CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE ART OF REBELLION:
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHICANO VISUAL ARTS

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
in Chicana/o Studies

By
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ABSTRACT
THE ART OF REBELLION:
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHICANO VISUAL ARTS
By
Jacob Eric Prendez
Master of Arts in Chicana/o Studies

This creative project examines the use and impact that Chicano visual arts have made on social justice movements and its current influence. My focus in this research is art that inspires social change, mass movements and is at its core is subversive, revolutionary and speaks and belongs to the masses. The use and implementation of revolutionary and protest art can be used to mobilize communities and mass movements. Critical to this project was the importance of understanding social justice and protest art of the past, as well as understanding what drives Chicano political artists today. More important than any interview, any tangible painting, any mural is an idea, an idea that art carries power. I propose in the research that art can be used as a tool to spread and disseminate messages, and that revolutionary, subversive, protest art, can be used in the implementation of mass mobilization of communities. The research project was conducted through art based inquiry and discourse analysis. To better understand the context of my art work I focused on four main art genres:

1. Mexican Muralists

2. Social Realists and the Federal Arts Project

3. The art of the Chicano Movement
4. A New Wave of Chicana/o Artists and Street Art

From these genres of art several key pieces were selected to deconstruct and conduct a contextual analysis. The goal of the discourse analysis was to better understand the aesthetics and work done by the artists as well as the themes, the ideas, and the criticism to use as a framework to contextualize my own work. For the arts based inquiry I examined how society relates to art work and focus on my art work as a primary means of inquiry. An essential part of this creative project was an exhibition of my political/social justice artwork. The exhibit consisted of seven digital art pieces, and original 12 paintings revolving around themes of immigrant rights, Arizona legislation, the Raza Studies, Chicano culture and the Dream Act. I will also exhibit 4 paintings as part of the “Norman Rockwell in Post Racial America” series, which challenges the notion of “Americana” and ask if there is such a thing as post racial America.
Currently I am an Outreach Counselor. I travel to high schools and community colleges and help students in the process of applying to college. When I do my lectures at the schools I usually start out by talking about my story and how I made it through college in hopes that the students in the crowd can relate. I believe this is also a good route to take in this paper to assist the reader in knowing how my past and path have influenced who I am and the work I produce. I feel my personal story also describes how Mexican Muralism, Social Realism, Chicano Movement art have helped influenced my own art work and the ideologies that drive my work.

My earliest and most vivid memories are of art and imagery. As a toddler I would spend hours looking through piles of Disney and Dr. Suess books that would arrive in the mail each month. I would look at the pictures over and over again, mesmerized by the imagery. My parents thought I was going to be a great reader because I always had my head in the books. It turns out I only cared about the pictures and that one day be an artist.

By kindergarten my parents began to notice that I was showing signs of a learning disorder. I had struggled learning to read, spell, and connecting sounds to letters. I would reverse my b’s and d’s (often writing Jacod) and incorrectly doing math operations. These are all signs of dyslexia and my parents asked for me to be tested. The school refused stating that I was not dyslexic. Instead of testing me they placed me in special education classes, which were administered in the coatroom, which heightened my humiliation. Growing up, I was constantly told I was neither smart enough, nor good enough. I grew up with very low self-esteem and
became more withdrawn. I didn’t know why I couldn’t understand class assignments and hated being so “slow” and hated myself for being “stupid.” My only outlet was art. It seemed the only thing I excelled at or got complimented on. While my self-esteem plummeted and I began to change from the quiet well behaved child to the angry teenager.

By 1994 I was a confused and angry senior in high school coping with undiagnosed dyslexia, family problems and struggling to understand my multiracial identity. Living in Bothell (a suburb of Seattle) I did not exposed to much Chicano culture during this time. I felt both alien and alienated by the dominate white culture. I immersed myself in the only place I could find Chicanos...in books. I spent many lunch hours at school in the corner of the school library reading the 3 or 4 books on Chicano culture/history available to me. While I had love at home my teachers seemed to despise me. One high school teacher scolded me and said that I would soon be shot and killed then graduate high school. I felt like a Chicano amongst a sea of homogenous white kids and to top it off I thought it was my job to be the class clown. I spent more time getting kicked out of class then time in the class room. The one place I thought I’d be appreciated in high school was in art class. Sadly, I didn’t fit the artist mold. The art teachers thought I was scary and saw my art as too ethnic and too unsophisticated. I was told I wouldn’t be taken seriously until I stopped doing “gangster drawings.”

While my face was buried in books I was unaware of the rumblings happening south of me. In California students and community were fighting anti-immigrant legislation Prop 187. Further south in Chiapas, a rebel group called the Zapatistas was uprising demanding indigenous rights. Little did I know that these events would have such a profound effect on me. While Chicano
history lessons would help my ideological foundations the art of the Chicano movement in California and the Zapatista movement in Mexico would soon change my life forever.

Between my senior year in high school and my first year in college my sketch pads began to transform from comic book characters and funny cartoons to Lowriders, Aztecs and zoot suiters. I started signing my artwork El Pachuco Nuevo, and tagging BEL (Blue Eyed Latino) on the walls. Although my art became highly cultural it still lacked the political consciousness.

High school was not a priority in my life and I barely graduated. At that time, college was not even on my radar. No one in my family had ever gone to college so I knew nothing of the process plus I hated high school and had no intentions of continuing my education. I only decided to attend classes at a community college the following fall only because my best friend’s parents were making him go and he didn’t want to go alone. He lured me in with promises of beautiful college women.

My first semester at the community college was a disaster. I got a C, D, and F. I decided to drop out after the semester. I knew I wasn’t smart enough for college and chastised myself for even trying. Towards the end of the semester I met Diane Harrison, a counselor in the Multicultural Services Department. After talking with her for a little while she asked me if I wanted to join the Latino club on campus. I told her the campus didn’t have a Latino club. She then asked if I was interested in starting one the following semester. I told her that “I was not returning” and that “I was not college material” Diane then offered to help me pick out my classes that she said would be an easier load and a more realistic schedule and then we could start the Latino club together, to which I agreed. For the first time in my life I had someone who believed in me. Someone who told me “You can do it”. When I look back, it upsets me a little to know that it only took
one person to believe in me to change my attitude and it took so long for one person to believe in me. With a lot of hard work I was able form a MEChA chapter on my college campus and graduated with an Associates of Arts degree.

By the time I graduated from Bellevue Community College I was 21 years old, married and had a 1 year old son. I applied and was admitted to the University of Washington where I planned on majoring in Art and American Ethnic Studies. I soon found that similar to high school my art work was considered foreign and unsophisticated. I was interested in graphic design but was told by a professor that my work was “too ethnic” and needed to be more mainstream. I was also told that the graphic design program at the University of Washington was so horrible that I should leave the school and go to an art school in Pasadena California. I decided to give up my passion and pursue just the American Ethnic Studies degree. By the time I graduated from the University of Washington I considered myself a strong student leader, I had two kids, a failing marriage, and a better understanding of Chicanismo. I had a, strong sense of my political ideology. I was involved in the fight to maintain affirmative action in Washington State (I-200) and the experience of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in Seattle under my belt.

Towards the end of my time at the University of Washington our MEChA group brought up Dr. Rudy Acuña to give a lecture on May Day. I was fortunate to be Dr. Acuna’s chauffeur. During our drives around Seattle Dr. Acuña talked me into moving to California and pursuing my masters in Chicana/o Studies at the California State University, Northridge. Recently divorced and ready to make a change in my life I packed up and moved to Northridge. While in the program I took a painting class with artist Yreina Cervantez who re-introduced me to my first love…art. Now an artist armed with a critical social justice perspective, my work began to go
beyond “Mexican” images. Although still heavily cultural, I produced images that questioned hegemony, Americanism, and hate. I began to see art as a weapon, as a tool for social justice. I began to be influenced by Favianna Rodriguez, Banksy, Ernesto Yerena, Melanie Cervantez, Jesus Barraza, Lalo Alcaraz, Ester Hernandez, Sheppard Fairey, Harry Gamboa Jr., and Yolanda Lopez and the works of the Royal Chicano Air Force

Today as the editor in chief of Puro Pedo Magazine and in collaboration with Adelante California we have been hosting art shows to raise money for scholarships for AB540 students. To date we have put on six art shows at CSU Fullerton, CSU Northridge, Casa de la Raza in Santa Barbara, Mi Vida in Pasadena and two shows at the Bell Arts Factory in Ventura California. The over $2000 raised at our art shows goes to students interested in Arts, Media, Communication and Cultural Studies and is available to students regardless of their citizenship status. I also coordinate Art Jam Mondays at California State University, Northridge. Art Jam Mondays is an open space for artists to come together and create. The “Art Jammers” have quickly become a family and plan to host collective art shows in the future.

