller analysis, to resist a further erasure of the internationalist politics during the 1960s, '70s, and the current moment. Such a perspective on this body of work cuts through approaches in the field of Chicanx art history, by highlighting how "political movements became internationalized and changed both the terms of engagement . . . and themes that were central to the Chicana/o movement."[21] The internationalist perspective, I argue, helps us gain a deeper understanding of the anti-capitalist, intersectional movements in which artivists participate today. Rather than seeing these digital political graphics as novel representations of solidarity with multiple communities locally and globally, they contribute to a long engagement with social movements and struggles for liberations across borders and the nation-state. Furthermore, recovering these histories on engagement from the 1960s and 1970s aids us in identifying recurring visual themes and strategies used by artivists, tracing a visual politics of solidarity from the perspective of the Chicana/o Left in the United States.

Chicanas and the Silkscreen Print

As the literature on social movements and the Chicana/o Left of the 1960s and '70s suggests, Chicanx artivists during this time were a part of a movement with many complexities and contradictions. The work that I have selected is not isolated from the conflicts across gender, race, and sexuality that cultural workers such as the ones discussed here lived these issues as they created visual rhetoric for a movement that did not fully accept their politics. As George

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[20] Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico*, 4.

[21] Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico*, 4.

Lipsitz asserts, Chicanx graphic arts, specifically the format of the poster "evoke the *Movimiento Chicano* in all its rich complexities, and contradictions, a movement both nationalist *and* internationalist, class conscious, *and* culturalist, reformist *and* revolutionary."[22] The opportunities to see all of these "rich complexities" are often in the form of the temporal, via museum exhibitions that privilege the archive, and their subsequent catalogs. The first book-length studies dedicated to the political poster itself, *¿Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California,* edited by Chon A. Noriega in 2001, provided an in-depth look into a format of art-making that has been dismissed within the art world. The exhibition traveled to three university art museums across the United States and two non-academic affiliated art museums respectively.[23] The accompanying catalogue is a rare collection of essays by historians, curators and social movement artists discussing on a formal level, the internationalist vein of the political poster archive; the visual strategy of solidarity is one of the main findings of this comprehensive and interdisciplinary effort to excavate and analyze over thirty years of political posters.

In 2020, following the precedent of *¿Just Another Poster?* the Smithsonian Museum of American Art's announced the opening of *¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now.* Organized by E. Carmen Ramos, curator of Latinx art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, with Claudia Zapata, curatorial assistant. The accompanying catalogue included essays by Ramos and Zapata, as well as contributions by Terezita Romo and Tatiana Reinoza, leading scholars of Chicanx and Latinx graphics.[24] With the

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[22] Lipsitz, "Not Just Another Social Movement," 72.

[23] *¿Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* traveled to the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art (Austin: University of Texas), University Art Museum (UC Santa Barbara), the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, the Merced Multicultural Arts Center, and the Jersey City Museum.

[24] "¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now" at SAAM | Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery," accessed January 18, 2021, https://americanart.si.edu/videos/printing-revolution-rise-and-impact-chicano-graphics-1965-now-saam-162532.

use of the Spanish exclamation points to signal a connection to the groundbreaking *¿Just Another Poster?* catalogue, Ramos and Zapata placed not just Chicanx graphics as a major point of study, they also extended the focus to digital graphics. The exhibition description states that ¡Printing the Revolution! will be "the first to unite historic civil rights era prints alongside works by contemporary printmakers, including several that embrace expanded graphics that exist beyond the paper substrate."[25] The act of this inclusion is not only the first but signals to the growing importance of looking beyond the analog, to include digital means of art production, exhibition, and distribution in art.

There is a growing body of work that chronicles the importance of Chicana artists to the fields of Chicanx Studies, and Art History. In Holly Barnet-Sanchez's "Where are the Chicana printmakers? presence and absence in the work of Chicana artists of the Movimiento," Barnett-Sanchez mentions the ways in which transnational activism looks different for Chicanas, she states, "In many instances, Chicana printmakers also reach beyond the specific needs of Chicana/o communities to build coalitions with others, locally, regionally, and globally. They break open the stereotypes imposed upon them from both within and outside of Chicanismo."[26] In this bilingual catalog essay, Barnet-Sanchez explores Chicana graphic art in California from the mid-1970s to the end of the millennium by discussing the unifying trends in Chicana art and the importance of—yet seldom acknowledged—Chicana artists. Focusing on specific works, many of which were included in the accompanying exhibition, the author proposes that Chicana

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[25] "¡Printing the Revolution!"

[26] Holly Barnet-Sanchez, "Where are the Chicana Printmakers? Presence and Absence in the Work of Chicana Artists of the Movimiento," 184.

printmakers created a visual vocabulary that shaped Chicano/an identity during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement.

Because the impact of Chicana art has been widely overlooked, Barnet-Sanchez discusses many works in depth, thus connecting them to true motivations of the decades between 1965 and 1995. Chicana artists played a major role in each of those periods, she writes, and their contributions have shaped the understanding of art, politics, and gender. In addition to this, Barnet-Sanchez discusses many self-portraits and their pertinence in creating a previously nonexistent Chicana identity. In other words, Chicanas used self-representation to give a literal and figurative face to Chicana subjectivities, in a Chicana/o Movement whose cultural nationalism forced them to work elsewhere or to rank their oppression, by devaluing gender-based issues in favor of race. Although I will discuss the self-portrait as a Chicana feminist visual strategy in a later chapter of the dissertation, it is important to note that this visual strategy has been overlooked prior to Barnett-Sanchez' article; due to its perception as an apolitical subject matter by other factions of the Chicana/o Left whose style was much more graphic and used male centric iconography in favor of a Chicano cultural nationalism. In her critical "writing and righting" of Chicana feminist histories, Maylei Blackwell notes the harmful effects of cultural nationalism:

> Cultural nationalism becomes a tool which we use to organize our oppressed
> Chicano communities. By throwing out most of the garbage and lies that have
> been perpetrated on us, we construct another set of values that are more relevant
> to our needs. We teach our children about Joaquin Murrieta, not Robin Hood,
> about Zapata, not Kit Carson. We learn about the Mayan and Aztec empires. We
> rewrite the history of the Southwest.[27]

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[27] Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 93.

Chicanx posters from the 1970s are a prime example of the influence Chicano cultural

nationalism had on Chicanx artists, with Latin American revolutionary figures like Zapata and

Che Guevara prominently featured. This phenomenon was not simply a division among gender
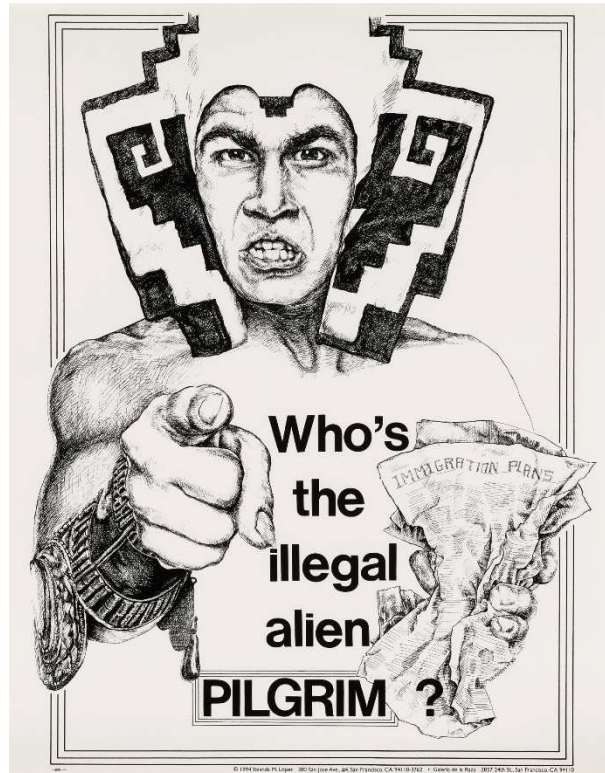
binary lines—Chicana printmakers like Yolanda López and others also reproduced cultural

nationalist iconography. López's poster, *Who's the Illegal Alien, Pilgrim?* (1978) (Figure 8), is a

silkscreen print featuring a hypermasculine representation of what appears to be a Chicano man,

clad in an Aztec headdress and appearing to mouth the words of the poster in a confrontational

stance and hand motion, pointing directly at the viewer.

Figure 8. Yolanda López, *Who's the Illegal Alien, Pilgrim?* 1978, silkscreen.

This set of male-centric visual strategies in Chicanx political posters of the 1970s, help

answer the question at the title of Barnet-Sanchez's essay, "Where are the Chicana

Printmakers?" The answer is as complicated and rich as the bodies of work themselves, with

Chicanas participating in the canon of culturally nationalist iconography but also producing work

that is highly personal and experimental in nature. What is key to understand in this decade is

that the work was not produced within a vacuum; on the contrary, Chicana/o Movement and

Chicana/o Left politics played a key role in influencing the work of Chicana printmakers,

enacting subtle violence on marginal or underrepresented identities within these spaces. As

Blackwell asserts, cultural nationalism "served as a regulatory apparatus to discipline deviant

subjects who do not fit within those boundaries, especially about sexuality, gender, and, often,

race (i.e., who was seen as truly Chicano [enough])."[28]

Another characteristic of Chicana printmaking is the use of personal imagery and self-

representational iconography, as opposed to explicit event announcements or political matter.

Artists such as Yreina Cervántes, Yolanda M. López, Judithe E. Hernández, Liz Rodriguez,

Barbara Carrasco, Ester Hernández, Patssi Valdez, Diane Gamboa, Margaret Alarcón, and Alma

López create and present themselves as individuals who have agency and power. Their work at

times does not "directly reflect what could easily be labeled a Chicano/a experience, but rather

deal with urban alienation, gender relations, or even a post-apocalyptic vision of threatened or

actual psychic and physical violence."[29] Ester Hernandez's *La Ofrenda* (1988) (Figure 9) is also

the product of a particular moment in Chicanx poster history, where the poster transitioned from

overt protest to art product.

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[28] Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 93.

[29] Barnet-Sanchez, "Where Are the Chicana Printmakers? Presence and Absence in the Work of Chicana Artists of the Movimiento = Dónde Están Las Grabadistas Chicanas: Presencia Y Ausencia de La Obra de Las Artistas Chicanas En El Movimiento Chicano," 118.
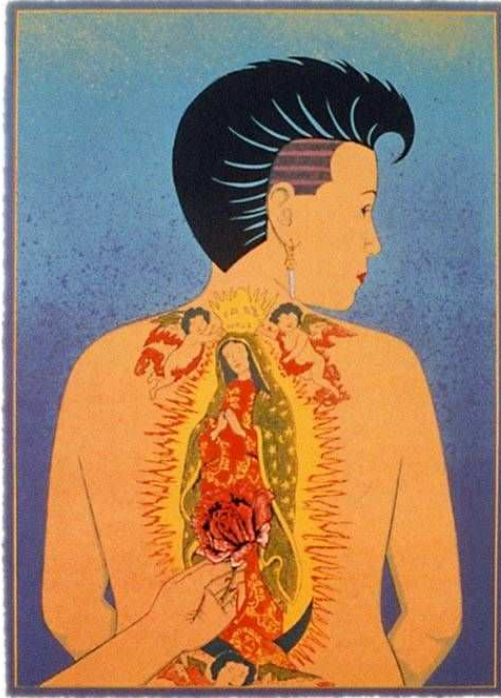
Figure 9. Ester Hernández, *La Ofrenda*, 1988, serigraph.

According to Romo, this transition was the result of several factors: 1) the formation of Chicana/o art collectives in the 1970s whose work expanded to include cultural iconography and expanded the agenda of the Chicana/o Left to historical and cultural affirmation; 2) the decline in arts funding for Chicana/o Movement-era non-profit organizations led to poster sales as a strategy to collect funds; and 3) the experimentation of the silkscreen medium resulted in a gradual change that can be seen in the aesthetics of posters from the 1980s.[30] Portraying a woman with short-cropped dark hair and a *Virgen of Guadalupe* tattoo on the entire length of her back, her body becomes the place of worship, as a hand extends from the bottom right corner, holding a rose up to her lower back, where the feet of the *Virgen* are etched.

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[30] "Points of Convergence: The Iconography of the Chicano Poster," 108.

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Romo cites Hernandez's devotion for the *Virgen* as an impetus for the image and identifies it as a deeply personal tribute to *La Virgen.* Produced within the Experimental Silkscreen Atelier, *La Ofrenda* exemplifies the ways in which Chicanas negotiated the "pull between aesthetic concerns and cultural referencing."[31] In addition to this pull, Hernandez's print went on to signify alternative representations of gender and sexuality, when it was used for the cover of *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo in 1991. Chicana lesbians formed the backbone of Chicana/o Left, organizing on multiple fronts during the 1960s and '70s and publishing their unique perspectives on the Chicana/o experience of queerness throughout the 1970s and '80s.[32] This also places Chicana posters in a unique position, where their content spoke to communities on the margins of the Chicanx experience at the time, and served as a form of representation for queer communities.

In the backmatter of *Chicana Lesbians* (Figure 10), a powerful quote by Chicana feminist writer Sandra Cisneros hints at the political climate and attitudes toward the book and by extension *La Ofrenda* itself: "When I was selling books at a Chicana conference, I noticed book buyers were afraid to touch this anthology. I say now what I said then, 'Don't be scared. Sexuality is not contagious, but ignorance is.' If you have ever been curious, been there, been voyeur, been a tourist, or just plain under-informed, misinformed, or unaffirmed, here is a book to listen to and learn from."[33] Chicanx art history essays such as Barnett-Sanchez and Romo fail

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[31] "Points of Convergence: The Iconography of the Chicano Poster," 111.

[32] The groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* centered its women of color feminist practice through the inclusion of a body of artistic work often relegated to the interstices of the art historical record. Queer of color scholars such as Emma Pérez, Sandy Soto, José Esteban Muñoz have cited Bridge as a significant cultural event in the development of their own political consciousness, as well as theoretical grounding for their work. See Anzaldúa and Moraga, "This Bridge Called My Back Writings by Radical Women of Color."

[33] Trujillo, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About,* quoted in backmatter.

to mention the use of *La Ofrenda* within a Chicana lesbian context, naming only the politics of production, i.e., Self Help Graphic's atelier initiative, the gender politics of the piece, and its Catholic iconography. While these characteristics of the piece are crucial to understanding its meaning, I argue that this use of *La Ofrenda* situates Chicanas in the unique position to represent alternative Chicanx experiences that have been a part of transnational leftist activism from the 1960s to the use of the piece in 1991.
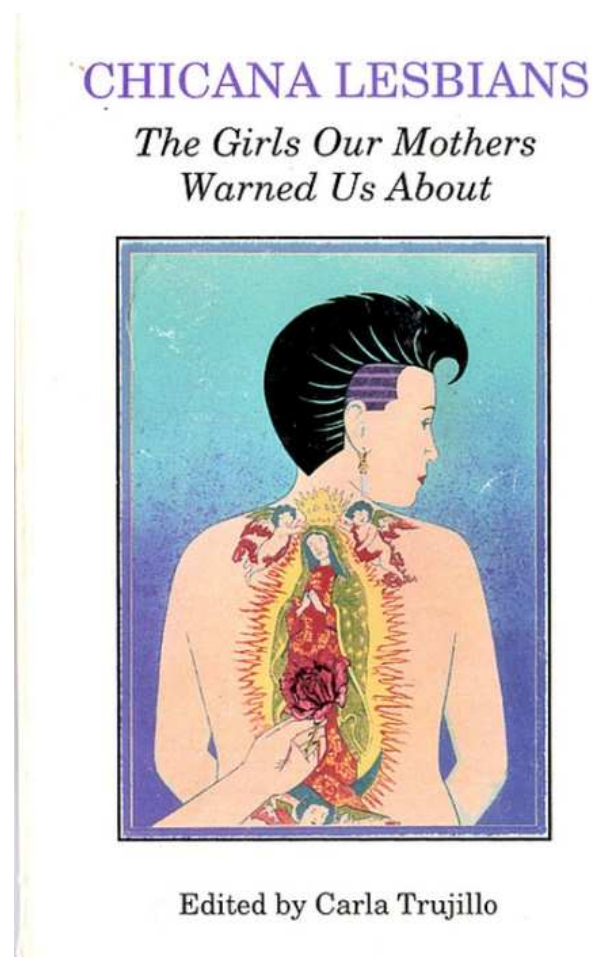
Figure 10. Ester Hernández, *La Ofrenda*, 1988, front cover for *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo (Third Woman Press, 1991).

I also contend that this usage exposed Hernandez's *La Ofrenda* to an audience that connected with the piece and felt affirmed by it. Representing Chicana lesbian identity as co-existing with cultural references such as *La Virgen* spoke to a rich experience, politicizing the piece and opposing Chicano cultural nationalism directly.

This shift from production to experimentation is also a period that is dominated by Chicanas, namely through the establishment of opportunities such as Self-Help Graphics and Art in Los Angeles's Experimental Silkscreen Atelier, established in 1983, where *La Ofrenda* was printed five years later. The atelier would then contribute to ushering the Chicano poster into the "era of the fine art print and would undergo commensurable changes in aesthetics and iconography."[34] Romo also identifies the 1980s as a period of commodification for posters; in this decade, Chicanx artists began to enter an institutionalized mainstream art sphere, via museums and galleries, making the poster or silkscreen print a marketable art object worthy of production, exhibition, and collection.

Internationalism was central to the development of the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic, and the internationalist part has unfortunately been forgotten. Furthermore, the work of Chicana artists directly aligns with the project of highlighting the internationalist vein of Chicanx political graphics in that it challenges our preconceived notions about the subject matter of these posters and offers us insight into which topics and issues were given priority in visual cultures. Work that has been ignored or misrepresented simply because it cannot be easily categorized as a political graphic or easily labeled as part of the "Chicana/o experience" can also apply to transnational solidarity with anti-capitalist and feminist causes abroad. While the work of

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[34] "Points of Convergence: The Iconography of the Chicano Poster," 109.

Chicanas shows experimentation as opposed to reactionary production, it is still part of a diverse print-culture that influenced Chicana identity formation. Social movement scholar Cynthia Young identifies print-culture as one of the two primary factors that ushered in the emergence of a Third World Left,[35] through 1) the large circulation of radical literature that enabled US minorities to access the strategies, and 2) stories of international struggles for liberation in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Young contends that "the US Third World Leftists' interest in artistic experimentation was informed by a commitment to a diverse set of political ideals, but such experimentation never sacrificed to the exigencies of ongoing political struggle."[36] For this group, cultural production and political activism "complemented rather than opposed each other."[37] The trajectory of Chicana artists and activists from the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and '70s to the contemporaries working in multiple platforms today point to a long tradition of the symbiotic relationship between political activism and experimentation, a strategy and survival tool that differentiates their work.

South Africa and Palestine: Going Beyond Solidarity

One of the key locations of political graphics from the Chicana/o Left is the involvement of Chicana printmakers in the Third World Left movement in the San Francisco Bay Area, where a network of organizations led by people of color invested in the anti-colonial struggle both beyond and within the United States and shaped the political legacies of the area. This activism reflects the multiple fronts on which Chicanxs were fighting as they formed a visual culture that spoke to these Third World issues. Emily Hobson's *Lavender and Red* integrates archival

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[35] Young, *Soul Power*.

[36] Young, *Soul Power*, 22.

[37] Young, *Soul Power*, 4.

research and oral history interviews to analyze how gay and lesbian leftists practiced their political commitments, conceptualized their identities, and carried out their activist lives from 1969 to 1991 in the San Francisco Bay Area. Hobson begins her discussion of queer activism within the United States at the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and the formation of the Gay Liberation Front, inspired by the national liberation fronts of Algeria and Vietnam. She argues, "Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, gay and lesbian leftists pursued an interconnected vision of liberation and solidarity, a combination they frequently represented through the metaphor 'lavender and red'—the first color indicating gay and lesbian sexualities, the second an internationalist left."[38]

Hobson connects this groundwork to contemporary queer activism, specifically by naming queer political work against the prison industrial complex and queer organizing in solidarity with Palestine and the Black Lives Matter movement as legacies of decades of organizing by gay and lesbian leftists through the 1990s. I foreground my analysis of Chicanx political posters with internationalist topics to keep in mind the queer activism that overlapped with Chicanx political graphics, notably to convey the idea that queer anti-capitalist activists and artists were also interacting and perhaps participating in the creation and dissemination of this work. According to Hobson, the gay and lesbian archive reveals slippages, multiple contingencies that include a diverse set of people within the gay left, with a much more radical notion of gender and sexuality, and intersectional politics before the word intersectionality was conceived.

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[38] Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*, 44:8.

While Chicanx artists were producing print cultures with culturally nationalist iconographies, Black lesbian feminists, and feminists of color saw identity as fluid and as a space of contestation. Roderick Ferguson traces the lineage of intersectionality to its earlier beginnings in the Combahee River Collective statement.[39] Although the gay and lesbian left and women of color feminism did overlap, they were not the same movement. The gay and lesbian left was overwhelmingly white during the 1970s and '80s.[40] Despite Black and Chicana lesbians and feminists being deeply involved in the conception of intersectional feminism in action, political posters during this time were predominantly made by men on the Chicana/o Left.[41] Artists such as Malaquias Montoya, Juan Fuentes, and Rupert Garcia produced hundreds of posters in solidarity with Third World struggles such as the Israeli occupation of Palestine, campaigns to release Black political prisoners in the United States and Puerto Rico, as well as solidarity with the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN) in Nicaragua.

While the analysis of political posters as solidarity is useful in connecting the US Chicana/o Left with social movements in Mexico and Latin America, it is a changing term that continues to be redefined by social movements. To understand the components of solidarity as an action, I mobilize Gómez's five characteristics for solidarity:

> (1) direct or indirect aid, (2) active elements/interventions, (3) circulation of information and ideas, (4) the more complicated issue of involvement/participation, and (5) the moments of articulation, which include the previous four characteristics, specifically focus on how struggles that resonated

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[39] Combahee River Collective statement (1977).

[40] Combahee River Collective statement, 44:12.

[41] Combahee River Collective statement, 42–44. Queer of color activism overlapped with the gay and lesbian left but also held meanings, logics, and histories well beyond it, as by seeking to challenge racist objectification within gay life.

with and influenced the politics of the Chicana/o movement reconfigure the historical timelines of movement activity.[42]

When the Sandinista revolution overthrew the US-backed Somoza dictatorship in 1979, public attention was drawn to Central America as a new location for victory against a common enemy: US imperialism. Throughout the 1980s, Chicanx artists produced posters in solidarity with the FSLN. Many of the artists involved in the creation of these images were veterans of Vietnam and saw a direct correlation between US involvement and the support of dictatorships abroad. As Carol Wells asserts, "Chicano posters were among the first to recognize and promote the revolutionary struggles of Nicaragua…and El Salvador…long before these movements became well-known on college campuses throughout the U.S."[43] In his cover art for a poetry volume, Fuentes produced a portrait of Augusto Cesar Sandino, the namesake of the FSLN, three years before the overthrow of the Somoza regime (Figure 11).

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[42] Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico*, 13.

[43] Wells, "La Lucha Sigue: From East Los Angeles to the Middle East," 181.

Figure 11. Juan Fuentes, *Poetry for the Nicaraguan Struggle*, December 11, 1976, event flyer.

The deep shadows of his face are offset by a red backdrop, signaling to the group's colors of red and black. On the other hand, Rupert Garcia's portrait of Angela Davis retains the same graphic quality of early Chicanx political graphics. The full-text reads: "Save Our Sister Day—Saturday, January 29, 1972. Millions of signatures, and thousands of dollars are needed to Free Angela Davis Buy tags & sign petitions at your local business. Please contact the L.A. Committee to Free Angela" (Figure 12).
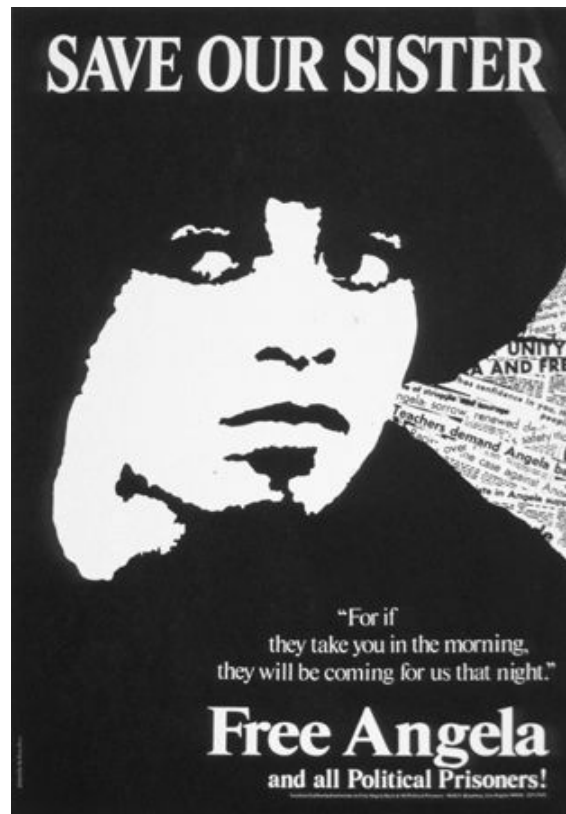
Figure 12. Rupert García, *Save Our Sister Day L.A. Committee to Free Angela* (Peace Press), 1972.

Although Garcia's poster links to direct aid, it also uses familial forms of relating to urge the viewer to action, calling Davis "our sister." The importance of these statements and the

posters that display them cannot be overstated—it is the very foundation of political graphics produced in the twenty-first century by a new generation of Chicanx artivists. It is important to recognize the extent to which domestic and international struggles for liberation influenced the content of political graphics, and of Chicana/o Movement and Chicana/o left participants from the 1960s until now.

Emory Douglas and Yolanda López

Another point of connection between Black and Chicanx graphics, both analog and digital, is the influence of the Black Panther Party's visuals onto multiple generations of artivists. Douglas was the primary artist for *The Black Panther,* the Party's newspaper, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.[44] His work consisted of "hundreds of pictures promoting the Panthers' program of armed militants and community welfare. Challenging long-standing assumptions about race and racism in America, Douglas crafted a protest aesthetic aimed at convincing audiences of Black power."[45] As a result, Douglas featured not just Black militant figures in the newspaper, but also included Black women and children. In an interview he states, "They used to buy the paper to look at the art. They could tell through the artwork which direction the Black Panther Party was going at that particular time," thus when discussing the artistic influences of Chicanx political graphics, Douglas is often the most cited, especially among those who came into political consciousness in the late 1970s, and who were mentored by Bay Area artists.

Favianna Rodriguez, Jesus Barraza, and Melanie Cervantes, all of whom reside in Oakland, California, the location of the BPP and of Douglas's home as well, all know Douglas personally and have gone on record to cite his influence on their work. The aesthetic

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[44] Doss 1999

[45] Doss 1999, 245.

characteristics of a bright but limited color palette, thick black outlines, the use of text and the featuring of prominent figures have become part of the legacy of Douglas's work (Figure 13). This, along with the Chicana printmaker traditions, represent the radical component of the CRDA.
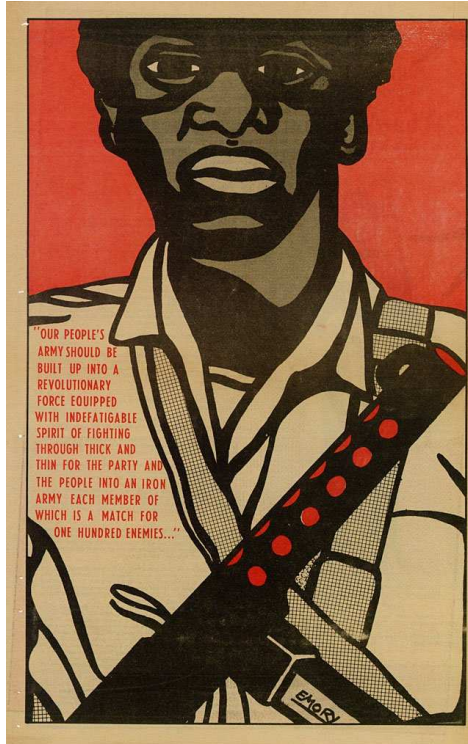
Figure 13. Emory Douglas, *Black Panther* newspaper, August 18,1970, poster. Copyright of Emory Douglas, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The fact that all six artivists featured in this dissertation have at one point or another traveled to or lived near Oakland and San Francisco is not a coincidence; rather, it points to the deep artivist roots that still pull many artists to the Bay Area. Douglas forms a key part of the radical aesthetic tradition that has inspired contemporary artivists like Rodriguez, Barraza, and Cervantes, and his presence can be felt as much if not equally to that of Chicana printmakers like Ester Hernández and Yolanda López.

Similarly, Cary Cordova's book length study of San Francisco's Mission District in the 1960s and its multiethnic arts movement confirms the coalitions built across communities. Cordova's text dispels two common misconceptions of the San Francisco Bay Area. First, it affirms the notion that the international was a key tenet under which Latinx community in this area organized. Her work emphasizes a transnational perspective that is a "broader, international,

and slightly more intangible vision of liberation from oppression"[46] secondly, it resists the idea

that the Mission is a Mexican centric neighborhood, she affirms "the historic strength of its

(Mission District) Central American populations has consistently propelled organizing around a

pan-Latino identity, as opposed to a Mexican American or Chicano identity."[47]

The influence of Black power movement cultural workers like Douglas, is not the only

instance of Black and Brown solidarity in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1960s. A key

example of the community organization "Los Siete de La Raza" formed in 1969 and took its

name from the seven young men, mostly Central American who were falsely accused of

murdering a police officer in the Mission. Six of the seven young men were arrested, and the

Latinx community in the Mission organized and demanded their freedom with the help of the

Black Panther Party.[48] Los Siete member Oscar Rios, recalls how the meeting with BPP leader

Bobby Seale occurred, "right away Bobby came out and said, 'Okay, this is what we can give

you: we'll give you one side of our paper—we'll give you space at rallies, anything you want."[49]

This alliance with the BPP led to Los Siete holding its first rally outside of the San Francisco

Hall of Justice in late May of 1969, with the support of the BPP and the Brown Berets.[50] Chicana

artist Yolanda López became deeply involved with Los Siete and created artwork for the

publication *Basta Ya!*, however López did not sign the majority of the images she produced for

the community newspaper (see Figure 14) The BPP newspaper, which *Basta Ya!* was modeled

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[46] Cordova, *The Heart of the Mission*, 10.

