CHICANA/O ART:
AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY THROUGH MULTICULTURAL ART EDUCATION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Art,
Art Education

By

Rochelle Fischer

December 2013
The thesis of Rochelle Fischer is approved:

Yreina D. Cervantez, MFA

Date

Lynette Henderson, Ph. D

Date

Kenneth Sakatani, Ph.D, Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge
Acknowledgements

Special Thanks to

Professor Kenneth Sakatani
Professor Yreina D. Cervantez
Professor Lynette Henderson
Professor Lesley Krane

and

to my mom, dad, and husband for their love and support throughout the years.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIGNATURE PAGE</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ART EDUCATION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE STUDY-INTERVIEW: YREINA CERVANTEZ</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEXT GENERATION OF CHICANA/O ARTISTS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

CHICANA/O ART:
AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY THROUGH MULTICULTURAL
ART EDUCATION

By
Rochelle Fischer
Master of Arts in Art, Art Education

The focus of this thesis is the relationship between Chicana/o Art and multicultural art education, which specifically addresses a growing Hispanic student population and evolving definitions of Chicana/o multicultural art and artists. The significance of this research is to examine and analyze past and contemporary Chicana/o art, artists, and their practices, which can be incorporated into a postmodern multicultural art education curriculum. The methodology used is a qualitative method that incorporates historical facts to construct a conceptual analysis of Chicana/o Art, and offers recommendations for developing multicultural art curriculum.
INTRODUCTION

The focus of this thesis is the relationship of Chicana/o art to multicultural art education. The problem of this thesis is to develop socially relevant 21st century multicultural art education practices and curriculum, which specifically address growing Hispanic student populations and evolving definitions of Chicana/o and multicultural art and artists. Using historical and theoretical sources, past and contemporary Chicana/o art, artists and their practices will be examined and analyzed for relevant characteristics, concepts and procedures that can be incorporated into a postmodern multicultural art education curriculum.

In general, multicultural education has evolved and changed over time especially in the present conditions of post-modern American culture. Yet, the struggle for cultural understanding and educational reforms, for students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, is still relevant. The need for a multicultural education is especially true for an increasing Hispanic and Mexican-American student population. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that by 2050, the Hispanic population will reach 102.6 million (U.S. Census, 2006). However, multicultural educational reforms aim to create a new consciousness that is beneficial not only to Hispanic and Mexican-American students, but also to all racial and ethnic student groups in regards to how students see one another, how others perceive them, and how multicultural educational strategies can reaffirm and empower students.

Within Hispanic communities is a sub-culture referred to as Chicana/o. The term, Chicana/o, is generally identified as a Mexican-American person who lives in the United
States, but has a strong sense of his or her ethnic and political identity. Chicanas/os have long been associated with political activism and social reform. American sociologist and historian David Montejano (1999) refers to the Chicana/o politics of immigration between the years of 1976-1986 as the evolution of Chicana/o activism through communal organization. This communal conformity and solidarity of the Chicana/o activists gave them strength to support or oppose legislative and social policies related to the Chicana/o community.

The history, evolution, and scale of contemporary Chicana/o art necessitate a re-examination of art curriculum to incorporate this perspective. The study of Chicana/o art is important to the profession of art teaching, because it creates a new outlet and space for the inclusion of otherwise marginalized art and artists. For example, Chicana/o art does not always follow the traditional Western European aesthetics of painting; as a consequence, the work might be overlooked as “outsider art” and not given the scholarly recognition it deserves. The inclusion of such artworks within the mainstream art community creates an environment in which other perspectives and practices in art can be re-examined and appreciated for their own aesthetics.

One such characteristic of Chicana/o art is the concept of reclamation, which means encouraging the retention of past knowledge. Professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, Laura Perez (2007) refers to reclamation in Chicana artworks as a healing force for personal, social, and spiritual ways of knowing that is associated with Pre-Columbian, Native American, and Mexican American histories. Perez discusses the work of Chicana artists, including Santa Contreras Barraza, Yreina D. Cervantez, and Diane Gamboa, as juxtaposing Western ideas of what it is to be Mexican in an American society with their
indigenous past. In doing so, these artists regain possession of their own identities by reclaiming their histories and reinterpreting them through their own voices; this endeavor has led to an artistic aesthetic that blends diverse cultures and traditions. As an educational process, reclamation can be understood and explained as honoring and respecting cultural differences.

