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Graduate Painting Studio
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Artist Statement

The body of my work is focused on how Mexican-American identity intersects with belonging and displacement within the United States and Mexico. I create work that questions what constitutes authenticity to being a Chicano or Post-Chicano artist. I am inspired by Latino supermarkets and street vendors. The spirit of these cultural advertisers reflect my concerns while exemplifying a Chicano “do-it-yourself” approach to life. Chicano art does not limit itself to a particular medium, but does focus on shared concepts about displacement, belonging, and identity. “To make something out of nothing became the essence of early Chicano art. While the political struggle was the driving force for the movement, the arts became the means of interpretation and explanation.” (Marin pg.17)

Various topics are explored within my artwork including Chicano culture, identity, celebration, contradiction, criticism, stereotypes and popular iconography. A portion of the work I create explores the dialogue of where a stereotype manifests, and how it is perpetuated. The imagery in my work mirrors the branding of a culture and my concerns for how Mexican-American's have very limited representation in popular media. My artwork is figurative, representational, with inspiration from Pop Art, Street Art, and Chicano Art. The work I create contributes, but is not limited to, urban environments, community centers, storefronts, cafes, and areas experiencing gentrification or elements of displacement. I don't focus on how to solve problems with the content of my artwork, but I do embrace the questioning and criticizing of issues I find discomforting surrounding my ethnicity. I embrace the grassroots approach to my art engagement and welcome art that crosses paths with curating, instruction, education,

mobilizing, group participation, and merchandising or publication. “Just as musical genres have perpetuated themselves beyond their moments of origin, the voice behind temporary public art is of a self-sustaining urban folk art. By no means limited to creations by self-taught artists-DIY in spirit, counterintuitive towards market and career considerations, low-budget, ephemeral, and community centric-work done on the streets is often far closer to a folkloric tradition than to the formalisms of fine art.” (Seno pg. 47)

Materials, Aesthetics, and Locations

The materials I am using range from acrylic paint, paper, canvas, fabric, insulation foam, wood, serape, sombrero, cornhusk, pencil/graphite, tissue paper, cardboard, paper mache, glue, wheatpaste, and varied found objects. I find it practical and applicable to use accessible materials that are simple to display or transport/install on varied surfaces or within specific venues making a better connection to the methods employed by the Chicano art I am referencing. The Chicano movement derived from the civil rights movements of the 1960's in which workers mobilized to ignite activism that would promote awareness of, and support for workers' rights. In the face of adversity Chicanos always find methods to make a statement blunt, creative, and sarcastic. “The Chicanos come to make a just claim on their patrimony. In this process, they take symbols and images of ultra nationalistic culture because their art responds to its times and context. They are constructing themselves beginning with the fundamental elements of Mexican identity in full view of the monstrous cultural apparatus of the most developed capitalist country in the world which steadfastly insists on their total allegiance to the ‘American way of life.’” (McKenna, Griswold Del Castillo pg. 20) Some of the work I create is illustrative in attempts to mirror the branding deployed by the media. Other works I create exist on un-stretched canvas in the shape of a sticker or silhouette. I have displayed artwork in banner, sticker, and installation formats. I

have also explored work that is sculptural and intended to be placed within the center of an interior. The sculptural work manifests as a piñata to create artwork that is representative of wonder and commodity.

One of my approaches is to make artwork accessible via locations such as street exteriors, interiors of small businesses, schools, and art centers. I desire to demystify art display and integrate it into more unconventional surroundings or interiors. The intention in showing in non-traditional environments is to better reach viewers who may not always have easy access to an art institution. I feel a responsibility to make my work practical for the audience to observe or interact, this derives from the methods employed by Chicano artists to engage the public who may not always be initiated in the arts. “The Chicano Movement's political agenda gave many artists a meaningful purpose to their pursuits as cultural producers; they were not just doing art for art's sake, but they were responding to a call to serve their community.” (Latorre pg.132) I am an active member of a few art collectives that focus on creating traveling art exhibits, providing opportunities to artists of varied experience levels to display art, or to contribute to art in a setting that embraces inclusive relationships in the Mexican-American community.