[47] Cordova, *The Heart of the Mission*, 9.

[48] "Cultural District to Honor 50th Anniversary of Los Siete - El Tecolote," accessed May 24, 2021, http://eltecolote.org/content/en/cultural-district-to-honor-50th-anniversary-of-los-siete/.

[49] Marjorie Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property: The Story of Los Siete de La Raza* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1972), 161, http://archive.org/details/strictlyghettopr00hein_0.

[50] Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property*, 162.

after, saw López and Douglas learning together. Others involved with *Basta Ya!* recall working with Douglas, such as Donna Amador. "She and López helped out in anyway[sic] they could, even traveling together to a Black Panther meeting site and learning from Douglas—the Black Panther Newspaper's graphic artist and Minister of Culture—on how to put together and publish Basta Ya!"[51] This direct collaboration between Los Siete and the BPP is a story kept alive by López's generation of Chicanx artivists but has faded from popular memory.
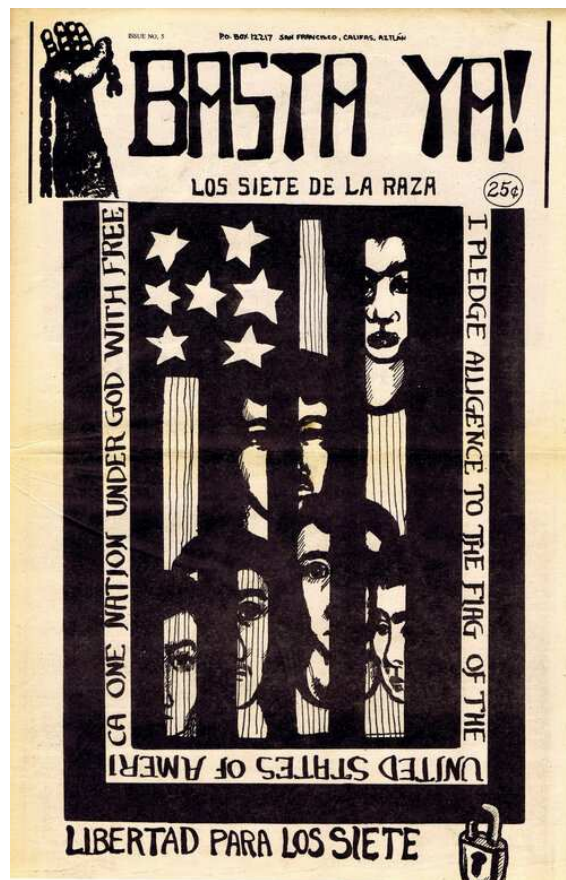
Figure 14. Yolanda López, "Untitled," *Basta Ya!* Issue no. 5, 1969, newspaper, San Francisco.

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[51] "Cultural District to Honor 50th Anniversary of Los Siete - El Tecolote."

Cuir[52] Colombian American muralistx Jessica Sabogal's recent mural, "Yolanda Taught Me" (2021) (Figure 15), honors the legacy of Los Siete and keeps the memory of the collaboration alive. In their *autohistoriateoria* caption, Sabogal explains the motivation behind the mural design, and their inclusion of López as the central figure.

Figure 15. Jessica Sabogal, "Yolanda Taught Me," May 19, 2021, mural, 2060 Folsom, San Francisco, https://www.instagram.com/p/CPD5NhknmwM/.

Sabogal who is also based in the Bay Area and has been creating mural installations for over ten years in the US and internationally, considers López a mentor and friend:

> Yolanda taught me about Los Siete's connection to the Black Panthers—After gaining some momentum, and with Yolanda's contributions of the Basta Ya! masthead, covers, and political graphics for the movement, the BASTA YA! Newspaper became its own independent source of local news for the Mission. The second issue of the newspaper carried a message of solidarity from Panther founder Huey Newton, from inside prison, that ended with the phrase, "Black

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[52] Sabogal's uses the term *cuir*, a Spanish pronunciation of Queer, as an identifier, as well as muralistx with the gender-neutral x modifier.

Power to Black People. Brown Power to Brown People. Power to all the oppressed people of the world.[53]

Sabogal's use of the iconic panther illustration drawn by Douglas for the BPP newspaper masthead is featured prominently on the mural's right side, along with a portrait of López herself on the left. In her characteristic stencil style, López's face has a deep contrast of pale yellow and deep gold to indicate shadow. The light source is brightest on López's right cheek, guiding the eye to the background pattern behind her. Sabogal uses a limited color palette of turquoise, yellow, red, and black for the mural, using thick graphic black for the background pattern and portrait outline. Sabogal's use of negative space accentuates the graphic pattern that adorns López's blouse, which showcases a pattern made of evenly spaced thick lines and three flowers along the neckline. López's neck is adorned in a multilayered golden necklace with a rounded turquoise pendant, signaling not just the respect Sabogal holds for López, but also gives her figure a dignified and serious stance. The mural is multiple stories tall and has the words "Basta Ya!" in red letters next to López's right eye, inside of a circular shape. Upon closer examination, I noticed that the letters in Sabogal's mural are a replica of López's masthead for the community newspaper by the same name. "Yolanda Taught Me" is one of four walls Sabogal is currently finishing in San Francisco, a commission that took more than a year of negotiation to move forward. Elizabeth Blancas is part of the all-women of color team aiding Sabogal, and I discuss their mentor-mentee relationship in detail in Chapter Five.

Sabogal's visual tribute to López highlights the intergenerational artivist relationships that continue to flourish in the Bay Area, and form part of a long history of collaborations and alliances. They were motivated to create this mural piece to preserve local histories like that of

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[53] "Jessica Sabogal (@jessicasabogal) • Instagram Photos and Videos," accessed May 24, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CPD5NhknmwM/.

Los Siete, as they exclaim, "Yolanda taught me the importance of documenting these oral histories which she has passed down to me and reminds me of my responsibility to preserve them each time we meet."[54] As a fixture in an urban landscape that has drastically changed since that fateful day in 1969, Sabogal's love letter on a wall to López is an exercise in memory, and in maintaining the internationalist activism of Los Siete. It reminds us that while everything shifts, art can serve as a reminder of those who take on the responsibility of honoring past generations like Sabogal, and of the power of coalition, fifty years later.

Abolish ICE

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was formed after September 11, 2001, and outlined in the Patriot Act, as an attempt to combine criminal and immigration law enforcement systems. Further militarizing the border, the agency's goal is "to target and detain 'criminal illegal aliens.'"[55] Since its founding, the agency has been met with resistance from immigrant rights movements domestically and internationally. Artists have often been at the forefront of opposing ICE raids and other practices that target the undocumented immigrant population in the United States— "Abolish ICE" is a familiar refrain and is not solely a new demand of the US political left. The Abolish ICE campaign has recently gained momentum as the media coverage of families separated at the border has shed light on the inhumane practices of the agency. For instance, in its efforts to detain, ICE has actively held undocumented immigrant children in detention facilities, often with inadequate housing and food. Dubbed the "Family Separation

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[54] "Jessica Sabogal (@jessicasabogal) • Instagram Photos and Videos."

[55] Abrego, "Legal Consciousness of Undocumented Latinos."

Crisis,"[56] this issue has produced a surge of artwork aimed at the abolishment of the agency, linking immigration rights with human rights movements.

The ways in which Chicanx posters are produced and distributed is key to understanding the ways in which artivists show solidarity with social movements and events that link US imperialism abroad. Artwork produced in response to family separations under the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy for immigrants seeking asylum is a unique case study that highlights the ways in which digital methods allow artivists immediate action. The five-color silkscreen print *Ya Basta* (2018) (Figure 16)—roughly translated to "That is Enough," by Melanie Cervantes and Jesus Barraza—was an image made immediately after reports of children being separated from their parents at the border and being transported without guardians to detention centers with inadequate care, surfaced in media outlets. Cervantes and Barraza created the poster in their own print studio within forty-eight hours.

Barraza spoke on the use of social media and digital community to fund the production of a second edition of posters, as well as three thousand stickers, by selling the first printing of the piece:

> For us, there is this component that everything we are going to do digitally, we are usually going to at least do some hand done ones, and then we are going to do maybe some digital, and then some will go up on Instagram and Facebook, then we do digital download. —We ended up printing I think five thousand maybe six thousand, thirteen by nineteen actual physical copies, we did that by printing the edition, selling a whole bunch. Then, from that money, so it is not coming out of pocket, we were able to pay for the supplies. They are all shared online, and then also put up by digital downloads.[57]

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[56] Chris Cita Cillizza, "The Remarkable History of the Family Separation Crisis," *CNN*, Cable News Network, June 18, 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/06/18/politics/donald-trump-immigration-policies-q-and-a/index.html.

[57] Jesus Barraza, "Artivist Interview 1," interview by Angelica Becerra, July 22, 2018.

The piece features a woman carrying an infant in her arms with one hand and tossing two agents (Border Patrol and ICE) into a symbolic trash can, labeled "basura"; her expression is determined and serious. The top of the piece has the words "Ya Basta" while the bottom reads "The US Government is abducting migrant children and locking them in cages" in neon green. The first color or layer of the image is a chain-link fence, foregrounding the incarceration of families seeking asylum and facing detention as opposed to support. Barraza had a chance to speak on the image while printing a separate piece at Self-Help Graphics in Los Angeles. He spoke of the process of making this piece as one that would not have been possible without the outpouring of support from others via social media.

Figure 16. Dignidad Rebelde, *Ya Basta*, 2018, silkscreen print.

This response facilitated and fully funded the first printing of the image, a limited series of 13 x 19-inch silkscreen prints. Images such as Cervantes and Barraza's *Ya Basta* form part of a larger archive of images that call for the dismantling of ICE as a law enforcement agency tasked with detaining and deporting immigrants. Currently the *Ya Basta* image is available for

download on Cervantes and Barraza's joint website Dignidad Rebelde, where visitors can access and print a high-resolution PDF file for their own use. In doing this work, I conducted several research trips to the city of Oakland where local businesses proudly displayed the "Ya Basta" image on their windows, along with other pieces of art that signaled solidarity with other movements, such as "Black Lives Matter" and against the Muslim Ban. The windows in local businesses are another archive of the visibility of artivism and the ways in which social media has increased access to this work. Images such as *Ya Basta* lead multiple lives with a varying degree of exposure. The political graphics produced as an immediate response to inhumane policies have multiple lives—it lives in the homes of those who purchased a print, it lives in the windows of shop owners and small businesses, it lives in the self-aggregating feed of those who follow the artivists themselves on social media, and more.

More importantly, these posters demonstrate that Chicanx visual culture has been multi-issue and intersectional for over thirty years, at least through the visual representations that political posters provide. These posters also show that "domestic and international policies are often inextricably connected and that international struggles for self-determination resonate close to home"[58] They opposed US intervention in Central America and the political imprisonment of Black radicals domestically, as well as declared solidarity with current issues. Chicanx artists and the political graphics they create continue to deeply engage in urging others to action, as well as to expand our notions of Chicanx subjectivity and lived experiences.

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[58] Cillizza, "The Remarkable History of the Family Separation Crisis," 194.

CHAPTER TWO: MIRAMÉ: PORTRAITURE AS RE-INSCRIPTION OF WORKING-CLASS
AESTHETICS IN LATINX ART

Portraiture and the act of self-portraiture has become a phenomenon in the digital

surfaces we frequent, such as the social media platforms of Instagram and Facebook. When

developing this chapter on why portraiture was central to Chicanx digital artivism, I deferred to

the archive, or the feed, an ever-aggregating accordion of self(ie) portraiture authored by artists

and cultural workers. Whereas the previous chapter discussed the ways in which the digital turn

of the political poster enabled artists to depart from traditional models of production and

exhibition and build networks of creative support online, this chapter focuses on how the

Chicana Radical Aesthetic can be a lens through which we can see the radical potential of

contemporary portraiture made and shared by Latinx artivists. The practice of self-portraits and

portraiture more broadly has become one of the predominant practices for contemporary Latinx

artists. I analyze why this practice is so widely used in our contemporary digital lives, and how it

has been repurposed and reworked for social justice. The use of portraiture by Chicanx and

Latinx artivists has gone "beyond major historical figures to capture the likenesses of everyday

people."[1]

I argue that the *artivist selfie,* a digital self-portrait of an artivist's likeness, is a political

piece of work. More broadly, I contend that selfie culture, and the accessibility of self-portraiture

via phone cameras has caused a shift away, to an art praxis that is more democratic. As a result

of this greater accessibility, artivists use selfies and self-portraiture to make themselves and their

communities more visible. The use of technology, such as digital tools to craft and manipulate

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[1] Carmen E. Ramos, "Printing and Collecting the Revolution: The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to
Now," in ¡*Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now* (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 2020), 50.

images, as well as digital platforms to disseminate the work are a democratization of the elitist and predominantly white art world, whether it be cultural institutions such as museums and galleries, opportunities such as artist grants and patronship, or the art market. Arlene Dávila calls these spaces some of the "most elitist spaces in society, and most recalcitrant to change."[2] Their whiteness is both a demographic and philosophical issue, with the staff at major cultural arts institutions in New York City remaining "three quarters white, even when whites represent only one quarter of the city's population."[3] Furthermore, as Davila points out, "we seldomly recognize race in categories such as 'American art" and 'contemporary art' that index whiteness, while 'Latinx art' or Black art' cannot be read apart from signifiers of race."[4] For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on how the digital provides a space and place where there is less reserve around confronting race and identifiers in the work of Latinx artivists. While the predominantly white art world and market have created subcategories for nonwhite art, the digital has placed less emphasis on these markers, creating a space for Latinx artivists to carve out greater visibility for both themselves and their communities.

This chapter highlights the work of two contemporary queer Latinx artists, Julio Salgado, and Jessica Sabogal. I analyze their two bodies of work: a digital self-portrait series by Salgado titled "Gimme All Your Colors," and Sabogal's illustrations depicting queer relationships in addition to her "White Supremacy Is Killing Me" series. Through deep visual analysis, social histories of portraiture, and the artistic legacy of Mexican painter and Communist Frida Kahlo, I contend that the work of Salgado and Sabogal not only embodies what I term the Chicana

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[2] Arlene Dávila, *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2020), 5.

[3] Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 5.

[4] Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 30.

Radical Digital Aesthetic, a praxis of politically engaged creative labor, it also reinscribes a working-class aesthetic to the tradition of portraiture, a practice that has been historically associated with economic and social elites, whose commissions of portraits served the purpose of establishing social status. Bringing in the classed, bourgeois history of the medium with contemporary iterations is especially poignant in our current political moment within the United States. The aftermath of the former Trump administration and its anti-immigrant rhetoric, denial of climate change, and elimination of key support to the arts left a deep mark on our current national psyche. Despite the growing wealth gap, artivists continue to challenge the status quo both in the content of their work and their methods. In other words, this chapter explores what is at stake, in contemporary Latinx portraiture, how it can visualize the conditions of Latinx working-class realities, and how the production and distribution of digital portraiture challenges the white supremacist, anti-immigrant, patriarchal, and nationalist social imagination made clear by the former Trump administration. Throughout this chapter, I draw on the insights of my fellow interlocutors and artists, whose voices have been crucial in my understanding of the portrait, and of digital arts practice from a Latinx perspective.

The archive of selfies, or digital self-portraits, both the images themselves, and the praxis of their becoming are part of an arsenal of visual tactics that artivists utilize for their self-determination. It is also important to note that "Selfies" as we have come to call them in the twenty-first century, are at once just another iteration of the self-portrait, and yet they are entirely different. They are a way for Latinx artists and individuals more generally, to assert their presence in a digital and artistic landscape (see Figures 6 and 7), and are tied to standards of beauty and gender, class, race, and citizenship.

According to Google Arts and Culture, "every day 93 million selfies are taken all over the world, with many of them being shared across multiple platforms for handfuls of likes, comments and adoration."[5] The article refers to the self-portrait in art as the "godfather of the selfie," indicating that the *selfie* is not the first iteration of reproducing our likeness as self-expression, but rather a digital child of a much older practice, whose production, like its predecessor, has been deeply impacted by its social context.

Figure 17. Julio Salgado, "Selfie," March 14, 2021, Instagram,
https://www.instagram.com/p/CMaPmsVlFAs/.

The genre of the autonomous self-portrait has its origins in "fifteenth- and developed in sixteenth-century Italy."[6] The self-portrait's development was due in large part to the greater accessibility and affordability of mirrors, as well as the "advent of panel painting—the technique

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[5] "How the Self-Portrait Evolved into the Selfie," Google Arts & Culture, accessed June 8, 2021, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/how-the-self-portrait-evolved-into-the-selfie/8gLCWiSIgsdBLg.

[6] Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (Yale University Press, 1998), 1.

of painting on a flat panel of wood rather than on walls."[7] Artists in renaissance Italy saw the

self-portrait as an opportunity to visualize themselves into a better life, as Joanna Woods-

Marsden argues: "The images projected the aspirations of their creators for a change in the status

of art and hence a change in their personal social standing."[8] These aspirations of projecting a

change in social standing via self-portraiture are similar to the *selfie,* in that its proliferation into

our digital landscape reveals the author's desires and perceptions of self in a visually mediated,

digital world. I see a parallel in the "highly competitive court culture" where sixteenth-century

artists were vying for "social recognition at the periphery of power"[9] and the urgency with which

Salgado and Sabogal create portraiture to assert themselves in a rapidly changing digital

landscape. The difference, however, is that "a digital selfie is a much more instant way of

creating a self-portrait, its reach is far bigger than it ever was."[10] And the stakes are high, as the

political climate in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election looms over the portraiture

featured in this chapter.

The selfie is not as the name implies—exclusively a self-directed enterprise—but has a

second life as it is consumed and responded to in real time, via likes, shares, and comments.

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[7] "How the Self-Portrait Evolved into the Selfie."

[8] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 1.

[9] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 3.

[10] "How the Self-Portrait Evolved into the Selfie."

Figure 18. Jessica Sabogal, "Selfie," October 7, 2016, Instagram,
https://www.instagram.com/p/BLR2s6GDTyl/.

The *artivist selfie* as seen through the lens of the CRDA is also influenced by artists such

as Frida Kahlo, whose deeply personal self-portraits included more than her likeness. Her work

often "dealt with the artist's physical and psychological suffering during her lifetime, as well as

touching upon her turbulent marriage to fellow artist Diego Rivera, and sometimes offered a

philosophical standpoint on politics, feminism, and other issues."[11] The work of Salgado and

Sabogal is an accumulation of generations of artists drawing their likeness in the search for a

deeper understanding of themselves, as well as the shifting technologies. With readily accessible

cameras inside of modern phones, the self-portrait has evolved into what we now understand as

the *selfie,* however, I am interested in excavating its potential to make marginalized and

underrepresented individuals visible by their own design.

In addition to the space of self-portrait or *artivist selfie,* I contend that the space of the

caption or image description text in particular is an artivist's *autohistoriateoria*.[12] Although

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[11] "How the Self-Portrait Evolved into the Selfie."

[12] Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, *Interviews / Entrevistas* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 235.

artists like Salgado are consciously trying to write about their own work, the places in which an artivists' words can be found vary. For example, in lieu of a formal artist's statement, the image "caption" space on a digital platform like Facebook allows artivists to prompt their audiences into their own image-making process, hence creating "autohistoriateoría." In this manner, artists who engage in image description are doing what Gloria Anzaldúa named an "enunciatory practice that converges radical autobiographic, historiographic, testimonio, and theoretical modalities of self-representations." In this extension of the self by online means, the active space of participation for Latinx artivists creates a feedback loop, where they have the agency to engage with how others are consuming and reacting to their self-image and portrait-based work.

On the other hand, the labor that comes with constantly having to educate and engage others with the work—as the real-time responses, both positive and negative—places a responsibility on the artist, subsequently raising questions of labor and providing an unprecedented opportunity for a larger audience to engage with the work and the artist directly.

With the advent of social media, there is also a replication of gendered and racial inequalities, such as the expectation of care and emotional support from artists whose gender presentation is more feminine, as well as the privileging of whiteness and thin bodies on social media platforms. Social media itself provides a space for these conversations and issues, whether it is in the comment section, or if an artist shares their frustrations with how their images are perceived. This speaks to what Pat Zavella terms "cultural shift work," or the work of "contesting hegemonic frames and offering representations and messages that link macro political and economic issues with the resilient lived experience of multiple generations of

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people of color."[13] Particularly on Instagram, which both Salgado and Sabogal mentioned extensively in their interviews, artivists use social media to contest the "hegemonic frames" their art is seen through, and do the cultural shift work by offering alternative representations that link the macro conditions to their own lived experiences. Social media is used to do this shift, and artivists are often both hosting and launching these conversations with their work. The work of Salgado and Sabogal directly opposes and confronts these biases both in the material and digital realm.[14] Their words also affirm a conflicting relationship with these platforms, as they seek to utilize them but still navigate their limitations and issues. Salgado, born in 1983, is a Mexico-born, undocumented, queer artivist based in Long Beach, California. The intersection of his undocumented and queer identities has fueled the contents of his visual art.[15] He challenges white supremacist standards of beauty and reinscribes a working-class aesthetic onto the traditionally elite practice of portraiture by forging a representation that challenges the classed and even gay, white homonormative gaze toward his own queer fat brown body.[16] Scholar Juan Ochoa has previously analyzed Salgado's work using what he termed "Jotería analytics" to track the shifting dynamics of power among Salgado's multiple intersectional identities.[17] The CRA

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[13] Patricia Zavella, *The Movement for Reproductive Justice: Empowering Women of Color through Social Activism* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 30.

[14] While I make a distinction to both the material and the digital spaces that both artivists and their work inhabit, it is important to note that the digital has material consequences. I cover more of the material outcomes of digital relationships in Chapter Five.

[15] "Home," Julio Salgado, accessed June 7, 2021, https://www.juliosalgadoart.com/.

[16] Salgado uses the word "Chubby" to describe not just his self-portraiture but numerous works where he reimagined famous singers and public figures as curvy bodies, notably in his "Chubby Girl Art Files" series, and in his illustrations of drag queen alter ego Perla del Norte.

[17] Juan D. Ochoa, "Shine Bright like a Migrant: Julio Salgado's Digital Art and Its Use of 'Jotería,'" *Social Justice* 42, no. 3/4 (142 (2015): 184–199.

expands on this idea and looks at how Salgado and Sabogal's work does the work of shifting cultural norms in digital spaces.

Sabogal, born in 1987, is a *cuir* (queer) Colombian American muralistx from San Francisco. Through her illustrations and murals of queer women of color, she advances our understanding of the role of representation and the artist in the digital realm. Her representations of queer intimacy and kinship often include her real-life friends into her artwork. I do not want to convey the idea that the internet or its many forums such as social media are utopian or unable to recreate unequal conditions in the physical world. Rather, it is important to highlight how artivists navigate the digital communities in which they actively create and participate in. For Salgado and Sabogal, as well as the rest of the artivists featured, social media is seen as a tool to network, bring awareness on social issues, and disseminate their visual politic, not as the goal or space of political change. In short, it is a means rather than an end. As Salgado expresses, "I think it's a tool. I think it makes art more accessible than it, than ever before. Like, you know, I think more people have seen the artwork that I have made online than, something that I have shown at *La Plaza*,[18] you know, like it's, it's just, it's just the reality of the times, you know? And, and I think that I, I really, I really embraced that early on."[19] While Salgado recognizes social media platforms as a tool that provide better access to his work, the platforms themselves have transformed the way we experience art, especially artwork that works within a CRDA framework. It is the work of artivists online that has allowed for the "cultural shift work" to occur, and to create critical conversations that challenge hegemonic, heteropatriarchal frames of

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[18] La Plaza de Cultura y Artes is an official project of Los Angeles County and a Smithsonian Affiliate. It is a gallery space with culturally enriching exhibitions, educational programs, and public programs.

[19] Julio Salgado, interview by author, in person, digital recording, Los Angeles, June 5, 2018.

understanding. In other words, CRDA-based work has the potential to create cultural shifts and provides the viewer with a specific experience of both art and the artist. It is this specific experience that creates an opening for new ways of understanding.

However, there is also a set of conflicts that all artivists mentioned navigating. Sabogal brought attention to the link between activity on social media platforms such as Instagram, and the monetization of the selfie:

> And now, I feel like I haven't posted on Instagram because it feels like an advertisement. It feels like everyone is a brand and is advertising that. Advertising their art, advertising their clothing, advertising an event, advertising whatever. So, I am in the thick of thinking through some of my feelings about it. You know what I mean? Because I get it. I am still scrolling every day, but at the end of the day I'm like, "This is too much." You know what I mean? I'm like, "It's too much. It's too much. It's too much." Yeah. It feels like too much these days. So, I am struggling because Instagram has, unfortunately, gotten me so far. I have gotten work through it. I have gotten jobs through it. I have gotten contracts through it. And that's amazing. It has gotten me fucking paid.[20]

Like many users of the platform, Sabogal has an uncomfortable relationship with the increased monetization of the visual in applications such as Instagram, where both the owners of the platform as well as companies seek to profit from advertising, both in the form of ads and collaborations with prominent users, whose large followings can result in revenue. On a smaller scale, as Sabogal describes, there has been a shift from sharing visual content to sharing visuals that promote everything from businesses to events to products. This saturation is what Sabogal voices her frustration about. Yet, all artivists interviewed, including Sabogal, recognize that the platform has resulted in their own economic benefit—it has been a place where they have secured commissions and job opportunities, and accessed their own forms of revenue. Yet there is an internal conflict, which Sabogal aptly described that she was "in the process of processing."

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[20] Jessica Sabogal, interview by author, telephone, digital recording, Los Angeles, July 30, 2019.

She added, "It got to the point where back when I was doing shirts and stuff, if I would post something that day, even if it was a selfie, the sales on my web store would go up." This, in particular, demonstrates how social media has become another space for commerce (with the advent of e-commerce). What Sabogal voices is a resistance to the commodification of her likeness, especially in relation to the sales of her work as a whole.

Mirando/Looking

There is a tension between the perceived egotism of selfie culture, and the work of Salgado and Sabogal. Our longing for connection is deeply rooted in what we seek and respond to, both online and offline. There is research that supports the correlation between engagement and visual content of the face. A 2014 Georgia Tech and Yahoo Labs study analyzed over one million images of faces on the Instagram platform and measured social engagement feedback factors such as *likes* and *comments.* The study found that "photos with faces are 38% more likely to receive likes and 32% more likely to receive comments, even after controlling for social network reach and activity."[21] As the title of the study succinctly puts, "Faces Engage Us," thus the power of the portrait, whether it is a photograph of the artivist themselves or portraiture-based work, is one that engages and invites interaction. The study also points to a trend in social media-sharing behavior, where photography as a medium is evolving because of our engagement with photos on social media platforms. In other words, "We are moving away from photography as a way of recording and storing the past, and instead turning photography into a social medium in its own right."[22] This use of photography to share our lives online, provides an opportunity to

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[21] Saeideh Bakhshi, David A. Shamma, and Eric Gilbert, "Faces Engage Us: Photos with Faces Attract More Likes and Comments on Instagram," in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: ACM, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557403, 965–74.

[22] Robin Earle Kelsey and Blake Stimson, *The Meaning of Photography* (Clark Art Institute, 2008), 35.

use visual analysis to assess the impact of portraiture inside online photo-sharing communities such as Instagram. It is this social form of photography and its sharing with a larger community that brings about challenges for artivists as well as opportunities to reach and connect. The engagement of artivists—specifically through portrait-sharing behavior—also provides an insight into the social demands of contemporary artists and the ways in which creating artwork in the twenty-first century presents new challenges and opportunities. For Latinx artivists such as Sabogal and Salgado, for example, whose work is being shared and engaged with online, and whose self-image is being consumed by a large community of users, the crafting of their image, both in their work and their shared visual content (see Figure 19), holds the potential to understand the demands of a digital world on the Latinx body.

Figure 19. Chucha Marquez, "Portrait of Julio Salgado," September 8, 2020, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/CFRRIIQFuAV/.

The tension of this is that while the portraiture of Salgado and Sabogal is embodying the praxis of the CRDA by challenging our preconceived notions of what a body can look like, as well as the traditional practice of the medium itself, it is also existing within larger hegemonic frames. In this case, the tension between selfie culture and the work of collective freedom of an empowered embodiment, and the significance of representation is rendered legible only through the CRDA lens. On the surface, the work may be read and understood within the egotism of selfie culture, but through the CRDA we can see that the artivism of Salgado and Sabogal is creating representations of queer bodies of color whose existence online does the "cultural shift work" of validating bodies that are similar, and the embodiment of these portraits can also provide a model for the collective empowerment of the viewer.

Despite the negative aspects of social media sharing that Sabogal alluded to in her remarks, all six artivists interviewed expressed gratefulness to social media platforms for connecting them to other artist-activists and facilitating dialogue as well as interpersonal

relationships with others who identify as Latinx and have a creative output. While Salgado and Sabogal's social media activity consists largely of sharing their work and their creative process, both mentioned networking and connecting with other artists as a pro of engaging with social media.[23] The *artivist selfie* is a work done by a single author that is consumed and engaged in by the collective. It enacts the principles of the CRDA by celebrating the collective through the individual representation. For those witnessing and engaging Salgado's work for example, his likeness becomes the catalyst for others to feel seen and have recognition, this political work is a collective freedom building, that introduces body and size diversity to the digital landscape. Thus, "the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web have created new practices of media use that provide opportunities for far greater user participation."[24] It is in viewing Salgado's work within a CRDA framework that different bodies can be celebrated, and resist fat-shaming and stigmatization.

My intent is to detail the social histories of contemporary Chicanx and Latinx artists and cultural producers, and the ways in which they fashion themselves within the domain of digital platforms such as Instagram. Every piece of art discussed here tells a story of the culture that produced it. It also carries with it a history of online engagement, such as *likes, comments, reposts,* or more traditional press coverage. I argue that the *artivist selfie* and the feedback or engagement loop it produces is a rich site of analysis and reveals the impact of work done within the CRDA framework. Thus, by carefully examining the practice of self-portraiture in Latinx artistic circles, we will gain further insight into why this form has become a common practice, and how it is defying expectations of gender, race, and sexuality in the twenty-first century.

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[23] I discuss these interpersonal relationships in detail in Chapter Four.

[24] Deborah Lupton, *Fat* (Routledge, 2018).

