

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Criminalized Aesthetics:
Chicanos, State Institutions and Radical Pluralities

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

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The Thesis of Oscar Magallanes is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

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DEDICATION

Para toda mi familia, especialmente mis padres, Arturo y Maria Elena Magallanes, who like so many Mexican parents, spent their days trying to keep their son(s) alive and out of prison.

To my partner Johanne, who quieted the voices so I might speak for others.

To my Beautiful Brown Brothers, together we rise.

To all the Raza doing time, while I am here and you there, I know it could have just as easily been me there and you here.

To the individuals in the lowrider community and the local shops who gave selflessly of their knowledge, resources and time. Your generosity is exemplary.

EPIGRAPH

“Their dogs came with them, running ahead of the column. They raised their muzzles high; they lifted their muzzles to the wind. They raced on before with saliva dripping from their jaws.” - Broken Spears, 1516

“...Rights group says hundreds of people who posed no threat to officers have been mauled by LAPD canines. Most of those attacked by animals are blacks or Latinos, attorneys assert.” - Los Angeles Times Headline, June 25, 1991

“It began to spread...striking everywhere in the city and killing a vast number of our people.” -Broken Spears, 1516

“Black and Latino people have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus in a widespread manner that spans the country, throughout hundreds of counties in urban, suburban and rural areas, and across all age groups.” -The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequity of Coronavirus, New York Times, July, 2020

“Yes! I have a deep anger in my heart but I know only the tiniest part of your crimes.” -The Mexica Handbook, Olin Tezcatlipoca, 1995

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Partial List of Anti-Mexican laws, codes state mandates and actions:

1836 Texas Rangers Formed
1846 U.S. Invades Mexico
1846-1848 Mexican-American War
1848 The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
1850 California Foreign Miners' Tax
1850 Act For The Government And Protection of Indians
1855 The Greaser Act AKA Anti-Vagrancy Act
1906 Naturalization Act of 1906
1907 Immigration Act of 1907
1910-1920 La Matanza committed by Texas Rangers
1918 The Porvenir Massacre committed by Texas Rangers
1924 Immigration Act (Johnson-Reed Act)
1924 National Origins Formula
1929-1933 Mexican Repatriation
1933 Immigration and Naturalization Service
1942 War Production Board Order L-224 (Zoot Suit Ban)
1943 Massive Zoot Suit Arrest
1952 Immigration and Nationality Act
1954 Operation Wetback
1958 California Vehicle Code Section 24008
1968 Civil Rights Act (Mexicans Excluded from talks)
1982 Anti-Cruising Code
1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984
1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act
1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)
1988 STEP Act Street Terrorism Enforcement and Protection Act
1993 CA Senate Bill. 976
1994 California AB 971 (Ch 12/94, Jones) AKA The 3 Strikes Law
1994 California Proposition 187
1996 Section 287(g) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act
1996 The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
1997 Section 80.36.10 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code
1997 Pilot Program (Later E Verify)
2002 Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act
2002 Department of Homeland Security Created
2003 Immigration and Customs Enforcement AKA ICE
2005 REAL ID Act
2005 The Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act H.R. 4437
2007 Criminal Alien Program
2008 DHS Secure Communities AKA S COMM
2008 E-Verify & ICE Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)
2015 Priority Enforcement Program
2017 Executive Order 13767: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements
2019 Migrant Protection Protocols AKA Remain in Mexico policy

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Criminalized Aesthetics: Chicanos, State Institutions and Radical Pluralities

by

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Professor Anya Gallaccio, Chair

Europeans invented the concept of race to support their idea of racial superiority over all inhabitants of this continent. With this, there was also an invention of systems to police aesthetics, separating white from other. This system was expanded in the lead-up to the United States invasion of Mexico, so much so that the United States government was used as the model for Nazi Germany. These criminalized aesthetics remain to this day. Covering Chicano aesthetics and the relationship with state institutions allows for a reevaluation of cultural iconography along with the relationship between state institutions, educational and criminal, and the Chicano.

INTRODUCTION

This may be a surprise to you, but I was here before you knew of me. My ancestors cruised these lands long before you or yours arrived. As difficult as it may be to conceive, I have my own histories, even if they are not written in your books, although you may read some of it on the walls. As impossible as it may seem, those histories do not ask for anyone's validation. While your histories on the other hand, have been a lullaby for white supremacy with those lyrics you know all too well. Lyrics of "if they just obeyed" and "without the data, who knew?" We did. We have always known.

I find myself writing this at a point that I am no longer invested in explaining the work to you, the institution. After all, explaining is enabling. I have learned that everything that has ever been recounted to anyone outside of the community has been weaponized and used against us. Besides, racism, classism, and elitism are poor excuses for dismissing the work's content. It should, at this point, be evident since we "Latinos" have outnumbered Whites in California since 2014. I know, it took us a while to get our numbers back up because of the whole you know genocide, invasion, occupation, war, state-sanctioned killings, illegal mass deportations, forced sterilizations, and intimidation by state agents for the past five hundred years thing... but I digress. UCSD is located in Southern California a few miles from the Mexican-American border and just south of the city of Los Angeles which has the largest Mexican population outside of Mexico City. Yet the institution actively works against an art form that is native to the region and has proven to be highly influential across the world. I and all Latinos and Chicanos are expected to enter academia with an apt knowledge of theoretical and canonical works of western culture. Yet, only two professors in the department are capable of seeing the significance of this art form and capable of situating my work within that tradition. Magu was my mentor. If this means nothing to you, it only proves my point.

As I began writing this, the entire world teetered on the precipice of such drastic systemic racism that it threatened to undo the United States and shifted the power axis of the world. Yet, I ask of the Visual Arts department, why is it so difficult to address this state institution's complicity in perpetuating systemic racism? I see you in your meetings saying "not I" and "I've been oppressed too." Unable to focus on the deaths and mass incarcerations. Incapable of asking what the institution's role is in them.

Our art is not separate from our daily lives. We do not have the luxury to not think about racism. Because of this, I have always addressed systemic racism with my artwork and now with my art collective 3B. This is not your social practice. Our art is strategic in addressing systemic racism and the lack of opportunities that stem from it. The work does not ask for validation, but it does command respect. As I said, we have our own histories, and it is possible to respect what you do not understand. It is possible to appreciate work created from another worldview. After all, that is what I am asked to do every day by you.

YEAR 1: THE INVENTION OF RACE

It is difficult to see things for what they are, and it is impossible to see things for what they were. For the past three years, I have engaged in research on the invention of race on this continent, the creation of the Mexican-American by the United States' invasion of Mexico, and the politics and systemic racism that gave birth to the Chicano identity. The roots of this inquiry stem from a lifelong search for an understanding of my place in the present that takes into account living in multiple realities. Being born into a lower-income family and being raised in a Mexican Barrio created my self-view. Some of my first memories are of commuting on a bus with my mother to a very affluent, and as far as I could tell, all-white community, where we helped my father perform janitorial work at a private school. This began to teach me how the world saw me. I was three years old. Upon completing this thesis, I will have completed forty-five revolutions around the sun. This is a lifetime spent maneuvering multiple realities. This thesis addresses the aesthetic association between the separate worlds I continue to inhabit. I do this even as one of those worlds is fading out of existence, with no small help by state institutions, and the other is fraying at the periphery. To address these multiple world views, some of this writing is straightforward, some of it will seem like a flow of consciousness. I ask that you indulge me as this is written from the positionality that Chicano scholars refer to as *Nepantla*.