Graffiti culture and mural painting have also impacted my visuals. However my intention is not to deface but to respect the urban neighborhood culture which has given me opportunity to experiment within informal spaces. I often explore imagery that celebrates the working class and urban environment as subjects. The paintings created are my response or contribution to my ethnicity's accomplishments and contradictions which may never be fully resolved. Being an artist I find that activating exterior surfaces attractive due to the public nature of the exposure. I create art with a public as a method of cultural intervention, this was something informally studied through graffiti culture. Developing my street art methods in this informal environment led me to create work in a fragmented combination of studio creation then frantic public

installation that was often without permission. I have installed or pasted my non permitted art within inner city environments often within gang active communities. I do not glorify gang culture but have practiced displaying art in what I perceived as a less explored or a complex territorial atmosphere. There exists a strong contrast in the celebratory imagery against a surrounding of gritty surfaces and association of gang boundaries in which the artwork creates a narrative of the bittersweet memories that can exist in place of territorial tension. “This new world, which was once discovered and conquered by modern civilization, has since struggled between the negative and positive aspects of a symbiotic relationship with the old world, creating a reference for the rest of the world through its culture and art-a new world where those who once were conquered are the conquerers today.” (Ruiz pg. 64) The temporary artwork I have created takes inspiration from street art and graffiti culture's use of the sticker. I create larger paintings on sheets of craft paper or butcher paper, I then cut out the shapes of the images painted in a similar shape as a sticker. The next step to displaying these paintings is to find or locate public exterior surface, thus creating an urban intervention of public art. These projects I usually refer to as “wheatpasting” which is one of the more common sub-genres of graffiti. I have also created painted murals, piñata installations, and event posters. “The spirit of graffiti art is rebellion and protest. Some of it is against the view of art as a commodity. But political and artistic rebellion is also involved. The art world, like most worlds in which we live and function, is based on authority. The authority is that of the directors and curators of museums, art critics, and historians. They set the pace. They tell us what is art and what is not art. They exclude some artists for the simple reason that they do not approve of what they do. The art world, just like the world of literature, philosophy, or religion, is based on power relations and those who have the power are considered the authorities, whether they are authorities because they have the power or they have the power because they are authorities.” (Gracia pg. 107 - 109) I have found

welcoming collaborators in otherwise underserved communities. Within the informal street exercises I felt growth was nurtured without elitist or ageist detractors. I have displayed art publicly and received some opportunity to exhibit as my audience has grown in less traditional aspects. Creating art from a humbling perspective has allowed for me to grow and maintain positive relationships with some institutions while having access to less artistically experienced community groups or markets.

Networking, Collaboration, and Curating

Networking promotes collaboration, thus reinforcing the Chicano movement. To form an artistic eco system solidifies relationships, development, and discourse amongst the artists involved. “Rather than seeking validation from institutions and individuals outside of the community, Chicano artists and cultural workers sought to create independent institutions to support Chicano artistic production.” (Francisco Jackson, Carlos pg.141)

In my current work practice, I have found an interest in curating and forming traveling exhibitions with my current art community and collective. The process of curating has led me to place much care and detail to planning, communication, and executing. In my experiences in curating, I find creating exhibition theme proposals, seeking a desired venue, inviting a specific group of artists, then coordinating expectations and deadlines. Once the venue and the artists are confirmed, I work on outreach to media to send out a press release along with exhibition summary, venue information, reception date, along with participating artists. At the moment about half of my exhibitions have been at more traditional formal institutions and the other half in storefronts or pop up art exhibits in alternative spaces. As a curator I have worked on exhibitions that were focused on Mexican-American or Latino identity, but I have also curated exhibitions of more mainstream subject matter. Curating has challenged by requiring positive

relationships and fostering respect. Curating has also expanded my networking practice with media to attract a larger audience to art exhibitions and projects. This has proven to be a useful method to further expand my catalog of art exhibits. I have also encountered on occasion detractors who criticize the quality or clarity of the exhibits in contrast to the media support that the events generate. For all my imperfections as an artist and curator I embrace the fact that I am persistent, inclusive, and pragmatic in my approach. I continually seek opportunities to display work in spaces that invite a general public.

Chicano/a Celebrations and Tropes

I have created artwork on serape cloth and cornhusk as a method of using iconic fabric or referencing fiber as craft. The serape is typically a decorative or utilitarian garment by using serape as a surface for painting promoting the display of art while maintaining a rich cultural backdrop. The serape has a generalized connotation of working-class decorum embedded in Mexican history. Cornhusk was another material I worked on that was linked to fiber and served as a source of inspiration for creating work that would be linked to identity and a husk that could be acquired or discarded. The cornhusk also references the commonplace use of maize in the Mexican diet, via tortillas and tamales. Using these materials as a catalyst for commentary and celebration became representative of reacting and connecting with Chicano Art.