In addition to the concept of reclamation, Western Washington University Art Education Professor Gaye Green (1999) advocates a socially-based pedagogy for art studio curricula, which promotes a sense of social responsibility that reflects community interests and needs. Green advocates this approach to learning because it not only cultivates students’ mastery of artistic techniques, but also it stimulates social reform, political activism, and giving back to the community. Developing socially conscious, multicultural art curriculum and best practices to teach Chicana/o art will be recommended in this study through an analysis of the history and theories of past and contemporary Chicana/o art.
METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this qualitative study will incorporate a historical and conceptual analysis of Chicana/o Art, and recommendations for developing multicultural art curriculum based on this analysis. Penn State Art Education Professor Mary Stankiewicz (1997) refers to the historical research method in art education as “The who, what, when, where approach.” Stankiewicz outlines the research method as compiling facts from secondary and primary sources, constructing a chronology of what happened from those facts, and forming an analysis that interprets those facts into a narrative.

The current struggle for cultural understanding, empathy, and educational reform is as relevant in 2012 as it was in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The similar agendas found in the literature review of Chicana/o pedagogy ask questions that are thought provoking and challenge not only Western paradigms, but also redefine the meaning of what art is and its effect on certain cultural perceptions. In redefining their own identities, Chicana/o artists have used their art to become the narrators of their own cultural topography. They have mapped out new ways of re-interpreting themselves within the confines of old and new world ideologies, fine art vs. kitsch, and sacred vs. profane to create new understandings of/for themselves and the viewer. As Chicana/o artists move forward to show their relationship within American society, they also struggle to fight against stereotypes and to improve Chicana/o art education and curriculum. The relevance of the Chicana/o aesthetic is to create a new consciousness about the importance of how Chicanas/os see themselves, how others perceive them, and how Chicanas/os use these aesthetic tools to reaffirm and empower themselves as a community.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The current Chicana/o literature (i.e., Sorell, Keller, Revilla, Urrieta, Grinberg, Fattal, and Martinez) advocates a culturally conscious art curriculum that supports a meaningful purpose or value to both the students and their communities. Ulyssa Martinez (2012) argues for a form of curriculum that advocates for a culturally responsive type of teaching. Martinez's study focuses on last names and the stereotypes associated with them. As an educator, she believes this is an example of how stereotypes can lower the expectations of academic abilities. She argues that mass media has perpetuated these cultural stereotypes, and it's the responsibility of teachers to teach culturally responsive curriculum. In doing so, students are required to be active participants in their learning process by collecting information from their environments with regard to racial and cultural stereotypes. Students would use their own cultural backgrounds in relation to their communities and to outside cultures in order to recognize inequalities perpetuated by stereotypes within our society. The students are required to analyze the data and form solutions to re-educate others about their cultures through their own image making. This form of responsive teaching empowers students to be active agents in their schools, communities, and society.

Victor Sorell (2004) documents Chicano history based on the critical examination of exhibition records. He has effectively compiled his sources for analysis, criticism, history, and investigation into the Chicana/o aesthetic. The Chicana/o aesthetic addresses the cultural notion of art in terms of beauty, taste, and values. Chicana/o artists focus on their indigenous past to reclaim an appreciation for and critical reflection of where they
have been, who they are, and what they will become as a culture. These artists have
forged their own identities by redefining images of themselves through their art, and
include Chicana artists Judy Baca and Ester Hernandez. They use cultural imagery, such
as indigenous, religious, domestic, and political icons, to explain and identify the
essential qualities of what it means to be a Chicana/o in American society.

A popular reference used to define Chicana/o gender identity and find
empowerment is Our Lady of Guadalupe, or La Virgen. A religious icon, Our Lady of
Guadalupe is historically rooted in Mexican indigenous culture. “Guadalupe” is
considered the counterpart of the Christian icon to the Virgin Mary. Both share the same
attribute in being symbols of salvation. One of the reasons for “Guadalupe’s” popularity
within Mexican culture is that her physical characteristics closely resemble those of
indigenous Mexicans. Chicana/o artists use images representing “Guadalupe” to heal and
reconnect to a spirituality between two cultures and identities. Sorell (2004) documents
Chicana/o culture as a historic struggle between the borders of indigenous and American
cultures, shaping social constructs of family and community activism.

Anita Tijerina Revilla’s (2004) area of interest includes the collection of data that
focuses on the Muxerista’s repeated efforts to proficiently challenge oppression, promote
holistic needs which include psychological, physical, and social needs, which challenge
western paradigms, and reform education.