More than anything this thesis/creative project has become a celebration of the full circle I have made in my life from a child in search of affirmation to a teenager struggling to understand the world to now an artist/activist using art as a weapon against oppression. I fell in love with art at a very young age and it was torn away from me by narrow minded people. Now it has come back to me after I had developed and matured and have a better idea of how to use art to effect change in a society needing change.
LITERATURE REVIEW

To better comprehend and contextualize my collection of political artwork one must explore how it relates to the body of artwork that influenced it as well as the socio-political conditions in which it was created in. To do so I have broken down my research to 4 main eras of influence:

1. Mexican Muralism
2. Social Realism and the Works Progress Administration
3. The Chicano Art Movement
4. A New Wave of Chicana/o Artists and Street Art

Due to length and time constraints in my research I had to edit the list down to a key four era’s. There are other influential artists and collectives such as the avant-garde group Asco of the 1970’s and 1980’s who were highly influential to myself and other Chicano artists but do not fit neatly into my four eras of influence.

MEXICAN MURALISTS

An important influence of my work and my artistic ideologies was the Mexican Muralist area. The use of indigenismo fused with leftist ideologies has had a profound impact on me and the work I put out as an artist. Also important to me is the use of art for the masses and not something to hoard or trap in galleries and private collections. Murals are painted in public spaces for the people to enjoy. You continue to see this influence not only in my work but as well as for much of the murals and Chicana/o art work being produced in Los Angeles today.

Mexican Muralists especially “Los Tres Grandes” who included Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros served as a primary inspiration for the Works Progress
Administration (WPA) and the social realist artists of the 1930’s. The Mexican muralist movement took place in the 1920’s in the post-revolutionary Mexico. All of “Los Tres Grandes” were educated at the Academy of San Carlos and were heavily influenced by Dr. Atl. According to Carlos Francisco Jackson, author of Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte. The Mexican muralists established a working philosophy in contradiction to the traditional studio-to-commercial galleries, thus bringing art to the masses.

Early works in the era found many Mexican artists looking to indigenismo for inspiration due in large part to Jose Vasconcelos appointment to Secretary of Public Education. Vasconcelos enlisted the help of artists to forge a united Mexico post revolution. During this time artists were commissioned by the local government to cover the walls of official institutions such as Mexico’s schools, ministerial buildings, churches and museums. Later works focused on Labor and leftist ideologies. According to Sarah Hymes in her dissertation entitled, The Construction of Identity in Post-Chicano Art, she states, “…Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, whose Social Realist style made the meaning in their murals abundantly clear. Because of their large scale and high visibility, murals functioned extremely well with the context of social reform and political activism.” (Hymes p.10)

While Mexican muralism is generally considered an artistic movement, it can also be considered a social and political movement. During a reconstruction period in Mexican history the muralists moved from painting a cohesive Mexico celebrating its roots to Mexico fighting for social justice while rich in leftist iconography. Many of the ideals later portrayed in the murals would inspire artists in the United States including Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists and would give rise to the social realist art form. History can be tricky, as some view the move towards a
cohesive national Mexican identity as one that marginalized indigenous people’s claims to rights and land or sought to regulate indigenous people to a glorious past while rendering them invisible in the present.

DIEGO RIVERA

Jose Diego Maria Rivera and his twin brother were born on December 13, 1886 in Guanajuato, the capital city of the State of Guanajuato Mexico. His father owned numerous silver mines and was rumored to be Russian born. His maternal grandmother was said to be of Indian blood. While his ancestry was unproven it reflected elements that later would hold special value in his art work.

In 1898, at age 12, Rivera entered San Carlos Academy where he studied rigorously until 1905. He studied under such artists as Santiago Rebull, Felix Parra, Jose Maria Velasco, and Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murrillo). In January of 1907 Diego Rivera traveled to Spain and with a letter of introduction from Dr. Atl, Rivera began to study under the leading Spanish Realist Eduardo Chicharro y Aguera. Rivera began to move in the Spanish avant-garde circles along with Pablo Picasso, Julio Gonzalez and Juan Gris. According to Kettenman, in 1909 Rivera followed his
friends to France, while continuing to be in close touch with Spanish artists and intellectuals. In Paris Rivera visited exhibitions, museum collections, attended lectures and worked in the free school of Montparnasse. Unlike Orozco and Siqueiros, Rivera was outside of Mexico during the revolutionary years. While in Europe Diego Rivera studied styles such as Realism, Dada, Cubism, and Post–Impressionism.

In 1920 the new Mexican President Alvaro Obregon appointed Jose Vasconcelos as Minister of Education. One the first actions of Vasconcelos were to introduce a “comprehensive programme of popular education, which included the provision of murals in public buildings as educative media.” (Kettenman p. 20)

After years of civil war the minister of education was in search of a new form of artistic presentation. When Rivera returned to Mexico, he was immediately enlisted by Jose Vasconcelos to help carry out the government’s cultural policy. Vasconcelos begun to put interested artists of the country to work to express his Mexican ideology and humanist ideals in the form of wall-paintings, which began to reclaim independent Mexican national culture.

While Diego Rivera’s work and persona may be the most famous of “Los Tres Grandes” the work of Siqueiros and Orozco is no less important. “Los Tres Grandes” have become strongly associated with mural painting and the sociopolitical art of that time. During the onset of the Mexican Revolution, Rivera studied Cezanne, Picasso and other greats in Europe on a scholarship from the San Carlos Academy while another pupil of the Academy decided to join the Mexican revolution at the age of 15, David Alfaro Siqueiros.
DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS
José de Jesús Alfaro Siqueiros was born on December 29, 1896, in Mexico City. His name, location of birth and date of birth have been disputed by historians as well as Siqueiros himself. In The Mexican Muralist by Alma M. Reed she placed his birth location in Chihuahua Mexico. Reed also listed his name as Jose David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Siqueiros and his two siblings were entrusted to the care of his paternal grandparents at the age of two when his mother passed. His grandfather was from Michoacán and had been an ardent guerrillero in the Juarista army, in which he had risen to the rank of colonel. His influence left a lasting mark on the artist’s ideology and shaped his tendency toward direct action. Siqueiros was the only member of “Los Tres Grandes” to actually fight in battle during the Mexican Revolution for the Carranza army.

In 1907 Siqueiros was returned to the custody of his father and entered the Franco-Ingles College and later in 1911 attended the National Preparatory School with fellow muralist Jose Clemente Orozco. In 1913 “through the influence of Dr. Atl, the then-Revolutionary leader, Siqueiros entered the Constitutional Army and rose from the ranks to the grade of lieutenant. His attractive personality and remarkable energy soon won him rapid advancement. He was rewarded for his fidelity with a diplomatic appointment when Carranza, The First Chief of the Constitutional Army, became President of the Republic.” (Reed p. 101)

Siqueiros was sent to Europe in 1919. While in Paris he formed a friendship with Diego Rivera. He also bonded with European radicals whose social doctrines fueled his own revolutionary ideology. This would lead to writing of the Manifesto a los Plasticos de America in the Magazine Vida Americana that would provide the ground work for the founding of the
organization, The Syndicate of Mexican Painters and Sculptors with fellow artists Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, Dr. Atl, and Fernando Leal. Siqueiros would return to Mexico in 1922 to spearhead the organization.

Like Rivera, Siqueiros had a very charismatic and energetic personality. After fighting in the Mexican Revolution he joined fellow Mexican artist Rivera in Europe. Siqueiros would return to Mexico to spearhead the Syndicate of Mexican Painters and Sculptors with the help of Rivera, Dr. Alt and Jose Clemente Orozco.

Like Rivera and Siqueiros, Jose Clemente Orozco also attended the San Carlos Academy and was influenced under the tutelage of Dr. Atl.

2. America Tropical by David Alfaro Siqueiros

JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO

While influenced by the same period of social turmoil and many of the same educators such as Dr. Atl, Orozco’s work was much darker and highly critical of the Mexican Revolution than Rivera who took a more optimistic view of the revolution. Orozco was also fond of the use of symbolism and fascinated by machines.

Jose Clemente Orozco was born on November 23, 1883, in Zapotlan El Grande in the state of Jalisco. When Orozco was six his family moved to Mexico City. On this seventh birthday he was enrolled in the San Carlos Academy night classes. Later as the result of an explosion in a
chemical experiment, Orozco lost his left hand, wounded his right hand, and impaired the sight of one eye. This determined his pursuit of the career in the arts. In 1915 Orozco held his first solo exhibition entitled “House of Tears”. The theme of the show was prostitution and according to Author Reed. It was a bitter criticism of hypocritical society. Throughout the period of the Mexican Revolution Orozco illustrated for the revolutionary paper Vanguardia, by Dr. Atl. In 1917 Orozco traveled to the United States where he remained for two years. While he was crossing the Laredo Border in Texas, an official in the Customs House destroyed sixty of his water colors in the “House of Tears” series because they were “indecorous”. This prevented Orozco from pursuing his art career during his stay in San Francisco.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEXICAN MURALIST MOVEMENT

“The Mexican muralist movement emerged after a decade of violence and civil strife, from 1910 to 1920, when political and cultural leaders attempted to consolidate the social ideals of the Revolution, among them being the educating of the populace and forging of a nationalist consciousness. To this end, artists such as Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros exploited the public mural as an instrument of social and cultural transformation.” (Indych-Lopez p. 1) In a time of reconstruction in Mexico, Mexican muralists forged a national identity bridging the country’s past with a path to the future on public walls. According to author Carlos Francisco Jackson, The Mexican mural movement had a great influence on the development of public art in the US. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros were seen as cultural heroes in the United States, especially by cultural workers involved in creating art during the periods of social and political turmoil, especially in the period of the 1930’s. This influence was aided by the fact that Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros all spent time in the United
States during this time. Orozco painted murals at Pomona College in California in the 1920’s, until 1934. During the Great Depression, Federal Arts Projected which employed artists to paint murals, helped paved the way for Mexican muralists to find commissioned work in the United States. Diego Rivera lived in the United States from 1930 to 1934 doing commissioned work and putting on exhibitions.