A large portion of my work addresses stereotypical imagery and tropes. Some of these specific to Latinos in the United States and I focus mostly on the Mexican-American identity with certain elements of branding and appropriating in popular media advertising. The highly sexualized, the gangster, the domestic, the macho cowboy, the uneducated, the undocumented, all of these stereotypical labels are used to this day to sell products, ideas, narratives, films, and satire. It is through my attempt to criticize these depictions that I find conflict in potentially

collapsing into the very content that causes me discomfort. In the formal aspect of my work I intend on refining the painting to allure the viewer, but to also gain the viewer's investment in the content; to present subjects that might not always be of interest to audiences that aren't always well versed in the Chicano culture. When my artwork is of mixed media or interdisciplinary approach, I want for the work to have a more theatric or advertising quality to the aesthetic as a method of inviting the viewer. In a sense there is a risk of objectifying my subject and treating it as the "other" this is my predicament and contradiction. It is for these reasons that I have found a malleable approach to my culture and its concerns with sustaining identity. I have found much use and empowerment in following artwork created by other artists within the Chicano community and to keep the conversation of Chicano art active. In a recent work titled "Live Mas", a painting depicting a young Mexican-American wearing a headdress (decorated with the head of an aztec god) smiling. The young girl is speaking which is visible by the use of a word bubble as used in comic books. The word bubble has a "QR" code which functions as a direct link to an article about concern for the diminishing number of students enrolling in Chicano Studies at universities. The painting is cropped mimicking pop art of the 1960s, using the design and branding of taco bell as a backdrop, the headdress itself mimics headwear from Disney World in which a cartoon character is merged with a hat. The painting borrows from the Aztec culture and the united farm workers flag. The artwork is also a combination of Chicano art, Mexican art, and Pop-Art. "Live Mas" is most interested with communicating with Chicano sensibilities and vernacular. "At the heart of Modernism was a myth of history designed to justify colonialism through an idea of progress. The spreading/distribution of modernism means the spreading of the mentality of the colonial era. Post modernism in the visual arts is part of the global project of cultural decolonization. It involves an attempt on the part of western people to go beyond strictly European ideas of esthetics and its history-ideas heretofore integral to their

sense of identity.” (McEvelley Pg. 85 -86) “One would think that a post-colonial attitude must acknowledge different theories of knowledge, including some that imply the falsity of one's own inherited assumptions. One is bound, in other words, to betray one's own specific ethnic inheritance in the attempt to open oneself to the reality of others. Acknowledging a variety of conflicting theories as equal approaches to reality of course precludes any attempt to establish an objective or universal scale of certainty.” (McEvelley pg. 99 – 100)

Chicano/a Status and Forecast

The artwork I create is charged with a passion for dialogue about Chicano culture and questioning what exactly constitutes authenticity to this movement. Does an artist aligned with Chicano art need to be a political commentator? How does an artist attempt freedom of expression while having the burden of being an agent of social justice? I am currently still addressing these questions, however I am discovering this might be a career long concern. Chicano art manifests in many forms or reaction and affirmation. I recently reached out to esteemed artists and pioneers of the movement Judithe Hernandez and William Nericcio for further consideration on the artist's role in the Chicano movement. “Some artists from my generation, the group that began the movement, still have a highly defined litmus test for “Chicano Art”. The early work was representational in style and the images and icons that first defined Chicano art included references to pre-Columbian art, art of the Mexican Revolution, and 1970's political themes, e.g. farmer worker rights, immigration, and education. Since then, the generation that followed, who were not part of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, have begun to branch out into work that does not incorporate direct references to Mexican or Chicano culture. In some cases, they are creating work that is *conceptual* or *non-objective* in style. The rise of Graf Art has added another layer of discussion because the style is an out-growth of

Chicano gang graffiti. The work of some graf artists is political, but much of it has become decorative art without political or cultural message. It's a very complex topic, with many diverse points of view. So, to answer your question, what constitutes Chicano art.....it depends on who you ask." (Hernandez 2015)