I ask that you imagine four points that would form a square. Now imagine each point moving upwards and towards the center in an arch where they eventually cross. One of those points is time, the other place, the other is class, and the last is gender. That intersection is where I find myself. Place can be interchanged with race since it pertains to a perceived sense of place or displacement rather than a physical location. In Nahuatl tradition, there is the understanding of the four directions as in every culture. The difference, from what I understand, is the understanding that you, the individual contemplating your position in the universe is the center point of your universe, and much as the *tlacuiloque* (Nahuatl Scribes) had to interpret their worldview, even during and after its destruction, I attempt to do so as well.

The signifiers are no longer referencing anything real. American societal structures, institutions and I would argue corporations have become self-perpetuating, not allowing even the dominant class to understand the systems that they have put in place. This is what Charles Mills calls epistemologies of ignorance (4). Yet amongst this, there are realities that are outcomes of these systems. These are very much real, observable, and most importantly, measurable. Making it possible to understand the reality of

these systems' purpose rather than the purported purpose. This is where multiple realities begin. These realities run parallel to, and in most instances, ahead of the dominant narrative. To the dominant culture, these are realities that must be extinguished in order for the dominant narrative to take hold. One has only to measure the social climate to liken this reality to the simulacrum. We can see the fraying at the periphery of society, or as the scholar José Rabasa (13) puts it "the limits of colonialism."

It is another reality separate from the understanding of the supplanted culture allowing me to write this as an observer. This has been the case since first contact for the vast majority of people on this continent. In addition, while I am older now, perhaps a veterano, my positionality to the dominant cultural narrative is still that of a young brown male- one who was first arrested in grade school. I could not tell you when the police began harassing my friends and I, but it was well before then. We were all brown kids. They were all white men. The creation of an oppositional relationship is set while young me stares at a mural of Zapata across the street and the police order us to turn out our pockets. This is my place. I am being put in my place. I am being made aware of my race. The time is specific. Reagan is in office.

While many themes are general and not specific to gender or race in this exploration of historical systemic racism, one of the goals of this writing is to focus attention on the intersectionalities that have led to gender biases affecting the Chicano. Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, and Latinos in the United States have faced increasingly hostile rhetoric from the 45th President of the United States along with the mobilization of all governmental institutions against them. While there are exceptions, they are just that, exceptions to the onslaught of systemic racism. Just as Native Americans and African Americans each faced a unique form of racism, I would argue that Mexican-Americans face a unique form of racism that is almost completely unstudied. No one is keeping count of how many Latinos are incarcerated in the United States. Outside of First Nations peoples, Mexicans and Americans of Mexican descent are the only group in America to be forced to live on land taken from them. This takes a unique form of systemic racism, one that has roots in first contact. While this may be true of all systems of racial inequality, the difference lies in the sustained effort to deny any of this while facing such an increased level of attacks. The lack of attention and frankly lack of interest by American society is disproportionate with the attention to any other form of discrimination. This is not to say that every form of discrimination does not deserve attention. This is simply to point out a form of discrimination that has yet to turn the corner of garnering sympathy from the dominant culture. Perhaps it never will. When the Civil Rights talks happened in Washington, Mexicans were purposely excluded despite much of the groundwork

having been done by Mexicans in California and the South West. Think of Mendez v Westminster that led to Brown v Board of Education. In 2016, the Urban Institute published figures on Latino incarceration under the title *The Alarming Lack of Data on Latinos in the Criminal Justice System*. It does not serve the system to expose its parts. The prison industrial complex is making a killing. The most powerful union in the state is the California Peace Officers Union. Cops need jobs too. The irony is not lost on us that these are the same “peace” officers that beat and arrest and even kill people when they have tried to organize. What does this mean to the majority of laborers in California who are Latinos, with the vast majority of them of Mexican descent? The roots of this very specific form of systemic racism gave birth to eugenics.

There is race (or place), class, and gender. In the United States, there are many varying forms of discrimination. One only has to imagine a Venn diagram of the three to understand how much discrimination or oppression you will face in American society. The intersectionality of these three can, for the most part, be an indicator of upward mobility, health, lifespan, criminalization (or lack thereof), quality of education (or lack thereof), and wealth or... you get the picture. While much is written about these factors and the intersectionality of such factors, the intersection I find hardest to research is that of men of color. The book *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration*, leads me to Khaled A. Beydoun’s article *More than Thugs: The Case of Richard Sherman and Other Men of Colour* found within its introduction.

Discrimination endured by men of color is framed within liberal circles as racial or ethnic animus, but seldom - if ever - examined from a conjoined gender lens...Indeed, being both minority and male in the US today invites a brand of gendered stigma that is under-discussed in media and academic circles, and marginalized by a narrow conception of gender discrimination. (2)

I take a non-linear view of time and space allowing me to address repeating and evolving cycles and patterns while referencing contemporary writings on race, history, art, systemic racism and how these subjects create parallel existences. I think of what Jose Rabasa calls (11) “elsewheres”. When it comes to young black and brown males, I think of these “elsewheres” creating what I call radical pluralities. This is most prevalent in the mainstream media. The closer Latinos get to identifying with a non-Eurocentric or with indigenous self-views, the less agency they have to craft their own narrative. Beydoun (2) is already touching on liberal blind spots. More on this later.

A Chicano with a non-Eurocentric self-view of oneself. The Spaniards supplanted the concept of race on Mesoamerica. There is much written on the caste system of Mexico, and the British brought race to what is now the United States, yet it evolved into a different form of racism. Dylan A. T. Miner in *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island* address the praxis of Chicano/Indigenous identity.

...when Xicano artistic practices combine multiple signifying systems, they are inherently mestizo, and therefore, as many Chicano studies scholars maintain, not entirely Indigenous. In much of this scholarship, mestizaje serves as a counter to Anglo-American essentialized authenticity, becoming canonical in the process. From this perspective, mestizaje is the disavowal of purity, both colonial and Indigenous. Indianismo is an Indigenous formation that is community-centered. Xicano indigenism, breaking with Mexican indigenismo and the logics of mestizaje, develops more accurately as an extension of indianismo. These are ideas I have learned while working with community, not just from academic texts. (6-7)

While young, I learned that I am always in school to learn, but not necessarily to be taught. Those who have known me since youth refer to my younger self as the “angry young man”. He is still with me. I ask young me to address his schooling. I am a mirror that reminds you that you are the other. You are the aggressor. You, right now, are playing the role of the conqueror of the Indians and writing back to Europe or in your journal about what you’ve “discovered”. You may be the carrier of an illness that strangles a continent and never ask why it has killed so many brown folks. Perhaps you are the educator to the children taken from their homes and communities in order to civilize them. Recognize that there has been no break or disruption of power, no overthrow of a regime, no great war that has displaced those who created the racist systems that continue to this day. I, therefore must play the role of the outlaw, the criminal, the young gang member, or now the older, more domesticated, tired of fighting, self. I play the role of the educated savage. Someone who came from the wilds and that “cleans up well” and can paint remarkably well and speak well enough in a trained vernacular about contemporary art for what I am.

You, the institution, created me. Is it only by the mere virtue of having been criminalized, and displaced by a system that privileges you and yours, and somehow having survived it, by which I gain credibility? I am a dying breed. I am an endangered species marked for extinction, or is it extermination? I think of Rigoberta Menchu. I think of James Baldwin. I think of Deloria, Rabasa, and the Zapatistas.

...the understanding of the racial question does not ultimately involve understanding by either blacks or Indians. It involves the white man himself... The white man must no longer project his fears and insecurities onto other groups, races, and countries. Before the white man can relate to others, he must forego the pleasure of defining them. The white man must learn to stop viewing history as a plot against himself. (Deloria, 54)

I think of myself as a revolutionary, yet if I posed a threat to the system, I would already have been executed like Ometochtzin. Centuries of random and extra-judicial killings and beatings by local, state and federal officials with the blessings of their corresponding institutions along with illegal deportations have created more than trans-generational traumas; they have created lessons. My parents succeeded in training me not to offend white people too much. How many Spanish-speaking people is one white person worth when speaking in my defense in a courthouse? I am thankful for my white friend. I think of the lynched Mexicans in the postcards. I think of the LA County Sheriffs, and the young Mexicans beat and left for dead. They are not spoken of, but I know. We all know. I think of Foucault.