The revival of the Italian fresco style had to do in large part on the influence of Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo) who spent many years traveling throughout Europe and the Far East. Dr. Atl, a professor of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros not only exposed the artists to the Vatican murals but also the use of art as a political tool. Dr. Atl saw the joining of the art institution to the social and political revolution as a fundamental principle. He believed that the artist should be a participant in the revolutionary struggle gripping Mexico. “In 1914 he persuaded Siqueiros, Orozco and other Academy students to join with him in supporting Carranza and his constitutionalist army in their evacuation of the capital, and to move to the southern town of Orizaba. There, Atl, who had taken with him most of the printing presses owned by the Academy, set up a propaganda center in support of Carranza using the newspaper La Vanguardia, for which Siqueiros acted as military correspondent and Orozco drew a whole series of biting cartoons and illustrations.” (Rochfort p. 20) The involvement in the Mexican Revolution would have a lasting effect on the artists and would drive much of the themes and imagery of their murals.

When President Álvaro Obregón was elected he appointed José Vasconcelos to Secretary of Public Education. Vasconcelos commissioned artists to paint murals in important public buildings in Mexico ushering in the Mexican mural movement. Commissioned artists included
Diego Rivera, Jose Orozco Clemente, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Dr. Atl, Roberto Montenegro, Jean Charlot, Xavier Guererro and many others. You can divide the murals of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros during the 1920’s into two groups. The first group consists of works commissioned by Vasconcelos and completed before the end of his term of office in 1924, which seem to reflect the ideological and aesthetic structure of his own particular philosophical vision. The second group, are works – some of which were commissioned by Vasconcelos– with themes and styles that moved away from his vision towards a more overtly moralistic, political and accessible art, with which the Mexican mural movement has come to be known for.

The Mexican muralists began to align themselves closer to labor and Marxist undertones. The works began to influence artist in the United States and coincided with the idea of social realism. An artistic movement spawned in the 1930’s was visual arts such as paintings and photography which depicted social and racial injustice as well as, economic hardship, through unvarnished pictures of life's struggles. Many times these visual arts depicted working class activities as heroic. The murals and painting style of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros and other Mexican Muralists became en vogue in the United States and inspired many young artists.

In the book *Radical Art: Printmaking and the Left in 1930’s New York*, Helen Langa states, “artists who wished to combine modernist styles with radical social viewpoints themes found few models among leading contemporary artists. Two important exceptions were the Mexican muralists Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who along with Diego Rivera were often referred to as “Los Tres Grandes” by American art critics and Journalists.” (Langa p. 61)

Many American artists during the 1930’s involved in the Federal Arts Project were heavily influenced by Mexican muralism. Some of them even got the chance to study under Rivera,
Orozco and Siqueiros. “People talked most about the Mexican “invasion” of American art. Leading Mexican muralists, such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco, worked in the United States and employed many American assistants. Most American artists considered study and travel in Mexico an essential part of their education. Among a certain artistic set, admiration of Mexican art took on something of the flavor of a religious cult. If a follower could not collaborate on a work by a Mexican master, he volunteered to grind colors or sat around the scaffolding watching the maestro. “The probable reason murals painted by Mexican artists in the United States attracted so many politically radical artist is that their work projected an especially critical view of American life – an outlook held by most leftist. Mexican – inspired murals centered in northern California, New York City, and Chicago. In San Francisco, to the delight of Mexican devotees, the FAP supplied Rivera with assistants for a mural in local college.” (McKinzie p. 108) One such student was Pablo O’Higgins who studied under Diego Rivera. O'Higgins immigrated to Mexico permanently in 1924, and like Rivera became an active member of the Mexican Communist Party. His mural "Struggle Against Racial Discrimination" is installed in Kane Hall at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Spurred by the political unrest within Mexico a decade prior Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros’ use of public art/murals full iconographical imagery of the militant protester, the heroic laborer, and horrific images of injustice, would set the stage for social realism art in the United States suffering during the period of the great depression as well as racial inequalities.

Today in Los Angeles the mural movement flourishes. Muralist groups such as SPARC with Judy Baca and the East Los Streetscapers with Wayne Healy. Young muralists are rising as well
such as Wenceslao Quiroz, Raul Gonzalez, Josue Bustos, and Erica Friend. LA muralists are taking the style and political power of the murals and applying it to today’s issues and community.

In November of 2011 ten muralists from Los Angeles ventured to Guanajuato Mexico to paint 2 murals for El Buen Pastor. El Buen Pastor is a convent which houses young foster girls that range in age from about 5 years old to about 17 years old. While in Guanajuato the artists led by Wenceslao Quiroz and included myself, painted two murals (one interior and one exterior). The artists designed drawings, paintings, photography and stenciling workshops for the young girls who also assisted in the painting of the interior mural. For the exterior mural the artists employed the assistance of the community of Guanajuato. The mural was broken up into 4 panels. Two were placed next to the artists hostel and the other two were placed at El Buen Pastor. The community was invited to help paint the murals that were pre-drawn by the artists. Paint, brushes and towels were supplied as the community of Guanajuato, children, parents, the elderly and college students helped paint in the mural. For the next two weeks the artists tirelessly worked on the murals, using the influence and style of the Mexican Muralists.

SOCIAL REALISM, WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION, FEDERAL ARTS PROJECT AND THE ART OF THE 1930’S

The Works Progress Administration was created by the order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as part of New Deal in 1935. According to www.wpamurals.com under the Federal Arts Project which was under the WPA, opened 5,000 jobs for artists and produced over 225,000 works of art for the American people. Many of these works focused on social justice, racial injustice and worker’s rights. Many of the murals created by WPA artists were painted in public
building like post offices and government offices. These works spawned the Social Realism
movement which was a reaction against idealism and Romanticism. This artistic movement that
sympathized with the working class and poor would later be a huge influence on Chicano
Movement art.

FAP was established in 1935 with the WPA and by 1936 had established regional offices
across the nation. “Fifty percent of the FAP workers were directly engaged in creating
works of art, while 10 to 25 percent worked in art education; the rest worked in art research.
By 1938, 42,000 easel paintings and 1,100 murals in public buildings were
commissioned. Large numbers of sculptures, silk-screen prints, posters, and other graphic
works were also made, and the FAP frequently worked in cooperation with the
Federal Writers Project to design covers and

![3. The Lord Provides by Jacob Burck](image)

illustrations for its publications.” (Findlay p. 8)

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a depression area program to employ the
nations unemployed who were able to work but could not find jobs. According to authors
Findlay and Bing, the WPA eventually employed approximately one-third of the nation’s
10,000,000 unemployed, paying them about $50.00 a month. While other programs like Federal
One assisted white collar workers, the WPA assisted in getting artists and professionals employment. It consisted of programs such as Federal Art Project (FAP), Federal Music Project (FMP), Federal Theatre Project (FTP), the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), and the Historical Records Survey (HRS).

Much of the work put out by the WPA and artists in the 1930’s were heavy in social realism or social viewpoint. Helen Langa stated in her book Racial Art that while the term social realism is commonly used today to describe the works that portrayed laborers, militant protesters, and victims as the heroic, at the time the term was not used. Instead she used the term social viewpoint since at the time it was utilized by leftist artists. According to Langa between 1940 and 1970, historians dismissed the art of the 1930’s stating it was a “decade dominated by both unimaginative realist styles and propagandistic imagery.” (Langa p.5) It would not be until the 1970’s that historians began to revisit the art of the 1930’s. This is when the term social realism began to become popular since it distinguished “socially critical” art from Urban Scene and Regionalist works which was seen to lack the political gusto. Today in most cases the common term is social realism and that is the term I chose to use in this study. Social realism is a term to describe art work which chronicles conditions of the working class and poor. It grew in popularity in the depression era of the 1930’s. Social Realism shows the working class and poor as the heroic. President Roosevelt hired Social Realist artists to promote his social programs. This idea was taken from Mexico’s use of artists during its post Mexican Revolution era.