While most of the scholarship on artivism focuses on the artwork or the social issues and themes that inspire it, my aim is to add an analysis of the behavior (both artivist and audience) that occurs within digital social platforms. I argue that the online space is both an affirming and conflicting platform for contemporary artivists—it has the capacity to amplify creative work and foster community, while simultaneously allowing for capitalist and white supremacist notions of labor, as well as the pervasiveness of thinness as the ideal to affect the lives both online and offline of its users. In other words, contemporary Latinx artivists are developing best practices for photo-sharing platforms such as Instagram through their artivism. More importantly, Latinx art has been transformed by their use. The advent of social media and the internet has transformed how artivists share themselves, but it has also affirmed some of their influences, such as the artist Frida Kahlo, whose self-portraits are in some ways the first *artivist selfie* Salgado witnessed.

Because Frida Told Me So

While there is a vast amount of literature that focuses on the life and impact of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, I want to give a brief overview of her introduction to US contexts and conversations, to better understand her place in the minds and hearts of contemporary Latinx artivists, and the work of Salgado as a direct result of her influence. A? main purpose of this chapter is to highlight Kahlo's role in portraiture for Chicanx artists, what it means politically for artists such as Salgado and Sabogal to look at her image and body of work, to further understand what her figure means to artivists aesthetically and personally.

Kahlo's work, her personal, and political life did not become a mainstream conversation in the United States until the late 1970s when she was discovered[25] by US feminists and Chicana/o artists alike.[26] This was due in large part to several exhibitions and publications about the artist that circulated amongst academic and artistic elite communities. Since the early 1980s, numerous biographies and books have been written about the artist, including Frida Kahlo biographer Margaret Lindauers.[27] Lindauers details how this shift—from unsung artist to fearless heroine—led to a "cult"-like status that can be best represented by one of her portraits being included in the New York Metropolitan Museum's 1991 exhibit *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*.[28] Despite the exhibition containing only one self-portrait by the artist, Kahlo's image was used to promote the exhibition with her face gracing billboards, posters, newspapers, and educational materials within the museum.

Soon after *Splendors of Thirty Centuries,* Kahlo's likeness began to make its way into popular culture. Her unibrow began to be used on fashion magazines; museum-gift shops began to produce and stock postcards, t-shirts and jewelry incorporating her self-portraits. In 1991,

[25] I use the word "discovered" to indicate a timeline in which her image and work was introduced to US-based artists and society both white, and of Mexican descent. However, Kahlo's work was already widely known in Mexico and Latin American more broadly, long before the 1970s, and had been exhibited in New York, Paris, and Mexico City before *Splendors of Thirty Centuries*.

[26] Pérez, *Chicana Art*.

[27] Biographies on Kahlo include, Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (Harper & Row, 1983). Martha Zamora, *Frida Kahlo: Brush of Anguish* (Chronicle Books, 1990). Gannit Ankori's, *Frida Kahlo* (Reaktion Books, 2013). Gerry Souter's, *Frida Kahlo* (Parkstone International, 2016). And the most recent reissue of Herrera's, *Frida: The Biography of Frida Kahlo* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018). Several books have been published on Kahlo's popularity and time in the US, i.e., Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Wesleyan University Press, 2011); Celia Stahr, *Frida in America: The Creative Awakening of a Great Artist* (St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2020). As well as historical fiction imagining her life from the perspective of her sister Cristina, Barbara Mujica, *Frida: A Novel of Frida Kahlo* (Abrams, 2012). Herrera's biography in particular has been cited approximately 538 times in scholarly articles, ranging widely in discipline. This is but a small sample of Kahlo's impact both in both the art historical record and popular imagination.

[28] Lindauer, *Devouring Frida*.

among the most vocal admirers of her work was singer/performer Madonna, who purchased two of Kahlo's paintings and spoke about her desire to play the artist in a film about her life. Since Frida's meteoric rise to popularity, there have been several exhibitions on her paintings, her personal photographs, and even a replica of her home garden in New York's botanical garden.[29] Kahlo has attained a status of celebrity that exceeds the success she enjoyed during her lifetime.

With the saturation not only of Kahlo's image but numerous biographies, several films, and a steady stream of scholarship about her and what she represents to the "politically disenfranchised and marginalized"[30] I contend that Frida Kahlo's image has been re-circulated and re-introduced through the art of Chicanx artists, via digital platforms, online search engines, and the generation of Chicana/o artists such as Yreina Cervántes and Amalia Mesa-Bains among others whose work was deeply influenced by Kahlo's creative output. It is the re-introduction of Kahlo's work into contemporary Chicanx and Latinx artist circles, that has led to her image and work to be used as influence and reference for a new generation of artists with digital tools at their disposal, such as Salgado. Kahlo's raw and unapologetic representation of herself is one of Salgado's main influences, and elicits a reaction from its viewers, much like Kahlo's work continues to do. Her embodiment left in Salgado a yearning to do this political work of self-embodiment.

In the case of Salgado's work, the phrase "Because Frida Told Me So" on his shirt in *Selena Inspired* (2016) is a directive, it is a call to action that Salgado is actively pursuing in his work (Figure 20). It is the acknowledgement that Kahlo's work has given Salgado permission to

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[29] The exhibition *Frida Kahlo Art Garden Life* was curated by distinguished art historian and specialist in Mexican art Adriana Zavala, Ph.D. Exhibition, May 16, 2015, through November 1, 2015, at The New York Botanical Garden. I discuss this exhibition further in the next chapter, where I analyze the incorporation of plants and organic materials in the work of Latinx artivists who make art related to climate justice and their immediate environment.

[30] Lindauer, *Devouring Frida*, 2.

document his likeness, in all of its fullness, digitally. There is power in the image of Kahlo as blueprint for a confrontational yet vulnerable self-portraiture practice, one that not only forces the viewer to contend with the artist himself, but also communicates the artist's views on class, sexuality, and immigration, to name a few. In their analysis of Frida Kahlo's work, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen propose a different approach, one that departs from relating the objects and symbols in her work to her "personal life and private emotions."[31] Mulvey and Wollen argue that Kahlo's use of visual devices or "emblems" in her paintings worked as a kind of subtext for her political beliefs and presented her point of view on broader social issues.[32] I take a similar approach in identifying the emblems and symbols within Salgado's work as not just direct representations of his personal life and emotions but view them as visual clues of his political work and stance. Given Salgado's background as a political cartoonist, to simply conduct a formal visual analysis of his work would not render legible the narrative subtext the emblems and objects in his work reveal about his views on labor, and undocumented queerness. Thus, my approach to the analysis of the seven images that comprise this series is a combination of deep visual and contextual analysis, and social histories of Chicanx/Latinx art. To understand why Salgado's self-portraits are significant, we must value the context in which they are created as much as what is in the images themselves.

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[31] Lindauer, *Devouring Frida*, 28.

[32] Laura Mulvey, "Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (New York: Springer, 1989), 81–107.

Figure 20. Julio Salgado, *Selena Inspired*, 2016, digital art.

For the month of June in 2018, the Arts and Culture division of Google published an

article featuring several LGBTQI artists, including Salgado, whose work carried on the legacy of

Frida Kahlo. On the subject of Frida, Salgado stated:

> I first saw Frida's work in 1996, when I was enrolled in this 7th grade art class
> after I moved to Long Beach, California from Mexico. I was a 12-year-old
> confused, gay, brown boy who did not want to live in the US and I remember
> seeing her *Las Dos Fridas* piece and totally changing my life. I did not fully
> understand the depth of Frida's work at that time, but something about that piece
> moved me to pursue a creative path in my life. Although there are many pieces of
> Frida that show pain, there are many self-portraits where she is surrounded by
> things she enjoyed. I think that as immigrant artists, we are expected to constantly
> create things that we are against, which is understandable. But I am taking a note
> from Frida's art book, and I am creating work inspired by the music that I listen
> to, the movies that I am watching, the sitcoms that I am re-watching.[33]

The portraits of undocuqueer artist Julio Salgado reveal the iconography and symbolism that

exists in his survival kit for the current time. Salgado immigrated to Long Beach, California at

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[33] "Frida Kahlo's Lasting Impact on LGBTQ Artists - Google Arts & Culture," Google, June 2018, artsandculture.google.com/theme/CgISm6mFqz2HIQ.

the age of twelve, with his mother, father, and younger sister, who underwent a kidney transplant in the United States. His first art show occurred because of encouragement from educators in middle school.

Later in high school, Salgado remained involved in art classes and art extracurricular activities. It was this encouragement that led him to major in Art during his first year at Long Beach City College, however, the classes proved to be a disappointment overall, as Salgado later recalled his experience with studio art courses. He began his response by calling out the lack of diversity at Long Beach City College, then retold a particularly painful incident that involved one of his art professors. He recalled, "We had to do a self-portrait, and we had to do a critique. And I remember that day I was feeling a little down, and so I drew myself, my face kind of sad, and the bottom part of my body was melting. It was like a charcoal drawing."[34] Although Salgado fully expressed his emotional state of being in the assignment, this was not to the professor's liking, who called everyone's attention to Salgado's piece. He said to the class, "I want everyone to see Julio's piece." At that moment, Salgado told me he expected praise, but instead the professor exclaimed, "this is what happens when you don't follow the rules, this is what happens when you're trying to show off."[35] In that moment, Salgado felt embarrassed and bewildered by the professor's response. Salgado reflected further on the incident: "Looking back . . . I was not ready to receive that kind of harsh criticism. I was seventeen years old, and I was one of the few people of color in that classroom."

I found this moment in Salgado's experience revealing because it involved a self-portrait, and it reflected the disenfranchisement and dissonance many Chicanx and Latinx artists face

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[34] Julio Salgado, interview, in person, June 5, 2018.

[35] Salgado, interview.

within the traditional arts classroom, and how one negative experience at a critical moment can deter them from pursuing art. This speaks to the limits of traditional portraiture and how the instructions are coded language for the parameters under which this art must be made. Salgado's mention of the harsh critique he received—due to his failure to "follow instructions" when in reality he had failed to draw his portrait in the style of hyperrealism—speaks to what critical race scholars refer to as racial microaggressions, or "subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns."[36] It was this negative experience, combined with a Eurocentric curriculum overall, that led Salgado to disengage from art and art history courses at his community college. When recalling the curriculum offerings, he elaborated: "I was very disappointed, we were learning about all this European art, it was not my thing, I became very bored. Eventually I saw this flyer in the school newspaper, they were looking for a political cartoonist." This flyer led Salgado in a different direction altogether that was a better fit for his interests, however, it began from a place of not feeling included within the traditional arts curriculum. Salgado began illustrating editorials for the school newspaper, and he now reflects on this experience as one that politicized him "more than the art classes."[37]

The insistence on a European curriculum in art classes reinforces a culture that does not make space for alternative representations, namely BIPOC students like Salgado. His experience reflects a rejection from formal arts training and formal art spaces on campus. In their study of campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates, Yosso et al. found: "Within a negative campus racial climate, these interpersonal interactions create anxiety for Latina/o

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[36] Tara Yosso, William A. Smith, Miguel Ceja, and Daniel G Solórzano, "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates," *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (2009): 660.

[37] Salgado, interview.

undergraduates, who cannot shake the sense that their every word may reaffirm racialized assumptions and cast doubt on their academic merit."[38]

While Salgado's experience did not lead him to abandon art altogether, it raises questions about the ways in which Chicanx and Latinx artists more broadly feel excluded from predominantly white arts spaces due to negative experiences such as these. Salgado's experience with self-portraits, albeit singular, is what led him to work within an environment that combined politics with art. This engagement with current events, deeply influenced his work, even the most personal pieces. During his community college and undergraduate experience, Salgado focused on political cartoons, a unique venue where his analysis of current events and key political issues transformed into visual satire. It was in this loose cartoon style that Salgado was able to express himself without the pressure of conforming to the instructions of his art classes (namely to draw in a hyper realistic style). Salgado's art style of the political cartoon speaks back to the "instructions" of a Eurocentric arts curriculum. Cartoons and comics are particularly seen as less formal and not taken as seriously within formal art practice; in fact, this disregard for what is deemed rigorous is a characteristic of Salgado's work. Comics and art in particular have "an uneasy relationship: the popularity of terms such as 'sequential art' and 'graphic novel' exist primarily to obscure the connection of certain elevated works with the mass media associations of comics."[39]

It is imperative to remember that Salgado's choice in style was in part a direct response to his experiences of rejection from traditional art forms, and an early realization that his art style

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[38] Yosso et al., "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates," 669.

[39] Anastasia Salter, "Comics and Art," in *The Routledge Companion to Comics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 349.

was unwelcome within the traditional studio art classroom, and establishment. Not only was Salgado's body and the cartoon likeness offensive within that classroom experience, his interest in wanting to express his political opinions led him to pursue political cartoons as well. Due to his involvement in his community college's newspaper, and later at the *OC Weekly*, the rapid turnaround for print made Salgado develop a quick hand-drawn practice rooted in keeping up with these deadlines.[40] This early focus was deeply influential to Salgado's work, and its current form still engages with current events, but features Salgado more prominently, and has taken on a bright, neon color palette to depict his undocuqueer lived experience. Thus, by utilizing a loose cartoon or comic like style, Salgado continues to disregard the instructions, and reinforces not only his likeness but the validity of the style in which he draws. His style is akin to what Michael D. Picone "calls an 'appropriation of comic art motifs"[41] used in that context to refer to the work of Roy Lichtenstein and before him Andy Warhol. The evolution of Salgado's style from newspaper fixture to his current practice, shows a similar move to Lichtenstein's in that it removed the "frames of progression"[42] and condensed this passage of time into a single image, thus increasing its visual impact.

Additionally, a self-portrait is a unique view into the artist's milieu. Thus in his practice, Salgado actively portrays his multiple identities as a fat, brown, queer, undocumented working-class creative of color navigating a fraught US context. Previous scholarship on Chicanx art has sought to delineate cultural hybridity in the lives of Chicanx and Latinx identified artists, such as Salgado, who embody multiple conflicting positionalities at once, queer, Latinx, undocumented,

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[40] While Salgado still regularly draws by hand with a marker (his preferred method) he has recently begun experimenting with digital image making software and has since produced several pieces with it.

[41] Salter, "Comics and Art," 351.

[42] Salter, "Comics and Art," 352.

working-class, to name a few. For example, the work of Laura Pérez located spirituality as both a theme and central identity in Chicana art. Pérez's work revealed the ways in which post-1965 spiritual literature became the context in which Chicana artists created their "culturally hybrid, often do-it-yourself, noninstitutional spiritualities—as a gesture of yearning, and an *ofrenda*— toward greater personal integrity, empowerment, and social justice."[43] In a similar gesture, I am invested in the context of social media and digital platforms as the surfaces where contemporary Chicanx and Latinx artists reveal themselves to others via the screen, where they, too, yearn for empowerment and integrity. Much of the scholarship[44] on Salgado's work focuses on the theme of immigration and the more blatant references to his undocumented identity—as an undocumented and queer migrant. Additionally, his artwork has been widely used and distributed during the youth immigrant rights movement around immigration reforms such as AB540 and the *Dreamer* movement of the early and mid-2000s and continues to be used as a form of resistance to the current presidential administration's strong stance against immigration reform for racialized minorities in the United States. While these realities are a deep influence, I argue that the self-portrait form in which a large part of Salgado's work takes shape is also part of the political work being done. It is the act of witnessing Julio himself, and his body, directly in conversation with these issues that engages his audiences online. Thus, the CRDA makes legible the layers of work both individual and collectively that the *artivist selfies* are doing.

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[43] Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 2.

[44] This includes Hinda Seif, "' Layers of Humanity': Interview with Undocuqueer Artivist Julio Salgado," *Latino Studies* 12, no. 2 (2014): 300–309. Salgado's first interview within an academic journal, although he has granted interviews to media outlets and popular publications since. Additionally, Carrie Hart, "The Artivism of Julio Salgado's I Am Undocuqueer! Series," *Working Papers in Education* 1, no. 1 (2015); and Ochoa, "Shine Bright like a Migrant." There are also several theses and dissertations that mention Salgado's work, primarily its role in the immigrant rights movement. i.e., Sandra Y. Galta, "Intersectional Subaltern Counterpublics: UndocuQueer Online Activism and Testimonios," 2018, https://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/handle/2097/39117.

Salgado's work is often used to bring attention to the use of protest art to humanize the experiences of undocumented immigrants as part of a larger immigrant rights movement. What Joanna Perez calls "Undocuartivism" has quickly become synonymous with individuals like Salgado, as a prominent artivist and outspoken individual on immigrant issues.[45] According to Pérez, "Latino undocuartivism (undocumented art activism) is playing an essential role in dispelling myths while also providing spaces of resistance and empowerment for undocumented immigrants."[46] Through a visual analysis of Salgado's "Gimme All Your Colors," I expand on scholarship covering Salgado's work, adding to it the digital engagement that both assesses the reception of the work, but provides insight into how the self-image of Salgado is received in real time. His work continues to evolve along with the narrative of undocumented migrant youth in the United States.

In discussing the consumption of Salgado's work as well as his online presence, and how his portraits provide affirmation for other queer and undocumented viewers, the work of Juan Ochoa offers a multidimensional analysis of Salgado's queer identity as a central tenet of his artistic practice, not as an additive. Ochoa begins his article on Salgado's work with a personal anecdote on how he came across the work of Salgado:

> Logging into Facebook is part of my daily routine to catch up with events. One particular day, I scrolled down the potpourri of posts and stumbled upon an image that haunted me for the rest of the day. Julio Salgado's digital print titled "In the Wise Words of Jay-Z" became a catalyst that launched the inquiry presented in this article. Salgado's print is a two-dimensional image depicting a young brown man wearing a light blue T-shirt and dark blue jeans standing in front of a red sea of anonymous nativist protesters holding picket signs that read: "What part of illegal don't you understand?" and "Go back home illegals!" To me, Salgado's

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[45] Joanna B. Pérez, "Undocuartivism: Latino Undocumented Immigrant Empowerment through Art and Activism," *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures* 2, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.2979/chiricu.2.2.04, 23.

[46] Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 26.

image captures the xenophobic Zeitgeist of present-day Arizona, where SB-1070 seems to dictate everyday life.[47]

Ochoa's encounter with the artwork of Julio Salgado on a feed of Facebook content, mirrors that of many who encounter the work of contemporary Latinx artists via the digital surfaces they frequent every single day. Ochoa's conceptualization of a "Jotería analytics" is an effort to bridge and weave multiple genealogies to explore how queer Chicanas/os destabilize Chicana/o subjectivity."[48]

Furthermore, Jotería analytics also allows for a much more complex analysis of works like Salgado's and credits the multigenerational labor of Chicana feminist scholars, and Chicana lesbians specifically, who sought to complicate the relationship between Chicana identity and queerness. This explicit building upon a Chicana feminist foundation also informs my reading of Salgado's work as part of the CRDA, since it centers self-representation and the depiction of his brown body as a site of knowledge. Taking Ochoa's approach as a departure point, I see Salgado's queerness as a central component to the meaning embedded in both his work and online presence, as well as his visibly brown body, which is a constant theme in his work, as it is the vessel he embodies most intimately.

The self-portrait series "Gimme All Your Colors" consists of six monochromatic digital self-portraits, each titled *Gimme All Your* followed by the color they represent. Together, the six pieces make up a rainbow. Salgado departs from his use of text to center color and visual symbols in his artwork to what I term are *working-class aesthetics*, a reinscribing of a working-class narrative using objects within the image such as street food, grapes, as well as figures of

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[47] Ochoa, "Shine Bright like a Migrant," 185.

[48] Ochoa, "Shine Bright like a Migrant," 187.

farm workers, street vendors, and more to indicate solidarity with manual forms of labor, and to bring awareness to the ways in which both rural and urban migrant workers have a hand in our daily lives. The signification of the working-class in Latinx and Chicanx art is not a new occurrence. Salgado's work joins that of artists like Carmen Lomas Garza, Ester Hernandez, and others whose depiction of working-class figures or labor inscribes an aesthetics that centers class. Social movements scholar Ed McCaughan notes that while Chicano Movement art strongly identified with the working class, these were deeply influenced by Mexican social movements, whose ideas of the working class had "been represented as unalterably heterosexual"[49] mainly through Mexican political cartoonist and lithographer José Guadalupe Posada. Much like Hernandez's *La Ofrenda,* Salgado's reinscribing of working-class emblems in his work, "refuse to be excluded from their class, their community, their movement."[50]

Gimme All Your Colors

Salgado arrived in the United States as a child and is part of what has been termed the 1.5-generation.[51] Sabogal is the daughter of Colombian immigrants who obtained a post-secondary education and is part of the second generation. While the definition of working-class has been largely subjective, it has often been associated with the lack of a four-year college degree.[52] Both Salgado and Sabogal (currently in their mid-thirties) came of age during the Great

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[49] Ed McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán*. Duke University Press, 2012, 100.

[50] McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements*, 101.

[51] "Ages, Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Second Generations in the United States. Rumbaut - 2004 - International Migration Review - Wiley Online Library," n.d., accessed September 13, 2019, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00232.x.

[52] Jack Metzgar, "Misrepresenting the White Working Class: What the Narrating Class Gets Wrong," *Working Class Perspectives* (2016).

Recession of 2008—an event preceded by decades of increasing inequality[53]—and obtained

bachelor's degrees at public California universities. Thus, the insertion of working-class themes

and figures in both their work is not only in relationship to their political values and alignment

with working-class communities and issues, but also a result of their own experiences with socio

economic precarity. As a whole, "today's youth are coming of age in an era characterized by

increasing socioeconomic inequality and a shrinking middle class."[54] As full-time working

artists, both Salgado and Sabogal rely on different forms of income, often based on selling

artwork and merchandise, working as a project manager for an arts advocacy non-profit

(Salgado), or attaining mural commissions in the case of Sabogal. Thus, working-class aesthetics

are both being reinscribed, and experienced by both artists at different degrees. The insertion and

representation of working-class labor figures and iconography is also deeply political and speaks

to the commitment both artists have to social and economic equality for Black, Indigenous,

people of color (BIPOC). Salgado's "Gimme All Your Colors" and Sabogal's "We the

Indivisible" and "White Supremacy is Killing Me" are direct responses to the class conditions of

the Latinx community, they are visuals that engage the volatile climate of the Trump era at the

time of their creation, by centering women, and/or queer bodies in states of rest and joy, a

different form of protest.

Salgado's "Selena Inspired" made shortly before the "Gimme All Your Colors" series

features Salgado prominently placed in the center of the image, in his bedroom, decorated with a

poster of Tejana singer and Latina icon, Selena Quintanilla, below it is a poster containing the

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[53] Christine J. Walley, "Trump's Election and the 'White Working Class': What We Missed," *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 2 (2017): 231–36. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12473.

[54] Veronica Terriquez, "Trapped in the Working Class? Prospects for the Intergenerational (Im)Mobility of Latino Youth," *Sociological Inquiry* 84, no. 3 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12042, 386.

logo for AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP),[55] directly to the left is a large poster with

a brown fist, that reads "Illegal Faggots Against Borders." The art on the walls sets up not only

the politics of Salgado himself, but frames his brown body, as it sits wearing a yellow shirt that

reads "Because Frida Told Me So," accompanied by a cup of coffee to his right and a solitary

flower on a vase to his left. This image is a prelude to the "Gimme All Your Colors" series,

bursting with monochromatic symbolism, yet the title alludes to another major influence of

Salgado's, the late Tejana singer Selena. Each piece features Salgado in the center of the frame.

Salgado's gaze is indirect, his facial expression serious, despite his body facing forward, his eyes

are cast to the side, toward the "Illegal Faggots Against Borders" poster. The expression on

Salgado's face in this piece mirrors the shift in his work, from speaking directly to immigrant

rights movement policies such as AB540, the Dream Act and DACA, to a much more personal

frame of reference.

This shift from explicitly political work to self-portraiture is one that Salgado attributes to

the election of Donald J. Trump in November 2016. At the time, as a well-known figure in the

immigrant rights youth circles, Salgado recalled the events immediately after the election:

> And so, after that [election night], like I also started getting a lot of calls and,
> people asking me, media asking, "Oh, we want to talk to DACA folks because we
> want to know how you feel. Are you scared? What are you feeling, you know,
> like, what's gonna [sic] happen?" And like to me what was funny because I am
> like, "Well during the Obama Administration we had the most record of
> deportations"—And I'm like, you know what? You want me to be scared. You
> want that? That's what you want. And like, I'm not going to be scared. I'm going
> to be creating art in times of crisis. I'm going to be creating art. That brings me
> joy. And that means talking about sex, talking about, you know, going on dates,
> talking about, you know, like exactly all these things that I'm not, and this is one
> thing that Yosimar (Reyes) and I talk about a lot, my roommate, the poet.[56]

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[55] ACT UP is an international direct-action advocacy group formed in 1987, working to impact the lives of people with AIDS (PWAs) and the AIDS pandemic to bring about legislation, medical research and treatment and policies to ultimately bring an end to the disease by mitigating loss of health and lives.

[56] Salgado, interview.

The immediacy with which Salgado was contacted for a reaction led him to reflect on what he wanted to focus on in his art from that point forward. While the assumption of the media outlets that contacted him was that he would be afraid, which he admitted at some level he of course is aware, he made a conscious choice to center his joy in as he calls it, in "times of crisis." This sentiment not only echoes in "Selena Inspired" and "Gimme All Your Colors" it is also one that expands what the undocumented experience looks like, Leisy Abrego's work on the lives of undocumented youth also helps to shed light on the complexity of undocumentedness. According to Abrego, the problem lies in telling a "general" story about the lives of youth, when there is more than one undocumented experience. She asserts, "Existing studies tend to consider the situation of undocumented immigrants or the role of legal status *in general* and therefore implicitly contribute to a notion that there is a monolithic undocumented immigrant experience."[57] The work of Salgado tells a different story, one that includes the everyday, and full colorful spectrum of joy in uncertain times.

"Selena Inspired" maintains Salgado as the main subject in the center of the image, the art on the walls foreshadowing his queer politics, paying homage to direct-action and community activism via ACT UP, as well as a call to action for queer kin to denounce borders, a political stance that reflects his intersectional activism as an artist of the undocumented rights movement of the later 2000s until now. Salgado has revealed in other interviews his personal connection to the AIDS virus, as scholar Hinda Seif writes, "During his adolescence when Salgado started to grapple with his non-heterosexual feelings, he frequently visited his gay uncle Chicho, as he was

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[57] Leisy J. Abrego, "Legal Consciousness of Undocumented Latinos: Fear and Stigma as Barriers to Claims-Making for First- and 1.5-Generation Immigrants," *Law & Society Review* 45, no. 2 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5893.2011.00435.x, 340.

nicknamed, who had contracted AIDS, when he was sick in bed or in the hospital. "I always felt that was going to happen to me, that's what happens when you're gay: you die."[58] Not only did having an uncle affected by the virus directly influence Salgado's work, but it also reflects the

taboo attached to be a gay man in a Mexican cultural context, where Salgado received messaging that conflated homosexuality with the virus itself. Salgado deals with this personal connection in several works, specifically a remix of his Queer Butterfly (2013) piece, with his uncle Chicho as the main figure to commemorate his passing in 2018 (see Figure 21).

Figure 21. Julio Salgado, *Tio Chicho*, 2018, digital art.

As the narrative of the undocumented rights movement has developed over time, so has Salgado's artwork. At the beginning of his career as an artivist, his work documented the fight of the youth-led efforts to pass the DREAM Act, bipartisan legislation that would provide an opportunity for undocumented students with "good moral character," and who have lived in the

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[58] Salgado in Duffy, 2013; Seif, "'Layers of Humanity': Interview with Undocuqueer Artivist Julio Salgado," *Latino Studies* 12, no. 2 (2014): 301.

United States for a certain period, to obtain legal status.[59] After college, Salgado formed

Dreamers Adrift, a media collective "by and for young undocumented people inspired by the

activism of immigrant youth for the DREAM Act."[60] Salgado is most known for his posters in

solidarity with the youth leading the immigrant rights movement, through the DREAM Act, and

most recently Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. Salgado's posters "visually

document and reinforce the undocumented youth movement. His 'I Exist' illustrations of young

immigrants in caps and gowns in support of the Dream Act "directly address the dehumanizing

language of anti-immigrant discourse."[61]

Salgado's work has included queer identity since 2012, with his poster series "I am

Undocu-Queer" launched in collaboration with United We Dream's Queer Undocumented

Immigrant Project (QUIP) and featured thirty LGBTQ undocumented youth. When asked to

define how he uses *undocuqueer,* Salgado replied:

> I cannot take credit for creating the term. I do not remember where I heard it first.
> I saw it on Facebook, somebody commented [and used it]. But what I knew,
> undocumented and queer people had been behind many of the actions that led to
> the first civil disobedience in Tucson in 2010. They were open about being
> undocumented and queer. Tania, Yahaira. That was a great shift in narrative.
> Because in many movements, the Chicano movement, queer men, you don't [talk
> about them] . . . It was a very patriarchal, male-dominated, straight-identified
> movement. To have these youth . . . saying "this is how we are, this is who we
> are"—it was historic. I could not *not* pay attention to it.[62]

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[59] Arely M. Zimmerman, "Documenting DREAMs: New Media, Undocumented Youth and the Immigrant Rights Movement A Case Study Report Working Paper Media, Activism and Participatory Politics Project Civic Paths," 2012, 8.

[60] Seif, "Layers of Humanity," 302.

[61] R. Lopez, "Interview Highlights: Dreamers Adrift and the 'I Exist' Collection," *MIT Center for Civic Media* (2012).

[62] Seif, "Layers of Humanity," 304–5.

Salgado's experience of seeing undocuqueer activists on the ground, combined with the ever-aggregating web of information that is social media networking, speaks to the twenty-first-century amalgamation of acquiring knowledge through multiple sources. Thus, Salgado's work has evolved as his own language around sexuality, immigration status and race has shifted. The authoritative "Gimme" in "Gimme All Your Colors" notes a taking as opposed to a polite request for representation in the queer and LGBTQIA+ experience. Salgado's title alludes to a direct and confrontational stance toward representation, one that is about taking ownership of his body and experience, as well as the colors in the figurative rainbow and what they represent. The

series as a whole uses symmetry and mirror images of key iconography, or figures to convey specific emotions related to the colors represented. The first two pieces in the series, comprised of *Gimme All Your Colors: Orange* (2017) (Figure 22) and *Gimme All Your Colors: Yellow* (2017) (Figure 23), feature Salgado in the center of the frame once more.

Figure 22. Julio Salgado, *Gimme Me All Your Colors: Orange*, 2017, digital art.

Figure 23. Julio Salgado, *Gimme All Your Colors: Yellow*, 2017, digital art.