While at UCSD when speaking about the symbiotic roles of prisons and universities as state institutions created to maintain a dominant class by instituting systems of punishment and rewards, I am told by a professor that it is my choice to deal with it, and that I can leave if I do not like it. I am reminded of members of the not-so-far-right of the political center and the “America, love it or leave it” mantra, which means that my comparison must elicit a sort of academic comparable to “go back to where you came from.” I think of Charles Mills’ *White Ignorance*:

Often for their very survival, blacks have been forced to become lay anthropologists, studying the strange culture, customs, and mind-set of the “white tribe” that has such frightening power over them, White Ignorance that in certain time periods can even determine their life or death on a whim. In particular circumstances, then, white ignorance may need to be actively encouraged. (17)

Mills repeats the sentiment with James Baldwin’s “I have spent most of my life, after all, watching white people and outwitting them, so that I might survive” (Mills, 53). The idea that people of color learn to see “the primary epistemic principle of the racialized social epistemology of which they are the object...” (Mills, 117) echoes Rigoberta Menchu’s declaration, and masterful reveal to the world that not everything is revealed.

We can select what is truly relevant for our people. Our lives show us what this is. It has guaranteed our existence. Otherwise we would not have survived. We have rejected all the aims governments have tried to impose... We pretend we're not thinking of anything. But when we're all together, amongst ourselves, we discuss, we think, we give our views. (170)

That there are things withheld from the western world helped inform the writing of Doris Sommer's *Resistant Text and Incompetent Readers*:

The distancing that silence performs can be strategic in more than self-protective ways...it can be a cunning device for interpellating the reader as supporter, not leader, of a coordinated activity...I want to speculate, a politics of coalition among differently constituted positionalities, rather than presuming an identity or interchangeability of subjects as the basis for equality and a political vision adventurous enough to imagine differences, yet modest enough to respect them may be the most significant challenge posed by learning to read resistance. (531)

This is the place where I can situate my work. Rabasa's writings on the tlacuiloque's ability to create from a position that keeps viewers from entering not by code-switching but from the ability to inhabit multiple spaces resonates with me as I must inhabit these radical pluralities. Even the idea of the imposing and encroaching arm of gentrification and capitalism is addressed in *Franciscans and Dominicans Under The Gaze of the Tlacuilo*:

We never find the tlacuilo situating himself in opposition to alphabetical writing or Renaissance pictorial perspective...Colonial discourse, moreover, aspires to create intermediary subjects, states of *nepantla* according to the Nahuatl expression, and persecutes those who like Ometochtzin refused to think of themselves within a master/slave dialectic... The exteriority and incommensurability of the subaltern world engenders fear of insurrection, as well as anxiety in the face of epistemological lucidity that captures the relativity of Western forms of life not by denying their truth but by inhabiting them and acting on them without abdicating one's own. (Rabasa, 33-34)

Palabra. I think of my brief time with the Zapatistas and of El Sub, Marcos in the mountains of Chiapas, Mexico. This is a person that was never born but created by forgetting everything he thought he knew about the Mayas. This person no longer exists.

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The belief that the experience of my upbringing in a Mexican and Mexican-American Barrio gives me a worldview that is inaccessible to those outside of the community and prone to misinterpretation by the dominant western culture, just as every culture since first contact, both informs and complicates the work. For this reason, my use of historical codex and the resistant text and incompetent readers theory that demarcates an “elsewhere” is important. I situated the works created in my first year in graduate school, especially those created while in this institution, amongst works created by the original inhabitants of the San Diego region--as well as north, south, and east of here--whose everyday objects would not have been classified as art by their creators. More specifically, the works created in my first year relate to codex, texts, and artworks from the colonial period in Mexico. I researched these works by reading the codices Telleriano-Remensis, Códice Tlaxcala, Códice Aubín, The Codex Mendoza, and The Florentine Codex to name a few. The approach to how the codices functioned is referenced in my work. These codices served, in their original usage, as historical documents and mnemonic devices that would allow the viewer to not only recall their own histories and mythologies but to create and interpret their worldview.

During the colonial period, the tlacuiloqueh, under the guidance of the European friars, produced codices that documented the Nahuatl’s cultural practices. These codices became a hybrid of traditional pictographs with Roman alphanumeric annotations added to allow the European friars to interpret the codex. This was done with the aim of essentializing the Nahuatl culture, allowing the friars to subvert and convert the Nahuatl. They were confronted by the tlacuiloqueh’ ability to inhabit a plurality of existences, thus mitigating the Eurocentric worldview. The colonial codices differ from the pre-Columbian. The tlacuiloqueh instead of filling the frame with the drawings, were instructed to leave margins and blank sections to allow the friars to enter notes. I find these blank spaces to be important as these were preconceived sights of interpretation, intervention, and destruction. They also differed in being painted on paper and being bound rather than in a long fan fold. Many of the colonial codices also lack much of the skill level that the pre-Columbian codices exemplify.

While there are five hundred years between the production of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis and now, I intend my work to act in common with these codices. While the current works are created as a Chicano artist, we can draw parallels with the tlacuilo. The artist, like the tlacuilo, recognizes the

effects of essentializing iconography. By finding parallels between the burning of pre-colonial Nahuatl scripts and the banning of books by Chicana and Chicano authors; between the whitewashing of murals and the defacing of Maya and Mexica murals in temples; between the notion of native Spanish speakers being inferior to English speakers and the Nahuatl being forced to give up their native language; between the destruction of people who resisted the Spaniards and British and the hyper-criminalization of barrio communities and the infiltration of community organizations. We can see the artist as a figure that creates and interprets the documentation of an unbroken chain of parallel and recurring events that have led to the current pluralities that have created the schisms in American society.

The tlacuiloqueh excelled in mastering Spanish and the Roman alphabet writing system, a technology allowing the Nahuatl culture to flourish in the midst of the colonial period despite the attempts by Europeans to impede it. The first step in the destruction of a culture is its essentialization. It is a dehumanizing process that allows for erasure. Yet within the essentialization lies the capacity of autogenesis. I think of the Japanese homeboys, tattooed cholos with lowriders in Tokyo. My current work takes this up in the case of Chicano identity and Chicano aesthetics resurgence in the wake of ongoing gentrification and now massive evictions, unemployment, and disproportionate deaths which is doing its best to erase barrio culture. The work draws upon cultural and popular iconography, along with pre-colonial to contemporary barrio and Chicano signifiers, which serve to simultaneously delineate and demarcate through visual vocabularies. This is reflected in the work's use of iconography that cannot through a western lens be entirely or even at times partially understood in regard to the original meaning.

If the texts of Ometochtzin and the tlacuilo partake of a fabric of rebellion, resistance and subversion, the concept of plural-world dwelling liberates us from the moral that exclusively values cultural artifacts in which one can find acts of resistance. (Rabasa, *Tell Me The Story*, 89)

YEAR 2: THE CREATION OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN

“We didn’t cross the border. The border crossed us.”

— Every Mexican-American. Ever.