To understand the body of work produced by the Mexican muralists, the WPA artists and other social realist artists of the time, one must also understand the political, cultural and social contexts in which they were produced. Due in large part to the economic crisis of the 1930’s
many artists were drawn to social realism art and leftist political imagery. The ideals of solidarity, worker’s rights and revolting against repressive powers were very strong especially amongst artists and writers. As WPA-FAP artist Mabel Dwight states “Art has turned militant. It forms unions, carries banners, sits down uninvited, and gets underfoot. Social justice is its battle cry. War, dictators, labor troubles, housing problems all appear on canvas and paper.” (Langa p.10) These same ideals, virtues and political crisis would later fuel a new generation of artists in the 1960’s and 1970’s fighting for racial and gender equality, social justice and the end to a war.

Today you can see the influence of Social Realist artists in much of the Arizona protest art. You can see it in the propaganda style posters, the works of Favianna Rodriquez, Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes. My personal work is highly influenced by Social Realism and social realists artists. My work employs the style and esthetic of the social realist artists such as Grant Wood, Jacob Lawrence and Frida Kahlo. I try to paint the everyday unpolished world, warts and all, showing the working class as the heroic. In my series Norman Rockwell in post racial America I take Rockwell’s images and reinterpret them in a contemporary view chronicling the everyday Latinos and the working class and poor as the heroic, from the depiction of the Chicana student to Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayer as the role model of a young girl.

Social Realism has also influenced my view of art for the people and the importance of after school art programs, public mural projects, and using art as a means of self-expression for people of all ages.
ART OF THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

“A Chicano is a Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of himself” Ruben Salazar

Like the era of the Mexican muralists and the Social realists of the 1930’s, the art of the Chicano Movement was born out of political and social turmoil. The art was an expression of not only political and social strife but also about cultural survival. Chicano art was more than Mexican American art; it aligned itself with the greater Chicano Movement or El Movimiento. As stated by Judy Baca in the book, Just Another Poster, “Chicano art comes from the creation of community. In a society that does not affirm your culture or your experience Chicano art is making visible our own reality, a particular reality – by doing so we become an irritant to the mainstream vision. We have a tradition of resisting being viewed as the other; an unwillingness to disappear…” (Noriega p. 7) The art produced during the Chicano movement positioned itself between the influence of the Mexican muralists and Social realist artists. It is the driving influence in today’s contemporary subversive Chicano art. Chicano Movement art served as a mortar that bridged the gap of revolutionary/protest art. According to Carlos Francisco Jackson author of Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtesArte, the mural and poster

4. Who's the illegal alien Pilgrim? by Yolanda Lopez
were two key art forms adopted by Chicano artists because of their unique ability to reach audiences outside of traditional art venues such as galleries and museums. This alludes to the influence of the Mexican muralists and also the great Mexican print tradition of Jose Guadalupe Posada of the late 1800’s and the Taller de Grafica Popular founded in 1937. I feel that the Taller de Grafica Popular was very crucial in bridging the gap between the Mexican muralists and the Civil Rights/Chicano Movement artists. The Taller de Grafica Popular (TGP) was an artist print collective located in Mexico City. Founded by Leopoldo Mendez, the collective included artists such as Pablo O’Higgins. O’Higgins was first employed by the WPA then later worked under Diego Rivera. During the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the TGP became inspirational to many politically active leftist artists; who would produce work at the TGP and go on to found similar artist collectives in the United States. Jackson also discusses the influence of the WPA on Chicano artists. He mentions that US government-sponsored art programs during and after the Great Depression were influenced by the Mexican Mural movement and later influenced Chicano artists…creating ‘cultural democracy’ was similarly an intention of artists during the Chicano movement.

According to Shifra Goldman and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, the Chicano Movement grew out of the farm workers struggle, the land rights battle in New Mexico and the urban working class of the Southwest. In the cities with high Chicano populations there were issues of police brutality, violations of civil rights, low paying jobs, drug abuse, gang warfare, inadequate housing and social services, and lack of political power as well as inadequate and irrelevant education that tracked most Chicano kids into trades rather than college.
The Chicano art movement came into fruition in the late 1960’s with the Chicano Movement and has spanned generations. The art work seemed to resonate with themes such as self-determination, revered ancestry, and social justice regardless of the generation that produced it. The social context drove the Chicano art movement which included; the civil rights, the Cuban revolution, the farmworkers movement, the Vietnam War protest movement, American Indian Movement/Chicano Neo-indigenismo, Feminism and Education. According to Sarah Hymes in her dissertation, The Construction of Identity in Post-Chicano Art, “Inextricably linked to politics and social reform, Chicano art arose to fulfill a specific need. Its origins can be traced to the Chicano movement, also known as el Movimiento, an outgrowth of the larger Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s. Whereas the Civil Rights movement enjoyed national visibility and impact, the Chicano movement was more specifically confined to parts of the country with large populations of Mexican Americans particularly the American Southwest, including California and Texas.” (Hymes p.4)

As part of “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan” (a manifesto written in 1969, which advocated Chicano nationalism and self-determination). Chicano Artists refused to “succumb to commercialism”. According to Carlos Francisco Jackson, “They (Chicano/Chicana artists) explicitly stated that Chicano art would not be created for “tourists” or as an “ornament to please the gringo”. Chicano Artists of the 1960’s were concerned with the functionality of art and the mass reproduction for the sake of social justice much like WPA artists and the Taller de Gráfica Popular of Mexico. The Taller de Gráfica Popular, as mentioned previously was an artist’s print collective founded in 1937 by Leopoldo Mendez, Pablo O'Higgins, and Luis Arenal. The TGP was primarily concerned with using art to advance revolutionary social causes. To the artists of the Chicano movement silkscreen prints became a vital part of the dissemination of artistic information.
Another important aspect of Chicano Art was the mural. According to Carlos Francisco Jackson, “Artists, especially Chicanos/Chicanas, during the U.S. political upheaval of the 1960’s and 1970’s, would look to Los Tres Grandes for a blueprint of how to create culturally and politically empowering public art.” (Jackson p 46) Popularized by the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s and 1930’s, Chicano artists began to put their own spin on the art form.

A large portion of the literature on Chicano art tries to leave the interpretations of the art to the reader making them an active participant in the evaluation of the work. A few books such as CARA (*Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*) and *Just Another Poster?: Chicano Graphic Arts in California* did include essays that discussed not only the art but the historical and cultural context in which the art work was created in. Both of these books are written as literary companions to traveling art exhibits. Both books also deeply examine the works included as well as a contextual analysis.

*Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* is full of amazing images of Chicano poster art. The book examines the role Chicano poster art has played in the struggle for affirmation in the US and especially California. The book is a companion piece to the traveling exhibit hosted frist at the University of California, Santa Barbara. According to Marla C. Berns the exhibit and book investigates the critical role posters and other graphic materials played in the Chicano struggle for self-determination in California. Like Just Another Poster, *Cara: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* is a companion book to an exhibition that ran from 1990 to 1993 during which time it passed through ten cities including, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Denver, and Tucson. Along with the amazing images of Chicano poster art, the book examines the role of Chicano poster art in the struggle for affirmation in the US and especially
California. The book includes essays from Jose Montoya, George Lipsitz, Tere Romo, Holly Barnet-Sanchez, Rafael Perez-Torres, Carol A. Wells and an introduction by Chon Noriega. Many of the concepts and ideologies discussed in the book also drive my art, ideas of working class struggle, social justice and self-determination. This is part of the thread that connects Mexican muralists to social realists; social realists to civil rights/Chicano movement artists, to civil rights/Chicano movement to work myself and other political contemporary artists are producing.

Amongst artists of the Chicano Movement there is a strong influence of social realist artists of the 1930’s. Many artists such as Emigdio Vasquez describe their work as social realism. According to California State University, Fullerton’s Department of Visual Arts website, Vasquez’ work is described as “In a style described as ‘social realism,’ Vasquez’s portrait, urban landscape and still life paintings all give voice to the struggles of the working class and the undeniable fortitude of the Latino culture throughout the decades.” On the Mark Vallen’s Website, Art For a Change his biography states “he was influenced by the great African American social realist, Charles White.” Chicano artists during the movement did not simply replicate the art of the Mexican Muralist and the Social realist artists but used these influences as a spring board to their unique style. According to the book Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlan by Edward J. McCaughan, the projection of a social movement’s identity and agenda through art clearly includes formal and other aesthetic considerations as well as subject matter. Mexican and Chicano movement artists from the 1960’s can draw upon a variety of influential art movements, including the Mexican School’s social realism, North American abstract expressionism and newer international, postmodernist trends. The stylistic and formal choices made by the artists were politically loaded.
Driven by self-determination and a struggle for identity, Chicano movement artists formed new paths using the influences of their Mexican Muralists roots and their social realist surroundings thus reinterpreting their own new reality.

I see the spirit of the Civil Rights and Chicana/o movement alive in the fight for equality of the Dreamers movement and the fight against anti-immigrant fervor. The Dreamers movement is a student led movement fighting for equal rights of undocumented students. Artists such as Julio Salgado and Favianna Rodriguez lead the Dreamer art movement. You can see the influence of the Chicano Movement in their silk screen posters and the style of their art work as well as their fight for social justice.