Gimme All Your Colors: Orange (2017) features an orange-clad Salgado, with eyes

closed, and his mouth wide open as though loudly yelling, a bag of oranges in each hand. During

our interview, Salgado mentioned the two alter egos he likes to depict in his work:

> When I draw myself or my alter ego I have two alter egos They're both drag
> queens. One is *Perla del Norte* (Pearl of the North) and the other one is *Ethnicity
> Brown*. Perla del Norte, yeah, she's, she's more like a lot of northern more like in
> touch with her, like Mexican or *norteño* culture—Brown is more like the
> Americanized, you know, like she watches *Rupaul's Drag Race* and like she loves
> *Garbage,* and she loves like *No Doubt*. She like, you know, loves all this, all this
> music.[63]

Thus, given the above descriptions, the figure in *Orange* is likely the second alter ego *Ethnicity*

Brown, whose love of American pop culture and rock music speaks to Salgado's upbringing in

Long Beach. *Brown* or Salgado is wearing a flowing sleeveless orange dress, several items

surround his figure in the background: a couple of orange-flavored carbonated drinks, known as

Jarritos, a Mexican cola brand. Below it, Salgado's figure is flanked by two albums, openly gay

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[63] Salgado, interview.

Black musician Frank Ocean's *channel orange* and *Version 2.0*, the second studio album by 1990s rock band Garbage.

In a single image, Salgado pays homage to the Latinx migrants who are fixtures at the side of Los Angeles freeway exits, making a living by selling oranges inside of mesh bags. Often but not always, these migrants are also undocumented, and resort to street vending due to its unregulated nature. The albums on the other hand, provide an insight into the music that shaped Salgado's own worldview, a combination of deeply personal, Pop music (Ocean) and 1990s women-led rock bands. *Gimme All Your Colors: Orange* (2017) is a rallying cry, a defiant yell against conformity, it is as angsty as the music of the 1990s that shaped its author. In centering his body and not just his face (like in traditional portraiture) Salgado embodies the intersections of his subjectivity as a racialized, classed, and queer body within the United States.

Salgado's brown figure mirrors what Cindy Cruz likens the brown lesbian body, she claims, "The brown and lesbian body that traverses the First to Third World landscape is, as Chela Sandoval so aptly describes, "the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity-as-masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideological, aesthetic, and political positions."[64] It is this trickster attitude of embodying multiple aesthetic and political positions that gives Salgado's work its playfulness, it is at once making the brown working-class body visible, and in the same vein including playful reminders of a life that includes sex and pleasure as part of living an undocumented life.

Gimme All Your Colors: Yellow (2017) features a demurer Salgado, with a forlorn expression, wearing of course, a yellow shirt while holding a half-peeled banana. Salgado's

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[64] Quoted in Cruz, 2001.

choice of the banana, half peeled in between his hands, as well as the corn represent his preference for phallic symbolism in his work, and allude to his queerness, an identity he is open and proud of. In *Yellow*, the figure of the street vendor takes on a homoerotic potentiality, both the right and left side of the image contain mirror images of Mexican-style prepared corn or *elote,* a popular Mexican street food, a brown street vendor along with a cart, labeled with the word "Elotes" to note the contents of his vehicle. The bottom half of the piece contains an alternating pattern of unpeeled bananas and a lemon. These objects reflect on the opposite side, framing Salgado's figure in the middle. The second image in the series imitates the balanced geometry of the last: the vendors in particular, clad in yellow, wear a Mexican cowboy hat, often worn by street vendors to shield them from the sun, while working outdoors. Between this mirror image of *elotes* and their vendors lies a cup with Mexican corn, another popular preparation of the corn kernels as street food, boiled and topped with cotija cheese, chili powder, and a spoon for easy eating.

As Salgado mentioned previously, his aim in doing work that spoke to his day-to-day life and sexuality includes a range of emotions and preoccupations that form his own undocumented experience. Not only does the banana in his hand symbolize a phallic desire, but it also represents nourishment and longing. Unlike *Orange*, in *Yellow* Salgado's forlorn expression makes direct eye contact, his mouth is shaped downward to indicate a sad expression, his eyes, slightly curved down. Once again, Salgado has chosen to feature Latinx street vendors, featuring the corn cob in *Yellow*, a food that is widely known and associated with life outdoors, often a treat for children living in urban communities. Salgado's *Yellow* reminds us of the joy that comes with hearing the horn of an *elote* cart as it makes its way down a neighborhood street. It also reminds us of the labor of Latinx street vendors, and the informal economies that exist alongside

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more formal work environments in the city. Many street vendors in Los Angeles are undocumented and live in a precarious social position, much like Salgado. Informal economies scholar Leigh-Anna Hidalgo notes that "from 1994 to 2018, however, street vending was classified as a misdemeanor and street vendors were regularly fined, jailed, and deported."[65] Coincidentally, at the time of Salgado's piece, a coalition of Black and Brown street vendors, in Los Angeles organized to decriminalize street vending.[66] Salgado's inclusion of brown *eloteros* in *Yellow* is both a nod to the network of street vendors in Los Angeles, and a representational choice to make visible the brown bodies of working-class Latinx elders.

Finally, so far in the series, Salgado has chosen fruits that correspond to popular informal jobs across the city, this choice is distinctive in that generally other Latinx artists have used fruit to refer directly to Mexican and Central American farmworkers, at the turn of the twenty-first century, representations of urban fruit and flower vendors began to increase. For example, Ester Hernández's "Virgen de las calles" features a "neighborhood street vendor Jesusa Rodriguez."[67] As Blackwell points out, Jesusa's stance is an act of courage, her "gaze is direct rather than defiant, as if saying, I am here."[68] In addition to Hernández's motivation for drawing Jesusa to showcase "the spirit and strength of all migrant women,"[69] Salgado's *Orange* and *Yellow* continue the inclusion of street vendors in the urban imaginary that Hernández and Frank

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[65] Leigh-Anna Grace Hidalgo, "The Los Angeles Street Vending Campaign: Visual Narratives of Contested Urban Terrains" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2020), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8gf121br.

[66] The work of this coalition ended with the Safe Sidewalk Vending Act, which made street vending legal in all of California. See, Hidalgo.

[67] Maylei Blackwell, "Women Who Make Their Own Worlds: The Life and Work of Ester Hernández," in *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (Texas University Press, 2018), 152.

[68] Blackwell, "Women Who Make Their Own Worlds," 152.

[69] Blackwell, "Women Who Make Their Own Worlds," 153.

Romero[70] have depicted, with the added layer of meaning to note that Latinx street vendors form part of the rainbow, the symbol that has become synonymous with the LGBTQIA+ community, and as a whole form part of Salgado's experience as a queer undocumented, brown man.

The first two pieces in the series, *Orange* and *Yellow*, in their inclusion of iconographic and direct references to street vendors, make the viewer painfully aware of the "people who occupy legally vulnerable and criminalized statuses"[71] in our society. Like Salgado, street vendors—whose vending was only very recently legalized in the state—have lived in a constant state of fear and persecution, with the added danger of deportation for many. In other words, Salgado's inclusion of his own body along with that of both icons of street vending such as oranges, and *elotes* is an act of class solidarity, and of making visible the informal economies that many undocumented individuals participate in and support every day. Salgado's act of drawing himself next to these foods and vending icons is an attempt to overcome the negative stereotypes that devalue both undocumented queer migrants and street vendors alike. They experience what Lisa Cacho calls a "social death," and are "targets of regulation and containment, they are deemed deserving of discipline and punishment, but not worthy of protection."[72] This visual inclusion not only determines Salgado's own unique experience of queerness, but it also inscribes a working-class existence and aesthetic onto the fabric of the rainbow.

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[70] Blackwell notes that Frank Romero's 1996 *The Arrest of the Paleteros* also depicts street vendors. See, Blackwell, "Women Who Make Their Own Worlds: The Life and Work of Ester Hernández," 152.

[71] Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 5.

[72] Cacho, *Social Death*, 4.

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Figure 24. Ester Hernández, *Virgen de las Calles*, 2001, pastel on paper, 44 x 30 inches.

The second set of the series, beginning with *Gimme All Your Colors: Blue* (2017) (Figure

25), continues to expand on Salgado's queerness and plays with gender and sexuality, as we

move into the cool tones of the rainbow. In *Blue*, the artist is wearing a blue shirt—with the text

"Illegally Fagging Since 1995"—and a clear blue sky as his background. In our interview,

Salgado mentioned his use of the word "Illegal" as intentional:

> You know what, cause during in times of crisis and I started making art
> specifically using the hashtag illegals in times of crisis. Using the word illegal is
> very intentional because it is like, okay, so now and we, and we clearly have seen
> in the past two years (of Trump administration) how like alt-right people, people
> that have existed, what Trump, what he's done is, he's just coming and just being
> more, they feel free to like to be more in my face about it.[73]

The rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric during the first two years of the Trump administration had

been extremely difficult for undocumented immigrants such as Salgado, and as protest his use of

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[73] Salgado, interview.

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derogatory language within his work is a direct response to the bigoted remarks made by the former president and his supporters. The word illegal, and the status of illegal "or unlawful alien, is a status that forms the foundation of immigration law, and, therefore, the unlawful alien cannot be incorporated into immigration or naturalization law."[74] Thus, Salgado's experience of an increasingly hostile anti-immigrant sentiment within the US led him to embrace the eternal outsider term of "illegal." This word, centered in *Blue*, anchors the piece, and conveys a state of long-term illegality, both in documentation and queerness.

Figure 25. Julio Salgado, *Gimme All Your Colors: Blue*, 2017, digital art.

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[74] Cacho, *Social Death*, 5.

The year 1995 refers to the year in which Salgado began to explore his queerness and became aware of it on a personal level, at the age of eight. The politics of writing our surfaces into the digital are fraught with the outside limitations of our society, and yet there is also hope in the extended self-social media provides for artists. Throughout "Gimme All Your Colors" Salgado uses phallic imagery to remind the viewer that the series is seven distinct vignettes of a queer brown body living and loving in the Trump era. The pair of single clouds that adorn the sky behind Salgado's figure, are surrounded by what appears to be bottles of personal lubricant, their contents a pale blue, spilling and framing Salgado's figure. The background is fairly minimal, with a graphic horizontal line in the lower third of the image, a deeper blue than the rest to indicate a body of water. The clouds also hint at an outdoor location, while "v" shapes in white allude to seagulls, or pidgeons. *Blue* is also one of two pieces, the first being *Selena Inspired*, that has Salgado looking to the side, as though deep in thought, avoiding the gaze of the viewer. The series as a whole vascillates between deep thought and a serious expression, to alluring, direct eye contact from Salgado's figure. The lack of confrontation in *Blue* portrays a pensive and quiet demeanor, perhaps the angsty *Ethnicity Brown* alter ego, or a simple fatigued artist trying to cope with modern love and the exhaustion that comes with a criminalized and marginal existence. In *Blue* more than the rest, we see the sadness that comes with the intersections of undocumented and queer, and how a life of legal limbo has affected Salgado's inner world and psyche.

In *Gimme All Your Colors: Purple* (see Figure 26), one of the most referential images in the series thus far, Salgado is placed in the center wearing what is now an iconic ensemble: a purple jumpsuit worn by Tejano singer Selena Quintanilla, during her last concert at the 1995

Houston Livestock Show in the Astrodome before her tragic murder (Figure 27).[75] In *Purple*,

Salgado confidently poses, wearing bright red lipstick amidst a background that is an array of

mirrored and monochromatic references to the artist's life. From the top half, a row of alternating

eggplants and grapes, the former a reference to emojis, "ubiquitous digital images that can

appear in text messages, emails, and social media chat platforms, are rich in social, cultural, and

economic significance."[76] The eggplant has come to signify a sexual symbol, used in text

messages and social media to refer to a penis. The grapes, on the other hand, refer to the farm

labor that produces and harvests it.

Figure 26. Julio Salgado, *Gimme All Your Colors: Purple,* 2017, digital art.

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[75] "Selena Killed by Fan Club Founder: Revisiting the Case 20 Years Later | Time," n.d.

Figure 27. Selena at the Astrodome in purple jumpsuit, 1995, EMI Music.

In the bottom half of the image, Salgado's figure is flanked by two lilac papers, each depicting a cloud with rain drops falling directly under them, a reference to pop singer Prince's film and album *Purple Rain*[77] (1984).The singer was not only partial to the color purple, he used it to represent himself in all public media, making it synomnymous with his image. Prince also regularly bent the social norms of gender, singing lyrics such as "I'm not a woman. I'm not a man. I am something that you'll never understand."[78] As such, this assertion speaks to a rejection of a gender binary, and in Salgado's work, stands for an influence on his own visual gender presentation in *Purple*. Towards the top of the piece, near Salgado's head, a pair of thigh-high purple boots, and lower toward his shoulders, mirror images of Barney, a children's television character from the show "Barney and Friends" makes an appearance. Below, the character

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[77] Purple Rain, was "Quasi-autobiographical, the film chronicles the rise to stardom of "The Kid," whose relationships with his father and with several women—his mother, his new girlfriend Apollonia, his bandmates Wendy and Lisa—propel the narrative." Robert Walser, "Prince as Queer Poststructuralist," *Popular Music and Society* 18, no. 2 (June 1994): 79–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007769408591556.

[78] Albert Magnoli, "I Would Die for U," *Purple Rain* (Warner Brothers, 1984).

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"Tinky Winky" from British children's show "Teletubbies" poses with a blank expression. The chidlren's show originally aired on public television's Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) from 1998 to 2008. The inclusion of "Tinky Winky," in particular, is a nod to a scandal that implicated the purple character in the late 1990s. In 1999, Jerry Falwell, a televangelist and conservative Christian, claimed that he discovered "Tinky Winky" was gay. In an article inside of Falwell's own magazine, titled "Parents Alert: Tinky Winky Comes out of the Closet," Falwell wrote, "He is purple—the gay pride color, and his antenna is shaped like a triangle—the gay pride symbol,"[79] he went on to say that "the character had a boy's voice, he continued, but he often carried a red purse"[80] (see Figure 28). Falwell was not the only one who noticed the character's accesorizing, according to journalist Ruth Graham: "When the show debuted in England in 1997, its hypnotic, winking weirdness had almost immediately become popular with club kids and the gay community."[81] Thus, while Falwell's accusations came after the show had been airing in Britain for some time, and been adopted by the gay community there, it emphasizes the ways in which queer youth identified with the purple, purse-carrying character.

Much of Salgado's work features women and feminine-presenting musicians who have influenced the artist. *Purple* is a clear altar to Selena, the late singer's music is often used by drag performers, specifically of Latinx descent, referencing a queer lexicon that is uniquely Latinx, within a US context.

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[79] Ruth Graham, "Yep, the Purple Teletubby Was Gay," Slate Magazine, December 7, 2017, https://slate.com/technology/2017/12/jerry-falwell-and-tinky-winky-the-gay-teletubby.html.

[80] Graham, "Yep, the Purple Teletubby Was Gay."

[81] Graham, "Yep, the Purple Teletubby Was Gay."

Figure 28. Tinky Winky in the BBC children's television series Teletubbies, 1997. Courtesy of Alamy Stock Photo.

The last set in "Gimme All Your Colors" consists of *Gimme All Your Colors: Green* (Figure 29) and *Gimme All Your Colors: Red* (Figure 30). In *Green*, Salgado directly critiques the capitalist society in which we live in and his own relationship with money. The artist is still at the center of the image, however he is dressed as the title character of *Daria,* an adult-animated sitcom that aired on MTV from 1997 to 2003.[82] The show focused on Daria Morgendorffer (see Figure 31), a smart yet cynical teenager whose critiques on popular culture and society satirized American values and the high school experience. Salgado was deeply affected by the show, and identified with Daria's deadpan humor and disilusionment in his own youth. Above Salgado's head are a green apple and a cucumber. Continuing the use of fruit in the series, Julio's use of the apple suggests a connection with the green serpents at either side of

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[82] Alex Suskind, "11 Animated Shows for Grownups," *The New York Times*, n.d., accessed September 13, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/watching/lists/best-cartoons-for-adults.

his figure, in the center of the image. The serpent has been used in many paintings and sculptures to represent the seduction of Eve at the Garden of Eden. Here Salgado references the meeting of Eve with the devil, disguised as a snake. "This dramatic biblical scene is described in the third chapter of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. The animal that addresses Eve is referred to as serpent, or *serpens* in Latin, and is supposed to represent the devil in disguise"[83] The serpents in Salgado's piece are in a profile pose, with a serious and menacing stare, their eyes red and directly engaging with the viewer.

Figure 29. Julio Salgado, *Gimme All Your Colors: Green*, 2017, digital art.

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[83] Eric W. A. Mulder, "On the Lost Legs of the Snake That Seduced Eve," *ZOOPHILOLOGICA. Polish Journal of Animal Studies*, no. 3 (2017): 191.

Figure 30. *Daria*, Season Three, Episode Two, "Through a Lens Darkly," directed/written/by Guy Moore, Glenn Eichler, aired February 24, 1999, MTV Network, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0763390/?ref_=tt_mv.

With *Green*, Salgado is issuing a critique of the relationship artists have with money.[84] He features two prominent dollar signs above the serpents, who are not only meant to represent the devil in disguise but the seduction of money for artists. In thinking about the sway of money for those working creatively, and the LGBTQIA+ community, Salgado is simultaneously issuing a critique of a phenomenon known as "rainbow-washing." The fairly new term has been used to describe corporate marketing that employs the rainbow as its main visual signifier to appeal to LGBTQIA+ consumers. Sociologist Amin Ghaziani describes this approach as "using aspects of queer cultures or queer political support to signal hipness, coolness, political correctness, tolerance or open-mindedness; the performance of a liberal sensibility in a self-interested way, such as for selling a product."[85] The act of rainbow-washing is harmful because it "it takes away the humanity of LGBTQ+ people"[86] and is often a seasonal gesture during the month of June,

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[84] to Julio Salgado, "Text Message Conversation," June 9, 2021.

[85] "Why Culture's 'Queerbaiting' Leaves Me Cold," the Guardian, June 29, 2019, http://www.theguardian.com/global/2019/jun/29/why-cultures-queerbaiting-leaves-me-cold-amelia-abraham.

[86] "Why Culture's 'Queerbaiting' Leaves Me Cold."

that does not come with a long-term commitment to the welfare of the community it is attempting to profit from. In *Green*, Salgado is interrogating the ways artists negotiate and often use their queer identity to secure profit via "rainbow-washing" campaigns as well as other opportunities that market to LGBTQIA+ community.

The image also follows the previous by featuring green grapes on both sides of the image. At the top of the piece, small cameos of four figures grace the corners of the image. When I inquired about these figures, Salgado said "the four shapes are the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles because, each of their personalities represent an aspect I have with money: being careless with money, being smart with money, being older and having to deal with money etc."[87] The show was based on the Mirage Comics "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" comic books created by Kevin Eastman and revolved around a quartet of humanoid warrior turtles and their friends. Each member of the quarter is also named after a famous artist: Leonardo, Donatello, Micheangelo and Raphael. Salgado identified with the personalities of the characters, and in *Green* embraces the multiplicity of his attitudes around money. More than any of the pieces in the series, the tone of *Greens* is one of synicism, against greed and capitalism and self awareness about the seduction it represents. It references the ways in which serpent-like figures have taken advantage of the working-class, and how he himself has sttrugled to become financially stable. *Green* is also a reference to the Great Recession of 2008, in which Salgado came of age. Although the rest of the series alludes to immigrant labor and street vending, *Greens* is a confrontational anti-capitalist visual, one that through the character of *Daria*, defiantly calls into question the greed for "green."

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[87] to Salgado, "Text Message Conversation," June 9, 2021.

The last piece in the rainbow is *Gimme All Your Colors: Red* (2017) (Figure 31), in it Salgado makes direct references to Frida Kahlo and continues his homage to music and Latinx food culture. At the center once more, is Salgado, wearing red lipstick, he holds a different object, an anatomically correct human heart, the blood dripping from his hand. His gaze is direct and serious, while in the previous pieces in the series, the objects behind Salgado made clear mirror images, "Red" is visually richer, with the objects behind Salgado forming a circular shape, and covering the majority of the background. The objects featured are, what looks to be chili covered *elote,* or perhaps chili lollipops, aranged on either side to form a heart, at the crown of Salgado's head, an "X" of Flaming Hot Cheetos (see Figure 32), make a cross with a single strawberry on either side, as well as cherries surrouding the spicy snack. The human heart in Salgado's hand at the center of the piece could be his own, or someone else's; while this is unclear, the gesture is a direct reference to Kahlo's use of the human heart in her work, in particular *Las Dos Fridas* (1939) (see Figure 33). Kahlo painted this piece in 1939 "on her return to Mexico following her separation from Diego Rivera, with whom she had been living in Detroit, Michigan."[88]

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[88] "The Two Fridas, 1939," Google Arts & Culture, accessed June 9, 2021, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-two-fridas-1939/_wJCem8xJOWKLw.
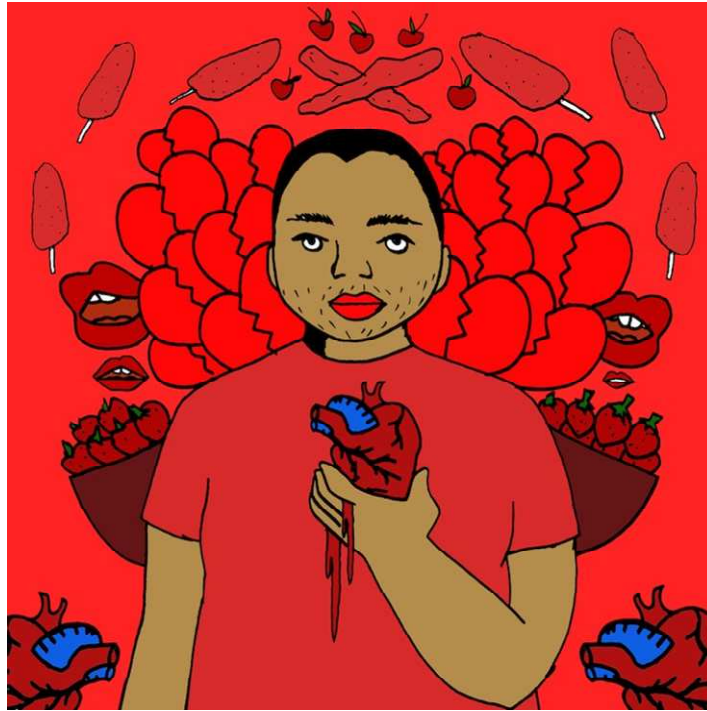
Figure 31. Julio Salgado, *Gimme All Your Colors: Red*, 2017, digital art.

Figure 32. CHEETOS® Crunchy FLAMIN' HOT® Cheese Flavored Snacks.[89]

[89] "CHEETOS® Crunchy FLAMIN' HOT® Cheese Flavored Snacks | Cheetos," accessed June 9, 2021, http://www.cheetos.com/products/cheetos-crunchy-flamin-hot-cheese-flavored-snacks.

Figure 33. Frida Kahlo, *Las Dos Fridas* (The Two Fridas), 1939, oil on canvas, 67 x 67 inches. Collection of the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City.

In this self-portrait, Kahlo portrays herself in two distinct forms of dress, one a white European style gown adorned with lace, the other a traditional Tehuana dress, a style that Rivera loved and encouraged. Kahlo's white dress is stained, her hand holds a pair of scissors that has cut the artery from her heart, and this has stained her dress. The image is a direct representation of Kahlo's separation from Rivera, and of her severing the connection. While Salgado does not include this detail, *Red* and its use of the heart, both human and graphic, imbues the piece with a sense of heartbreak, a commonplace experience in his life as an undocuqueer artist.

In an interview with *Borderless* magazine, he mentions his deployment of humor to combat the heartbreak. He says, "a lot of the time humor and dark humor were ways of us coping with the things that were being thrown at us as we were pushing for the Dream Act. From the criminalization of our lives to the possibility of deportation—laughing at the situation is

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cathartic."[90] This turn to humor via the use of Hot Cheetos snacks or a bright red lip to offset the experience of criminalization is one that makes "Red" an important piece for Salgado to make his specific positionality more visible through portraiture. Behind Salgado are eight broken hearts on each side. This particular token is a direct reference to the logo of Los Angeles Latinx rock band *Los Abandoned* (see Figure 33)*,* one of the few US-based alternative acts of the early 2000s whose lyrics featured Spanglish lyrics and a Latinx lead. Salgado worked with the band's street team and went on to make art for the lead singer once she launched her solo career. Near Salgado's shoulder is a pair of lips, mirrored, and one basket of strawberries on either side.

Figure 34. *Los Abandoned* rock band logo, 2001.[91]

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[90] "Julio Salgado on Telling Community Stories as an Undocumented and Queer Artist," *Borderless Magazine* (blog), August 19, 2020, https://borderlessmag.org/2020/08/19/julio-salgado-on-telling-community-stories-as-an-undocumented-and-queer-artist/.

The image is framed at the bottom by two additional anotmical human hearts. As the conclusion in the series, *Red* is injected with the melancholy and heartbreak of Kahlo yet retains the unique referential tokens of Salgado's youth in Los Angeles. The strawberries reference yet another fruit picked and harvested by immigrant laborers, a workforce often left out of the larger immigration debate. *Red* incorporates the red lipstick from *Purple*, the object in hand from *Yellow*, and the food from *Orange*, together revealing what is in the artist's heart. Together, the six "Gimme All Your Colors" pieces make up a rainbow. Salgado intentionally referenced the rainbow to directly make up the flag that represents the LGBTQIA+ community. Each shade of the rainbow Salgado has created is filled with references to his unique experience as a cis, undocumented, queer man of Mexican descent, whose wide references of 1990s and early 2000s popular culture and manual labor, provide a full spectrum of his experience. In this series, Salgado's work goes beyond bringing visibility to his fat, brown queer body. In "Gimme" he is literally documenting himself—who in this country is perceived as not existing—where he experiences a social death, color by color, drawing himself into existence.

White Supremacy is Killing Me

Jessica Sabogal's portraits are an homage to the women around her. Born in San Francisco to Colombian American parents, her work consists of large-scale murals and illustrations. While Salgado is himself the subject of many of his pieces, Sabogal rarely makes an appearance in hers; instead, she features close friends and loved ones in her work. She brings a collective mentality to an individual *artivist selfie* format. In this section, I focus on two specific illustrations turned murals. The first is a mural in Montreal that had been created as part of *Voix*

insoumises / Unceded Voices, a biennial festival of indigenous street art which took place in

2017.[92] The second is a mural created for the prior *Unceded Voices* festival in 2015.

Figure 35. Jessica Sabogal, *White Supremacy is Killing Me*, 2017, digital illustration.

    The first image, first developed as a digital illustration and later installed as an acrylic

and spray paint mural in Montreal, "present[ed] the portrait of a friend and mentor of the artist,

Lexx Valdez, holding a sticker in her hand with the sentence « White supremacy is killing me.

»."[93] The image is done in a minimal color palette of dark and light brown tones, with the skin

tone and highlights a warm yellow. There is also a circle shape behind Valdez's head, and a

turquoise blue background. Sabogal shared the process of completing this mural on her social

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[92] "White Supremacy Is Killing Me by Jessica Sabogal," The Goethe-Institute, accessed January 1, 2020, https://www.goethe.de/ins/us/en/kul/art/abi/sab.html.

[93] "White Supremacy is Killing Me, 2017."

media platforms, namely Instagram. Once the piece was finished, she posted a picture of the

mural with the caption:

> We are here to serve as a reflection of justice. As artists, it is our duty to uplift the
> sacredness of women, people of color, the disabled, queer and trans folks,
> immigrants and the undocumented, and our indigenous brothers and sisters, whom
> history has forced to believe are less than human. We believe in the right to our
> own liberation, unbounded by man-made borders, white supremacy, misogyny,
> and xenophobia. This is for @lexx_valdez. This is for @melaniecervantes. This is
> for the women growing me a backbone.

In her caption space, Sabogal made it clear that the mural was a direct reflection of what she

believes to be her role as an artist.

She dedicated the mural to both Valdez, who is pictured in the mural itself, and fellow

Oakland-based artist Melanie Cervantes. Only a few days after the mural was completed, it was

vandalized. The words "Anti-White" were spray painted in red at the bottom of the mural.

Sabogal took to social media to denounce this act against her work and the incident catalyzed a

conversation around censorship and why this work is important. The comments section became a

space of support for Sabogal, whose caption read: "I could write about how white folks just keep

exposing themselves and proving my point, but mostly I'm grateful for the artists that surround

me and show up for me every day."[94] Albeit an unfortunate incident, this is a clear example of

how practices by Latinx artivists like Sabogal are effective tools to engage in the political

landscape of the United States and beyond. Within the CRDA lens, Sabogal's work and its

vandalization created an opening to have a conversation around image, as well as an opportunity

for Sabogal to respond directly. As a muralist, Sabogal's work exists in both the material and

digital realms, with both a physical and digital location in space. Hence, the digital has provided

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[94] Jessica Sabogal, "Last night I got word my latest piece was tagged," August 30, 2017, Instagram photo,
https://www.instagram.com/p/BYbyz3FlpxC/

Sabogal with a forum to both track progress and update her followers on social media on any

developments. In saying she is grateful for "the artists that surround me," Sabogal points to the
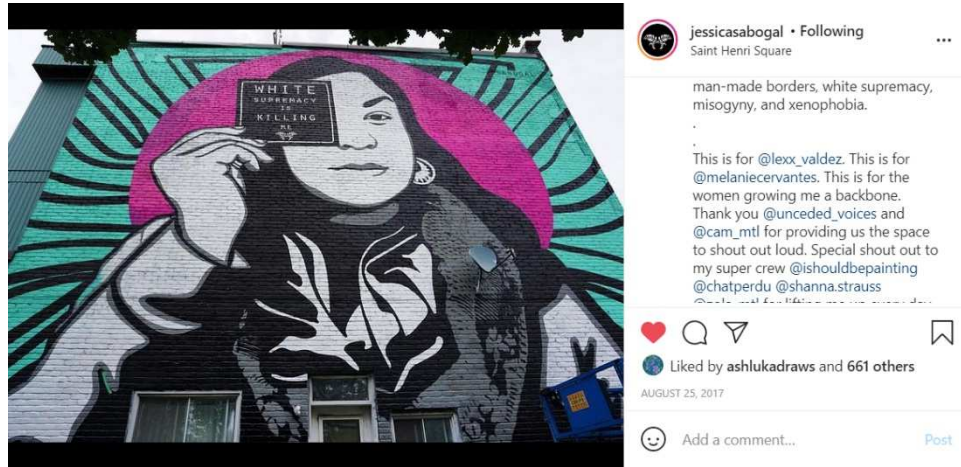
artist community that supports her, thus keeping the collective as a foundation for her work.