The work like this writing seeks to collapse historical epochs into coexisting elements in the creation of the now. The United States, in creating the Mexican-American, had to first create the concept of the Anglo. In doing so, it further defined an aesthetic that must contrast itself. The foil to its righteousness. This is the beginning of a criminalized aesthetic. The Mexican-American War or as it is referred to in Mexico as the North American Invasion, was the central point of investigation of my second year. The war and subsequent signing of el *Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo* created the Mexican-American. Historians write much about Mexican-Americans, but the writings focus almost exclusively on the expansionist push of the United States and the politics surrounding the invasion of the northern Mexican territories. In all the historical data, almost nothing has been written about the artistic production surrounding the American invasion. This is an important and rich field to investigate since the Mexican American War was the first war to make use of new printing and photographic technological advancements, creating a dominant role in visual communications crafting a war narrative and account (Sandweiss, 1). More importantly, art and cultural production is also a marker for the visual language used to create and shape a new identity in the midst of an invading foreign army and the illegal occupation by foreign immigrants. This is not without its irony considering the current political climate whose xenophobic roots are firmly planted in the rhetoric leading up to the invasion of Mexico (Greenberg, 120).

“The catalyst in the overt adoption of a racial Anglo-Saxonism was the meeting of Americans and Mexicans in the Southwest, the Texas Revolution, and the war with Mexico. In confronting the Mexicans, the Americans clearly formulated the idea of themselves as an Anglo-Saxon race” (Horsman, 208). This Anglo-Saxon identification was to confront the stark contrast of the Mexican Mestizo race that developed through the Spanish conquest and its caste system. The essential whiteness of the Anglo-Saxon was drawn up to contrast the native people’s influence in Texas and the rest of the Southwest that required saving, correcting, civilizing and proper management by the self-proclaimed superior Anglo-Saxon race. Interestingly, this race was created to politicize the meaning of American. In doing so, the focus moved from a unifying national identification to one that changed the political and social schema of the

time to one that profited from the white focus and would be ingrained in the fabric of the United States, eventually leading to Civil War.

Moving back to the start of the Anglo-Saxon race, Hyde states, “[i]n our imagination and national mythology, the state brings order and peace. Nevertheless, in these years in this place it brought mayhem and massacre... as time passed, this violence moved from being extra-legal to being condoned and organized by the state” (484). With this condonement, the shift to move west and to begin the takeover of Texas and then eventually all of Northern Mexico was solidified. The framing of these colonizers as settlers, explorers, or frontiers people all give rise to the mythical storytelling of the Anglo Saxon as putting their life in danger for the greater good of the nation. The description of the United States as encompassing across the continent spreads the tenets of America as fulfilling a divine mandate. The concept of Manifest Destiny is not only premised on the religious idea that God has provided a destiny to the Anglo Saxon but that this destiny is a mandate as well. In doing so, anyone standing in the way of this destiny is cursed. The transformation of Mexicans into the category of which “Indians” and slaves inhabited is that of being inferior and cursed since the Mexican stood in the way of progress. The fact that they could not or would not protect themselves, their land, and their culture only proved that it was God’s will for the Anglo Saxon to subjugate them or eliminate them from the continent. Religious tenants remain the legal basis for the United States’ claim to the land.

The focus on moving southwest made sense to those expounding Manifest Destiny and the push “onward and onward” since it had developed a narrative of Mexicans as unworthy mongrels inferior to Anglo Saxons. Secretary of State James Buchanan said in 1847, “How should we govern the Mongrel race which inhabit [Mexico]”(Rodriguez, 184). Note the beginning comparison to dogs of mixed breeds. This sentiment, paired with anti-immigrant shifts in policy, made it a platform where Anglo Saxons could present their racist motives in taking over the Southwest as “many had convinced themselves that what they wanted was for the good of the world as well as themselves” (Horsman, 228).

The National Mall in Washington D.C. hosts a monument to every war the United States has ever fought- that is, except the Mexican American War. There is a hole in history. This hole is a deliberate omission. One rarely notices this hole since it has been filled with a carefully crafted mythology of the noble American founders. Another one of those spaces intentionally left blank for a white man to fill. A bedtime story of the noble and righteous country that was destined to be. Perhaps it is a cautionary tale of what could or would be of this world without this noble country to pacify the uncivilized evils that seek to

destroy these people of god. By extension, everyone else is Godless. This essentialization is necessary for colonization. This is the prelude to war and the beginning of America's hatred of Mexicans.

Texas with its large tracts of land attracted many American settlers. In 1835, a band of slave-owning Americans rebelled in the state of Coahuila and Tejas. Their objections were that of restrictions to immigration and slavery since 1830. This is now referred to as the Texas Revolution. I have known that slavery was the cause of the American invasion of Mexico for most of my life. I have found numerous references stating that this is a myth. I ask why then was it opposed by abolitionists and triggered the Civil War a few years later? The "Texas Revolution" and Annexation while framed as anything else could at best be fueled by racism and greed. "Most Americans viewed the Texas Revolution not as war for slavery but as a race war between brown Mexicans and White Texans" (Greenberg, 8).

Abolitionists were not so easily fooled by the idea that the Texas Revolution was a race war. The fighting in Texas began and slaves tried to revolt. White Texans would claim independence from Mexico in 1836. Mexico would not recognize this, and the annexation to the United States would upset the balance of free and slave states. This would stand until the slave-owning president John Tyler, exceeding his presidential powers and in search of a re-election winning issue, promised military support to the White Texans if annexed in 1844. Manufacturing a war proved easy enough for the following president Polk. A supporter of Texas annexation and westward expansion, he instigated a fight with Mexico by moving military troops into the area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Both countries had recognized this as part of the Mexican state of Coahuila. This triggered the Mexican American War.

The war was unpopular with the military along with the war's increasing unpopularity outside of the military. This was not out of sympathy for the Mexicans being slaughtered. More often than not, it was out of concern for the morality of the white Americans fighting the war and out of fear of absorbing lands that contained so many racially inferior subjects. The rhetoric in the lead up to the war and the sensationalist accounts during the war had created the idea of the Mexican as lazy, cowardly, treacherous, or bloodthirsty but in every account as inferior to the Anglo-Saxon.

The war lasted two years and was bloody and devastating for the young country of Mexico. The Americans would have taken all of Mexico had it not been for all the Mexicans. They settled with the less populated half. The War ended on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty granted citizenship to those who decided to stay in the newly conquered land along with honoring land grants of the residents. One could imagine America grinning during the signing of the

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with its fingers crossed behind its back. Never intending to live up to its part, just as it never had in regards to any land. The road west for the Anglo-Americans is paved entirely in broken treaties.

This brings us to lynchings. Is there any other symbol of violence or oppression more potent that speaks to the very core of America's racism? As a symbol, it is perfect. Both for the oppressor and victimized. "For decades lynch mobs terrorized persons of Mexican origin or descent without reprisal from the wider community" (Carrigan, 411).

In the period following the invasion and occupation of the territory now known as the American Southwest, the distinction between a Mexican National and that of person of Mexican descent becomes conflated simply into a "Mexican" to Anglos. A concerted and targeted effort for a widespread systemic displacement by means of violence of anyone of Mexican descent has persisted to the present day. We see this in the confirmed thousands of "Mexicans" that were killed by white mobs. Estimates of unconfirmed killings range in the tens of thousands. Decades later, echoes of this are seen in the deportation or repatriation of thousands of American citizens in the 1920s and 30s. Estimates are as high as 2,000,000 Mexicans or Americans of Mexican descent that left either by forced deportation or coercion or in the violent attacks on Mexicans known as the Zoot Suit riots. Proving that this is systemic, American institutions not only universally ignored the murders and lesser crimes inflicted on Mexicans but perpetuated the same crimes. This includes and implicates academics to this very day.

With the collective denial of local laws and customs, the collective racism, invasion, occupation, war, war-atrocities, revenge killings, denial of land rights, squatting on land, and uninvestigated murders, a flattening effect is created of the previous social order. America crammed the poor Indian, the Mexican laborer, the former elite Hispano all into simply being Mexican. Even if they were born in the United States or a naturalized citizen, anyone of Mexican descent became inferior to the Anglo-Saxon like the African American and the Indian. To white America, the road to progress led to the elimination of the Mexican. The wheels of progress grind on. The Mexican-American is born. America still claims it is not his.