In regards to being Chicano I have been confronted as being a hybrid or a fragmented version of a traditional Mexican. The difficulty I have endured by certain groups or circles within the Mexican community have brought about questions about what defines purity to a culture. This is a topic that fascinates me, I am Mexican-American but am often challenged by my own culture about how authentic I am to my ethnicity or simply the use of the Spanish language. At some point in the twentieth century a pejorative term "pocho" was used when referring to a Mexican-American who only speaks english. The term pocho refers to a person as being fragmented or somehow shameful for inadequacy as a "true" Mexican. "I've actually never heard anyone discuss "pocho" in a serious way. I personally like the term. It really describes who Chicanos are today. When I was a child, we were *hyphenated* Mexican-Americans. In Mexico we were not Mexican, maybe pochos, but not Mexicanos anymore. Chicanos have developed a unique identity." (Hernandez 2015)

"Pocho is slur—a reverse slur used by Mexicans to tag emigrants who don't speak Spanish the way you're "supposed to." It is a qualifier, a separator, a designator. These days in California, with "Pocho-power" it is a tool of empowerment. We are a gente (people) that is neither here nor there, ni de aqui, ni de alla." (Nericcio 2015)

The ongoing growth of population and the changing perception of younger generations will impact the landscape of Chicano art. The art of contemporary Chicano's might not always focus on political activism however the preface of the art movement will still hold a structure to people involved in the various topics addressing Latino's in the United States. The contemporary

Chicano is confronted with challenging a monolithic ethnicity, pedagogy, hierarchy, and unjust bureaucracy. To consider our current status some artists and scholars have stated we are living in a “post-chicano” movement. I find this unsettling because it undermines the adversity we still face and considers our problems to be resolved. “In the 1980’s-1990’s young Chicanos (like my students) were fairly complacent about the social-political progress of Chicanos. They seemed satisfied that my generation started the snowball down the mountain and that more improvements would take their natural course. Obviously, current events have demonstrated that we still have much work to do. We are still under-represented in government and lag behind white Europeans in education and employment. And now the “deportation” movement has returned to political discussion. As a member of the first wave of Chicano artists my path was set by that experience, although the artistic approach to my work has grown and evolved. To say that the current work being produced is “post-Chicano” is premature. It won’t happen until Chicanos no longer have social-political injustices that need to be fought. The movement was and is political. A political movement that also happened to give birth to school of American art.” (Hernandez 2015)

“Never post-Chicano; we are, in fact, in a post-movimiento moment—not that the movimiento chicano is dead; it has evolved: its children are everywhere and they are full of fecundity and innovation.” (Nericcio 2015)

With all these ideas in regards to the subject, display, documentation, and execution I truly do endorse artists to approach creation as inviting to the public. I embrace the idea of diluting pretentious notions to art exhibitions and inviting the general public. I find if the art I create or my mannerisms are not approachable then my message is useless outside of myself. I also endorse ideas linked to philosopher Richard Rorty in that cohesive work further heightens the understanding of the broader message of the artist's practice. To create artwork which leads

to extending conversations within but not exclusive to a community. The process of creating artwork for public interaction while gaining knowledge from that community and adapting to the strengths of the environment. Artists should be encouraged to taking incentive to create and install art of relevant subject matter to the community to open a forum for more ideas regarding the work rather than expecting to perform what is perceived as the correct method. (Grenz, 1996)

With respect to my association with Chicano Art I will say that it is necessary to document, share methods, converse with fellow Chicanos, and to build upon the art canon within the culture without making it a restriction. “What is the future of Chicano Art? Our work to continue the struggle and assert our art and our artists within the mainstream in this country has to go on, and must be carried on by our youth who follow. Therefore, our job is to make sure we leave proper documentation in volumes and books in universities and colleges for their education and their futures. If we don't document what we have done, we will guarantee that in the future Chicano Art will not have a place and no one will remember or understand what was done. We must leave a strong record that will empower our youth with cultural values and political history.” (Griswold Del Castillo, Rodriguez pg. 195)

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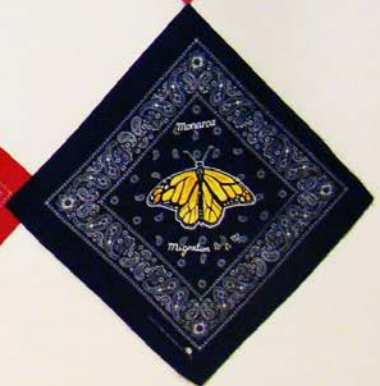
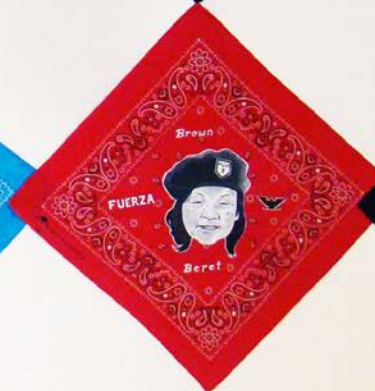
Hernandez, Judithe. Internet email interview, 7:19 am November 18, 2015.