Figure 36. Jessica Sabogal, "White Supremacy is Killing Me" mural, August 25, 2017, photograph, Instagram.

Figure 37. Jessica Sabogal, August 17, 2015, photograph, Instagram.

Figure 38. Jessica Sabogal, *We the Indivisible*, 2015, digital illustration.

The second mural completed in 2015 is a tribute to queer love and the resilience of the

LBTQIA+ community. In preparation for the mural, Sabogal photographed two of her friends, a

lesbian couple, for the 30-ft. commission. Sabogal had expressed anxiety about the mural. In her

caption she stated, "I'm scared in all aspects possible not only bc [sic] of the crazy 45 but

because of my content/message. We witnessed what happened to our @mariconcollective

brothers but using them as inspiration to advance our narratives and be bold."[95] Here, Sabogal is

referring to the Maricon Collective's mural in the San Francisco Mission District,[96] which was

set on fire after its completion. The Maricon Collective mural "depicted two same-sex couples in

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[95] Jessica Sabogal, Instagram photo, accessed January1, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/6gmyZlPJDL/.

[96] "Out in the Mission: Galería mural vandalized for depicting LGBTQ Latinos," July 2, 2015.
http://eltecolote.org/content/en/out-in-the-mission-galeria-mural-vandalized-for-depicting-lgbtq-latinos/.

lowrider, Latino-style clothing gently embracing, and a third transgender man in the center. The

arsonist, who was caught on camera attacking the mural on June 29 at about 11p.m., only

destroyed the image of the male couple embracing."[97]

Less than a month after this incident, Sabogal headed to Montreal to paint a mural of a

similar scene, two queer Latinx individuals in a loving embrace, one holding the other's face

while maintaining eye contact. The mural also included the words "OUR EXISTENCE WILL

BE NO LONGER SILENCED. WE REQUIRE NO EXPLANATIONS, APOLOGIES OR

APPROVAL" in French. Shortly after, the mural drew controversy. While it was not vandalized,

it drew attention and criticism from the local community. Sabogal commented on this reception

in an interview with *Xpress Magazine*:

> Even though gay people can get married, and women should be able to get equal
> pay as men, why is it so controversial for the words "Women Are Perfect" to
> exist," Sabogal said. "And why is it a big deal for me to produce a big lesbian
> mural in Canada? I am discovering it is a big deal because it is still not being
> talked about.[98]

Sabogal's comments point to her linking her own queer politics with feminist values, thus

enacting the framework of the CRDA. It is her politics of refusal in her work that demonstrates

the radical tradition of Chicana feminist ways of knowing.

Both Sabogal and Salgado unapologetically represent queerness in their work and make it

personal. Not only are both artivists representing subjects in their portraiture that are largely

underrepresented, but they also continue to engage in conversations online and offline about the

importance of these bodies to be seen. Through the use of the *artivist selfie,* both Salgado and

Sabogal challenge the white heteronormative ideal body, focusing on both the collective

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[97] "Out in the Mission."

[98] Oscar Gutierrez, "Inside the Women are Perfect Artist," *Xpress Magazine*, October 6, 2015,
https://xpressmagazine.org/12242/arts-culture/women-are-perfect/.

embodiment of freedom, refusing to be misunderstood, and choosing to represent themselves and their communities, whole.

CHAPTER THREE: BEARING WITNESS DIGITALLY TO THE BODIES OF WORK OF
FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ AND MELANIE CERVANTES

> It took me decades to build a healthy relationship with my body, to allow my
> body to rest and feel good. I grew up impacted by systems of oppression which
> brainwashed me into believing that pleasure could only happen if I had been
> hyper productive, if I had "earned it." Most messages I received about my body
> were pain-oriented and based in colonial and patriarchal ideas around domination
> and shame and bodily exploitation.
> —Favianna Rodriguez[1]

> I took the risk to go at it [artmaking] full time only to hit a wall when I was
> diagnosed with lung cancer. My life and health haven't been the same since. For
> the past few years, it has felt like a tsunami of challenges and heartaches have hit
> and there have been periods of time when I felt weighed down under the pressure
> and I want to give up but so far, I haven't.
> —Melanie Cervantes[2]

Within a capitalist, heteronormative society, our productivity is often the priority. In the

context of art, the body of the visual artist—the vessel in which the work is thought about and

executed—is often decentered from the work, and the environment surrounding it. However,

artists working within the Chicana Radical Aesthetic are actively engaging their bodies into the

social justice issues their work brings awareness to, and the digital has given us unprecedented

access to these artists. This alignment between artist and art is one of the key characteristics

shared by the group of artivists this dissertation focuses on. In this chapter, I connect both the

practice and bodies (physical and art production), of Favianna Rodriguez and Melanie Cervantes.

I argue that both artists experienced a deep shift in practice and body politic from environmental

justice to include a more intimate body of work. Both artists were transformed by specific

experiences with their physical bodies, and as a result they have added a more intimate scale to

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[1] Favianna Rodriguez, "Favianna Rodriguez (@favianna1) • Instagram Photos and Videos," April 22, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CN_OJeZBOkC/.

[2] Melanie Cervantes, "Melanie Cervantes (@melaniecervantes) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram, November 28, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CIJjd_Cpjgf/.

their work and have generously shared the process. I posit that the digital allows us to bear witness to their hardship and transformation, for better or worse. I argue that although it can be difficult to bear witness to limitations brought on by illness (Cervantes) or the journey to accepting our erotic selves (Rodriguez), it is part of how the digital makes visible the experiences of these artivists and solidifies the relationship between them and their online public. The act of witnessing digitally creates a witnessing experience that bonds us to their healing.

I analyze the political graphics both Rodriguez and Cervantes have produced, the embodied commitment they have to their own physical healing and sharing their process via *autohistoriateorias* and online engagement. This sharing and subsequent witnessing that allows us into their own process of creating art and healing is part of creating a space for these conversations around the body and its recovery. The first half focuses on Rodriguez, the development of her work in solidarity with the climate justice efforts in the United States and abroad, and how she has extended her work to include her home environment and bodily pleasure politics with the advent of social media and digital tools. The latter half focuses on Cervantes, her work within her printmaking collective Dignidad Rebelde and its innovative strategies for digital engagement, as well as her process of sharing a body impacted by illness, and the community online that has held her via mutual aid and other efforts.

In locating the work of Rodriguez and Cervantes within the CRDA, it pushes the boundaries of what solidarity looks like, especially for artists creating work to advance social justice, who are simultaneously undergoing transformative experiences. In this chapter, I analyze what it means to share a body's journey with a digital audience, and how it can create an online community of support. My interest in looking at work of both X/Chicana and Latinx identified artists working not only on their own bodies, but also within digital spaces to build strategies for

liberation is to see the depth of their engagement beyond their creative work. Thus, it is important to look at these multiple scales in order to unearth the meaning behind the commitment of both Rodriguez's and Cervantes's to their art practices, and to their healing. Solidarity within the CRDA is not just about doing the work on behalf of others or in service social movements, it is also about locating yourself within it, and seeking clarity of the work that needs to be done on an individual level in tandem with the artwork. The digital documentation that both Rodriguez and Cervantes engage in is unique in that it provides further context to the artwork produced and creates a digital archive of the process.

One of approaches of this commitment to both social justice movements and self is embodiment, in the sense of what Alicia Gaspar de Alba terms "embodied aesthetics"[3] Gaspar de Alba utilized this framework to render legible the ways in which Chicana artists within the Chicano Resistance and Affirmation exhibit imagined place through race. Thus, embodied aesthetics in that context were, "Instead of dispossession, ownership, or reclamation of a place outside the self, embodied aesthetics uses the body as the signifier for place. As such, the body functions as site of origin, bridge between worlds, and locus of liberation."[4] In short, as self-identifying women of color, Rodriguez and Cervantes are embedded in all the systems that the solidarity work is taking on. By focusing on the individual process of these two artists, I highlight the artivist work of Cervantes around the time of her diagnosis as well as a year after her illness began; additionally, I examine Rodriguez's work for the People's Climate March and her Rauschenberg Residency, where she began to share more of her views on bodily pleasure

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[3] Alicia Gaspar de Alba, "There's No Place Like Aztlán: Embodied Aesthetics in Chicana Art," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4, no. 2 (2004): 103–40.

[4] Alba, "There's No Place Like Aztlán," 127.

online. This work is connected and influenced by the personal politics of each artist, an important tenet of the CRDA—to be deeply committed to a radical set of values rooted in Third World feminism, observing the connections between and across communities affected by capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. By actively making work that brings awareness to the transformations their bodies are undergoing, Rodriguez and Cervantes actively assert and construct their own sense of belonging. The feeling of "belonging," of feeling comfortable in the space we choose to inhabit is inextricably tied to our own sense of belonging within a larger social world. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the act of sharing digitally and using the caption space to create *autohistoriateorias* is an act of providing further context to the image-making process. Rodriguez and Cervantes also utilize other sharing features on the social media platform Instagram, namely the Stories and Highlights. The former is a curated set of daily moments, and can include "text, music, stickers and GIFs" as well as other posts from the platform. Stories disappear from the user's profile after twenty-four hours but can be permanently stored if added to the Highlights section of a user's profile. The Highlights section has become a way for users to store important information for a longer period of time, and a way to curate themed resource guides.

Digital Sharing as Praxis

In a recent Pew Hispanic Center study, social media users reported that they are more likely to say sites such as Facebook and Instagram are "personally important for getting involved with issues, expressing their political views."[5] Like Rodriguez, roughly 45 percent of those

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[5] Monica Anderson, Toor Skye, Lee Rainie, and Aaron Smith, "Activism in the Social Media Age," Pew Research Center, 2018, https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/07/11/public-attitudes-toward-political-engagement-on-social-media/.

Blacks and Hispanic social media users more likely to say these sites are personally important for getting involved with issues, expressing their political views

% of U.S. social media users who say these sites are very or somewhat important to them personally when it comes to ...

● White ● Hispanic ● Black

Finding others who share their views about important issues	39	54
Getting involved with issues that are important to them	36	52
Giving them a venue to express their political opinions	32	53

0   20   40   60   80
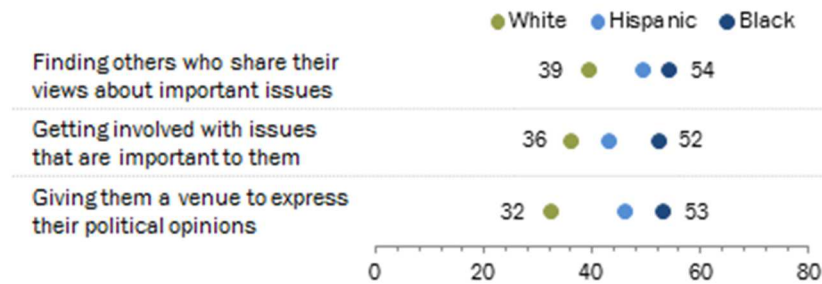
Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 29-June 11, 2018.
"Activism in the Social Media Age"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

surveyed who identify as "Hispanic" said these sites gave them "a venue to express their political opinions (see Figure 39).

Figure 39. Pew Research Center, Activism in the Social Media Age, July 2018.

Born in 1978, Rodriguez is a Latinx artivist with Afro-Peruvian roots, a first-generation American, Queer, polyamorous, cisgender woman, based in Oakland, California. In a recent artist talk at the University of California, Los Angeles, Rodriguez began with her upbringing in the predominantly Latinx, working-class Fruitvale neighborhood in Oakland, California. A daughter of Peruvian immigrants, Rodriguez's family supported her creativity early on, she remarked that her father enjoyed displaying her artwork in their home: however, her family wanted her to primarily focus on the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) offerings at her school. Rodriguez attended Saturday engineering camp to appease her parents'

wishes, but she still "always found a way to do art."[6] In retrospect, Rodriguez stated that one of

the reasons she did not pursue art seriously (besides the focus on STEM her parents had instilled)

was what she termed a lack of an "ecology that was able to support me," meaning structural and

institutional support for the arts in the Fruitvale was scarce. This lack of investment led her to

craft her own path to a career in the arts.

Rodriguez came into her own political consciousness in part by learning about other

women artists such as Frida Kahlo during her senior year of high school, and later, as a student at

UC Berkeley by taking Ethnic Studies courses whose content included Chicanx art. Although

Rodriguez did not complete her degree, she carried with her the political consciousness she

fostered at Berkeley. She left the Bay Area to pursue an internship at Self Help Graphics in Los

Angeles, one of the oldest community-based art studios and event spaces that has supported

Latinx artists since its founding in the 1970s.[7] This was made possible through meeting Chicana

artist Yreina D. Cervántes, who was facilitating a printmaking workshop and encouraged

Rodriguez to join her. In our interview, Rodriguez identifies that moment as a key shift for her to

take the arts seriously as a possible career path. The printing workshop was none other than the

MAESTRAS ATELIER XXXIII, "the first all-female silkscreen 'master' workshop to be held at

Self Help Graphics in 1999. Under the direction of Yreina D. Cervántes, seven Latina and one

African American woman—at various stages in their career as artists and with different levels of

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[6] Favianna Rodriguez, "The Butterfly Effect: Activism & Transformation through the Arts," Keynote, Gloria Kauffman Hall, UCLA, February 6, 2019.

[7] The first book length study on the community art space by Kristen Guzmán, *Self Help Graphics & Art: Art in the Heart of East Los Angeles*, ed. Colin Gunckel (Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2005). And several other articles such as Colin Gunckel, "Art and Community in East LA: Self Help Graphics & Art from the Archive Room," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 36, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 157–70. Have contributed to establishing it as one of the most well-known art institutions for Latinx artists in the Southwest and the broader BIPOC arts community.

experience in the medium—came together in a collaborative process, from January through April of that year."[8] When speaking of Self Help, Rodriguez exclaimed, "Going to Self Help Graphics was like walking into art heaven for me. It is the place where Chicano and Latino artists thrive. And they loved my art."[9] Not only was this space where Rodriguez learned from Yreina D. Cervántes, but she also connected with Chicana artists Diane Gamboa and Barbara Carrasco.

The space and its origin story are now a Los Angeles legend. Self Help was founded in 1970 by a "radical Catholic nun and lauded printmaker named Karen Boccalero" and several local artists: Carlos Bueno, Antonio Ibáñez, and Frank Hernández.[10] Borrowing from the model of other Chicano Movement-era art collectives such as El Teatro Campesino, the space is a "continuation and expansion of these alternative autonomous cultural spaces."[11] Self Help has four distinct characteristics according to historian Kristen Guzmán—its focus from inception was not muralism but printmaking, placing it within the silkscreen boom of the 1960s. Second, Self Help, was founded and led by a woman, with "some support from government agencies but was not, initially, related to any public institution or agency."[12] Finally, it has enjoyed an impressive and long stay in a rapidly changing urban landscape, celebrating its fiftieth anniversary last year. Exposure and participation in spaces like Self Help are a common anecdote in Latinx artists' journeys, including Rodriguez.

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[8] Laura Elisa Pérez, *Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 41.

[9] Eva Martinez, "An Artist's Journey through Time," *El Tecolote* (blog), November 25, 2012, http://eltecolote.org/content/features/an-artists-journey-through-time/.

[10] Guzmán, *Self Help Graphics & Art*, 1.

[11] Guzmán, *Self Help Graphics & Art*, 3.

[12] Guzmán, *Self Help Graphics & Art*, 5.

From being "the Atelier's youngest and least-exposed artist at the time"[13] to currently

being one of the most visible Latina artivists within the United States, Rodriguez's work has

grown in multiple directions since the workshop. Her art practice deals with issues of bodily

autonomy, pleasure, feminism, immigration, and climate justice. Just as her piece demands

action on climate change and bringing justice to the communities Berta Caceres belonged to and

built with, Rodriguez's "Stories" on the Instagram site are a consistent call to action for issues

dealing with climate justice (see Figure 40). Rodriguez stated, "We must reimagine solutions,

fight for the truth, change our relation to mother earth and to all creatures, and fight alongside

indigenous communities and youth!"[14]

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[13] Pérez, *Eros Ideologies*, 41.

[15] Martinez, "An Artist's Journey through Time."

Figure 40. Favianna Rodriguez, *We Must Reimagine Solutions*, March 13, 2019, Instagram.

Like most of the artists profiled in this dissertation, Rodriguez is self-taught. Her arts

practice has grown from many diverse but important life experiences and roles. Her move to Los

Angeles in the early 2000s was also the beginning of her entrepreneurial pursuits, having taught

herself HTML coding along with Jesus Barraza (the other half of Dignidad Rebelde). In 2001,

Rodriguez co-founded TUMIS, "a multi-purpose design and web-consulting firm with a mission

to help communities of color."[15] Their work consisted of building websites for local

organizations to help them have a digital presence (see Figures 41 and 42). At the time of this

endeavor, website building was a daunting and confusing task for many, given that the

technology was relatively new. This experience demonstrates that Chicanx and Latinx artists

were deeply engaged in using digital tools at the time of the internet's inception. It also

contradicts research that states only "digital natives,"[16] or the millennial generation, have been

the most active in participating and using digital tools. While this is still largely true, it is

important to highlight the early efforts of Rodriguez and Barraza who are not part of the "digital

native" generation, yet they identified early on a need to use digital tools to empower and

enhance community efforts.

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[15] Martinez, "An Artist's Journey through Time."

[16] Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1," *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001), https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816, 68.

Figure 41. TUMIS, Logo Design, 2001.

Figure 42. Mercado La Paloma Website by TUMIS Agency, circa 2004.

Early scholarship on the "digital divide," the concept that the advent of the internet widened the gender, race, and class gap by creating "information haves and have-nots"[17] is essential to consider when dealing with exceptions to this gap, such as the case with Rodriguez, Barraza, and Cervantes. Thus, the first wave of digital divide research at the turn of the twenty-first century drew attention to disparities in "…lack of access to computers and the Internet, commonly found in America among poorer households, those with high school education, the Black and Hispanic populations, rural communities, and women."[18] With the invention of the World Wide Web and photo editing software such as Photoshop, there also came a greater

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[17] Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[18] L. Telec and A. Tio, "Falling through the Net: Defining the digital divide," quoted in Norris and Norris (2001, 68).

concern for what made the "haves and have nots" different. In looking at the usage of digital

tools by artivists such as Rodriguez and others, my goal is to contribute to the second level of

digital divide[19] research, a vein concerned with "…different aspects of the digital inclusion

process, including skills, and differentiated usage of the web."[20]

In other words, by looking at the social media usage and frequency that artists such as

Rodriguez and Cervantes engage in—"…actions that require greater involvement and

technological skills—content creation, and educational, economic or political activities"[21]—I

aim to demonstrate the depth of their engagement with the issues they make artwork about, as

well as the ways in which they are democratizing access to the artistic process via sharing on

social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. The CRA provides a space to see these

contributions as the correlation of digital technology, social justice commitments, and Chicana

feminist epistemologies. Rodriguez's own journey as an artist has been marked and shaped by

using new technologies: this would not have been possible without her involvement in working

with them. She described her use of technology in the beginning of her career:

> My evolution as an artist began because of the Internet. In those very first days,
> Adobe Photoshop 1.0 and Illustrators gave me a whole set of new tools to create. I
> realized that I could have my work on a page for the whole world to see. The
> Internet was an open space to have your content and connect with the world. Also,
> the DIY [Do It Yourself] culture really helped. I was able to learn so much. It
> totally shaped how I do my work. I believe in technology as an important part of
> my work.[22]

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[19] Eszter Hargitsai, "Second-Level Digital Divide: Differences in People's Online Skills," *First Monday* 7, no. 4 (2002), htsps://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v7i4.942.

[20] Teresa Correa, "Digital Skills and Social Media Use: How Internet Skills Are Related to Different Types of Facebook Use among 'Digital Natives,'" *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 8 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1084023, 1095–1107.

[21] Correa, "Digital Skills and Social Media Use," 1096.

[22] Firuzeh Shokooh Valle, "Favianna Rodríguez: 'Artists Are Risk Takers and Truth Speakers' · Global Voices," *Global Voices* (blog), March 30, 2015, https://globalvoices.org/2015/03/30/favianna-rodriguez-artists-are-risk-takers-and-truth-speakers/.

The adoption of digital tools such as Adobe software as well as establishing a consulting firm to help build websites for local community members is the foundation of Rodriguez's art practice, thus not only affirming the impact of the digital turn on political graphics, but for artivists as well.

The climate justice vein of Rodriguez's work began with reading about the fast-food industry and getting involved with the food justice movement in the early 2000s. She described it as a natural progression from learning about exploitative capitalist farm practices and the abuse of nature. Rodriguez stated, "The people who most suffer from environmental impacts are poor people, people of color, indigenous people—I want to change what people see, and just encourage people to see things differently. We need all people affected at the table."[23] Work that directly uses plant life and natural iconography has been a fixture of Rodriguez's activism. One of the images that has since become one of the key visuals for the immigrant rights movement worldwide is her *Migration is Beautiful* image (2012) (Figure 43), featuring the monarch butterfly. In an interview with scholar Stephen Duncombe, Rodriguez explained the making of the image and its evolution into a prominent image within the social movement:

> The concept of connecting the monarch butterfly to migration is something that I believe has been going on since the '80s. People use that metaphor, because the other sort of metaphor that exists, especially for Day of the Dead, is that the monarchs carry the spirits of the dead. So, I think in general it is a metaphor that's been out there. What I did differently and how I was able to really maximize it, is I created a symbol that explicitly connected the migration of insects to the migration of people, and that it was actually something that it [sic] was dictated by nature.[24]

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[23] Mignoni, "Art Elevates Climate's Front-Line Voices » Yale Climate Connections," *Yale Climate Connections* (blog), April 26, 2018, https://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2018/04/art-elevates-climates-front-line-voices/.

[24] Stephen Duncombe, Favianna Rodriguez, January 12, 2019, https://c4aa.org/2019/01/favianna-rodriguez/.

Her use of nature and the monarch butterfly to convey the natural movement of people across land is not only in line with the principles of climate justice, but it also became a political statement against the forced removal of immigrants by the Obama administration. Her work used a powerful and elegantly simple metaphor that framed immigration as a natural act.
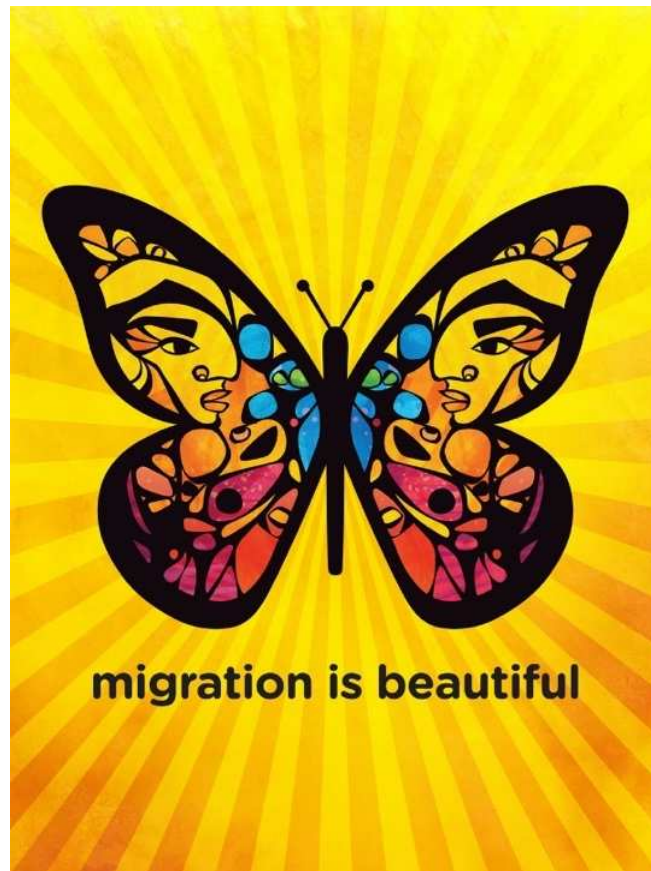
Figure 43. Favianna Rodriguez, *Migration is Beautiful*, 2012 (reprinted in 2018), offset print.

This image was originally conceived by Rodriguez at the "Democratic National Convention in collaboration with the UndocuBus."[25] The "UndocuBus" were a group of undocumented migrants that rode on a bus to the North Carolina Democratic National Convention. The riders deemed their journey a "No Papers, No Fear" Ride for Justice."[26] Rodriguez joined the UndocuBus and collaborated on the now famous *Migration is Beautiful* image with the riders in North Carolina. The image consists of a Monarch butterfly stencil, with a thick black outline, and the negative space within the wings contains two faces, facing each other as a mirror image at the center of the monarch body. Likening the movement of undocumented migrants to a butterfly made the connection between humans and life clear— we share this land with plants and animals alike. The image has gained national recognition and circulation and has been mentioned in multiple scholarly articles on the topic of migration and immigrant rights visual art.

Scholars like Daniel Perez have written on the use of Mariposa or Butterfly iconography in literature and art.[27] Juan Ochoa states that Rodriguez's image visually framed migration as a human right,[28] while Cristina Serna has included it as part of a "Transborder archive" of queer Feminist art, in conversation with queer Mexican artists.[29] Edward J. McCaughan has noted that

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[25] In her website, Rodriguez discloses that this image was originally made in 2012, she states, "At the time, former President Obama was deporting over 1100 immigrants a day. Since then, this symbol has become a popular symbol of the global immigrant rights movement" ("Migration Is Beautiful 2018 | Work of Art by Favianna Rodriguez," n.d.).

[26] Von Diaz, "'No Papers, No Fear' Undocubus Destroyed in Los Angeles," *Colorlines*, September 6, 2013, https://www.colorlines.com/articles/no-papers-no-fear-undocubus-destroyed-los-angeles.

[27] Daniel Enrique Pérez, "Toward a Mariposa Consciousness: Reimagining Queer Chicano and Latino Identities," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 2 (September 1, 2014): 95–127.

[28] Ochoa, "Shine Bright like a Migrant."

[29] Serna, "Locating A Transborder Archive."

the image provides clues to the "shifting representations of the border and immigrants over time."[30] Finally, Floridalma Boj Lopez's work with Mayan communities in Los Angeles mentions how *Migration is Beautiful* as a motif reveals "a critical tension that exists for Indigenous migrants who have been dispossessed and yet contend with the possibility of enacting similar Indigenous dispossessions."[31] Due to its notoriety, Rodriguez's image both provided a slogan of denaturalized borders within the immigrant rights movement, and continues to be a point of contention for some, as Lopez's work indicates.

The metaphor of the butterfly occurred as the result of a collaboration with undocumented activists, and it was also the result of an intentional choice to center nature, which naturally led to these themes emerging in the artwork. Rodriguez explained that she had wanted to "frame it through the lens of nature, and not acknowledge or give importance to the border and the wall, because it's a man-made concept, versus that it's [actually] a nature concept."[32] By referring to the border wall that exists between the United States and Mexico as "man-made," Rodriguez rejects the delineations of the state to separate migrants and police migration, thus adopting abolitionist principles in her thinking of nature and migration.[33] Rodriguez's approach

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[30] Edward J. McCaughan, "'We Didn't Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us': Artists' Images of the US-Mexico Border and Immigration," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 6–31, https://doi.org/10.1525/lavc.2020.210003.

[31] Floridalma Boj Lopez, "Mobile Archives of Indigeneity: Building La Comunidad Ixim through Organizing in the Maya Diaspora," *Latino Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 1, 2017): 209, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41276-017-0056-0.

[32] Duncombe, "Favianna Rodriguez."

[33] Pulido and de Lara recognize this important shift in environmental justice rhetoric; to eradicate racial capitalism, borders must also be eradicated. They cite the work of Gaye Johnson and Alex Lubin on the future directions of Black radicalism as a new direction for EJ. Johnson and Lubin argue that EJ needs to become abolitionist by seeking "the destruction of racial regimes and racial capitalism'' that ''entails the end not only of racial slavery, racial segregation and racism, but also the abolition of a capitalist order that has always been racial." See Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, *Futures of Black Radicalism* (Verso Books, 2017).

is to create graphics with "affirmative and visionary and even futuristic, or naturalistic"[34] language. She asserted that this "approach to social justice iconography is just as impactful as images that incite action."[35] In thinking about this image in particular, with its references to Emory Douglas's "sunray patterns"[36] and its accessible slogan, Rodriguez understands the reality that social movement messaging shifts and moves forward, while the art remains unchanged.

While the *Migration is Beautiful* (2012) image was made as part of an effort to stop the Obama Administration from carrying out deportations, its message reaches beyond the limits of the state. Rodriguez explains, "And so often our messages are about what's politically feasible. And so, when I created *Migration Is Beautiful*, it was about making a statement that we are a part of nature; we migrate. As human beings, we've always been migrating since the beginning of time.[37] Rodriguez's use of the butterfly metaphor to invoke migration as a natural part of life is in line with the 'reimagining of justice in environmental justice" because it "argue(s) for a form of freedom that does not revert to nation-bound definitions of peoplehood and nature."[38] Nearly a decade after the image was created, it is still widely used to affirm the migration of individuals seeking a better life for themselves and their families, in the United States and beyond. The longevity of *Migration is Beautiful* is a testament to the core idea that the movement of people across borders is a natural act that must not be criminalized.

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[34] Duncombe, "Favianna Rodriguez."

[35] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 140.

[36] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 139.

[37] Duncombe, "Favianna Rodriguez."

[38] Pulido and De Lara, "Reimagining 'Justice' in Environmental Justice," 78.

The same year she created *Migration is Beautiful* Rodriguez designed two posters for the

People's Climate March (Figures 44 and 45) of 2014. The People's Climate March was a

demonstration in New York City that gathered an estimated 311,000 people[39] along with sister

demonstrations across the world, which ranged from Rome to Papa New Guinea. Rodriguez not

only created an image that publicized the gathering, she, along with many artists and cultural

workers attended. In the first image, the figure of a person is centered, and they are wearing a

yellow raincoat and are holding a piece of paper. The foreground of the image is filled with two

images; the top half is a cityscape, outlining the skyline of an urban environment.

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[39] Lisa W. Foderaro, "Taking a Call for Climate Change to the Streets," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2018, sec. New York, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/22/nyregion/new-york-city-climate-change-march.html.