Revilla’s research is based on the Muxerista pedagogy, which is based on the
contributions of Chicana/Latina student activists, Raza Womyn (1979, UCLA Chicana
organization).
Revilla’s feminist focus examines and analyzes the Muxerista pedagogy, which promotes the improvement of social justice in education for Chicanas. The instructional Muxerista method encourages the cultural connection of ancestry and language to re-enforce an identity that better represents the Chicana reality. Revilla believes that Chicanas help to support and promote a cultural consciousness in their communities that has been beneficial in the efforts to raise critical awareness of self-discovery amongst Latinas. Chicanas’ social actions can be applied in the advocacy of new reforms of pedagogy in Chicana/o education that extend the knowledge of self-discovery and social support beyond communities to the classroom.

Luis Urriceta Jr. (2004) focuses on the educational conditions of Mexican minorities in the United States and the organizations that are trying to reform research, theory, and pedagogy. The two educational reform organizations he considers, MEChA (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán) and NACCS (National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies), functioned as backlashes to educational policies and practices that led up to the Chicano Student Movement in the 1960’s and 70’s. The catalyst for these movements was the unrest amongst Latino students over the enforced educational practices of an Anglo curriculum that denied Latino students a sense of their own self-worth.

This Anglo-centric educational system perpetuated the stereotype that Latinos were low-skilled, low-paid, menial workers. Anglo teachers’ low expectations for their Latino students resulted in significant dropout rates, low self-esteem, and other self-destructive acts. Latino students organized themselves into groups like MEChA and NACCS that reaffirmed their self-worth and advocated for educational changes.
Although some individuals and institutions have accused these groups of perpetuating racism through cultural exclusion, Urrieta believes that these groups have evolved into positive outlets for self-pride. He argues that participation in both MEChA and NACCS has paved the way for the development of new methodologies to analyze the educational needs of Chicana/o students for the 21st century.

Grinberg and Goldfarb (1998) focus on the research analysis and pilot teacher education program of one group of pre-service, K-8 students at the University of New Mexico. This program develops curriculum that advocates democracy and social justice and incorporates the social context of their communities in order to give back to them. These central themes are based on the examination of culturally relevant questions and are implemented into the curriculum in order to promote cultural diversity and understanding beyond the classroom. The project involves pro-active teachers who invest in their students by learning about relevant issues that affect them in their communities. The emphasis of the curriculum is based on the examination and understanding of cultural structures, including belief systems, family framework, and social concerns. Therefore the authors’ common goal for this project is to further educational pedagogy for Latino students and provide them with equally accessible knowledge while being sensitive to their cultural identities and needs.

L.F. Fattal (2006) created a thematic art project that involved thirteen Plainfield schools, grades K-12, within the 2003-2004 school year. The lesson plan, “Sabor Latino: Bodegas of Aesthetic Ideas,” encouraged an appreciation of and respect for cultural diversity through the examination of Latin foods. The lesson is a significant part of the curriculum, because students make art that is uniquely characteristic of themselves and
their food (tamales and sugar skulls, for example). The authors maintain that, through this lesson plan, students learn not only an appreciation for critically thinking about the process of making art, but also they understand the historical and social context of an accessible subject: food.
NEW ART EDUCATION

Gaye Green (1999) argues for a new way to make art that includes intention, opinion, reflection, and critical thinking especially with regard to cultural context. She cites Suzi Gablik, Suzanne Lacy, and Henry Giroux for the development of an art making process based on critical thinking.

Art historian Suzi Gablik believes art should follow the paradigm of participation according to the Modernist aesthetic. It should be practiced as a tool for social consciousness as well as a way to create ecological healing.

Artist Suzanne Lacy characterizes public art as a visual art that uses traditional and non-traditional media to communicate ideas that are important to a diverse audience. She defines the relationship of the artists to the audience in order to communicate a social message that informs and combats selected social and cultural problems.

Theorist Henry Giroux questions existing power structures and argues for a more democratic system of education through interdisciplinary endeavors. His idea supports a culturally responsive approach to education that includes an emphasis on orientation, diversity, investigation, and construction of cultural identity.