A NEW WAVE OF CHICANA/O ARTISTS

Street Art and Chicano Political art are similar and different at the same time. Chicano Artists may be participants in the larger street art movement but what sets them apart is the focus of their work. Both are concerned with public space, both contemporary Chicano political art and street art are influenced by Mexican Muralism, Social Realism and current political issues, however Chicano political art has a culture, a history, a legacy and a genetic memory other artists do not have. Chicano Political art is more than a discussion of space and control but an intimate discussion of culture, resistance and affirmation to the residing community. According to Hugh M. Davies, PhD in the book Viva la Revolucion , speaking on street artists, suggests there is a lineage and connection to Mexican muralistas, including the sharply political visual commentary expressed by many artists.

I have been fascinated by artists such as Shepard Fairey, Ernesto Yerena, Ron English, Lady Pink, or Vyal Reyes. Rather than focus on one figure to represent all street art I chose to focus
on the street art movement and what it says about public space and ownership. One artist that is getting a lot of publicity is London’s own, Banksy. The true identity of Banksy is unconfirmed but to me what stands out is his ability to mesh political activism, dark humor and stencil style graffiti. One source used on street art is the film Bomb It released in 2008. Bomb It is a street art video documentary by Jon Reiss. The film starts with the man they claim started graffiti, “Corn Bread” out of Philadelphia. From there, the film moves to Taki 183 and the rise of the New York scene. It then transitions across the Atlantic to Paris to introduce us to artist Blek le Rat who began using stencils of rats throughout the city. From there we travel through Holland, Hamburg, London, Berlin, Barcelona, Capetown, Sao Paulo, and Tokyo. After the world tour the film returns to the US and Los Angeles. When the film interviews street artist Shepard Fairey, the discussion switches to billboards, “visual pollution” and who controls public space.

Race and class is a major difference between street art documentaries, Exit Through the Gift Shop and Bomb It. In 2010, Banksy released the critically acclaimed documentary film entitled Exit Through the Gift Shop. The film is meant to be about Banksy and the street art movement but it ultimately ends up becoming a film about the documentarian Thierry Guetta who has dedicated his life to filming street artists such as his cousin Space Invader and Shepard Fairey. After Thierry finally begins filming and working with Banksy he is asked to create the film from the boxes and boxes of tapes Thierry has already filmed. When Thierry gives him a “bad film”, Banksy takes over and asks Thierry to go create art and put on a small show in the meantime. Guetta does, and creates his Mr. Brainwash persona. He organizes a grand exhibition of his work (mostly created by hired help) and makes millions of dollars selling his artwork. “Mr. Brainwash” ultimately becomes a watered down version of Shepard Fairey and Banksy. Since
his work also is met with incredible commercial success, the joke seems to be on the art scene. There are rumors that the film is a hoax perpetuated by Banksy and Fairey but it is unconfirmed. If this is the case I really don’t know who the joke is on.

*Exit Through the Gift Shop* is virtually devoid of people of color while the artists interviewed in *Bomb It* seem to be working class people of color. It also takes a more international view of street art. *Bomb It* also seems to spend more time discussing how street art is viewed differently in different countries and the variations of criminalization of artists. For example in London they take a very hard stand against graffiti and have cameras all over the city. In Cape Town graffiti is less about tagging and more of a political tool by guerillas against apartheid.

Probably the two biggest names in street art are Obey (Shepard Fairey) and Banksy. Each, Obey and Banksy have published books on their work. The book, *Obey: E Pluribus Venom* is basically a companion piece for the Shepard Fairey E Pluribus Venom Art Shows that took place in Brooklyn and Chelsea in June 2007. Shepard Fairey in the introduction discusses the art show, why he chose New York as the setting, some of his influences and the growing street art movement. There is a section by Sarah Jaye Williams which discusses more who Shepard Fairey is and why he and his art show are important to the street art movement and popular culture. The last written section is by Jonathan Levine who hosted the art shows. Levine talks more about the logistics of the shows.

There are very few words in the book *Wall and Piece*, by famed street artist Banksy but the few words are very poignant. In his book, Banksy defends street art and the artist. He rails against the criminalization of street and graffiti art and the visual pollution of advertising stating, “the people who truly deface our neighborhoods are the companies that scrawl giant slogans across
buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. They expect to be able to shout their message in your face from every available surface but you’re never allowed to answer back. Well, they started the fight and the wall is the weapon of choice to hit them back.” The book is about 99% images of Banksy’s graffiti work, sculptures, paintings and installations. There are a couple short stories and explanations of art pieces. Banksy shows a very sophisticated, thought provoking and many times flat out hilarious way of looking at the world and they ways we look at public space, criminalization of art and the ways we react and respond to one another.

Contemporary Chicana/o artists are grappling with many issues and find themselves in a formidable time. The Chicano/Latino community is at the center of the immigration debate and finds themselves the scapegoats of an economic recession. In Arizona the Chicano community is fighting attacks towards the preservation of culture and history. Urban artists find themselves fighting the limits of “public space” and against those who are using the economic and political power to truly access this space. When Street art merged with the Chicano community, muralism, social realism, questioning of public space, attacks on Chicano culture and history, urbanization, and a growing anti-immigrant sentiment, it created a new wave of Chicana/o political artists. Leading this charge are artists such as Favianna Rodriguez, Melanie Cervantez, Jesus Barraza, Ernesto Yerena Montejano, Wenceslao Quiroz, Rage One, John Carlos de Luna, Vyal, Shizu Salamando, Raul Gonzalez, Raul Herrera and Julio Salgado.
For Example Bay Area artist Favianna Rodriguez’ work deals with issues such as war, immigration, women’s rights, and social movements. Favianna has toured the world lecturing and presenting art in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Providence Rhode Island, Austin, Rome, Tokyo, England, Belgium, Cuba and Mexico. Favianna Rodriguez has also co-founded the Taller Tupac Amaru printing studio to foster resurgence in the screen-printing medium. She is co-founder of the EastSide Arts Alliance (ESAA) and Visual Element, both programs dedicated to training young artists in the tradition of muralism. She is additionally co-founder and president of Tumis Inc., a bilingual design studio helping to integrate art with emerging technologies. Favianna Rodriguez is also one of the first artists to tap into the digital art age and offer royalty-free images, inspiring a new wave of free-share artists.

Chicano political art has adapted to its environment. For example, sprawling Los Angeles became the mural capital of the world due in part to its driving culture and plentiful walls available. The public walls became the medium in which to paint the message of the people rather than inside government buildings. In Northern California in the Bay Area, print making became the means in which to disseminate information due to the lack of wall space and the
denseness of the population. Instead of painting on the sides of freeways the movement was posted in windows for pedestrian traffic to absorb.

Like the greater street art movement, Chicano political art is a response to ideas of public space and who controls it, for example the recent fights against the City of Los Angeles mural moratorium lead by the local muralist community. But Chicano political art is more than a fight to be able to create art, it is an intimate discussion with the Chicano community, it is a battle cry sprayed on walls, and it is our response to immigrant bashing and cultural destruction silkscreened on thousands of pieces of paper. It is about genetic memory; using the tools and spirit of our ancestors to create new forms of love notes to our descendants and community. In essence Chicano political art is a thank you to our elders, a commitment to our community and a promise to our children.
METHODS

For my thesis I will be doing the creative project option. I will be conducting a qualitative research which will be advantageous to the subject matter. The research project will be conducted through art based inquiry and discourse analysis. I will focus on four eras of political art have been very influential to me and my art work:

1. Mexican Muralism
2. Works Progress Administration and Social Realism
3. The Art of the Chicano Movement
4. A New Wave of Chicana/o Artists and Street Art

From these eras I will select some key pieces to deconstruct and do a contextual analysis. The goal of the discourse analysis is to better understand the aesthetics and work done by the artists as well as the themes, the ideas, the criticism to use as a framework to contextualize my own work. For the arts based inquiry I will look at how we as a society relate to the art work and focus on my art work as a primary means of inquiry.

It is said a picture is worth a thousand words. Researchers Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner have stated that Arts Based inquiry has limitless possibilities of utilizing non-linguistic forms of representation. According to Barone and Eisner arts based inquiry “possesses certain characteristics that draw primarily from the arts and humanities rather than science. Perhaps most central to this approach is the explicit use of aesthetic qualities in both the inquiry itself and the presentation of the research.” They also point to the seven design elements:

1. The creation of a virtual reality
2. The presence of ambiguity
3. The use of expressive language
4. The use of contextualized and vernacular language
5. The promotion of empathy
6. Personal signature of the researcher/writer
7. The presence of aesthetic form.

Through the utilization of art based inquiry, my exhibit of art work will show that art can make important scholarly contributions to the body of knowledge of Chicano social justice, and that an art project as a thesis is as valid a method as of research and is also another form of research. I will look at how scholars value knowledge and data and how many scholars can over value data, statistics and numbers and other forms of knowledge and the ways of generating that knowledge. Art based inquiry is a way to use the art form to inform. I feel that this first hand approach allows me to better understand and relate to the other artists and the greater context of which art is born. It also allows me to better comprehend my art, the process of creating the art as well as contextualizing the accompanying art exhibit for my thesis project. I also feel that the exhibit will bring people closer to the subject matter engaging them in the conversation and encouraging their own discourse and participation thus making the viewer an active participant.