Here we may ask what all of this has to do with art to which I answer everything. Cultural production and traditions are the only means of creating identity at large. While the contact between native people to the Spaniards has been documented in various capacities, it was mostly by the Spanish colonizers. They documented what the purpose of the move north was and provided examples of trade

and native people's acceptance and cohabitation with Spanish understanding their Spanish superiority. There are some accounts that describe the art of the period and the ways in which they were used. When speaking of art, the writings are mostly about tribes that are called Native American. Accounts are documented as early as the 1540s for some areas such as present-day New Mexico. From the perspective of mostly the Spanish elite class, it entailed documentation as to who was colonizing the regions and what the exchange between the two was. Firstly, it is apparent that ease of subjugation is a myth. There was much bloodshed and resistance to the conversion to Catholicism. Secondly, the Spanish colonizers were mostly Mestizos, mixed European with Nahau blood, since these people arrived in the northern parts of Mexico traveling through central Mexico. They brought slaves, mostly African, and began trading slaves with the Pueblo tribe. Many of the slaves they traded were captives from rival tribes. In the region that is now present-day New Mexico, these slaves-criados, Spanish for domestic servants, were able to earn freedom (Wroth et al., 9-10). As trade continued, there was a production of textiles, glazed ceramics, and weavings that the Pueblo people began making solely for sale and trade with the Spanish, central Mexico, and Missouri (Wroth et al., 20).

Beginning in the 1870s, Anglo Saxons began to view native populations less as savages and hostile and more subjugated. Think buffalo skull piles and the Trail of Tears. The completion of the Transatlantic Railroad in 1869 allowed for easier passage to the new western regions. This would give root to a new tourist economy. Based around the Indian and the new and carefully crafted myth of the Spanish Southwest, this would drastically affect the cultural and architectural production of the region. The tourist and new colonizers also brought with them items that the Native Americans would appropriate and use to incorporate into their own motifs. This was now common since the Spanish missions first introduced new mediums such as metal smithing and stone carving to the region. We can see Native American motifs woven into the iconography and religious motifs. The difference at this point is the cultural production for mass consumption, founding an economy that would become dependent on tourism that would eventually define what is seen as authentic.

While we see many examples of the merging of techniques and technologies since first contact through the present, we see a concentration of cultural production and convergence of different peoples begin to work together to support a growing tourist economy in the Southwest. Parallel to the story of the American Indian of the Southwest we see the fabrication of the myth of Spanish colonialism.

...the romanticized Spanish past of California, best symbolized by the restoration of Franciscan missions and the novel *Ramona* written by Easterner Helen Hunt Jackson and published in 1886, served to distort the highly stratified Spanish reign in the region. In addition, it totally glossed over the Mexican heritage and influence in the region, and the clash of cultures between Mexicans and Americans in the State.” (Sánchez, 96)

While there are so many Mexican Americans, there is no place for the acknowledgment of the Mexican history of the region. The hole in Art History. In researching the cultural production of the region during the period of Mexican control, I find nothing. Many prominent and purported comprehensive and scholarly books on Mexican art include nothing on the Southwest region regardless of it having been colonized by Spain then independent Mexico and currently holds citizens of tribes whose traditional lands straddle the U.S. Mexican border. The books *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* and *A Guide to Mexican Art: Its Beginnings to Present* make no reference to the region. American institutions are just as complicit in this. In searching for artifacts from the region in the period of Mexican control all are listed under the following: United States, New Mexico, California, or Native American.

I end where I began. While this section is structured very much in a linear way, it curves back onto itself. In researching this, I recognize patterns. I see parallels in histories. Forgotten lessons and character types mirroring those in our time, in earlier times, and in different regions. Similarities from Mesoamerica to Latin America to the barrios east of Los Angeles.

These histories are really cycles. Ironies in the knowledge that European-Americans migrated to Mexico, refused to obey the laws and assimilate, then stole the land through war and conquest. Now we have a wall being built to keep Mexicans from migrating to America because of the fear that they will not obey the laws and cannot assimilate. All the while recognizing that I am already present. I exist in a society that was invented just like the idea of a Mexican-American. Just as the “Indian” was an invention of Europeans.

“...prior to the arrival of Europeans the category of “Indian” did not exist. During the three-hundred-year period of Spanish colonialism some did embrace the new category, thereby becoming “Indian,” while others clung persistently to older identities.” (Earle, 1)

We can say the same for Mexican Americans. While we continue to be grouped as Mexican-American, Latino, Hispanic, or self-identify as Chicanas, Chicanos, or Chicax, I think there are many questions to be asked before we can even begin to grasp at not only what things are but also what has been done. An impossible framing that not only displaces the western lens but must negate it. Without this ability, we cannot compose a question that can begin to direct us to this hole that no one has claimed yet is consistently filled by White America. As a Chicano, I interrogate cultural signifiers and visual language that is uniquely tied to the cultural production of this continent.

“What does the use of images mean for resistance, transformation, and cultural destruction? Finally, what new interpretations and understandings are necessary? The questions examined may be more important than any truth we might hope to find, and yet the questions themselves also shape how they are considered and ultimately answered.” (Martin, 225)

I never expected to encounter so little academic scholarship on the cultural production of Northern Mexico and the American Southwest. What I did find only reinforced a view of systemic erasure by both countries. Both suffering from a traumatic event. One as the victim who has moved on and the other as the aggressor telling a story of waging war with its inner demons and self-healing. Clearly, it has not. Perhaps the memorial for the Mexican American War in Washington is buried under the base of the Civil War Memorial.

YEAR 3: BIRTH OF THE CHICANO

It is 1980. I am four years old. Thousands of people are flanking the avenue as the parade nears its end. I ask my father if he can see them yet. “Si, ay vienen,” he answers as he effortlessly hoists me up and seats me on his shoulders, as he has done hundreds of times before. I spot the first one as the people around us begin to whistle and cheer. A customized three-wheeling Monte Carlo with a paint job in intricate blue patterns with flake and pearl and pin stripping is advancing in circles with the front passenger side of the car up in the air as if saluting the crowd with its gold plated spoked rim. The twenty-five or thirty bombas and lowriders that follow all have gold plaques with Old English lettering, Azusa Car Club. I feel pride for the first time.

A few years later, the crack epidemic fueled by the flooding of urban areas by Reagan’s CIA cocaine will hit the streets of Los Angeles, setting off a decade of gang warfare and hyper-criminalization now known as the decade of death. The warring gangs are long gone, but the criminalization continues. I think of the recent gang injunctions put in place when violence is at an all-time low and white residences at an all-time high.

The machinery that is the prison industrial complex grinds away with the bodies of brown and black males greasing the wheels. Millions of them, primarily young but the old and poor too. The newest addition to be exploited for profit is the kids in cages program supported by both Democrats and Republicans alike. There is a direct connection between first contact, colonialism, slavery and present-day prisons and detention centers. An unbroken chain of power consolidation. A refining of conquest, war, biological, environmental and political, extra-judicial and legal killings, and legal maneuvering that left almost every non-European person landless, homeless and an immigrant in their own homeland.

The murals in the city I grew up in are all gone. Having been whitewashed as part of development, beautification, urban renewal, gentrification by other names. The murals were cultural signifiers of difference. The fresco mural traditions of the Maya revived after the Mexican Revolution to create a new Mexican identity, then employed to employ artists in America during the Great Depression. It was Mexicans that taught Americans how to paint frescos and murals and to go big. It is no wonder why Chicanos adopted mural painting as one of the tenants of helping define the Chicano identity.