Green’s new genre in art education encourages students to re-conceptualize art media by integrating two or more forms into unique hybrids, thereby expanding the canon of accepted art forms. These hybrids juxtapose combined forms to create unexpected relationships. Combining indigenous Mesoamerican traditions and icons with symbols in a contemporary context brings new life and meaning to old traditions and creates viable curriculum to enhance student learning.
According to Green, the artwork should reflect social transformation through community interaction. Students' studio production should include community audience input in an effort to explore social issues that deal with cultural transformation. This form of education is community-based and focused on "gender, class, race, and sexual orientation." It follows a Modernist inspired pedagogy that asks trained artists to rethink studio curricula and to include socially relevant content, merging art and life, and artist and audience.

Artists and students develop socially engaging art by understanding and confronting stereotypes used in advertising, analyzing culture, and incorporating students' viewpoints into artwork that exposes inequity and promotes alternative viewpoints. This methodology teaches students to confront entrenched societal values and beliefs, and engage in critical thinking strategies that compel them to define complex issues, analyze data, identify assumptions, infer solutions, and conceptualize new forms of evaluation. Giroux (Green 1999) also advocates a new genre of public art that questions the quality of social life by addressing language, sexuality, social inclusion, identity, and power struggles while avoiding the politics of narrow-mindedness. The two criteria that guide this area are research and artistic representation of social issues in works that interact with communities in both large and small-scale projects.
CASE STUDY

INTERVIEW: YREINA CERVANTEZ

For a case study, I interviewed Yreina Cervantez, Chicana artist and professor at California State University Northridge. I asked about her experiences with other Chicana/o artists during the 1960's and 70's and how her work reflects the social and political ideologies that germinated from her activism in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. More importantly, I was interested in her teaching methods as an artist and educator, her goals, and whether or not she believes the study and practice of art education is improving with regard to Chicano aesthetics.

During the interview, I concentrated on the complex methods and meanings of Chicano/a visual expression, artistic exclusion, and the re-creation of sacred spaces. Chicana/o art must be understood by the essential features of its aesthetics, and I asked Yreina to describe her methods of visual expression and context in her artwork. She characterizes herself as a formally trained artist shaped by the movement for social justice, working as a painter (self-taught in watercolor), muralist, and printmaker (Yreina Cervantez, May 13, 2006). Though formally trained, earning her B.A. at UC Santa Cruz and M.F.A. at UCLA, she does not adhere to the limitations or Western bias about traditional watercolor painting. Her handling of the medium is radically distinctive, because she applies the medium as an impasto and integrates opaque and translucent layers to create rich colors. Another aspect of her work that is characteristic of Chicano/a art is her incorporation of contemporary and indigenous imagery. However, the context of her artwork not only explores her personal experiences, but also it implements a
critical analysis of cultural history with regard to Chicano/a identity and its contradictions within American and Mexican cultures. The women’s journal “Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies” also addresses Chicanas struggling to find their own identities within a system of sexism, classism, and racism (S.H. Armitage, P. Hart, Y.F. Niemann, & K. Weathermon, 2002).

The undervalued appreciation and understanding of Non-Western art exclude Chicano/a aesthetics from many public institutions. Yreina Cervantez has experienced the challenges of finding a place in the art curriculum for Chicano/a ideas and issues within art institutions (May 8, 2006). Being a Chicana artist and professor, she is most disturbed by the national under-representation of people of color teaching in art institutions.

Today, the fundamental question is how can art educators continue to develop new methods of teaching that will contest marginalized spaces, create new ones, and redefine how art is valued? For Yreina this means developing pedagogy that responds to this lack of space and addressing these challenges in her artwork. Part of her pedagogy includes Chicana feminism and art theory, approaching them as an awareness and examination of different types of oppression. She includes a discussion of traditional types of art both past and contemporary to provide context (May 8, 2006). Her “Day of the Dead” and “Chicano/a Studio Painting” classes include written theory and studio components. She believes that incorporating the theoretical aspect of art provides a reference point for her students, motivating, stimulating, and providing them another perspective (May 8, 2006). Another component of Yreina’s “Day of the Dead” course functions as a community based event, offering art, performance, and discussions. Carol
(1999) discusses the importance of these social events as a means of fostering interactive consciousness.

The recreation of sacred spaces includes contemporary and traditional ways of knowing. The Chicano/a aesthetic is, as Yreina puts it, “Connected with the traditional ways of creating a connection to indigenous culture and making space within a contemporary world” (May 8, 2006). Doug Hanson (2003) refers to this idea of Chicano art as a struggle to find middle ground (Mexican tradition vs. American culture). Yreina refers to this as Nepantla, which is the indigenous belief of existing in between the past and present (May 8, 2006). She explains it as the co-existence of a cylindrical connection between life and death, in which time does not exist (May 8, 2006). Therefore, she believes in a constant battle within the self to become balanced with the duality created by Nepantla.