Discourse analysis is a methodological approach to analyze written, spoken, signed language or simply an approach to study texts. According to Rosalind Gill, Professor of Social Psychology and Cultural Theory, Discourse Analysis has 4 themes conveyed in the research:

1. Concerned with what people are saying
2. What people say as a construction of language and to construct versions of their experiences.

3. Verbal expression as a form of action

4. Looking at texts literally

The goal of using discourse analysis in my thesis is to better understand the aesthetics and work done during the four eras I have chosen as well as the themes, the ideas, the criticism to use as a framework to contextualize my own work. Discourse Analysis has the tendency to devote more attention to the notion of discourse through various kinds of images and verbal texts than it does to the practices involved by specific discourses. By better understanding the relevance of Mexican muralism, Social Realism, Chicano movement art and contemporary political art I can better understand the relevance of my own work. An objective of the contextual analysis of the four eras is to look at how environment affects the artwork, for example, in a museum gallery, on screen printed, sprayed on a wall or distributed online.
There are five areas chosen to delve into that highly influenced my body of work and much of the art working being done by my contemporaries. Those areas that I chose to focus on are:

1. Mexican Muralism
2. Social Realism and the Works Progress Administration
3. The Chicano Art Movement
4. A New Wave of Chicana/o Artists and Street Art

In my opinion, to comprehend and truly understand what I am trying to say and what I am creating as an artist, you must understand my influences and what happened before me.

MEXICAN MURALISTS

In November 2011, myself and ten artists from the Los Angeles area traveled to Guanajuato Mexico to paint two murals. While in Guanajuato the artists designed workshops on drawing, paintings, photography and stenciling for local children. Never had I felt so connected to artists such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco. I truly felt I was painting for the masses and not for a gallery or studio. For the exterior mural we employed the assistance of the community of Guanajuato. The mural was broken up into 4 panels. Two were placed next to the artists hostel and the other two were placed at El Buen Pastor. The community was invited to help paint the murals that were pre-drawn by the artists. Paint, brushes and towels were supplied as the community of Guanajuato, children, parents, the elderly and college students helped paint on the mural. For the next two weeks we tirelessly worked on the murals, using the influence and style of the Mexican Muralists. I feel this experience illustrated a thread of connectedness of artists, almost a lineage. There is a connection between the Mexican
Muralists and the Social Realists, a connection between the Social Realists and the Civil Rights/Chicano Movement artists, a connection between the Civil Rights/Chicano Movement artists and the contemporary street artists and new wave Chicano artists.

While the Mexican Mural Movement largely took place in the 1920’s and 1930’s and included many artists, I am going to focus on “Los Tres Grandes”, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Jose Clemente Orozco. I also chose to start on this area because if puts us firmly in the 20th century and comes from a very politically turbulent area in which Mexican artists seemed to be leading the way. The influence of the movement and the artists are undeniable and unmistakable. In Los Angeles you can see the residual inspiration on the walls of local markets and on the sides of freeway walls. The Los Angeles murals of today much like those done by Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco are rich in story, symbolism, history and color.

Many of the Mexican muralists were educated by Dr. Atl who taught at the Academy of San Carlos. Dr. Atl philosophy contradicted the studio to commercial galleries and believed in bringing art to the masses. Dr. Atl was also very keen on the reviving the old Italian fresco style painting. The mural movement took off when Jose Vasconcelos was appointed Secretary of Public Education during the reconstruction period after the Mexican revolution. Enlisting the help of artists, Vasconcelos worked on creating a united post revolution Mexico. Artists were commissioned by local governments to cover the walls of official institutions such as Mexico’s schools, ministerial buildings, churches and museums. Much of the early work focused on indigenismo for inspiration and later largely focused on labor and leftist ideologies. While Mexican muralism is generally considered as an artistic movement it is also clearly a social and political movement as well. Artists such as Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco used large scale and
highly visible murals as a vehicle to promote their beliefs in social reform and political activism. This spirit is alive today in artists who view art as a tool for social reform. This is also seen in Dr. Atl’s philosophy of out of the galleries and to the masses.

Spurred by the political unrest within Mexico a decade prior Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros’ use of public art/murals full iconographical imagery of the militant protester, the heroic laborer, and horrific images of injustice, would set the stage for social realism art in the United States suffering from the great depression and racial inequalities. Like the murals created in Mexico in this area many of the murals in Los Angeles show a reverence of the past with a path to the future and prosperity.

One of the biggest influences the Mexican Mural Movement would have was with artists in the United States during the great depression. Led by the Franklin D Roosevelt and his “New Deal”, a newly developed program under the Works Progress Administration called the Federal Arts Program put artists to work like in Mexico previously, creating art in public buildings, post offices and government offices. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros were seen as cultural heroes in the United States, especially by cultural workers involved in creating art during the periods of social and political turmoil. These inspired artists created a new genre of art later called Social Realism.
Many artists employed under the Federal Arts Project created a counter art form, which was a reaction against idealism and romanticism, during the depression area of the 1930’s in the United States. This was a time of great economic strife which led to many artists molding the sentiment of the day into a new genre of art. These works spawned the Social Realism movement, in the 1930’s, where visual art, paintings and photography depicted social and racial injustice and, economic hardship, through unvarnished pictures of life’s struggles; many times depicting working class activities as heroic. This would later be a huge influence on Civil Rights art and Chicano Movement art.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a depression area program to employ the nations unemployed who were able to work but could not find jobs. It consisted of programs such as Federal Art Project (FAP), Federal Music Project (FMP), Federal Theatre Project (FTP), The Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), and the Historical Records Survey (HRS). My focus in this paper is on the Federal Arts Project.

Coined later in the 1970’s, Social Realism became popular when historians began to revisit the art of the 30’s. Social realism is a term to describe art work which chronicles conditions of the working class and poor. It grew in popularity in the depression era of the 1930’s. Social Realism shows the working class and poor as the heroic. President Roosevelt hired Social Realist artists to promote his social programs, an idea taken from Mexico’s use of artists during its post Mexican Revolution era. Due in large part to the economic crisis of the 1930’s many artists
were drawn to social realism art and leftist political imagery. The ideals of solidarity, worker’s rights and revolting against repressive powers were very strong especially amongst artists, and writers of the time.

These same ideals, virtues and political crisis would later fuel a new generation of artists in the 1960’s and 1970’s fighting for racial and gender equality, social justice and the end to a war.
Like the era of the Mexican muralists and the Social realists of the 1930’s, the art of the Chicano movement was born out of political and social turmoil. The art was an expression of not only political and social strife but also about cultural survival. Chicano art was more than Mexican American art, it aligned itself with the greater Chicano movement or El Movimiento. The art produced during the Chicano movement positioned itself between the influence of the Mexican muralists and Social realist artists and is the driving influence in today’s contemporary subversive Chicano art. Chicano Movement art served as a mortar that bridged the gap of revolutionary/protest art. If Mexican Muralism and Social Realism were the grandfathers of new wave Chicano artists of today, then Chicano Movement art was our mother.

The Chicano art movement came into fruition in the late 1960’s as part of the Chicano Movement. The art work resonated with themes of self-determination, revered ancestry, and social justice. The social context that drove the Chicano art movement included topics such as; the civil rights, the Cuban revolution, the farmworkers movement, the Vietnam War protest movement, American Indian Movement/Chicano Neo-indigenismo, Feminism and Education.

Printmaking and murals were important aspects of Chicano Movement art. Artists were directly influenced by the works of the Mexican muralists and the Social realists and carried the ideal that the artist is a participant in the fight for social justice and that art should be brought to the masses. What better way of bringing art to the masses than large scale paintings in public spaces and highly reproduced prints?
Driven by self-determination and a struggle for identity, Chicano movement artists formed new paths using the influences of their Mexican Muralists roots and their social realist surroundings thus redefining into their own new reality.

I see the spirit of the Civil Rights and Chicana/o movement alive in the fight for equality of the Dreamers movement and the fight against anti-immigrant fervor. The Dreamers movement is a student led movement fighting for equal rights of undocumented students. Artists such as Julio Salgado and Favianna Rodriguez lead the Dreamer art movement. You can see the influence of the Chicano Movement in their silk screen posters and the style of their art work as well as their fight for social justice.
Initially I wanted to talk about street art and contemporary Chicano political art as separate pieces. Ultimately I chose to combine the sections. Street art and Chicano political art are both the same and different. Chicano artists may be participants in the larger street art movement but what sets them apart is their focus of work. Both are concerned with public space, both contemporary Chicano political art and street art are influenced by Mexican Muralism, but at times street art can be very apolitical. Chicano political artists carry more of the thread of influence from Social Realism and current political issues but also Chicano political art has a culture, a history, a legacy and a genetic memory other artists do not have. Chicano Political art is more than a discussion of space and control but an intimate discussion of culture, resistance and affirmation to the residing community.