Figure 44. Favianna Rodriguez, Climate Change is Real, 2012, digital art, 18 x 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 45. Favianna Rodríguez, *Defend Our Mother*, People's Climate March, 2014, offset poster, 17 x 11 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

The bottom half of the image is a wave of water, reaching up to the shoulders of the figure in the center. The image reads "La Crisis Climatica Es Real," which translates to "The Climate Crisis is Real." The words "crisis" and "real" are both emphasized with different colors from the rest; one in blue, the other in orange. The figure holds what appears to be a protest sign, since it contains the date and place of the march as well as the words "Nuestro Planeta/Nuestro Futuro," or "Our Planet/Our Future." One of the ways in which Latinx artivists have been able to contribute to social movements has been through the creation of flyers for protests and events. Rodriguez was commissioned by Climate March organizers to create both images. The second poster, of which there is an English and Spanish version, reads "Defend Our Mother," and features the figure of a brown-skinned woman in red who is holding her child in the middle of the image. Her face is framed by an image of earth, creating a halo effect to connote sacredness.

The earth is framed by petals, in alternating yellow and orange. The bottom third of the image contains small, outlined figures of protesters, giving the woman a larger-than-life scale in comparison, thus adding to her importance as "Mother" and "Earth." Rodriguez's use of a woman's figure and "Earth" references the print "Mis Madres" (1986) by Ester Hernandez (Figure 46), keeping in touch with the work of Chicana and Latina artists from a generation prior.

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Figure 46. Ester Hernández, *Mis Madres*, 1986, screen print, 27 x 20.25 inches.

Their use of religious mother figures and mother earth referred to indigenous ancestry, as well as the respect of family elders in Latinx culture. This continuation of a reinterpretation of icons such as La Virgen de Guadalupe for example, is one of the ways Chicana artists such as Hernandez and Yreina Cervántes have seized a "visually familiar icon, the Indigenous Virgin of Guadalupe who appeared in Mexico in 1531 and insert within her sacralizing mandala modern-day mestiza women."[40] The Brown woman at the center of Rodriguez's print is not only a familiar figure of authority to a Latinx viewer, so it also elevates her to sacredness—an attribute that numerous images for climate change do when referring to earth as a mother figure. Feminizing Earth is a strategy used by both Black and Latinx artists to emphasize the importance of recognizing the divine feminine in nature. It is a feminist interpretation of climate justice

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[40] Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 231.

issues, and its intention is to call to action those who view it. Rodriguez's first decade of work

consisted primarily of political posters. In the following section, I analyze her intentional shift

away from digital political poster making to analog methods such as collage, and her decision to

focus on more intimate subject matter such as her bodily autonomy, pleasure, and home

environment.

Release What Doesn't Serve Me

> I began my art career doing political posters, so they are very meaningful to my
> own artistic growth and have formed the basis of how I communicate. I created
> posters actively for ten years, and most of that work would happen through digital
> mediums, since that was the fastest way to create and disseminate my work.
> Twenty years later, as I have gained expertise in other more analog modalities, I
> am reinterpreting some of the techniques that I would use in my early poster days.
> —Favianna Rodriguez, 2021

Taken from her website[41], this epigraph is the descriptive text that accompanies

Rodriguez's *Release What Doesn't Serve Me* (2019) collage. An *autohistoriateoria* that theorizes

a new chapter in the artist's artistic praxis. However, Rodriguez's return or rather focus back to

collage making began a year earlier, during the Spring of 2018. Favianna Rodriguez joined a

cohort of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's "Artist as Activist" fellows. The thirty-first

cycle of the art residency in Captiva Island, Florida, where Rauschenberg had lived and created

work for over four decades, was awarded to "independent artists and art collectives whose work

addresses racial justice through the lens of mass incarceration."[42] Lauded as one of the most

influential artists of the twentieth century, Rauschenberg's work expanded into multiple

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[41] "Artist, Organizer & Social Justice Activist | Favianna Rodriguez," Artist, Organizer & Social Justice Activist |
Favianna Rodriguez, accessed July 23, 2021, https://favianna.com.

[42] "Past Residents," Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, October 15, 2014,
https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/residency/past-residents.

mediums, including a "fusion of painting and sculpture,"[43] printmaking, photography, assemblage, and even performance.

One of the principal tenets of his practice was to bring in an unexpected array of materials and objects into his work, thus creating his own visual vocabulary. Both experimentation and collaboration defined not only Rauschenberg's art practice, but his way of living in Captiva Island. As Rauschenberg scholar Walter Hopps describes, "two of the driving forces in Rauschenberg's art and life—the urge to collect and display, as well as to collaborate"[44] defined him. It is with this collaborative and industrious spirit that the "Artist as Activist" fellowship was established in 2012.[45]

Rodriguez has called the experience "a transformative and career-changing residency" where she was able to "break into an entirely new visual language and had a significant influence on her artistic practice."[46] I would like to see the works Rodriguez produced during the five-week residency, and beyond as "conversational openings,"[47] and examples of the work that is possible within the Chicana Radical Aesthetic. I argue that Chicanx and Latinx artists more

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[43] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Julia Blaut, and Jon Ippolito, *Robert Rauschenberg, a Retrospective* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1997).

[44] Walter Hopps, "Introduction: Rauschenberg's Art of Fusion," in *Robert Rauschenberg-a Retrospective: The R. Solomon Guggenheim Collection* (New York: New York: 1997), 21.

[45] The Rauschenberg Residency is inspired by Rauschenberg's early years at Black Mountain College where an artistic community brought out elements central to his art, collaboration, and exploration. The residency advances new work, extends practices into new mediums, and serves as a research and development lab for performance-based projects. See "Residency," Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, August 28, 2014, https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/residency.

[46] "Migration Is Beautiful to Ben & Jerry's: Favianna's Art Career," Artist, Organizer & Social Justice Activist | Favianna Rodriguez, accessed June 11, 2021, https://favianna.com/about/chronology.

[47] In an oral history interview, Rauschenberg's son described his father's practice of collecting and meticulous detail as multiple "conversational openings," he said, "That's why when people come up to a painting of my dad's, there's not a meaning in there that they're supposed to get. There's a whole series of conversational openings." See "Christopher Rauschenberg," Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, June 27, 2017, https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/artist/oral-history/christopher-rauschenberg.

broadly, whose work is based on a political set of values and commitments, are deeply engaged with space and place. This can offer *openings* to discuss how to be more accountable to the space our bodies inhabit, both private and public, and is one of the motivations for sharing so much of the process. This concept of conversational openings upon interacting with the work of Rodriguez (and later in this chapter, Cervantes) allow for multiple interpretations and meanings dependent on the viewer, as well as the artist themselves. Rodriguez created numerous collages during the residency, but to limit her residency experience to the work produced would be a capitalist and reductive assessment of her time in Captiva Island. Instead, looking through the CRA, we can witness her embodied-ness, her "being there-ness" through her documentation via social media and in her work within the studio.

Rodriguez's piece *Mother Earth Demands Action* (2019) (Figure 47), which was conceived at the residency, features stenciled leaves and colorful patterns taken directly from the Captiva landscape. The figure in Rodriguez's signature abstract outline style is the late Honduran activist Berta Cáceres (see Figure 48). In her description of the image, Rodriguez highlights her work for climate justice, "a Honduran environmental activist, indigenous leader, and co-founder and coordinator of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). She won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015, for "a grassroots campaign that successfully pressured the world's largest dam builder to pull out of the Agua Zarca Dam at the Río Gualcarque. She was assassinated in 2016 in her home by armed intruders, after years of threats against her life."[48]

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[48] "Mother Earth Demands Action | Work of Art by Favianna Rodriguez," n.d.

Figure 47. Favianna Rodriguez, *Mother Earth Demands Action*, March 13, 2019, monotype collage and acrylic on wood panel, 30 x 40 inches.

Figure 48. Berta Cáceres, 2015, UN Environment/Wikimedia, https://www.unep.org/championsofearth/laureates/2016/berta-caceres.

Closer observation of the image begins to reveal the curves of her curly hair to the viewer, her figure facing in profile, fixing her gaze upward, a longing stare of hope for better living conditions. Several artists paid homage to Cáceres upon her assassination by making portraits of the activist, whose death confirmed the corrupt nature of the Honduran government and companies seeking to profit from the dam construction. These portraits, like Rodriguez's, served the dual purpose of honoring Cáceres, as well as raising awareness of her story and cause to the thousands of people who follow artivists like Rodriguez via social media.

In addition to this, her reach goes beyond her social media following. Rodriguez is also responsible for founding two advocacy organizations: *Presente* and *CultureStrike,* which is now the *Center for Cultural Power.* The first is an online organization dedicated to creating campaigns that amplify Latinx voices and issues.[49] The latter is an arts advocacy organization that supports artists doing social justice work around the country. Since its founding in 2011, *CultureStrike* has:

> . . . connected a national network of 200+ socially engaged artists, provided space
> and funding for professional and creative development, developed shared strategy
> with movement groups, and spearheaded dozens of events and campaigns that
> have resonated in local venues, social media, and the halls of power. As we grow,
> we continue to develop new projects that amplify our strategy and inspire new
> artists and audiences with visions of social justice.[50]

The work of *CultureStrike* has allowed hundreds of artists to be part of efforts supporting multiple social movements, such as the global immigrant rights movement, the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, and several more. Thus, Rodriguez's art practice consists of both creating work and facilitating connections between artists and movement organizers, as

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[49] "Presente.Org," n.d., accessed March 26, 2019, http://www.presente.org/about/.

[50] "About," CultureStrike, November 25, 2013, https://www.culturestrike.org/about.

well as speaking around the country to advocate for this work. Rodriguez has now become an active participant in the ecosystem she recognized that she had been missing as a young child in the Fruitvale. The concept she termed an "ecology" of support has now become an infographic chart (Figure 49) that Rodriguez frequently uses in her own talks to cultural organizations and fellow creatives to demonstrate the networks that need to be built to support the work of cultural producers.[51]

The chart is comprised of one large circle with smaller surrounding circles. At the center of the ecosystem, Rodriguez places "Artists, Storytellers and Culture Makers." The circles supporting artists include "arts organizations, audiences, social movements, and philanthropy—among others." As the interim director and cultural strategist of the organization she helped found in 2011, CultureStrike aims to be part of the ecosystem.

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[51] Favianna Rodriguez, "Arts Ecosystem," social media, Instagram, March 23, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BvVH3qshOef/.

Figure 49. Favianna Rodriguez, Arts Ecosystem Slide, March 23, 2019, Instagram.

With the digital turn of both the graphics produced and the tools used to practice artivist work in the twenty-first century, we are currently experiencing unprecedented access to the practices and documentation of artivist work. It is the public nature of the work that is also important via digital documentation such as in-studio videos shared on social media profiles and additional information inside of the caption space of their posts, Rodriguez and Cervantes among others are enabling us to bear witness to their process. One example of this is Rodriguez's use of the "Stories" feature inside the social media platform of Instagram, which allows a user to create as many ten-second videos as they want and aggregate them to their profile as well as images; the feature also allows users to add text as well. Those who follow the user's account can watch the story in its entirety or tap the left edge of their phone's screen to skip to the next video, and so on. All videos expire after a 24-hour period. The user is, however, capable of viewing all their videos and images after the expiration date and has access to their own personal archive. Additionally, with the "Highlights" feature, users are able to add posts or parts of their "Stories" into a permanent space on their profile.

Through the digital world—namely social media video interfaces, text inside captions,

and videos—we gain a window into the embodied practices of art-making these artivists engage

in—not just at the end of an artist residency or a piece—but also before, during, and after the

experience. This is part of what Russell Belk calls a digital "extension of self,"[52] a way in which digital participation extends our physical body beyond its limits and creates another body in the online spaces where we participate. The CRDA as a lens allows us to witness digitally the ways in which artivists remain deeply engaged, how they work, and what their daily lives comprise of. This type of access is unprecedented and has thus created a phenomenon of engagement between artist and audience that did not exist before, outside of in-person interactions.

On her Instagram account where 44,000 followers[53] have access to her posts and stories alike, Rodriguez shares her in-progress work inside the studio (see Figure 50). In this particular image, Rodriguez included a photo of her work along with the text, "It's a lot of work, but I love what I do. I've now hit a level of success that allows me to make the work I want. I have amazing fans who love my work. I'm grateful. / AND [sic], I am working on trying to achieve a life work balance. Part of why I work so hard is to numb myself. There is something deep inside I'm [sic] still unearthing. With time it will emerge."

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[52] Belk defined the extension of self into five categories of possessions that extended our humanity into the digital. They are "body, internal processes, ideas, and experiences, and those persons, places, and things to which one feels attached." See Belk, "Extended Self in a Digital World."

[53] "Favianna Rodriguez (@favianna1) • Instagram Photos and Videos," n.d.
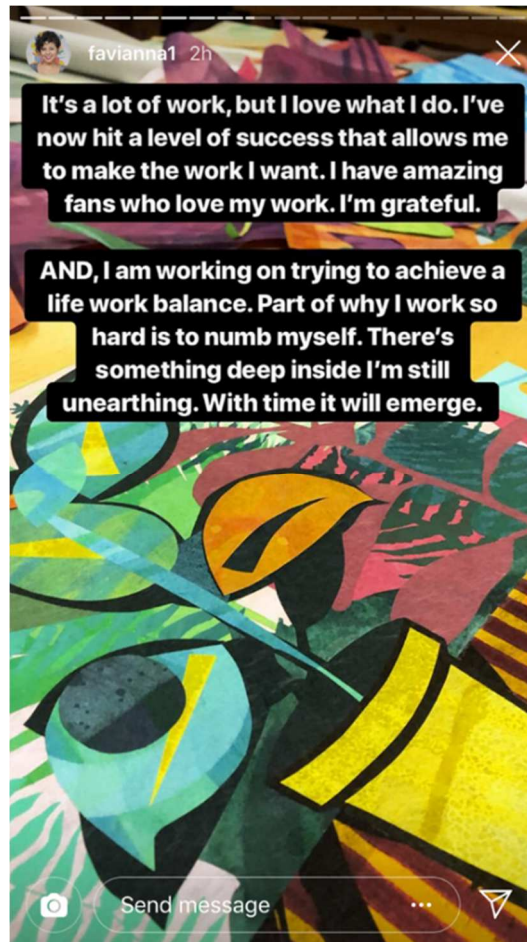
Figure 50. Favianna Rodriguez, *It's a Lot of Work*, March 13, 2019, Instagram.

In this image, Rodriguez shares an intimate reflection about her work, and how she aims

for balance at this point in her career. This intention is mirrored in Rodriguez's recent collage

work, in particular the piece *Release What Doesn't Serve Me* (2021), a re-adaptation of a 2019

piece of the same name. In the re-adaptation of self-portrait *Release* (see Figure 51), Rodriguez's

brown body is laying down, her eyes closed, a serene expression on her face, with a slight smile.

The top half of the collage is fairly calm, with a large green monstera plant leaf and a wavy

orange abstract shape behind her head, the transparency of these creates a watercolor effect, and

contrast Rodriguez's green hair. The orange wash of color behind her head can also be

interpreted as part of the release, and the old ways of working that she is moving forward from. The lower half of the image is much more explicit. It depicts two dynamic shapes under the legs and torso, one is a bright neon pink, with pointed edges which often indicate conflict or movement, reminiscent of menstruation, or a type of release. The bright yellow shape takes on the form of a plant vine, indicating new beginnings growing from Rodriguez's vagina, a source of power for her, and a constant theme in her work overall.[54] This continues Rodriguez's efforts to center her body autonomy and do what Laura Pérez calls "de-pornogrify and unshroud

patriarchal imagery and thinking around the vagina."[55]

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[54] Laura Perez discusses Rodriguez's "Pussy Power Imaginary Project" in detail in Pérez, *Eros Ideologies*.

[55] Pérez, *Eros Ideologies*, 42.

Figure 51. Favianna Rodriguez, *Release What Doesn't Serve Me*, 2021, collage on cotton rag paper, 30 x 22.5 inches, https://favianna.com/artworks/release-what-doesnt-serve-me-2021.

The use of text in *Release* is minimal but effective and declarative, a characteristic of Rodriguez's recent poster making philosophy, the naked figure's lungs contain the word "RELEASE" in red, with "WHAT DOESN'T" nestled below it, inside of the figure's belly. Finally, the rest of the piece's title "SERVE ME" is inscribed in blue text along the figure's left arm. The location of the text is strategic, with "RELEASE" inside of where the lungs would be, it indicates and exhaling and releasing of old ideas and ways of working, while "SERVE ME" is located along Rodriguez's dominant hand, referencing the source of her drawing, and thus her
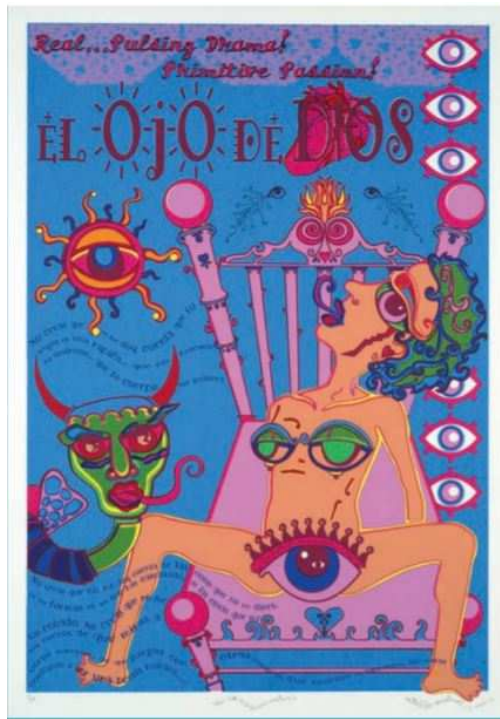
artwork as a whole.

Figure 52. Favianna Rodriguez, *Del ojo de Dios no se escapa nadie*, 1999, screenprint, 32 x 34 inches.

When looking at *Release*, the similarities between this and her early work in the MAESTRAS ATERLIER XXXIII titled *Del Ojo de Dios no se Escapa Nadie/ From the Eye of God no one Escapes* (1999) (see Figure 35) are striking. In Rodriguez's earlier piece, the eye of

God is placed in between the legs of the nude figure in the piece, her gaze fixed upward. Pérez explains that at the time of its printing, Rodriguez encapsulated the eye of God: "it saw all, everywhere, including men's objectifying and abusive sexual behavior."[56]

The in-between spaces of being that artists embody is the focus of my analysis, and of the CRDA, to shed light on the presence of artivists embody within the digital. For example, this extension of self gives artivists a platform beyond their own work and allows them to share their process with those who follow them via social media platforms.

Resilience as Salve: Melanie Cervantes' Embodied Strength

Melanie Cervantes identifies as a Xicanx artist and cultural worker. She was born in Harbor City, California in the suburbs of southwest Los Angeles and "grew up in a small inland city called Lawndale which neighbors a wealthy, mostly white beach city, as well as other working-class cities like Hawthorne and Gardena,"[57] to first-generation immigrant parents. Like Rodriguez and Barraza, she attended the University of California, Berkeley and majored in Ethnic Studies. It was here, where similarly to Rodriguez, she met a fellow Latina artist and was encouraged to pursue art. She explained:

> As long as I remember, I have loved creating. I was surrounded by ingenuity and creativity my entire life. My mom used to sew all my clothes. She would let me dream up the outfits I wanted, and she let me choose the colors and fabrics I liked best at the Los Angeles swap meets that sold fabric that was left over from the nearby garment districts. I like to joke about how my dad was king of upcycling before hipsters gave it a name and made it popular. He would transform what other people considered trash into new treasures. So, it came naturally for me to make things, but it wasn't until I was enrolled at UC Berkeley, where I met my mentor, Celia Herrera Rodríguez, when I claimed an artist identity. Calling myself an artist is a political decision I make to carve out space, to elevate my feelings

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[56] Pérez, 42.

[57] "Feminist Fist bumps: Artist Melanie Cervantes Discusses Art as Decolonial Activism – Third Woman Press," n.d., accessed March 28, 2019, http://www.thirdwomanpress.com/feminist-fistbumps-artist-melanie-cervantes-discusses-art-as-decolonial-activism/.

and views on what is happening in the world. It allows me to have a conversation with my community through a visual language that predates written communication. The process helps create a space to build community and share ideas and visions with the world.[58]

Cervantes described the act of taking on the identity of artist as a political act to "carve out space," in this way she is engaging in embodied aesthetics, and becoming visible to amplify her thoughts on society through her art. Both Rodriguez and Cervantes express the influence of their parents on their art practice by highlighting either the encouragement to be creative, or the ingenuity to create with what was around them, a practice first modeled for them by their immediate family. Melanie reflected on her father's inventiveness: "He would transform what other people considered trash into new treasures."[59] This is what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto called *rasquachismo*,[60] an aesthetic practice and view of life, a "world view of the have-not, but is also a quality exemplified in objects and places (a rasquache car or restaurant), and in social comportment (a person can be or act rasquache)." The paths that contemporary artivists such as Rodriguez, Cervantes, and Barraza have taken, align with the "Do It Yourself" initiative of rasquachismo. Ybarra Frausto named this set of values as an *"irrepressible spirit manifested in the art and life of the Chicano community."* The "Do It Yourself" practice expanded to Cervantes's life as an artist. She remained in the San Francisco Bay Area, where in 2007 she co-founded Dignidad Rebelde*,* along with artist and partner Jesus Barraza. Cervantes and Barraza described this collective endeavor:

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[58] "Feminist Fistbumps."

[59] "Feminist Fistbumps: Artist Melanie Cervantes Discusses Art as Decolonial Activism – Third Woman Press," accessed March 28, 2019, http://www.thirdwomanpress.com/feminist-fistbumps-artist-melanie-cervantes-discusses-art-as-decolonial-activism/.

[60] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo* (Phoenix, AZ: MARS, Movimiento Artiscico del Rio Salado, 1989).

[As a] graphic arts collaboration that produces screen prints, political posters and multimedia projects that are grounded in Third World and indigenous movements that build people's power to transform the conditions of fragmentation, displacement and loss of culture that result from histories of colonialism, patriarchy, genocide, and exploitation.[61]

Individually, Cervantes has exhibited her posters widely, including at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, National Museum of Mexican Art (Chicago), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), and abroad at the Musée d'Aquitaine (Bordeaux, France), Galerija Alkatraz (Ljubljana, Slovenia) and Museo Franz Mayer (Mexico City, Mexico).[62] What later became Dignidad Rebelde, was the result of Cervantes and Barraza meeting in 2006, and the first iteration of the now fourteen-year collaboration was a website, built with the intent to share artwork and the artists' respective stories. Barraza recalled the early days of Dignidad:

I am reminded of the late nights we spent drawing and painting in Melanie's apartment. Through the lessons learned from each other and the art made together, we created a collaborative space that we continue to develop. This was the true beginning of *Dignidad Rebelde*, when our art practices merged, and our shared politics became the guiding principles of our art making.[63]

The shared politics that Barraza refers to are the concepts of "Xicanisma and Zapatismo." Both artists were influenced by "Xicanas such as Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga, who defined an *indigenista* perspective in their writings that helped us develop a consciousness that recognizes women's central role in the struggle for liberation from systems of oppression."[64] This central value shaped their posters and graphics, which now consists of hundreds, featuring portraits of prominent women in both X/Chicana, Asian, and Black social movements—many of

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[61] "Melanie Cervantes | Dignidad Rebelde," n.d., accessed March 28, 2019, https://dignidadrebelde.com/?page_id=740.

[62] "Melanie Cervantes | Dignidad Rebelde" n.d.

[63] Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes, "Empujando Tinta: The Work and Politics of Dignidad Rebelde," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 41, no. 2 (2016): 209–20.

[64] Barraza and Cervantes, "Empujando Tinta," 209.

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which are done in collaboration with community organizations in the United States and abroad. The second central value for their collaboration is the indigenous uprising of Zapatistas in 1994, which took place in Chiapas, Mexico. Barraza exclaims that the event "happened before our eyes (on television screens and the Internet) and allowed us to, in imagine a world where revolution is possible."

This movement by the indigenous to disenfranchise themselves from the Mexican nation-state had a deep influence on many artists and cultural workers working in the global North, particularly Los Angeles and Oakland. A phenomenon that is described as "transnational Zapatismo" where the uprising of the Zapatistas led to activists and those sympathetic of the Zapatista cause to not only adapt a "set of tactics, but also the interrogation of their own positions of power." With this set of founding values, Dignidad Rebelde became an asset for community activists in the Bay Area and beyond several disenfranchise themselves from the Mexican nation-state had a deep influence on many artists and cultural workers working in the global North, particularly Los Angeles and Oakland. This phenomenon is described as "transnational Zapatismo," where the uprising of the Zapatistas led to activists and those sympathetic of the Zapatista cause to not only adapt a "set of tactics, but also the interrogation of their own positions of power." With this set of founding values, Dignidad Rebelde became an asset for community activists in the Bay Area and beyond several modalities. Their first collaborative print was the *EZLN Women's Revolutionary Laws* poster (Figure 53).

The print illustrates the central role of women to the Zapatistas and their influence on both artists as well as the Ejército Nacional de Liberación Nacional's/Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) "Women's Revolutionary Laws." This "charter, written in consultation with Tojola'bal, Chol. Tzotzil, and Tzetal women who were members of the EZLN, was made public

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on January 1, 1994."[65] The "Ley" or law has been a significant marker for indigenous women

beyond Mexico and the EZLN, its demands included "democratization of gender relations within

the family, the community, and social and political organizations."[66] In Dignidad Rebelde's *Ley*

Revolucionaria, the key document's ten demands are included in full, and Cervantes featured her

piece *Mother's Milk* (2007) on the left side of the collaborative graphic. Cervantes's portrait of

an indigenous Zapatista woman carrying her child on her *rebozo*, "a multi-function shawl worn

by women in Mexico,"[67] is a visual representation of "La Ley" and whom it represents. In her

portrait, the woman's figure is standing, her face is covered by a red bandana. The Zapatistas'

choice to cover their faces is an intentional one, as a young Tzotzil spokeswoman explains:

"Why do we wear masks? You must understand that we were the poorest people. We were

marginalized. We still do not trust authorities. Even though we are autonomous now, there is still

fear. We only wear our masks when we are with outsiders."[68] Thus, the figure's defiant stare is

joined by her child who is looking directly and drinking from the woman's breast. The piece uses

primary colors, with the rebozo in yellow, and her dress in the same blues shade as the graphic's

background. Behind the woman and the text is another graphic of a group of Zapatista women, it

is a thick white and blue outline that blends into the blue shade used for the background. The

print overall uses five colors and is representative of Dignidad Rebelde's effective use of a

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[65] Shannon Speed, R. Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn M. Stephen, "Indigenous Organizing and the EZLN in the Context of Neoliberalism in Mexico," in *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), xi.

[66] Speed, Castillo, and Stephen, "Indigenous Organizing and the EZLN," xi.

[67] Virginia Davis, "The Mexican Jaspe (Ikat) Rebozo: Comments on Its History, Significance And Prevalence," in *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, 1988, https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/630.

[68] "Mexico's Zapatista Rebels, 24 Years on and Defiant in Mountain Strongholds," the Guardian, February 17, 2018, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/feb/17/mexico-zapatistas-rebels-24-years-mountain-strongholds.

limited color palette, an aesthetic practice reminiscent of the 1960s, when ink was costly, and

artists made use of multiple colors for their political graphics to save money.

Figure 53. Dignidad Rebelde, *EZLN Women's Revolutionary Laws*, 2007, screen print, 12 x 16 inches.

In 2018, Cervantes reprinted *Mother's Milk* and exhibited the piece at the Manetti Shrem

Museum in Davis, California.[69] She chose a deep orange for the background for this occasion,

and a dark lilac for the figure's rebozo. The reprinting and repurposing of graphics is a key

component of Dignidad Rebelde's practice, and portraits made by both Barraza and Cervantes

are often used multiple times over the years of the collaborative project for both of their

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[69] Scott Tsuchitani, "Exhibition Opening: Xicanx Futurity at Manetti Shrem Museum," Feminist Research Institute, December 11, 2018, https://fri.ucdavis.edu/events/exhibition-xicanx-futurity.

individual graphics, and collaborative pieces alike. Dignidad Rebelde's production model is

community-based, and dependent on community needs. It loosely follows this cycle.

First, graphics are created by hand and each layer is cleaned up on Adobe Illustrator, next

depending on the urgency and subject matter of the piece, Barraza and Cervantes will print a

limited amount, then they will share on their social media platforms. Then, both artists gauge the

interest and demand online and often but not always, crowdfund additional printings. These

funds will cover printing materials and the sale of an edition often funds donations to local

organizations or mutual aid efforts related to the graphic's subject matter. For example, after

making *La Ley Revolucionaria* in 2007, Barraza and Cervantes followed up the printing by

donating, as Barraza explained:

> We gave two-thirds of the edition to the Colectiva Zapatista Ramona in Oakland,
> which sold them as a fundraiser. With the money collected they helped send local
> Native American women leaders to meet with Indigenous people of the global
> South at the 2007 Zapatista Encuentro in Chiapas. This method of working with
> community plays a central role in our cultural practice and is grounded in the
> methodology we inherit from artists of the Chicana/o movement.[70]

This practice of donating parts of their screen-printing editions to local community

organizations and making digital reworkings of these prints online for download or purchase is

part of the CRDA model of working with digital tools: this is a way that is sustainable, but that

retains politically conscious values. Because of the high cost of materials for printing, Cervantes

and Barraza often rely on online crowd funding to print extended editions of their work. This is

one of several ways their online presence and community building has helped them grow their

own practice. Furthermore, their website did not only serve as an archive of their political

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[70] Barraza and Cervantes, "Empujando Tinta," 210.

graphics, but it also became an online resource for activists. In addition to their graphics being

printed for protests and social actions over the last fourteen years, Dignidad Rebelde's website

serves as a "multimedia resource platform"[71] where they provide access to downloadable

graphics and posters for the public's use under a creative commons license. Dignidad Rebelde's

digital strategy of making their graphics a downloadable resource was one of the earliest

adoptions of this strategy.

Figure 54. Screenshot of Melanie Cervantes at Taller de Nuevo Amanecer (TANA) with *Mother's Milk*, 2018 reprint. https://www.instagram.com/p/BrlwAwmjlw7/.

In 2014, Cervantes and Barraza began to make a limited number of high-resolution files

of their posters available for users to download at no cost via their website (see Figure 55). This

seemingly small feature of their online presence had a deep impact in their ability to provide

access to political graphics for community members, both on and offline. This strategy becomes

especially visible, when graphics on timely issues such as child separations for example, can be

seen on numerous storefronts in Oakland, California, near where Barraza and Cervantes reside.