I avoid several state institutions. The infamous Y.A., “up north,” and other Mexican vacations. Twenty years later, Lari Pittman tells me, “It takes a lot to reinstitutionalize yourself”. Judy Baca ask

me “Did you lie to get in? Because they don’t take Chicanos.” While at UCLA, I quickly realize that the Latinos in the program faced “microaggressions,” or rather, serious challenges due to institutional racism. I challenge long-standing assertions in the trajectory of modern and contemporary art that revolves almost exclusively around white male artists. In my final months at UCLA, I create an art collective of Chicano’s and Latinos. We paint murals on institutions.

Zoot suiters gave raise to the Pachuco. Pachucos to Cholos and lowriders first began to get dropped and cruised in the early 1950s. Thus began the Chicano Aesthetics that created a renaissance in literature, art, fashion and was an integral part of a movement that was foundational to the civil rights movement. This was not separate from the political and community organizing that predicated cultural pride. It is at this time that ¡Ya Basta! and ¡Si Se Puede! (Yes We Can), enter the American lexicon. Within a decade, these points of pride are criminalized. Pachucos and lowriders go from archetypes to stereotypes of criminality in the white American consciousness. This is parlayed into every Chicano with a Raiders jersey, a gang member. The irony of difference creating an easy target. An essentialization used to criminalize literally millions.

My community, the one I grew up in, like my childhood home, is gone. The home I grew up in bulldozed and replaced with a much larger one we could never afford. I feel a nostalgia not only for what was but for the infinite possibilities of what could have been. I think of all the lives destroyed by systemic racism. Cops hell bent on a mentality of “get them for anything, so when they do something serious, it isn’t their first offense.” I can still see that white cop’s face. So full of mirth and contempt towards us Mexicans. Never mind that we are American, and by every metric we belong here more than him.

In researching my thesis, it becomes apparent that so many Chicano/a/x writers, historians, and professors continue to espouse the rhetoric of mestizaje. It is part of the institution. A holdover of the idea of a cosmic race. The hybridity of Euro and Mesoamerican. Yet, it is a disavowal of both my Nahuatl and European heritage. The concept of Nepantla, the neither here nor there. Perhaps this is true if we accept the idea of race as the marker that defines one’s sense of self. Cemanahuac did not become Europe because Europeans arrived any more than Europe became Cemanahuac when the Nahuatl arrived there.

Rabasa stated, “the capacity to create a discursive space that does not react to, instead adopts elements from Western codes to communicate the specificity of a plurality of worlds” (53). The question I pose is this, in this day and age why would anyone even think it is acceptable to assume, and by default force upon me, a eurocentric worldview when I have never in my life had a self perception of myself

as white? Perhaps the concept of *Nepantla* has been misinterpreted as so many other concepts have by western intellectuals. It is not neither here nor there. I propose that it is both here and there with the ability to view both sides critically as to be able to act upon and to take from both.

You who read this act of contrition should know that by writing it I seek a kind of forgiveness—not yours. The forgiveness, rather, of those many persons whose absence from higher education permitted me to be classed a minority student. I wish that they would read this. I doubt they ever will. (Rodriguez, 164)

I am glad I am not Richard Rodriguez. I did not leave my community and family behind. I continue to inhabit the space of my birth even long after gentrification destroyed it. My evolution has not been a solitary one. Yet, I understand that as a Chicano in higher education, even now, I carry with me that survivor's guilt unique to my community. I know more Chicanos that have been to prisons than universities. Less than 1% of graduate degree holders identify as Chicano. It is virtually zero for PhDs.

I feel an affinity towards the *tlacuiloque*. In the work created for my thesis, I focused on the Chicano Aesthetics which is equated with a Criminalized Aesthetic. The self view and society's imposed view create the radical pluralities that I exist in and a continuance of the idea of an identity that is not reactionary to a eurocentric worldview.

The othering and the systemic racism that lowered the great cultures and the works of extremely skilled artists from the southwest and Mexico also simultaneously plundered those same aesthetics. White individuals, when trying to create their own identity independent of Europe simply took it from Mexicans and other cultures that have existed in these lands for thousands of years. Turell took from the Kivas, Heizer from the Mayas, Josef Albers from the many regions of Mexico where he and Anni plundered textiles and ceramic figures from for decades, Pollock from Siqueiros and the list goes on and on as a who's who of white European artists. We go back to the beginning. Western culture's arrogance continues to use the language of colonialism to define everything it encounters while denying the violence that it inflicts. Progress, growth and education is code for the exploitation of my people, culture, and heritage. This is all to serve the myth of their genius that you have created. This is the academic institutionalization of racism. I think of how long Europeans have compared Mexicans to animals while taking from them their aesthetics. Just as Anni Albers did.

“We did in time go to some dealers, like Tannenbaum in Juarez, whom we visited in the 1930s, but for the most part what people were selling was china and European baroque pieces, with the less desirable pre-Columbian objects half hidden in the back of the shop; there wasn’t enough money in them for people to specialize. And of course there were markets, like Mezcala, in Guerrero, and Chichen Itza, which we went to on a local bus. I’ve never smelled human beings so beautiful as on that bus. They were looked down on, like cattle, but to me they were very polite, and if in fact they smelled a bit like cattle, to me it was a wonderful, wonderful smell.” (Taube, 11)

ARTISTS, THE WORK, & OUR UNSEEN LABORER

The myth of Western genius continues even now when universities and institutions are supposed to be anti-racist. We can see the continuance of this in the hidden labor of Latinos and Mexicans in the galleries, institutions, and studios of any artist that can afford assistants. These are the workers that are skilled enough to create the works that the artists from art schools do not have the talent or experience to execute. I am part of that unseen labor. My collective is part of the legacy of this repression. When I introduce the collective, I include their alma maters, UCLA, Yale, VCU, UCSD. Immediately we are looked at differently and acknowledged where seconds before they had been seen just as laborers not even worth introduction. My crew rolls academically deep. Yet, we will never be offered exhibitions in these spaces where we spend hundreds of hours creating and installing works, despite the MFA’s. After all, we are still Mexicans and Latinos. But HOT DAMN!! if our real hard work don’t make other artists look good! There it is. The myth of the mongrel race incapable of higher thought continues. We know we are one step up from standing in a Home Depot parking lot. Good thing we are hustlers, or as the people in Laguna called us, entrepreneurs. If you were to accept the position of respecting multiple worldviews rather than continuing to play the role of arbiter, then perhaps you would understand that the work may not have been created for you. Perhaps your issue with the work is that it was created for a community that you do not serve. We can look at the lack of representation both in students, faculty, and staff and compare these to the population of Southern California and see how representative the academic state institution is. Now do the same with the state institutions that are jails, prisons, and detention centers. This is not just how it is. This did not just happen by chance, and this definitely did not happen because we are less than. This happened because you made it so.

These things are real. The racism, the killings, the riots, and protest, and the political

maneuvering. The border that divided communities and ancient cultures. The pitting of groups against each other. These things are not imagined, and they are the basis for your understanding of art, whether you acknowledge it or not. The year leading up to my thesis was one of unprecedented loss and upheaval and one marked with a new urgency from the environmental crisis that we as a planet face and as humans are responsible for. There was also a final straw in the public execution by police of George Floyd and the racist rhetoric of the right encouraging an attack on the Nation's Capitol. This is real. Art is fiction. Most art being created is only a reference to something. A signifier. An artifice. An illusion. I have gone in the opposite direction in my work.