Contemporary Chicana/o artists are grappling with many issues and find themselves in a formidable time. The Chicano/Latino community is at the center of the immigration debate and finds themselves the scapegoats of an economic recession. In Arizona the Chicano community is fighting vicious attacks against the preservation of their culture and history. While urban artists find themselves fighting the limits of “public space” and who is using the economic and political power to truly access this space. When Street art merged with the Chicano community, muralism, social realism, critiques of public space, attacks on Chicano culture and history, urbanization and a growing anti-immigrant sentiment, created a new wave of Chicana/o political artists.
“Kill Bill 1070” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez. 2010
The Kill Bill 1070 poster was in response to Arizona’s anti-immigrant SB1070 which was passed by Arizona voters in 2010. The satirical poster is a spin on the Quentin Tarantino film Kill Bill movie poster. The idea was to have an image of a Chicana with the text 1070 added to the Kill Bill logo, so instead of Killing “Bill” a person it is alluding to Kill the State “Bill” 1070. I used my wife Esbeydy Cruz de Prendez as the Chicana photoshopped in the poster. The poster also states Boycott Arizona in reference to the boycott called by Congressman Raul M. Grijalva. I also added the tag line “Being Brown is Not a Crime” A mantra I personally coined and have used in several posters.
“They came first for the ‘illegal immigrants’, and I didn’t speak up because I was born here.

Then they came for the ‘ethnic studies programs’, and I didn’t speak up because I was a business major.

Then they came for the ‘heavily accented’ teachers’, and I didn’t speak up because I had no accent.

Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak up.”

Being Brown is Not a Crime

“First They Came…” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez and Lalo Alcaraz. 2010
The “First They Came…” poster was a satirical spin on an old Nazi propaganda poster. The poster was also a collaboration piece with Lalo Alcaraz and myself. The original poster depicts a soldier holding a Nazi flag. I changed the Nazi flag to an Arizona state flag. I also added updated interpretation of the famous statement by Pastor Martin Niemöller in reference to the holocaust but reinterpreted by Lalo Alcaraz to refer to the oppression of immigrants in the US and especially Arizona. I usually don’t like to use Nazi references because not many people can really live up to the Nazi’s reputation for terror but I used this Nazi reference more as a reference to propaganda and brain washing and that the state of Arizona has really become a police state. Many people are uneducated on the issue of immigration as well as the plight of immigrants and have been force fed anti-immigrant propaganda by political pundits and politicians in order divert attention to issues that are really hurting our country and our economy. At the bottom I posted again my slogan “Being Brown is Not a Crime”.
“Arizona Keepin’ It Real…Racist” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez. 2010
The Arizona Keepin’ it Real…Racist” poster was my first Arizona protest poster after the passing of SB1070 in Arizona. It is another satirical look at the racism that I feel was driving Arizona’s legislation. The poster depicts a hooded Ku Klux Klan member in a classic hip hop pose with gold chain with the word Arizona at the top and the slogan “Keepin’ in Real…Racist” which is a play on the slang term Keepin’ it Real. The background is in the silhouette of the state of Arizona with an old photo of a large group of Mexican-American children to show Mexican historical roots in the United States. At the bottom of the poster are the tag lines “stop SB1070” and my slogan “Being Brown is Not a Crime”. The poster was created using photoshop.
“You: Have the Power to Stop Hate” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez. 2010
You: Have the Power to Stop Hate took at different approach to the anti-immigrant debate. This poster was not satirical nor did it use the Being Brown is Not a Crime tagline. This was a more straight forward and sleeker designed poster. It also includes the No HB2281 on the poster which was the House Bill to end Raza Studies in public schools. I started off with a photo shoot with model Sonia Salazar who also posed for the Sonia Salazar in College painting. She is positioned the “Uncle Sam: I Want You” stance pointing at the viewer, with her piercing stare telling them that they have the power to stop hate.

On top of the anti-immigrant SB1070, Arizonians especially those living in the Tucson area now had to deal with the eradication of Raza Studies spearheaded by School Superintendent Tom Horne. Even though studies show that students who took Raza Studies outperformed their counterparts, Tom Horne and other politicians viewed Raza Studies as seditious teaching and indoctrination. Personally I feel the bill extremely xenophobic, racist and denies all students the opportunity to delve into the richness of Chicano/Latino history and culture.

The poster was created on Adobe Photoshop and Graphic designer and fellow Art Jammer Edmundo Duran was brought in to sharpen up the image.
“Wicked Witch of the Southwest” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez 2010
During the debate over SB1070 in Arizona, Governor Jan Brewer became in a way the poster child for the anti-immigrant fervor along with Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Governor Jan Brewer was a major supporter of SB1070 which empowered police officers to stop and interrogate any individual on their citizenship status and make it a crime to be an undocumented person in Arizona. The poster took a satirical look at Jan Brewer and compared her to the Wicked Witch of the West. La Bruja in Spanish means the witch so I tweaked the spelling to be closer to her name *Jan “La Brewja” Brewer* and wrote on the bottom of the poster *Wicked Witch of the Southwest*.

The image was created on Adobe Photoshop. I photoshopped Jan Brewer’s head on the body of a witch and turned her skin witchy green. I used a ghoulish font for the text and added an Arizona desert background.
“The Arizona Emperor” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez 2010
The Arizona Emperor poster was a play on a character from the Star Wars series. The poster was in response to the building hate and anti-immigrant, anti-Latino vehemence in the state of Arizona.

In the climactic scene in the movie Return of the Jedi, the Emperor in an effort to turn the hero Luke Skywalker to the “dark side” tries to get him to kill Darth Vader by stating… “Good. Use your aggressive feelings, boy. Let the hate flow through you”. The Emperor knows that if Luke Skywalker uses hate to vanquish his foe then he will have succumbed to the “dark side”.

This is where I got the idea for my poster the idea that if you use hate you have succumbed to the “dark side”. In my poster I have an image of the Emperor pointing at the viewer almost like Uncle Sam with the text “Good Arizona…Let the Hate Flow Through You”. In the background is another Arizona desert scene and at the bottom is the text “Boycott Arizona” which was called upon by Congressman Raul M. Grijalva and my tagline “Being Brown is Not a Crime”. On the sides of the text at the bottom of the poster are two Empire logos from the Star Wars movies.
“I Am A Dreamer” 18” x 12” Digital Print by Jake Prendez. 2010
The poster, *I AM A DREAMER* was inspired by students fighting for the Dream Act. The Dream Act is a legislative proposal that would give undocumented students a path to residency through either military service or through a college education. The non-partisan legislation was put together by Republican Orin Hatch and Democrat Richard Durbin. On December 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2010 a Senate filibuster blocked the bill.

Around the country brave students fighting for their right to the American dream have been organizing student organizations as a support network for undocumented students. The poster itself has a very whimsical, dreamlike background with model Gabriela Sanchez pointing at herself with her thumbs. The slogan “I AM A DREAMER” is the unifying rally call for the Dream Act students. Below the slogan is the text *SUPPORT THE DREAM ACT*. An alternative slogan was “WHO HAS TWO THUMBS AND WANTS THE DREAM ACT PASSED…THIS GIRL!” The poster was created using Adobe Photoshop.
"I Read Banned Books" 48” x 24” Acrylic and spray paint on canvas by Jake Prendez
In 2012 the Tucson Unified School District under the pressure anti-immigrant groups abolished a very popular Mexican American Studies program in their schools even after an outside audit gave the program a positive review. For good measure the school board decided to also ban books such as Rodolfo Acuna’s Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, Howard Zinn’s People’s History of the United States, Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Shakespeare’s The Tempest.

I painted “I read banned books” In response to the Tucson Unified School District’s decision. The painting was done in acrylic with spray paint used for the background. A CSU Northridge student activist Cathie Pacheco was chosen to model for the painting. I painted her holding a sign saying “I read banned books” in defiance to Arizona’s ban on our history.
“I, too have a dream” 36” x 24” acrylic and spray paint on canvas by Jake Prendez
In 2006 the pro-immigrant rallies across the country were organized across the country and attended by hundreds of thousands of people. I attended several rallies in downtown Los Angeles. During one of the rallies I took a picture of a young Latino boy holding a sign that read “I too have a dream”. It quickly became one of my favorite photos I had ever taken. The slogan “I too have a dream” alluded to the speech by the Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. I felt the slogan affectively joined the immigrant movement to the civil rights movement. The photo of the boy was also a very powerful image that I felt put a face to the immigrant rights struggle. Years later I decided turn the photo into a painting. The painting was done in acrylic with some spray paint touches. I also wanted to give it a whimsical/dreamy type background.
“Si se puede” 20” x 16” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
“Si se puede” was a re-interpretation of the “We can do it” poster created by J. Howard Miller during World War II. The original poster is often confused for Rosie the riveter but is not. Miller painted the poster as part of commissioned work in support of the War effort.