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[71] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 138.

The accessibility of their graphics via their website, allows for local businesses to demonstrate their solidarity with these issues, in an almost immediate manner. Other prominent artivists have adopted this strategy of making both their graphics and additional resources available on their website. For example, Favianna Rodriguez's "Resources" page on her self-titled website includes "instructional videos, free art downloads, and educational materials on how to stencil
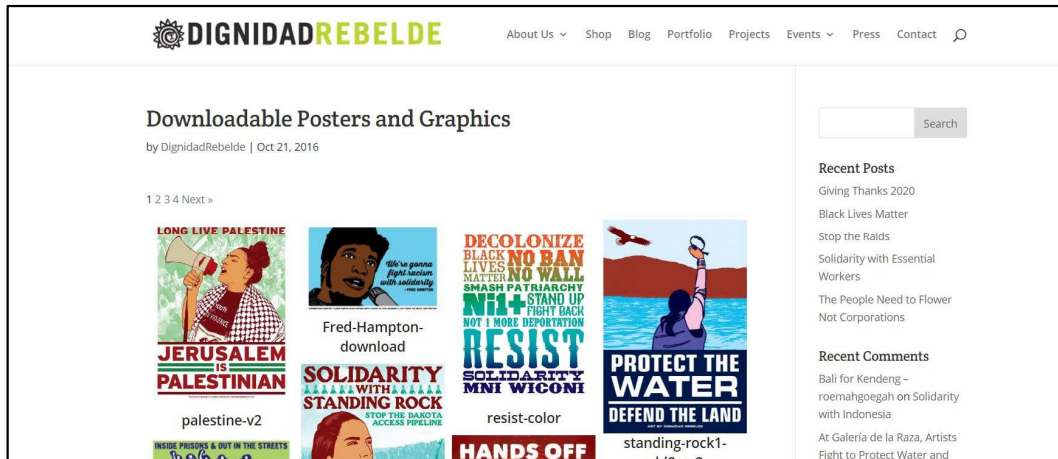
your own protest banner etc."[72]

Figure 55. Screenshot of "Portfolio" page from Dignidad Rebelde's website. The page title reads "Downloadable Posters and Graphics" and serves as a repository for their public-use work. https://dignidadrebelde.com/?envira=downloadable-posters-and-graphics

Cervantes consistently produced both her own graphics and portraits, along with collaborative work for Dignidad Rebelde, until 2017, when her practice faced an unexpected obstacle. In 2017, when tragedy struck, Cervantes and Barraza were able to lean on community support themselves. When Cervantes was diagnosed with a rare type of lung cancer, she needed to undergo surgery urgently. Within a few days of her announcement on social media, her online and offline community rallied to support her, raising over sixty-four thousand dollars via a

[72] Zapata, "Chicanx Graphics in the Digital Age," 138–39.

GoFundMe fundraiser.[73] At the time, Cervantes's personal Instagram account had just under

20,000 followers. Due to this health emergency, Cervantes's art practice shifted, and she began

making work in different mediums and with more personal themes than previously. In a post

shortly after her diagnosis she writes in the caption space, "I continue to carve relief images of

cacti as I experience the waves of emotion that come with my lung cancer diagnosis" (Figure

56). In the months following, Cervantes created several pieces featuring cacti, to embody

resilience and perseverance, for their ability to grow in near uninhabitable conditions. The cacti

became a sort of emblem, a key piece in her subsequent work, to embody her resilient spirit and

to honor the role of plants in her healing process. In the years since her diagnosis, she has also

been able to adapt her screen-printing process to account for her new limitations, mainly to limit
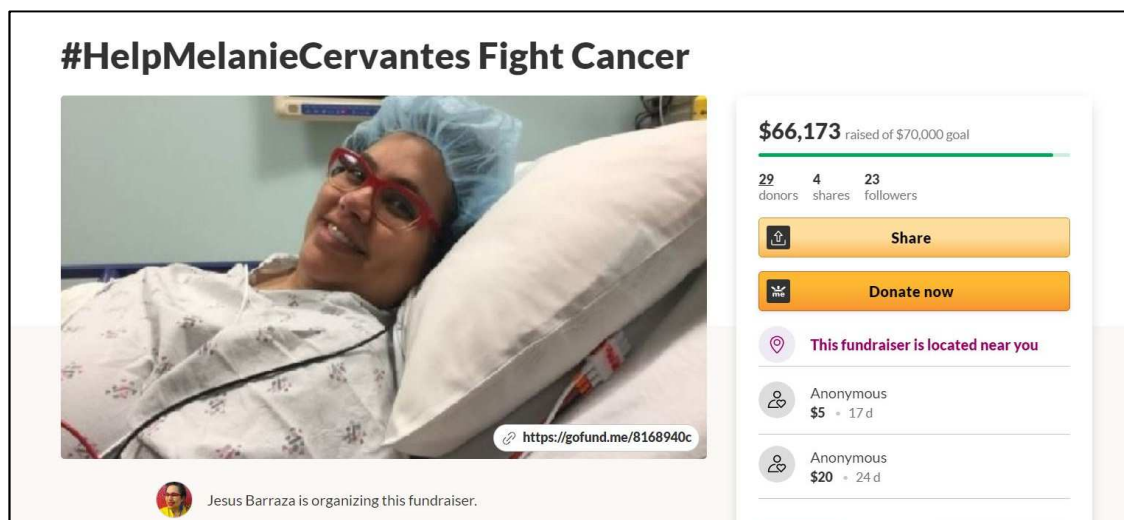
her exposure to airborne chemicals.

Figure 56. Melanie Cervantes's GoFundMe Crowdfunding Campaign Page created August 5,

2018, https://gofund.me/8168940c.

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[73] "#HelpMelanieCervantes Fight Cancer" created August 5, 2018. https://www.gofundme.com/f/pe7tn-helpmelaniecervantes-fight-cancer.

Figure 57. Screenshot of Melanie Cervantes's "The World is Better with You in It," October 10, 2018, Instagram.

The cactus is a recurring image in Cervantes's recent work, as well as the hummingbird. A year after her cancer diagnosis, she made *The World is Better with You in It* (2018), a self-portrait of her looking away and upward into the distance with a slight smile occupies the right side of the piece, she is wearing Cacti earrings (the thorns still present on the paddle), her wavy hair blending into the thick neon blue outline. The piece uses Cervantes' personal favorite colors of neon yellow, pink, blue and green. The words "the world is better with you in it" frame her face, layered on top of a yellow and green pattern consisting of "x" and triangle shapes with curved edges. The left side of the piece is a pattern that incorporates zig zagged thick lines of alternating blue and green, along with pink dots. A double pink stripe acts as a barrier between the pattern and Cervantes's face. The bright color palette offsets the serious subject matter of Cervantes' caption, where she shares statistics about suicide rates for Native youth, and her own struggle with depression. She continued:

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Being diagnosed with metastatic cancer brought up a lot of these issues and in many instances exacerbated old feelings. I still struggle. Sometimes it's a daily struggle. I've started to create more personal work about the root causes of my pain, about the oppressive structures that have impacted my life and as a way to remind myself that there are good days.[74]

Cervantes's acknowledgement of her shifting to create more personal work, and of examining the oppressive structures as the root causes of her suffering speaks to a CRDA lens and demonstrate her embodiment of vulnerability. Both Rodriguez and Cervantes have reexamined their respective art practices, and made intentional changes moving forward. Both of them create work from the experiences of their own physical bodies, and the work that is created exists on multiple ways. From canvas to the body, to their home environment, both of them hold a steadfast commitment to their healing and share this process of release and resilience with their digital audiences.

In *Las plantitas heal me*, Cervantes employs a minimal palette to convey her appreciation for the plant life that has kept her company during her healing, as she has been forced to stay home due her immunocompromised state (Figure 58). She writes in the caption space, "I find healing and wellness in plantitas. Plants feed me, they provide my vulnerable lungs with clean air, and they show me what care is necessary for life. In so many ways plantitas heal me and are a salve for my wounded heart."[75] *Las plantitas* prominently features a cactus paddle, with prickly pears atop its thorny exterior. The neon pink of the prickly pears provides a contrast to the dark and bright green tones of the print, decorated with similar thick outlines of "The World is Better." In her own words, Cervantes refers to plants as a "salve" for her wounded heart. In this

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[74] Melanie Cervantes, Instagram Photo, October 10, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bow_dRMnex3/.

[75] Melanie Cervantes, "'Through My Struggle...'(@melaniecervantes)," November 15, 2019, social media, https://www.instagram.com/p/B46HNHfpeQN/.

recent body of work that uses plants and cacti as protective elements against her illness and struggle since 2017, Cervantes voices a more intimate and vulnerable relationship to her surroundings. She uses her digital platform as an online journal to document not just the artwork produced, but the transformations along the way that have shifted her perspectives on her body and how she carries her practice moving forward. Furthermore, Cervantes's recent work retains the neon palette and communicates directly with her digital audience. In November of 2020, two years after *The World is Better with You in It* (2018), Cervantes posted the following image (see Figure 59) on her personal Instagram account. Visually, the graphic bears similarities to the former piece discussed here. Instead of a portrait, *I am Grateful* (2020) contains the title words

and a second line of text: "Thank You."

Figure 58. Melanie Cervantes, *Las plantitas heal me*, 2019, Serigraph.

Figure 59. Screenshot of Melanie Cervantes's graphic that reads "I am Grateful. Thank You," November 28, 2020, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/CIJjd_Cpjgf/.

The power of the caption space, and its potential to serve as a proto artist statement, is seen here, where Cervantes uses the space to express her appreciation for those who have supported her and her work in the last two years of her battling lung cancer. She names specific ways others have supported her: "I am grateful to the folks who purchase work from me, put my work in places where people can engage with it, to those who hire me to present lectures, who commission work, to those that share my work and encourage others to support it."[76] In her caption for this graphic, Cervantes names the tangible ways she has been supported, and shares with her digital audience how much it has impacted her to feel this support. She also takes the time to mention the ways in which online actions on social media also have an impact and make her feel supported. She shares: "To those who take the time to ask people to properly credit my work when they post it without attribution and to those who offer encouraging words and stories

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[76] Melanie Cervantes, "'I Am Grateful...' (@melaniecervantes)," social media, Instagram, November 28, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CIJjd_Cpjgf/.

that help fuel me toward better days and those who take the time to double tap a heart to affirm

they like something I have done."[77] in these small but significant digital actions, artists like

Cervantes feel that their work has value, and it is one of the ways online communities can show

care and support. The added context of Cervantes's words in addition to her artwork are a more

complex and intimate look into her own process. It solidifies the bond between artist and

audience and leads to the outpouring of support and transformative events, like her crowdfunding

campaign. She ends her *autohistoriateoria* with the following paragraph:

> My work is not just my own. It is all of ours. I couldn't do what I do without all of
> the people who came before me and offered inspiration. To all the people in all
> my communities who fight for justice not just for themselves but for generations
> to come, to the people who see beyond our human selves and the interdependence
> between all life and to the millions of ancestors who help guide us toward
> something better. Thank you. I couldn't be here without you.[78]

Cervantes's digital entry of gratitude acknowledges the multiple communities that have shown

up to support her. Bearing digital witness to her fight with illness has not been an easy process

and reveals the limitations of the vessel that is our bodies. However, through their willingness to

share not just their process of making work, but their thoughts and feelings on the ways they are

choosing to make work moving forward, Rodriguez and Cervantes enact a Chicana Radical

Aesthetic, a praxis that deals with community care and uses the digital to make visible the labor

behind those who hold digital platforms. Without the space of the caption, without the access

Rodriguez and Cervantes provide for the online communities, the work would still shift,

allowing for one type of witnessing. The digital thus allows us to witness the difficult and thorny

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[77] Cervantes, "I Am Grateful..."

[78] Cervantes, "I Am Grateful..."

parts of an artist's experience with deep transformation and moves us closer to remembering our own mortality.

CHAPTER FOUR: FROM THE DIGITAL TO IRL (IN REAL LIFE) ARTIVIST NETWORKS OF CARE

As the title suggests, there are multiple worlds in which artists interact with other artists, although much of this dissertation focuses on the ways in which digital workflows and virtual interactions have shaped the way in which artivists practice art and political engagement. One of the key findings of looking at the artivism of all six individuals through the CRDA was the depth of the connections the internet has mediated between them and their larger artivist networks. My goal is not to set up a hierarchy of interactions, favoring the in-person to the digital instead, I am interested in the ways in which the connections between the six artivists have deepened with the incorporation of the digital into their practice and daily lives. I argue that despite critiques of the digital realm as potentially superficial, these digital artivists have used the internet to establish artivist networks of care and have chosen to form bonds with each other and practice reciprocity. Their bond and responsibility to each other's success models the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic framework by engaging in and helps us understand the unique connections forged among artivists.

One of the most important elements of this dissertation, and an important tenet of contemporary artivist practice, is connection. Connections permeate these artivist narratives, whether they founded organizations to support other artists, like Favianna Rodriguez, or collaborated with a partner to produce work, like Melanie Cervantes and Jesus Barraza, or if they could trace back their art practice to another artist who had provided the chance for them to learn these skillsets, like Elizabeth Blancas. Woven into the lived experiences of all six artivists, was

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the value of the networks they cultivated, the tangible opportunities obtained because of them, and the work they continue to build over the span of their art practice. In this chapter, I analyze how their relationships to other artivists have affected their work both online and offline, and how the six portraits that form part of this dissertation are fundamental to understanding the praxis and theoretical lens of the CRDA.

I am interested in how digital platforms and tools have brokered these connections, as well as leveled an already uneven art economy. The interactions discussed in this chapter have resulted in an artivist network of care and have offset some of the structural gatekeeping practices of "today's 'global' arts landscape."[1] While the digital space within internet-mediated social media, platforms has allowed for artivists to create relationships that overcome geographic distance, and generational gatekeeping, it is also deeply flawed. I respectfully acknowledge the work of Safiya Noble, Ruha Benjamin, and Sasha Costanza-Schock, on how internet infrastructure often "reinforces oppressive social relationships" within a neoliberal society. Noble, in particular, points out a phenomenon of "technological redlining": "on the internet and in our everyday uses of technology, discrimination is also embedded in computer code and, increasingly, in artificial intelligence technologies that we are reliant on, by choice or not."[2] This increasing dependence on decision-making software such as algorithms[3] has put Chicanx and Latinx artivists in an increasingly precarious position, and has become one more obstacle for them to overcome in their digital lived experience.

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[1] Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 232.

[2] Dávila, 232.

[3] An algorithm is "a sequence of computational steps that transform the input into the output." See Thomas H. Cormen, Charles E. Leiserson, Ronald L. Rivest, and Clifford Stein, *Introduction to Algorithms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009). In the context of social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, algorithms instruct a computer how to process and order data.

However, as Costanza-Schock's work details design and the intentional creative labor of political graphics can also create opportunities for resistance. The digital has become a space where artivists such as Elizabeth Blancas were exposed to the event where she met her mentor Jessica Sabogal for the first time. This meeting resulted in Sabogal inviting Blancas to assist her on a nearby mural, and thus began a connection that remains to this day. The digital is also the place where Rodriguez first saw Salgado's work, and their first interaction happened completely online. I contend that we cannot overlook how digital forms of communication and exhibition have created new ways for artists to expose others to their work and develop relationships with other emerging and experienced artist-activists.

Giving Flowers as Praxis

As an artivist myself, I had a deep desire to incorporate into my doctoral work the depth of reciprocity I experience daily from my online and offline network of care. I know that my experience as an artist navigating academia is one that at times feels full of tension and uncertainty, however, painting and making art for this project is a fundamental part of my methodology, and intervention. The series of portraits in "Give Us Our Flowers: Latinx Artivist Portraits" allowed me to truly incorporate my six artivist collaborators into this project and enact the CRDA as a praxis in visual form.

I am keenly aware that the majority of doctoral projects take shape in the written form, and so in breaking away from this norm, I made space for a new model of reciprocity that models my theoretical aims. Often in academic research, we employ the honorarium or cup of coffee to thank those who give us their time and insight for our work. In taking the time to paint my collaborators—as both pedagogy and *ofrenda*—I was able to reciprocate in a way that was familiar to me and my collaborators in community. In my experience, artists trade work with

each other constantly, and often prefers the "trade" to monetary compensation. As someone who is writing from within the community, I wanted this project to emulate the practices inside of artivist circles, the exchanges of work and the intimate act of painting each other's likeness. I wanted to honor my collaborators with my artistic labor and simultaneously develop a visual opening into the work. In other words, if the CRDA was a painting, it would look like "Give Us Our Flowers."

I will dive into the representational choices of the portraits later in this chapter and discuss how they create meaning, and form part of my process in thinking about the development of the Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic framework. The main conversational opening I sought to create with the painting of these portraits was: what are the tangible, everyday acts, that we carry out to support artivists in life and not in death? How can we, when confronted by the faces of these collaborators, develop our own networks of care and support online and offline. This is the conversation I invite you to have with me.

Investing in Each Other

The youngest in the group of artivists that form part of this dissertation, Elizabeth "Lizzy" Blancas was born in 1996, and began getting politicized in high school, in her hometown of Freemont, in the Bay Area of northern California. She describes that time in her life as challenging, particularly because of her own struggles with anxiety. In this chapter I aim to highlight not only the social networks she participates in, both digital and physical, I also reframe the lens in which we see networking and professional ties. Through the CRDA, artivists committed to social justice, apply these values to their networks. Thus, what I term artivist networks of care are deeply engaged, dynamic relationships, that include sharing artistic skills, in lieu of a formal fine art education for the majority of artivists in this project, social media savvy,

business, and personal branding knowledge, as well as small business and art sales management. Rodriguez, Salgado, Barraza, Cervantes, Sabogal, and Blancas challenge current definitions of the type of relationships possible between creatives and push us to imagine other ways to be present for others in a shared community of cultural workers. Blancas speaks to how her own relationship with femtor Jessica Sabogal began with an in-person meeting at a local event in Oakland, California. At the time, Blancas was navigating her own struggles with mental health, and via social media she began to learn more about her own upbringing as a daughter of Mexican immigrant parents. She recalled:

> That was a really . . .. Yes, that was a really tough time for me, I think. Even before meeting my mentor, at that point in my life, I was starting to be politicized because I'm someone who grew up in the digital age. I had access to Tumblr and Instagram, so at this point in my life, I was learning what the word Chicana [sic] meant and then going to my bookstore and buying all the books I could on that topic and learning about myself that way through academics even though I was a kid, basically. I remember the first book on being Chicana [sic], really, that I bought was *Massacre of the Dreamers* by Ana Castillo.[4]

Blancas refers to other social media platforms such as Tumblr and Instagram as elements of her own political consciousness. Both digital platforms consist of multimedia sharing, where users create an account and can create their own content if they chose to, or simply follow other accounts. Both Instagram and Tumblr allow each user to curate what they consume, resulting in a "feed," an aggregated and ever-expanding accordion of content created by users of the person's choosing, posted in chronological order, with the most recently posted content at the top of the browser page. Blancas, like many of her fellow Generation Z peers who have internet access in the United States, was exposed to quotes and images of Chicanx literature and cultural productions, such as Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma.* Castillo's text

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[4] Elizabeth Blancas, "Phone," 2019.

in particular is not only a resource many discover only in college, but also a collection of essays where Castillo replaces the term "Chicana feminism" with "Xicanisma" to include women on both sides of the US/Mexico border, and calls for a transnational feminist approach.[5]

As Sabogal and Blancas began to work together and build on their initial meeting in San Francisco, Sabogal spoke of how clearly Blancas showed her commitment to learning the ins and outs of muralism on their first project:

> She was a teen. 18. And she came up to me and was like, "Hi. This is a sketchbook. Would you take a look at it?" And I was like, "Holy fucking shit." You know what I mean? I don't even remember what I thought, but I was just like, "You know what? That's so fucking brave." I would never do that. Like, go up to some artist I like and be like, "Can you critique me?" And so, instantly I was like, "You know what? I'm working on a mural soon in Oakland. You should come help out." And then next thing I know she is . . .. That mural was interesting because I have 20 different volunteers, and she showed up every fucking day, like 9:00 to 5:00. So, you very easily identify during those things who has it and who doesn't.[6]

Blanca's initiative to not only attend the event Sabogal was a panelist in, but to show up consistently for the mural painting process, set a foundation for their relationship and commitment to each other's growth. Blancas even attributed an improvement on her own mental health as a direct result of her painting that summer:

> Part of it was finally seeing a Latina woman painting a huge wall. Just, I had never seen that before. And then there was also the aspect that I knew she was queer. Her girlfriend was there. And I, at that point, was talking to a girl for the first time but had never said the words out loud, so I feel like Jess mentored me in a lot of ways. We just ended up really hitting it off, and I would again show up every single day, and we worked really well together. And of course, I had technical skills. It was beautiful to see . . . and to experience the way that she, from the jump, really invested in me. The last few days of the mural, she ended up not doing a volunteer call out, and it was just her and I painting alone.[7]

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[5] Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*, 20th Anniversary updated edition (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

[6] Jessica Sabogal, interview with author, phone, July 31, 2019.

[7] Sabogal, interview.

Working together on a mural was the impetus for Sabogal and Blancas to continue building and collaborating professionally.

The connection between Sabogal and Blancas, however, is not only about learning the skill set of muralism, but one of visibility. As Blancas explains, Sabogal's queerness made Blancas feel seen, and affirmed her own exploration of her sexuality. This relationship also mirrors Salgado's and Rodriguez, both of whom identify as queer. Blanca's work explores queer themes and brings visibility to this community. In her piece, *The Future* (2018) (Figure 60), which features a portrait of Davia Spain, a Bay Area activist, artist and trans woman, critiques a particular trend in current feminist circles, particularly the use of the word "female" to refer to feminists, thus creating a trans-exclusionary narrative that alienates trans women and gender non-conforming individuals. The piece reflects the graphic style of the murals Blancas has worked on with Sabogal and on her own, it is a combination of acrylic and spray paint on a wooden panel. Half of the horizontal piece features a portrait of Davia on the left, while the right side features the affirmation: "THE FUTURE IS/ FEMME/TRANS/NON/BINARY/NOW" The text in Blancas's piece is a direct response to the resurfacing of a 1970s feminist bookstore slogan, "The Future is Female" (Figure 60). According to the New York Times, "The original

"The Future Is Female" T-shirt design was made for Labyris Books, the first women's bookstore in New York City.

Figure 60. Elizabeth Blancas, *The Future*, 2018, acrylic and spray-paint on wood, 24 x 36 inches.

Additionally, the photographer Liza Cowan took a picture of Alix Dobkin, her girlfriend at the time, wearing it in 1975"[8] (see Figure 61). In early 2015 the photo of Dobkin was featured on an Instagram account "h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y" whose purpose is to feature "herstoric lesbian imagery"[9] and later the t shirt design was reprinted by a Los Angeles boutique, whose famous clientele popularized the slogan once more. The resurfacing of the slogan brought up discussions and tensions within multiple feminist communities, the slogan, and its use in contemporary movements, isolated trans women like Davia Spain, due to its exclusion of non-binary and trans identities. Although "The Future is Female" originated in the 1970s, its resurgence and wide use affirmed the stance that non-binary and trans women were excluded from identifying as feminists due to the limiting use of the word female. This is "the stance of what has recently

[8] Marisa Meltzer, "A [ ] ber 18, 2015, sec. Fashion, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/a-feminist-t-shirt-resurfaces-from-the-70s.html.
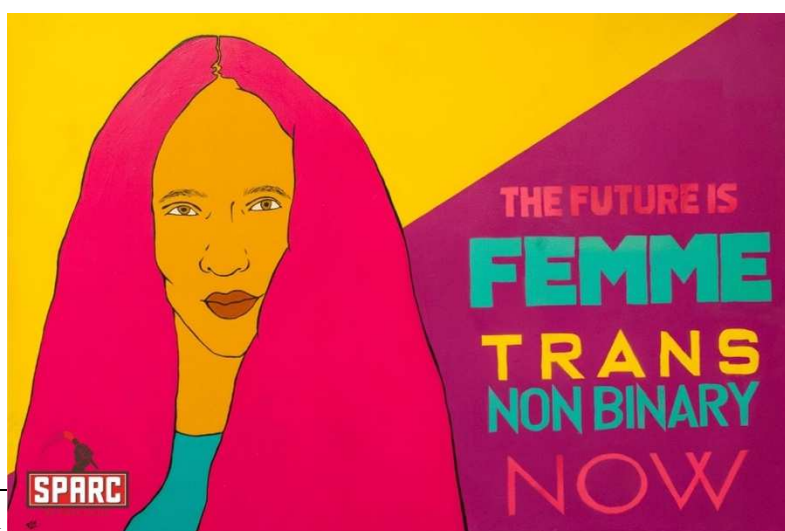
[9] Meltzer, "A Feminist T-Shirt Resurfaces from the '70s."

become to be known as a 'TERF' (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) perspective."[10] Thus

Blancas's use of the words "FEMME/TRANS/NON/BINARY/NOW" speaks to a counter

current, one that centers the voices of trans women despite the popularity of conflating biological

sex and gender by mainstream feminist movements. In the piece, each of the words vary in color,

they also vary in typographical style, a type of experimentation that coincides with Blancas's

interest in sign painting.

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[10] Sally Hines, "The Feminist Frontier: On Trans and Feminism," *Journal of Gender Studies* 28, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1411791.

Figure 61. Liza Cowan, *Alix Dobkin*, 1975, silver gelatin print.

When I asked Blancas about her art practice, she mentioned multiple styles and interests:

> for my art practice, I am drawn to two major things. Well, three. My main focus is screen printing and muralism. I also have a secret love for sign painting, but now at this point, screen printing and muralism, that is my art practice. And I would say both of those mediums are important to me because, at this point, I have been able to learn so much about how they're a part of my history. Especially as a politicized Chicana, these forms of artwork have been used to not only showcase beautiful images but to also get a message across.[11]

As an emerging artist and muralist, Blancas not only has the technical know-how but also has knowledge on how muralism has been a key medium for previous generations of Chicana/o artists, particularly during the 1960s and '70s. This education has been shaped by her taking Chicano/a Studies courses at her community college, and by engaging with visuals via social media platforms, from photographs of murals and artist profiles of the 1960s and '70s generation

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[11] Blancas, "Phone."

of Chicana/o artists this online education has fostered a commitment to art and artivism that has moved to Blanca's own real-life pursuits.

Sabogal and Blancas continued to collaborate on projects after their first mural together in 2014, one of the cornerstones of their relationship as mentor and mentee was gathering in community arts organizations. One space that Sabogal wanted to expose Blancas to was "Galería de La Raza" in San Francisco's Mission District. Since its founding in 1970, Galería has been a hub for Chicanx and Latinx artists working in the Bay Area. Galería is a "non-profit community-based arts organization whose mission is to foster public awareness and appreciation of Chicano/Latino art and serve as a laboratory where artists can both explore contemporary issues in art, culture and civic society, and advance intercultural dialogue."[12] In the summer of 2014, Sabogal reached out to Blancas and asked her to be an intern for her residency at Galería de la Raza. The internship would last a year and later evolve into a full-time position as a Public Programs Coordinator. Blancas attributes this series of opportunities as the result of several key people investing in her.

First, Sabogal, and later Galería director Ani Rivera. Blanca's choice of words is key in understanding the networks that were formed to foster her professional growth. Investment in Blancas's growth was not simply the act of her being tapped into these opportunities, it was the recognition and belief that young Chicana artists like Blancas need to be fostered and mentored through their professional journey. Sabogal's main intention was to expose Blancas to a different community from her own, and to enable her to network with other artists in San Francisco:

> I told her, "Lizzy, hop on BART twice a week and come meet me in San
> Francisco at this gallery. Just get out of the house and come." It is not like I had
> projects or anything, but I was like, "Just come be in this community." Because

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[12] "About Galería de La Raza," n.d., accessed August 12, 2019, http://www.galeriadelaraza.org/eng/about/index.php.

Galería is how I met a million people. Just artists, elders, a lot of that Judy Baca generation. Like, Yolanda Lopez is a huge one. —And so, I wanted her to be a part of that. And so, through that, she just became my left arm. And slowly I would get mural commissions. So, then I started to get them out of town. I got one in Chicago, and I got one in Montreal, and that is when I was like, "Fuck it." And I talked to her mom on the phone and shit, and I was like, *todo va a salir bien,* it's going to be fine. I am going to take care of her. Everything is cool. And sure enough, just over time, she just rose. She just rose and became this incredible fucking woman.

This, in turn, reveals the politics that drive both Sabogal and Rivera, as the two mentors that Blancas credits with her development as an Arts professional. These politics refuse the disposability of community members and create opportunities for further growth. The CRDA is not just about the type of commitment artivists have to the issues they portray in their work, but to the types of community relationships they foster because of these politics. One of the ways in which the CRDA shows up is in the networks of care that develop among artivists, particularly the six artivists featured in this project. Sabogal widened Blancas's network of support and enabled her to add mural commissions out of state and internationally to her work experiences. She also modeled community principles and served as a resource for the technical skillet of muralism and screen printing.

Sabogal did not stop her commitment to Blancas's development after their first collaboration. Instead, she brought her alongside as other opportunities arose. Reflecting on her own trajectory, Blancas remarks "I really believe in mentorship. I'm just so passionate about it because I have firsthand experience, I have had it save me and just really set me up, so I really wish the same for so many other people."[13] Blancas's transformation from a community college student and shy attendee at a panel about muralism to a current UCLA undergraduate

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[13] Blancas, "Phone."

demonstrates the power of connection, and the way in which artivists take care of each other by modeling commitment and sustained investment in one another's wellbeing, there is an emphasis on the collective, and of rejecting the disposability of individuals overall.

Another characteristic of these artivist networks of care is reciprocity. Although Sabogal began to think of Blancas for opportunities, the relationship has always been reciprocal. Blancas speaks of participating in Sabogal's work by modeling for her illustrations along with other friends, and throughout their mural collaborations, forming part of a team effort to complete the mural commissions, which cannot be completed in time without extra help. Beyond professional or artistic collaboration, Blancas and Sabogal contradict research that speaks of animosity and tension between younger Generation Z individuals and older generations, or of a lack of understanding. In her interview, Sabogal revealed that when she struggles with a new feature on her social media applications, Blancas is there to help. She exclaimed:

> It is interesting because Lizzy's something like ten years younger than me, I think through seeing her with social media, I feel like a dad being like, "How do I make the tag move when somebody ..." You know what I am saying? Like, when the tag moves with someone in a story. I still don't know how to do that, but I'm like, "Lizzy, can you . . ." You know what I mean? And she is so fucking good with capturing things on the spot. She uses it in a different way that I cannot. It's too much for me at that point, you know.