The recreation of sacred spaces challenges the European canon of what art is. Yreina believes teachers need to re-educate students about what Chicano art is and to reach a larger audience. Chicano/a art is more than stereotypical images of the Cuban rebel leader Che Guevara (or Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata) and Calaveras sugar skulls; Chicano/a art encompasses different styles, including traditional Mexican folk art, political protest (rooted in the Chicano/a Movement), and more contemporary styles of abstract and conceptual work. Laura Janku (2003) suggests that in order to challenge people and engage both ethnic and Anglo audiences, space must be made for multicultural art. Janku suggests that art must live and develop through active discussions.
Chicanas continue to teach a pedagogy that encourages students not only to challenge Western paradigms, but also to redefine the meaning of what art is and its implications on cultural perceptions. Chicana/o artists move forward in their struggles to fight against artistic stereotypes and to improve Chicana/o art education and curriculum.
NEXT GENERATION OF CHICANA/O ARTISTS

During the 1970’s, Chicana/o artists were not given serious recognition in the contemporary art world. As a result, they formed ethnic art communities to create a space of representation for themselves. One of those groups, ASCO, helped put Chicana/o art in the public eye and eventually got the support of major museums such as The John Paul Getty Art Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. C.A. Miranda believes institutional acknowledgement is still inconsistent and lacking. For example, the 2010 Whitney Biennial, as well as Sotheby’s and Christie’s auction houses did not include Chicana/o artists. Miranda attributes this exclusion to the stereotypes of Chicana/o art and its restricted exposure.

J. Kun (2005) discusses the perspective of Chicana/o artists whose work transcends cultural identity. He describes many young Latino artists’ discontent about the inherited label, “Chicana/o.” They believe this label aesthetically stifles their ambitions to create art that is not associated with a narrative style of imagery, including the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960’s and 70’s; empowerment, barrio life, and cultural affirmation. This new generation fears this history hinders their mobility, preventing them from becoming individual artists separate from a genre they did not choose.

This important point made by Miranda and Kun anticipates an issue that might present itself in the classroom. Americanized students of ethnic descent may not acknowledge their heritage or cultural roots as a significant part of or influence on their art making. As a school age Chicana, I remember bristling in response to teachers’ comments about my stylized approach to rendering and use of color having a...
"Chicana/o" aesthetic. My reaction came from a lack of information; I did not know about Chicana art or what being a Chicana artist meant. As a result, I interpreted my teachers’ comments as a racial, Western-centric stereotype, grouping me in the "other" category of not being good enough to be a "real" artist. My experience demonstrates the importance of introducing students to historical and social content; this provides a foundation of context and information as students seek new meaning in and interpretations of artworks that reflect their identities.
CONCLUSION

Chicana/o multicultural art education has become a socially relevant topic for discussion in the 21st century. The significance of multicultural art education practices and curriculum directly addresses and affects the growing Hispanic student populations and evolving definitions of what Chicana/o art is. Examining the conventional style of art that is currently made in the schools, art educators witness students being denied an enriched, more inclusive education. The current “school art” lacks forethought and social significance. The new notion of Chicana/o multicultural art will be taught using relevant historical and theoretical methodology; past and contemporary Chicana/o art, artists and their practices will be examined and analyzed for characteristics, concepts, and processes that can be incorporated into a Post-modern, multicultural art education curriculum.

In general, multicultural education has undergone notable changes in the last couple of decades of Post-modern American culture. Yet the struggle for cultural understanding and educational reforms regarding students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds still exists and must evolve from the institutionalized “school art” style. Multicultural educational reforms will yield a new consciousness that is not only beneficial to Hispanic and Mexican-American students, but also to the entire student population; it will positively affect how students see one another, how others perceive them, creating a culture of diversity, tolerance, and empowerment. A diverse art faculty will expand and enrich dialogues and perspectives, as well as foster a multicultural curriculum. The history and evolution of contemporary Chicana/o art signifies a need to re-examine and update how a variety of educators can incorporate multicultural
educational approaches into art curriculum. The study of Chicana/o art is important to the profession of teaching art, because it creates a new opportunity to acknowledge and include a formerly marginalized art.
REFERENCES