In my version the strong working woman is wearing a ski mask to show her affiliation with the Mexican insurgent group the Zapatistas. Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) is an indigenous rights group based out of Chiapas Mexico. In my painting the slogan “We can do it” is also translated into the Spanish “Si se puede”. This painting was one of my earliest works.
“Esbeydy the revolutionary” 20” x 16” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
“Esbeydy the revolutionary” was one of my first paintings and to this day one of my favorite. The painting was originally a portrait of my wife taken from a photo shoot for Puro Pedo Magazine. The colors red, black, and green are often associated with Leftist Marxist groups as well as the red star which is both behind her and in front of her on her bag. The five pointed red is suggested to represent the 5 fingers of the worker as well as the 5 continents.

I painted Esbeydy with her fist in the air with her hand dark and shadowed to look like a black glove. This was all in reference to the 1968 Olympic protest by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the winner’s podium. Both Smith and Carlos raised their gloved fist in honor of human rights and the black struggle.
“War is over” 36” x 24” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
This painting was taken from one of the most vicious images of the Vietnam War. The original photo shows Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting Vietcong operative Nguyen Van Lem in the head capturing the moment Lem is killed. I wanted to take this violent war image and re-imagine it in a peaceful anti-war painting. In my painting I show Loan sharing his music with Lem. The slogan on the painting is taken from the John Lennon song “War is over if you want it”. This was initially intended to be the first in a series of violent images re-imagined.
“Walk like an Egyptian” 20” x 16” acrylic and spray paint by Jake Prendez
In early 2011 the people of Egypt rose up in a mostly non-violent campaign of civil disobedience which include a number a marches and demonstrations. Eventually the efforts of the people led to the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The events have influenced demonstrations in other Arab countries including Yemen, Syria and Libya. The use of social media during the protest also became very important to keeping the world connected to the events.

The painting was painted in acrylic with spray paint used in the background. The slogan, “walk like an Egyptian” was taken from the popular 1980’s song by the Bangles. The title of the song was re-interpreted to mean to “walk like an Egyptian” was to be empowered. The image was taken from a photo from one of the demonstrations.
“7 Generations of genetic memory” 36” x 24” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
In 2008, I had been playing with the idea of genetic memory based off the Tezozomoc poem. When I saw a poster of a young girl holding a flower at a bus stop an idea for the painting came to me. The painting is about comparing the connection to our ancestors like a seed turning into a flower.

Many indigenous peoples did not just think of their children’s future but rather made their decisions for the seventh generation forward. In the painting the Mayan represents our ancestors holding the symbol for Xinatchli (seed). The young girl represents our youth or the seventh generation holding the symbol Xochitl (flower). In essence the seeds that our ancestors planted have bloomed into flowers with us the “seventh generation”.
“Genetic Memory: Xinatchli to Xochitl” 36” x 24” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
In 2011, I participated in a delegation with Los Angeles artists to Guanajuato Mexico to paint 2 murals and work with young girls from the Buen Pastor Shelter. While in Mexico we worked closely with the community and explored the city. I fell in love with the city, community and culture. I felt a reconnection with my Mexican roots and was inspired tremendously artistically. During my two weeks in Mexico I sketched out numerous drawings and painting ideas.

One of these sketches was a re-examination of my seven generations of genetic memory painting. In this painting I wanted a more sister to sister/mirror effect. When I returned I asked my friends Stephanie and Melanie Moreno to model for me. Melanie I painted as an indigenous ancestor holding the symbol for Xinachtli (seed) and Stephanie as the contemporary woman holding the symbol for Xochtil (flower). I also painted the ollin (movement) symbol in red white and green to show that our culture is constantly moving and never stagnant.

I also painted the two women wearing the same jade jewelry to show that our piercings, plugs and jewelry are not just fashion to us but are the things our ancestors wore. It’s about genetic memory.
"WOMAN IN THE WIND"

by Jake Prendez

“Woman in the wind” 20” x 16” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
While on my trip to Guanajuato Mexico another idea I had was to paint my friends as representations of the four elements (fire, water, earth and wind). This also ushered not only a change in style of artwork from mostly stencil style street art to more realistic, but also very cultural with more symbolism. 

The first of my 4 elements paintings, “woman in the wind” was of my friend Dorys. She became my representation of wind. This painting was a beginning of stepping out of my comfort zone and challenging myself artistically. The painting was done strictly in acrylic. It would turn out to be the most simplistic of the four paintings.
"LADY OF THE LAKE"

by Jake Prendez

“Lady of the lake” 20” x 16” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
The second of my 4 elements paintings, “Lady of the lake” was of my friend Sonia. She became my representation of water. Sonia is a very special woman who I met while working with the Chicano Youth Leadership Camp hosted by Sal Castro. She is a strong woman who works selflessly for the community and with youth. She has also been the model for several of my art pieces included “you have the power to stop hate”.

I began to become more comfortable painting in this realistic style and began to spend more time on the details. The painting was also done strictly in acrylic. I also began to incorporate symbolism. I gave Sonia a necklace with the Mayan symbol for water. I wanted all four paintings to fit well together and while the background of the first painting was in all blue tones “lady of the lake was painted in blue and green tones so that it would complement the next painting that would be a representation of earth.
"TLAZOCAMATI TONANTZIN"
by Jake Prendez

“Tlazocamati Tonantzin” 20” x 16” acrylic on canvas by Jake Prendez
The third of my 4 elements paintings was “Tlazocamati Tonanzin”. The model, Shai was actually the nurse that helped my mom when she was in the hospital with total kidney and liver failure. I was so grateful for her help that I asked her to model for my painting. Shai is also the only non-Latina in the series, she is African American. She became the perfect choice to be my representation of earth and the earth mother. The title Tlazocamati Tonazin means Thank you Mother Earth in Nahuatl the indigenous Mexican language.

This painting is also a move forward in the details and time spent on the backgrounds. The background is full of life both plant and animal. I added butterflies to represent new beginnings and a hummingbird to represent our ancestors. I also added some red highlights to the painting so that it would flow into the next painting, “ring of fire”.

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"Ring of Fire"
by Jake Prendez
The fourth of my 4 part elements painting series, “Ring of Fire” was of my friend Josie. She became my representation of fire. I feel I had come long one way in one 1 year. The portraits, detail and backgrounds all have become better.

I gave Josie a tattoo flaming sacred heart to show the burning passion of love. I gave the painting yellow, orange and red drips to give the illusion of flames. I wanted the background to have the feel of a wild fire with smoldering ashes and brunt branches. I also added a ring from the Mexica sun stone behind Josie’s head as a halo effect.
CONCLUSION

I believe that art is not innately political, nor inspiring, nor communal. Art is in the hands of its creator(s). It does what it is created to do. Art can be ornamental, decorative, passive, and a-political. In the “right” hands, art can also be a tool, a weapon, a means of social change and is mightier than the sword. Some decorative a-political art is tremendously beautiful and can evoke great emotion. My paper and research does not deal with such art. My focus was art that inspires social change, mass movements and is at its core subversive, revolutionary and speaks and belongs to the masses. The use and implementation of revolutionary and protest art can be used to mobilize communities and mass movements. I try to make my art bigger than me. I want it to be a symbol, an idea that carries power and hope. I want my art to speak to the working class and the poor. I want it to speak of social justice and equality.

My art is inspired by the progressive, social justice artists such as the Mexican Muralists, Social Realists, and the Chicano Movement artists that came before me. I hopefully can continue the lineage of influence and one day inspire that next generation of politically conscious artists.

While the creative project for this paper is an exhibition of my art work the paper is background into the historical works that have inspired and informed my own work. As you explore the history of Mexican Muralism, Social Realism, Civil Rights area art and street art you can see a thread that binds them all together, a line of influence from one leading to the next. Each has been highly influential to me, and thus created who I am and guided my paintbrush stroke by stroke.
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3. Chicano Movement Art


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   b. America Tropical by David Alfaro Siqueiros
   c. The Lord Provides by Jacob Burck
   d. Who’s the Illegal Alien Pilgrim by Yolanda Lopez
   e. Undocumented Unafraid by Favianna Rodriguez
   f. Kill Bill 1070 by Jake Prendez
   g. First They Came by Jake Prendez and Lalo Alcaraz
   h. Arizona: Keepin’ It Real Racist! by Jake Prendez
   i. You Have the Power to Stop Hate by Jake Prendez
   j. Wicked Witch of the Southwest by Jake Prendez
   k. Arizona Emperor by Jake Prendez
   l. I Read Banned Books by Jake Prendez
   m. I, Too Have a Dream by Jake Prendez
   n. Si Se Puede by Jake Prendez
   o. Esbeydy the Revolutionary by Jake Prendez
   p. War is Over by Jake Prendez
   q. Walk like an Egyptian by Jake Prendez
   r. 7 Generations of Genetic Memory by Jake Prendez
   s. Genetic Memory: Xinatchli to Xochitl by Jake Prendez
   t. Woman in the Wind by Jake Prendez
   u. Lady of the Lake by Jake Prendez
   v. Tlazocamatli Tonanzin by Jake Prendez
   w. Ring of Fire by Jake Prendez