Sabogal's experience of consulting Blancas when using social media is one that shows the complexities of adapting to changing technology as an artist, and how the care extends beyond the professional, to include digital literacy. Blancas and Sabogal's levels of comfort with social media are vastly different, yet as Sabogal recognizes, as a younger and digitally savvy user, Blancas is utilizing the platform in ways that Sabogal cannot. Although Sabogal and Blancas seize social media in different ways, there is still an open line of communication between both femtor and femtee, particularly in recognizing the limits of one's expertise in a medium. As

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Sabogal exclaimed, she is not using the platforms to the capacity that Blancas is but understands that it is another way to engage applications like Instagram. Sabogal went on to praise Blancas for her self-confidence and mastery of online tools, "She knows her self-worth above any other person I've ever met. She knows that as a young person. You know what I mean? And I feel like she has created community online in a way that I have never seen before. She will go to places and know everybody because she is just a certain way with them online. You know what I mean? But to me, that feels really intense. I'm too private for that."[14] Whereas Blancas is in constant contact and fosters deep relationships with others online, Sabogal has mostly deepened relationships online with artivists she has previously met in person. This is one of the key differences in how both artivists choose to engage their respective networks and social media platforms. It also points to the level of comfort each artivist has, or what Sabogal refers to as her privacy. The other side of sharing one's process and oneself online is a unique vulnerability, and it is this feeling of exposure that artivists like Sabogal have a clear boundary on.

The other aspect of "digital" that artivists refer to, besides the social media and public aspect of their work, is the software they use to either digitize hand drawn sketches or create from scratch on the software itself. For example, Sabogal taught herself how to create stencils for murals by watching YouTube tutorial videos online and trying out these methods on her own, in the streets of Colombia and later Oakland.[15] Over the years, Sabogal has become comfortable using software like Adobe Photoshop, and Illustrator, the latter is heavily used due to its ability to produce "vectors," which are scalable graphics, enabling artists to magnify their artwork at any size, from the scale of a poster to a building wall, vectors allow artwork to become any size

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[14] Sabogal, interview.

[15] Sabogal, interview.

without distorting the quality of the graphic. While she is comfortable with the digital social media aspect, Blancas was forthcoming about her reaching out to Sabogal with help on the software end:

> But I, only know what I know because of folks around me and like, cause[sic] I am taking notes and asking questions and to be able to produce the work that I'm doing. It takes a ton of work on my end. Right. Because I do not have that background and I have only been doing it for such a short time. So, I, I typically work by hand, and I like to illustrate things "a mano." And then when it comes to creating things digitally, which is a huge part of what I have to do, right. To be able to like play with colors or be able to do various concepts for murals or to create a screen print. I have to know some of these things. And it's so funny because I've literally sent this to people who want to do what I'm doing, but one time, I think I either sat down with Jess or I called her and I was like, "Okay, walk me through every single click that you take when you scan a photo or a drawing that you've done and then you turn it into a vector."[16]

Like Blancas, when the topic of software came up in our conversations, not only were we able to discuss it in depth as practitioners and heavy users of the programs, all artivists learned the software from another artivist or friend, whose mastery of the software was then taught one-on-one. None of the artivists in this project have undergone formal graphic design or software training. As a result, many have a specific goal in mind when using the software, and once that goal is achieved or mastered, they rarely stray or learn other modalities. Like Blancas, her goal in reaching out to Sabogal was to create a vector of her hand drawn image, which she could then magnify without distortion.

Likewise, Barraza whose main medium is screen printing, uses Adobe Illustrator to create the different layers that make up his prints. In our interview, he spoke of how he learned this process through his friend Juan, he explained, "I'm great in Illustrator for what I need to do. So, I

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[16] Blancas, "Phone."

was able to perfect when I needed to do and what I needed to do also shaped the way I do things

. . . But I mean it really helped me understand what was possible."[17] Having had previous

experience working on websites with community organizers and nonprofit organizations,

Barraza was familiar with basic Illustrator techniques circa 2000. Slowly, the software began to

become a part of his process, particularly for the posters he was making for the Mission Cultural

Center for Latino Arts (MCCLA) around 2001, Barraza explained that this was precisely when

the software and the digital became an important part of his process:

> Really when, when it takes off in like 2001, it's when it finally just all clicks
> together, the silkscreen poster, Illustrator . . . And so, for the first few posters and
> I made, (they) were all hand done. But as I said, I was doing more of the digital
> stuff for the posters for the cultural center and so I was doing more design and
> then like things back then, I said, "Oh this is cool." Then it became like a thing
> where I started trying to build, I think I was talking about this with Oscar (print
> master at Self Help Graphics) about this, as graphic designers, and not artists, we
> learned to be able to adapt and recreate a style.[18]

What began as a casual curiosity with Adobe Illustrator became the digital protocol for how

Barraza and Melanie produce color separations for their posters at Dignidad Rebelde, and in their

own personal bodies of work.

The care with which these relationships are maintained and fostered is not only one of the

findings of this project, but also what enabled me to conduct the interviews in the first place. As

an artivist who forms part of these networks of care, it was the willingness of the six artivists to

help with my dissertation project that facilitated the interviews and portraits that followed, this

willingness to help was also possible due to the relationships of support I have been building

among fellow artivists outside of the university. Although all six artivists spoke of the

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[17] Jesus Barraza, "Self Help Graphics Studio Interview," 2019.

[18] Barraza, "Self Help Graphics Studio Interview."

superficiality that can arise when engaging with social media, they also mentioned the

relationships to other artivists and their work that have been facilitated by different applications.

Just as the opportunity to work at Galería de la Raza changed the trajectory of Blancas's life,

Julio Salgado's journey shifted dramatically upon connecting with Favianna Rodriguez. One of

the main findings of this work, is the constant economic support present within artivist networks

of care. Given, that the majority of artivists work as freelance designers or rely on speaking

engagements or commissions for their income, referrals are a form of care within this community

and lead to income.

As an undocumented and queer artivist, Salgado's income primarily comes from his

online art sales, and speaking gigs at universities and other venues, where he shares his story of

immigrating and making a living as an artist while undocumented. Thus, it is common to find

mentee and mentor relationships that lead to employment, as Salgado reflected on his first

interaction with Rodriguez:

> Around 2011, Favianna Rodriguez hits me up and I guess somebody told her
> about my work, which I always joke with her, I used to message her on Myspace
> back in the day, and she never replied to me. But when a lot of my work started,
> people were sharing my work between 2010, 2011, she noticed it and then she
> was like, "Hey, I want to come to your studio in LA." And I'm like, "Girl, my
> studio is my parents' living room, and I don't really have a studio." And she was
> like, "Oh my God, you need to move to the Bay. I'm starting this organization
> called CultureStrike. Come through." And I'm like, "Well, if you got a job for
> me, I'm down." And to this day, Favianna is one of the first people who actually
> put her money where her mouth is. This was before DACA, and she was like,
> "We will figure out a way to make sure you get paid. We will figure out ways."[19]

Although it began as a playful conversation, it led to one of the most significant chapters in

Salgado's life so far, he moved to Oakland shortly afterward, and lived there for several years,

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[19] Salgado, interview.

where he networked with other artivists based there like Barraza and Cervantes, and eventually Sabogal and Blancas as well. Salgado refers to his time in Oakland as the most formative for him as an artivist thus far and calls the city a "second home." In a short feature for local independent TV station KQED, Salgado and Favianna discussed their work over a plate of chilaquiles. Sitting at her kitchen table one morning with Salgado, Rodriguez reflected on how she became aware of Julio's work. Rodriguez stated, "My good friend Gon Golan, told me that I absolutely had to look at your work, that I was missing out. So, I looked at it, and I was like, 'Oh my god' your creative potential was just, it blew me away."[20]

Salgado's reflection during our interview also reveals the power of social media, and its ability to amplify artwork. It was the act of others sharing his artwork across platforms like Myspace and Facebook at the time, that caught Rodriguez's eye and led to greater opportunity. Salgado's admission that he did not have a studio space is one that touches on the ways social media plays with our perception of the real-life conditions of artivist livelihoods. Across all interviews, this topic surfaced often, with artivists like Sabogal and Barraza affirming that what they choose to share online is not reflective of their entire human experience, or their income. Like Salgado, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color artivists often lack a formal studio space, and instead create from their homes, on their kitchen tables or bedrooms, or make studio spaces out of their garages like Barraza and Cervantes. This is a practice frequently seen in the social media posts shared by artivists, whether it is on a post of a work in progress or a video story on their Instagram account, artivists like Salgado are often creating artwork from home.

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[20] "(7) Creating Radical Visibility and Chilaquiles| KQED Arts - YouTube," n.d., accessed March 25, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvCWDZNCamw.

Rodriguez and Salgado's relationship did materialize into a full-time job. Salgado has

been working at CultureStrike since its founding in 2012 and is currently the organization's

Artist Projects Coordinator and has recently moved to their Los Angeles office. Like Blancas,

Salgado found a home in the art advocacy sector, where supporting artists is one of the main

goals of the organization. This sector can be a place of growth for artivists like Salgado. It was at

CultureStrike that he found a sense of belonging and was able to, in his role as Art Project

Coordinator, support other artivists. A full-time position at the organization also gave Salgado a

more permanent source of income and benefits, he reflected upon his time in the organization:

> [It] really taught me that we need to create more spaces like that. We need to
> invest in artists, we need to invest in spaces that hire . . . because a lot of artists
> that do, and for many years I did it, you get hired to do a job and it's a very
> transactional . . . There are artists who, they don't have health insurance, they
> don't have all these things, and so it's really taught me to . . . and I mean, I'm
> very thankful, for sure. But just being more thankful to be able to be in that
> position. And to have somebody have faith in your work, that's a big deal, and I
> think that was a big change for me, to "Oh my God, I'm worth it." You know?
> "I'm worth it," and not being ashamed to charge money or be like, "I'm going to
> take the time to create this."

A more permanent source of income and employment is not just an anomaly for Salgado, it is

something that is sorely needed.

As Salgado points out, more spaces like CultureStrike need to be formed in order to

create a strong foundation for artivists' work. Artivists are often working freelance and engaging

in what Salgado calls a "transactional" work life, where there is no job security or health

insurance. Investing in spaces that can provide a more permanent work life for artists is part of

the investment and care network that Salgado is a part of. Additionally, Salgado speaks of the

power that comes from being invested in, this manifested in Salgado not just realizing but

believing his worth as an artivist. Part of this investment can also reveal as he put it, the work of

overcoming the same around "charging money" or "taking the time" to create work.

Another finding from the interviews in relation to care is the sharing of branding and business operations knowledge among mid-career and emerging artivists. During our interview, Salgado shared the steep learning curve for artivists, when it comes to learning how to generate income from work and speaking engagements:

> Favianna really, really taught me a little more solidarity and I hate . . . that we live in a capitalistic society, and if you are an artist out there listening to this, take a business course. Unfortunately, you have to learn certain things. And so Favianna's really, not just teaching me about owning my art, being an artist, but really pushing me to... around this time, people were also asking me to do speaking engagements and I felt really bad about charging, and then she was like, "But you gotta eat, girl," you know? She is teaching me how to see my worth. Really, those years that I was there [in Oakland] helped me develop myself as an artist who . . . how to have a credit card. Like I did not get a credit card until 31, you know? How to do basic things like this, because all my life I worked paycheck to paycheck, and really savings? What? I don't know what that means.[21]

With an increasing social media presence and following, Salgado reflects on how he was hesitant to profit from his art; having Rodriguez as a mentor in this crucial time of his career helped him leverage those opportunities and charge for his speaking engagements to provide for himself. He also urges those who are also artists to "take a business course." This includes figuring out a speaking gig rate but also a knowledge of contracts and negotiation, skillsets that all artivists interviewed have expressed they use in their public lives as artists.

In a digital landscape, where a robust social media following and presence can lead to income-generating opportunities, a network of other artivists who have experience with developing their rates for example, can be an asset and help improve the economic situation of artivists like Salgado, who had previously lived paycheck to paycheck. Artivist networks of care, like the one Salgado and Rodriguez have, not only lead to more opportunities, but they also lift

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[21] Salgado, interview.

artivists out of economically precarious situations. Blancas put it well when she termed it, "an investment that communities and networks make" to you. This investment in artivists is one that goes beyond an interest in seeing other artivists succeed, the relationships formed among all six artivists in this project demonstrates the tangible value of staying connected and mutually supporting and investing in each other, it emphasizes collaboration over competition.

Artivists rely on multiple networks of care to survive, they sometimes include institutional support, like a nonprofit organization (Salgado), a teaching position at a nearby university (Barraza) or even a community gallery (Blancas and Sabogal), these avenues of income are supplemented by referrals and emotional support from fellow artivists, both in real life, face to face interactions (IRL) and through digital support. Digital support can take on several forms, it can be 1) "liking" an artivists work and social media posts, 2) sharing their work to one's network online, and guiding those who see it to support them, 3) buying work from the artivist directly, and as the interviews have shown, and 4) Keeping other artivists in mind for opportunities we have access to. Most importantly, these mentee and mentor relationships are reciprocal, they enhance the quality of life and show a commitment to not just the survival, but the thriving of artivists.

Give Us Our Flowers in Life Not in Death

In addition to oral histories with each of the six artivists, I also produced a portrait series featuring Barraza, Blancas, Cervantes, Rodriguez, Sabogal and Salgado. The process of collaborating with each artist on their portrait is not only an act of reciprocity for their contributions to this research, but also a pedagogical tool. The act of painting the portraits is part of my intellectual process and allowed me to share my art practice with my collaborators and fellow artivists, who will keep their original portrait. It is important to me that in producing this

dissertation, I also produced art, as an arts practitioner, I see the series of portraits as a visual opening into this work, and more importantly, I see the portrait series as an application of the networks of care of which I am a part and to whom I am accountable.

For example, four of the portraits, were on view in 2019, at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, as part of their fiftieth anniversary celebration. I titled the mini exhibition "Give Us Our Flowers: Latinx Artivist Portraits."[22] The title of the exhibition articulates my belief that artivists of color, who work to dismantle structural oppression, should be nourished while alive, not ignored until after their deaths. The livelihoods of these artists are often at risk because their creative work is devalued within our larger society.

Each portrait features the artivist's favorite flower or plant. I wanted to incorporate this element not only to honor the activists by offering them flowers in life but also to indicate each artivist's personal aesthetic. For example, in the portrait of Blancas (see Figure 62), the reference photo was from an impromptu photo shoot the artist did with a friend in and around the Mission district where Galería de la Raza is located. In the original photo, Blancas held a bouquet of pink roses, but when prompted on which was her favorite flower, she said, "Let's see . . . I really love peonies and calla lilies, craspedia, eucalyptus, I could go on and on."[23] One of the reference photos Blanca sent me, contained a fully bloomed pink peony, and this was the inspiration for the flowers featured in her portrait.

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[22] The exhibition's title was inspired by the work of trans artist B. Parker, who incorporated the phrase "Give Us Our Roses While We're Still Here" into a poster created for the International Trans Day of Remembrance in 2015.

[23] Elizabeth Blancas, "Ref Photos - Angielibertine@gmail.Com - Gmail," March 12, 2019, https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?pli=1#search/shopblancas%40gmail.com/FMfcgxwBWBBHQNsxnlWFxxSDzVq LWFdJ.

Blancas's portrait also features several examples of adornment, jewelry that she feels a deep connection to, such as her nameplate necklace and gold doorknocker earrings (see Figure

63, detail). I wanted to convey the intentionality with which she dresses, especially as a Xicana woman walking the streets of the Mission. In addition, her gaze is direct and serious, expressing a confidence and comfort in her body. This confidence, as previously discussed, stems from the investment of femtor like Sabogal and Ani Rivera, who have formed part of Blancas's support network.

Figure 62. Angélica Becerra, *Elizabeth Blancas with Peonies*, 2019, watercolor on paper,

16 x 20 inches.

A portrait is not just a reproduced likeness of the sitter, but a narrative, a collective vision from both the artist and the sitter. In the case of *Give Us Our Flowers*, the digital enabled me to request reference photos and discuss the portraits with each artivist via email. These email conversations took on the place of a traditional event, like "sitting for a portrait," yet another way the digital has shifted how we do artistic labor. Seeing these portraits as a collective construction of likeness between me and the artivists considers the layers of decisions made for the work to be

realized. Also, the work in previous chapters of this project, sheds light on some of the key factors to consider when analyzing these portraits, such as the "the historical conditions within which the work is produced, the representational intentions and social identities of the artist and sitter, and its context of reception."[24]

Figure 63. Angelica Becerra, *Elizabeth Blancas with Peonies*, detail.

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[24] Euripides Altintzoglou, *Portraiture and Critical Reflections on Being* (New York: Routledge, 2018), x.

Each portrait contained within it, the intentionality of both me and the artivists, for example, Salgado's reference photos for his portrait (see Figure 64) were specifically chosen because they were taken by his best friend and longtime collaborator Jesus Iñiguez, a fellow undocumented media artivist and lead content producer for CultureStrike. Salgado also chose the photo because in it, he wore a shirt that displayed the logo of "Scum," "a monthly party that embraces punk and drag, features live punk bands, and has become a staple of underground East L.A. night life."[25] The party was founded by Latinx queer community members Hex-Ray y Rudy Bleu, and in our discussions about the portrait, Salgado expressed wanting to keep the logo on the finished painting. Salgado's body of work is heavily influenced by music, particularly alternative rock, punk, and regional Mexican music. Salgado has illustrated his favorite bands in the past and has even drawn an album cover for one of his favorite bands, Los Abandoned. This

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[25] "The Nightlife Outlaws of East Los Angeles - The New York Times," n.d., accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/19/style/the-nightlife-outlaws-of-east-los-angeles.html.

visual marker, the "SCUM" logo, reflects Salgado's passion and belonging in the queer Latinx alternative music scene in Los Angeles.

Figure 64. Angélica Becerra, *Julio Salgado with Daisies*, 2018, watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 inches.


Figure 65. Angélica Becerra, *Julio Salgado with Daisies*, detail.

Keeping these tokens or visual markers within the portraits is one of multiple choices made in the process of representing the likeness of each artivist. Just as the clothing and jewelry

were key in the portrait, so was the choice of flowers. Each artivist took time to decide on this choice, and sent reference images, often of specific plants or flower families. For example, Sabogal chose a "foxtail agave," also known as "Agave attenuate" due to its bending shape, giving it the appearance of a tail. Four out of six artivists chose a flower or plant that belonged to the agave or cacti family, which is largely associated with Latin America or the US Southwest.

Finally, the added labor and pedagogy of creating collaborative portraits is another example of investing back into the artivist community I belong to. As made clear by the intersecting lives of Blancas, Barraza, Cervantes, Rodriguez, Sabogal and Salgado, it is the ways in which others choose to intentionally support you that make it easier to navigate as an artivist.

Figure 66. Angélica Becerra, *Jessica Sabogal with Cacti*, 2019, watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 inches.

Figure 67. Angelica Becerra, *Favianna with Cacti*, 2019, watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 inches.

Whether it is through a femtor or mentor relationship, a detailed tutorial on how to transform a hand-drawn sketch, or even an organization willing to offer employment, these opportunities—especially when chained together over time—make a life of creating art in the service of a community a sustainable practice.

CONCLUSION

All the work addressed in this dissertation points to a Chicana feminist radical tradition. However, varied these expressions may be, they generate both intangible and tangible change. The work of all six artivists featured embodies an internationalist, feminist, and queer politics that honors earlier Chicana, Black, and Latin American printmaking, and muralist practices. The material changes that surface from the digital art of Barraza, Blancas, Cervantes, Sabogal, Salgado, and Rodriguez have shaped aesthetic trends and inspired political strategies for the next generation. The advent of the internet and social media platforms as well as the communication technologies embedded therein, have provided space for Chicanx and Latinx artivists to visualize social justice and envision community care. The use of digital means to disseminate social justice messaging is not disconnected from the *rasquachismo* or inventiveness of previous generations of artivists, and their use of the copy machine to mass produce visuals for the masses. Like previous generations of Chicanx and Latinx artivists, the contemporary artivist practices of Jesus Barraza, Melanie Cervantes, Jessica Sabogal, Elizabeth Blancas, Favianna Rodriguez, and Julio Salgado use what is at their disposal; in this case the mimeograph has been replaced with a smart phone, the stencil with an image manipulation software. Their works contain Chicana and Black feminist principles, span local and internationalist dimensions, and finally, continue to bring past aesthetic traditions to the contemporary moment, such as design principles rooted in traditional screen printing, with graphic quality, a handful of vivid colors and portraiture.

These principles form part of what I theorized as a Chicana Radical Digital Aesthetic, a praxis and theoretical lens that focuses on how visual cultures that emerged out of 1960s and '70s social movements, shaped aesthetic trends, and political strategies for a new generation of

artists in the twenty-first century. I argue that the work of all six Chicanx and Latinx identified artivists featured is indicative of how we view political work being produced, distributed, and consumed in a contemporary digital moment.

The CRDA is both an homage to the analog methods of generations past, and a nudge toward the now. In Chapter One, I traced the connection of the format of the political poster, a significant part of the visual culture Chicanx and Latinx artists have created in conjunction with the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, to the medium of the digital graphic poster being used by Latinx artivists today on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. I demonstrated how the digital nature of the work of Chicanx and Latinx identified artivists has shaped the ways we produce and view political artwork in our contemporary digital moment. The shift from analog to digital signals a clear reference to political graphics in current work and exemplifies the intergenerational nature of the CRDA praxis. In summary, while the production of political graphics has multiple origins today, artivists like Barraza and Cervantes as well as Rodriguez continue to use traditional printmaking methods but convert these images into digital shareable graphics for social media consumption and distribution. This hybrid existence has defined contemporary visual political strategy and continues to be a powerful vehicle for political graphics to gain greater exposure, as well as led to critical conversations catalyzed by their subject matter. The CRDA framework enables us to see this hybrid practice as a continuation of the political graphic practices of the 1960s and '70s, with an added digital component.

In Chapter Two, I focused on the internationalist roots of Chicanx artivism[1] circa 1965–1995, locating the contributions of Chicana feminist printmakers from the post-Vietnam period to the end of the twentieth century and framed solidarity as a strategy in the cultural work of Chicana artists specifically. I linked the generation of Chicana and Latinx artists, Yreina Cervántes, Judy F. Baca, Yolanda M. López, Judithe E. Hernández, Barbara Carrasco, Ester Hernández, Patssi Valdez, Diane Gamboa, Margaret Alarcón, and Alma López, to the work of Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes, specifically their collaborative silkscreen project *Dignidad Rebelde.* This chapter delineates a long history of internationalist solidarity and engagement with Palestine, South Africa, and social justice issues abroad more generally. I conclude with a contemporary example of the internationalist vein within the CRDA praxis as a case study of the "Abolish ICE" poster created by Cervantes and printed by both Cervantes and Barraza. The "R" in the CRDA signals to the radical solidarity that previous generations of artivists embodied, and which all six artivists featured here continue to do. With the world wide web as a constant in our lives, artivists are more connected to political struggles abroad than ever before. Thus, the CRDA is internationalist not because of the digital, but because of the previous generations of artivists who built solidarity through their art and linked their local realities to global conditions of oppression. Thus, in this chapter, I grounded the visual practices of the contemporary digital moment to their radical internationalist roots in the 1960s and '70s generation. This link both guides all six artivists and highlights the intergenerational nature of political graphics, making it clear that the role of Chicana, Black, and queer ways of knowing is to root artivist practice. In

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[1] The practice referred to as "artivism" is a "hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism." Defined in Sandoval and Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism," 82.

other words, through the CRDA, the work of previous generations is rendered visible, and lays the foundation for contemporary digital artivist practice.

In Chapter Three, I linked the practice of self-portraits and portraiture in the digital space, also known as *artivist selfies* made and shared by Julio Salgado and Jessica Sabogal to the Chicana feminist principle of self-making and self-definition. I demonstrated that artivist self-portraiture contains the radical potential of visualizing aesthetics not previously explored in the medium, such as fat, voluptuous brown bodies, queerness, intimacy, and what I argue is a working-class aesthetic. Thus, bringing a practice with roots in an elite practice of commissioning portraits of social status, to representations of Chicanx and Latinx working-class bodies. This chapter helped demonstrate how art enacts change in a digital world, by making clear the intentions of each artivist in producing the work. Through the space of the caption, both Salgado and Sabogal engaged in *autohistoriateoria*, or personal writing that theorized. Throughout this project, I used the caption space on artivist's social media posts to explore their thoughts on the pieces they shared. From Cervantes's vulnerability and resilience in the face of illness, to Salgado's unapologetic self-representation, to Sabogal's documentation of a lesbian mural in Canada, the digital space is an effective tool for engaging the political landscape both locally and globally. Furthermore, it was Cervantes's caption space that let her audience know she needed community support in the form of mutual aid, while the comment section provided an opportunity for *Convivencia* with others, in the form of written support. The material outcomes of these captions' spaces are part of the CRDA's potential to help us understand the power of connection among artivists and their online communities.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the vessel of the artivist him/herself and how it relates to the CRDA praxis. This chapter connected both the practice and body, from both the artist and

artwork of Favianna Rodriguez and Melanie Cervantes. I argued that their strategy of embodiment is one of multiple scales, including 1) their actual canvas, or work; and 2) their own physical bodies as well as their larger environment and the "digital" spaces they inhabit. they create work dealing with protecting natural resources, plant and animal life, gentrification, and water protection, thus extending themselves across multiple spheres of creating. Following in the art practices of Chicana and Latina feminist artivists—a connection made visible through the CRDA lens—both Cervantes and Rodriguez used their lived bodily reality to create work. In this part of the dissertation, I demonstrated how in our contemporary moment, artivism is not just a process of making images but of witnessing. The advent of social media platforms has enabled artivists to not only share their process, but it has also allowed them to share more of themselves, their personal struggles, and thoughts as they create their work. Whereas previous generations of artivists relied on the artist statement to convey their process and lived reality in relation to their work, contemporary artivists using digital tools have the option to update others in real time and let them in as much as they want to. The act of witnessing, moreover, encourages others to mobilize, not just in regard to the broader social issues artivists advocate for, but for the artivists themselves. This open line of communication lends itself to community support and mutual aid efforts.

In Chapter Five, I focused on two pairs of mentor-mentee relationships within the group of artivists, Jessica Sabogal who mentors Elizabeth Blancas, and Favianna Rodriguez, who mentors Julio Salgado. Specifically, I discuss how the sum of digital and IRL (in real-life) interactions of these individuals, has resulted in an artivist network of care and has offset some of the structural gatekeeping practices of an unequal art market. Concluding that the digital space within internet-mediated social media platforms has allowed for these artivists to create

relationships that overcome geographic distance, and generational gatekeeping. The CRDA is rooted in Chicana feminist principles of self-expression and community care, thus a CRDA praxis and aesthetic is concerned with community wellness. The practices of care exemplified in this chapter point to an intergenerational commitment, beyond the fast-paced digital feeds artivists navigate. This chapter demonstrated both the emotional and material value of the connections forged among artivists, and the deep impact they can have on a life. Thus, demonstrating that the CRDA is not just a set of principles that undergirds and guides the work of Latinx artivists, it is an active practice of care. Its foundations lie in the collective and emphasizes not just individual intentions, but a community effort to share resources.

In this dissertation, I have analyzed the ways artivist mediums and practices have changed in a digital contemporary landscape, but also, how they remain inextricably linked to previous generations of Black, Indigenous and People of Color movements for liberation. In sum, the digital is an added tool to disseminate messages, and as such contains limitations. This work is deeply relevant to understand how art and activism continue to occur in a society deeply invested in social media, and how previous generations of creative activists have impacted current practices. This work stands at the intersection of media literacy, Latinx art history, and practitioner-centered scholarship. Future directions of this work include analyzing the impact of a deeply flawed and commodity-driven digital landscape to creative and community-focused activists.

Artivists or artivistas continue to do important work amid a rapidly changing media landscape, especially when the infrastructure and coding of these spaces prioritizes white supremacy. This is a central line of inquiry that I intend to pursue as a new direction for this work. During the time I conducted this project, I began to see the early effects of a racially

biased algorithm. While written extensively about in computer science scholarship, algorithms, or decision-making systems embedded in internet sites, and applications, these codes have recently come under scrutiny for their racial bias. Although this was not present nor discussed in my interviews with all six artivists for this project, the artivist community spaces I am a part of have recently brought up the algorithm as a direct obstacle to Black, Indigenous, and of Color creatives. These codes are disrupting what Martha Gonzalez calls "Convivencia," both an "aesthetic and moral philosophy . . . it is the mindfulness of presence with others."[2] In other words, the ways in which the algorithm behaved began to affect how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color artivists interacted with others online in meaningful ways.

I find myself holding the contradiction of artivist produced artmaking being disrupted within a larger "commodity culture that is inherently competitive and transactional,"[3] and the depth of meaningful connection mediated by various technologies demonstrated in this dissertation. Currently, emerging platforms such as Tik Tok, with its catered algorithm and unpolished approach to content creation, are becoming more and more popular with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color creatives. As new platforms and social media applications emerge, I intend to integrate them into my work. I am interested in also documenting the harm social media and technologies have caused to arts activism.

I point this as a future direction, because as I have mentioned, I am aware that work on digital community building utilizes an infrastructure that is not created with and for marginal and oppressed communities. This dissertation has clarified the purpose of a dual mission—to

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[2] Gonzalez, *Chican@ Artivistas*, 4.

[3] Gonzalez, *Chican@ Artivistas*, 5.

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document the hope found in artivist relationship, as well as the "commodity culture" that Gonzalez speaks of, in a larger white supremacist commodity culture, online and offline.

This project has demonstrated that Chicanx and Latinx artivists have developed effective tools for engaging the hearts and minds of many using digital platforms. It has also highlighted how mediums such as the silkscreen print have been repurposed for the twenty-first century. The political graphics created by Jesus Barraza, Melanie Cervantes, Jessica Sabogal, Elizabeth Blancas, Favianna Rodriguez, and Julio Salgado have reached hundreds of thousands of people, if not more at the time of my writing. They have driven communities to action. As the introduction stated, "The art is the movement." This project was first and foremost about the artivism that urges us to move, to envision and to demand better for ourselves, and for our communities at large.

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