The concept of art as it exists in Western society is an elitist social construct that mimics the decorative work that every society had always used to honor and commemorate that of the everyday life. The artifacts that are part of the pillaging that accompanied colonialism, that fill institutions were never once considered art as we have been conditioned to think of it. The beautiful craftsmanship that adorns the tools and objects of everyday use were created to honor the labor with which we subsisted. The objects were done with such care that they were even made to commemorate those who had passed on. Until this day, I cannot look at a ceramic piece in an institution that has a small hole punctured at the bottom of it without asking myself what burial site was disturbed by European grave robbers, aka academic scholars, to have this piece displayed in a Western institution. Unseen are the bones that accompanied the works that have been pulled from public view yet remain in storage in institutions like UCLA. Maybe the bones have become a nuisance to you. The ancestral bones of the forcibly removed tenants preventing the building of a new chancellor's residence. This is all real too.

I do remember a time when there weren't any freeways, and then I do remember the neighborhood, whole city blocks abandoned, then chewed up, our neighbors disappeared. It devastated, amputated East L.A. from the rest of the city. The bulldozers resembled the conqueror's ships coming to colonize a second time and I felt a real desire to portray the lives of those who disappeared. (Viramontes)

This is progress. After the ancestral bones are the disturbances of family homes. I see the flags of the colonizers again. All of those For Sale signs and We Buy Homes on posts, like flags on open lands in the Southwest. With our communities ignored and our labor unseen, we are objects unseen. The citadel of the Rose Hills Projects is set to be demolished. They were at a strategic disadvantage being at the foothill

of homes with a nice view. The real estate broker brags about the \$800,000 home she just sold right above it. I wonder how long we have before our rent doubles. It occurs to me that we are migrants even as citizens. I think of the picture of the “Indian” on a horse in my grade school history book. The Indian is pulling behind them their belongings. The white man creates a myth that they are nomadic and so as it is written in your books, it is. Yet, the “Indian” knows that this is only the most common sight the white man has of them, that of their fleeing from the white man in order to survive or their forced death marches to reservations. Young me asks, “this was their way of life before the european came?” “Yes” the white teacher answers. I follow up with “where did the horse come from?” My white teacher pulls me out of the class room and says that even if I am correct I am undermining her authority in the classroom. Good thing they do not burn people at the stake any more. I think of poor Ometochtzin.

Before pursuing my career as an artist full time, I studied visual communications and worked for fifteen years as a graphic designer. I worked in a world of signs and signifiers. The space that the signified inhabited in the mind is what interested me the most. In designing logos and labels for commercial products, I would be told by clients to “make it look more Mexican.” How, and more importantly who, puts these concepts in our psyche? My time in the state institution that is the University of California has allowed me to view firsthand how abstraction is created with lack of representation of the real. The conversation of what it is to be Chicano is an abstract concept without a Chicano leading the conversation. This of course carries over to everything. How do we understand something that we are not experiencing firsthand? Even worse, how do institutions erase entire histories and thousands of years of knowledge through the idea that knowledge is only information transmitted in the classroom?

Part of the images planted into our psyche are a carefully crafted concept of the criminal. It started with the blood thirsty savage. Centuries later this became a stereotype of the violent gang member, a breed of “superpredators.” The millions of words, news hours, newspaper articles, documentaries, movies, radio news stories, and photographs that have been employed to create this concept in your mind is one of aesthetics- the crafting of the other by European-Americans. Since I was young and before I thought of what world encompassed my worldview, I was a Chicano. Everything I experienced was that of the native turned foreign by war and conquest. A conflicting view pushing against the narrative of the dirty Mexican constantly being reiterated at every point of contact with the European-Americans and their media. The overwhelming pressure to look white and act white and never speak Spanish and eat the same bland white bread sandwiches instead of the tortillas that my mother would pack me. It only got worse

as I grew older and went from a stupid Mexican to a troubled adolescent bound to be a criminal. In my mind, I was fighting racism when I spoke out and “acted up”. Ten suspensions, one expulsion, and five arrests later, accompanied by countless times of being pulled over and pulled out of my car, many times at gunpoint, I very grudgingly complied. I sold my Oldsmobile Cutlass and I stopped wearing anything that could be mistaken for creased slacks and flannels, and I was never out in public in a plain white T for the sake of self preservation.

I may be an instantiation of a particular culture in this point of existence, but it is not an unexamined one. In fact it is one that has been closely studied and monitored and advised upon by experts for the last eight years along with other individuals of similar backgrounds who have participated in regular group discussions about their experiences with and in various institutions. This has lead to a careful dissection of the idea of self and the identity that is Chicano within a state institution. Once again, as life often does, we go full circle and I find myself back where I started. A child cheering on my barrio’s lowriders. A kid in my uncle’s El Camino upholstered in plush velvet with diamond patterned seats smiling at the Pachucas as they would call me guapo. I am also a grade school kid with an undiagnosed learning disability being treated as if I was simply stupid because I was Mexican. A defiant child who learned that a book was a weapon against authority. I will also always be the child in the back of a patrol car. The high school student being told by the school dean that I “will never get into UCSD”. I am the teenager shackled to five other black and brown men on a full to capacity county bus headed to arraignment. These things are real. What a racist society put on me and took from me and from my entire community – is what is examined in this work. The real. The work that is functional to honor the everyday life, as it has been for thousands of years before the European concept of art was imposed on this continent.

Upon re-examination of cultural markers from childhood and the products of what was barrio high art, I began to question what were those cultural markers that are used to adorn the everyday object or even oneself? Beginning with the Zoot Suit, we continued to use our dress as an expression and extension of self that breaks from the individual that society tries to define as simply a dirty Mexican or a “greaser”. In the barrios, we had no galleries, so we turned the streets into our galleries. The mural, a tool to educate and transmit a sense of empowerment or even used as an art form turned into protest, while the placasos demarcate territory and signaled to white sailors and in my day skinheads that the community was under protection. Our bodies, when imprisoned and turned into property of the state institutions,

are turned into permanent art collections. Sovereign spaces, that are embodiments of our barrios, and homages to nuestra familias with Old English and West Coast block lettering and handstyles embedded in personal and cultural histories. Individual histories that are part of the whole. Telling stories as walking Codices to be recounted and interpreted to those who have the privilege to examine them but only fully understood by the community. While the state turned the ancient art form into a tool to criminalize Chicanos, in the community it remained a metric by which one embodied the Chicano archetype. Finally, the ultimate marker of barrio high art, an object that embodies the Chicano aesthetic most succinctly, the customized classic automobile. The object by which we are transformed into lowriders.

In the body of work that I present in support of this thesis, there are objects that are of cultural significance to myself and members of my community. Dual signifiers of both cultural pride and the hyper-criminalization that they have become a signifier of. There is work speaking to the appropriation of our cultural heritage by Europeans and European-Americans. There is documentation of displacement juxtaposed along with the mechanisms used to cover up such blatant acts of systemic racism with the hypocrisy in telling the story as one of desegregation and civic pride. Ultimately though, this is not about the work. It is about the real. What I present to you is a well orchestrated and very deliberate performative act of endurance that began in 2013 when I “re-institutionalized” myself and what I did with that time in the state institution. Through work that includes these objects, artifacts, an exhibition in the community, and this writing, I have reinvented myself. I have transformed myself into the person I should have and could have been decades ago, had it not been for the institutionalized racism. I have shed the filth that racist teachers, administrators, police, judges, prosecutors and public defenders alike had placed on my psychological make-up of self by successfully navigating their system. The system which is also your system. Whether you agree with it being yours or theirs we can agree that it is not, and will never be, my system. The crowning piece of this work is the 1951 Chevy 3100 Pickup which this institution, along with others, has paid for. It is the object by which I become a lowrider. The subversion of your educational system to take me back home to my barrio and the point where I was most proud of my community. The car is not a signifier. It is very real and it serves as a bridge to the communities surrounding and servicing the institution, yet are still largely excluded from it.