Nericcio, William. Internet email interview, 7:19 am November 18, 2015.



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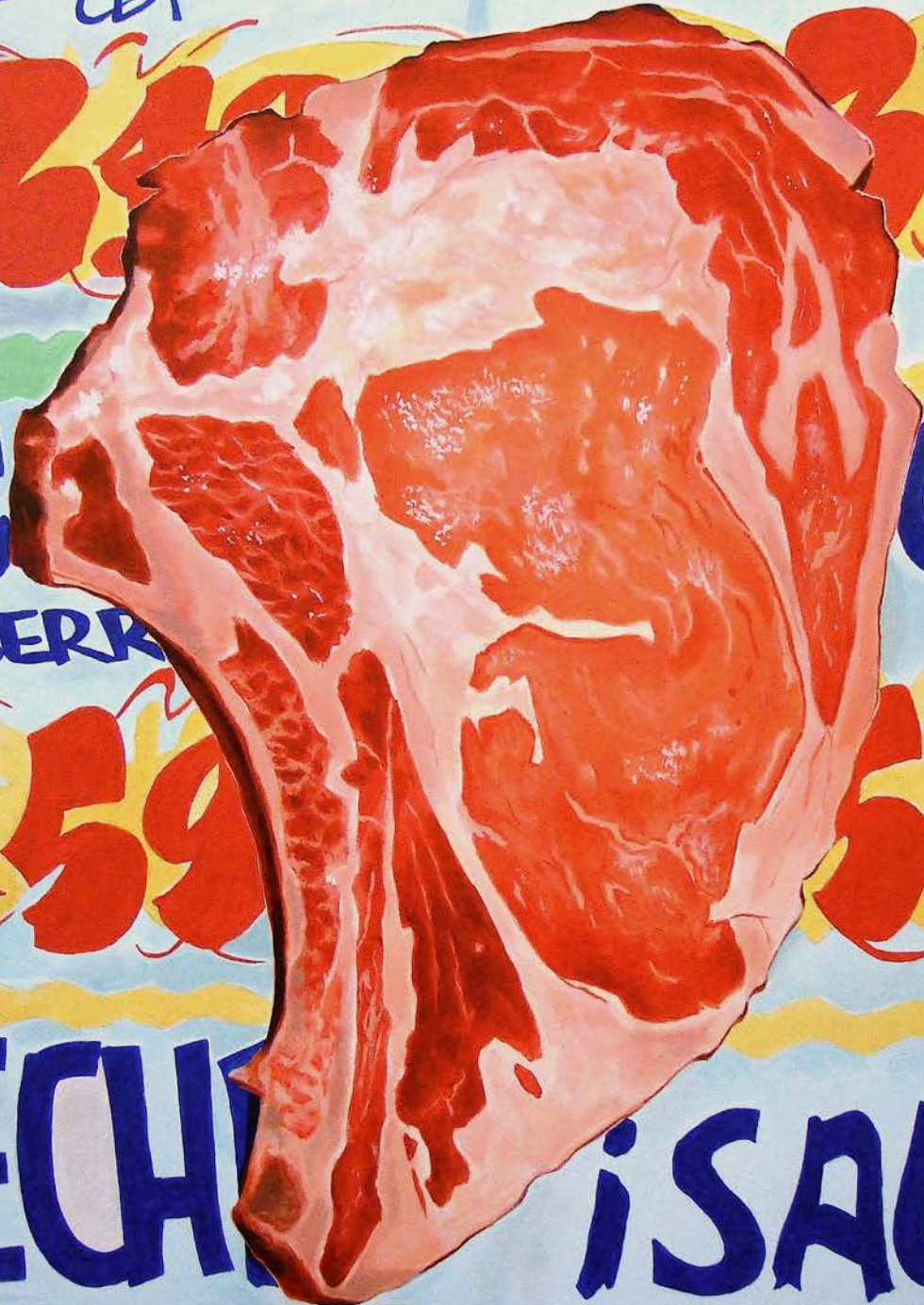




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