The institution would be wise to utilize this bridge. Though I doubt it will even notice. It is understandable since it is too busy at the moment inventing anti-racist strategies. – C/S

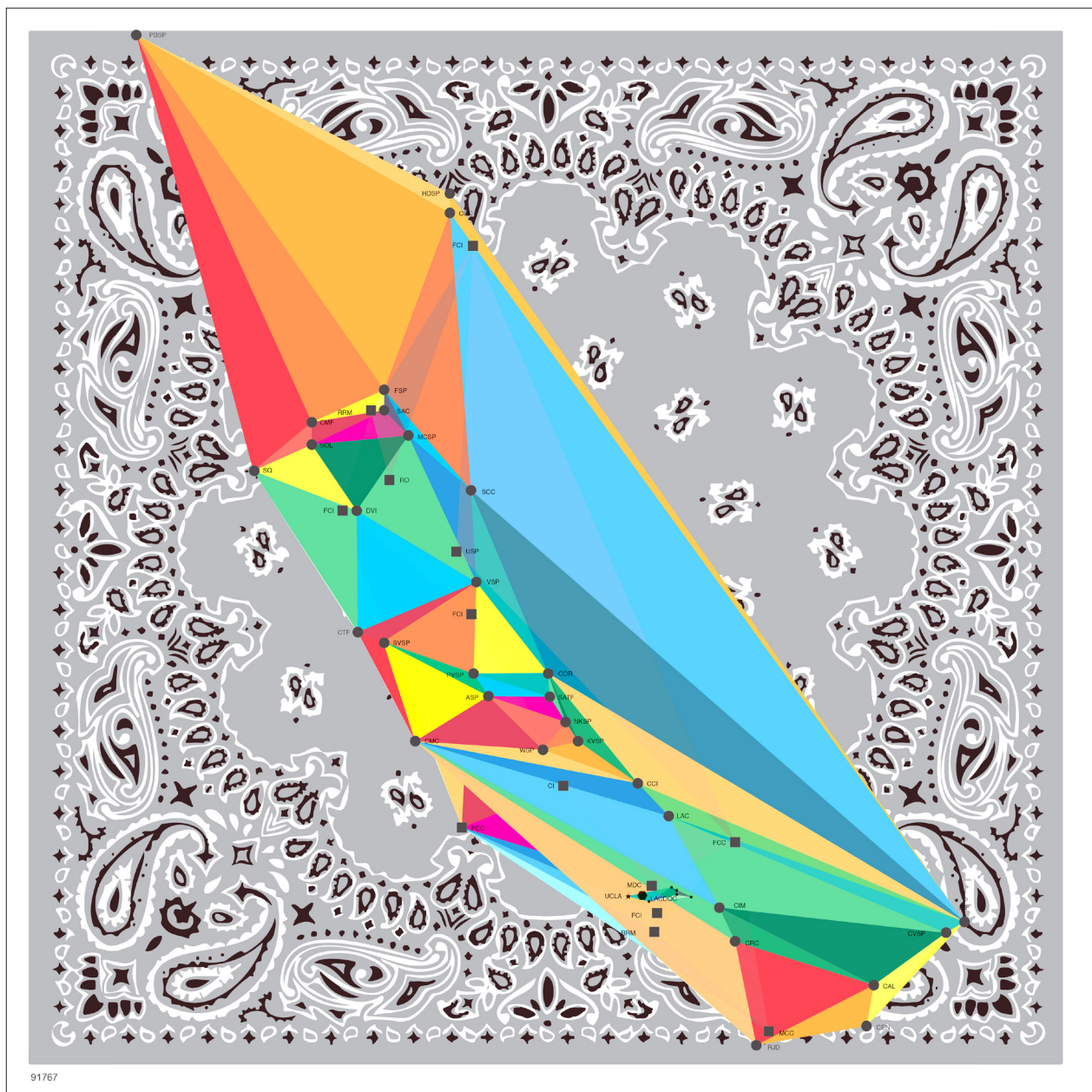
APPENDIX



Unknown
Anti-Mexican Propaganda Poster, C. 1880



3B Collective, *Tejas*, 2019
Acrylic and aerosol on building
70' ft x 20' ft.



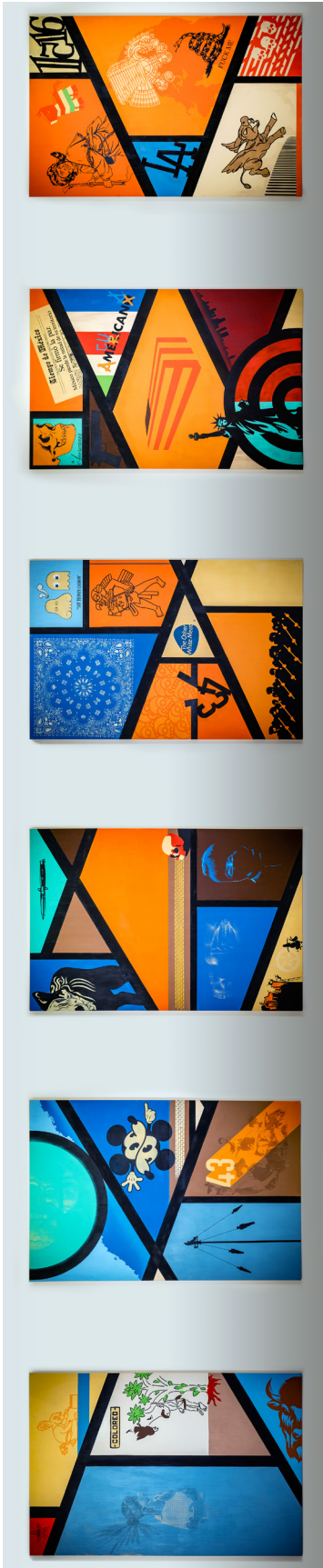
The Shortest Distance, 2014
 Digital Print on Paper
 36 in x 36 in



3B Collective
Black Lives Matter Intervention, 2020
Hazard Paint on State Institution
110 ft x 12 ft



Detail from *Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 2018
Acrylic and aerosol on wood
4 ft x 6 ft



Epistemologies of Ignorance, 2018
Acrylic and aerosol on wood
6 4 ft x 6 ft panels

Detail from *Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 2018
Acrylic and aerosol on wood
8 ft x 6 ft



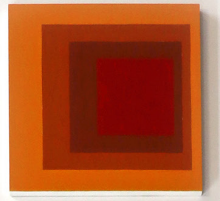
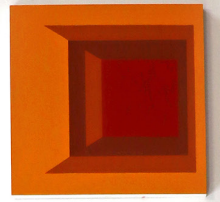
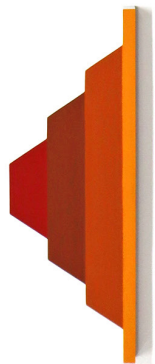
Diego Muñoz Camargo, late 16th c.
The Burning of the Idols
Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala
Pen and ink on paper.



IXPETZ, 2019
Acrylic on Wood
14" x 20.5"



Stealing Home, 2020
Photo Collage
Dimensions Vary



A Study of a Study of Mexico, 2021
Acrylic on Masonite
Dimensions Vary



3B Collective, *By Way Of* exhibition opening reception, May 8th, 2021 (From left to right: Adrian Alfaro, Gustavo Martinez, Michael Khosravifar, Alfredo Dominguez Diaz, Oscar Magallanes, Aaron Douglas Estrada)
Best Practice, Barrio Logan, San Diego



3B Collective, 2021
By Way Of Mural installation
Best Practice, Barrio Logan, San Diego



Vintage Zoot Suit
Dimensions Vary
Courtesy of John Carlos de Luna
Displayed at SME Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, California



1951 Chevy Truck Lowrider Detail
4 link suspension installation
UCSD Visual Arts Facilities



La Troka, 2020-2021
Modified 1951 Mid-Century Chevy Truck
Dimensions Vary
SME Gallery, UCSD, La Jolla, California

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