L.A. Xicano

Art Along the Hyphen
The Mexican-American Generation

Icons of the Invisible
Oscar Castillo

Mapping Another L.A.
The Chicano Art Movement

Mural Remix
Sandra de la Loza

Chon A. Noriega
Terezita Romo
Pilar Tompkins Rivas
"YOU DON'T KNOW L.A." With a wave of her hand, filmmaker and friend Sylvia Morales expressed her frustration that I could not follow her directions using landmarks that no longer existed. The year was 1992, and I had just moved to Los Angeles to teach at the University of California, Los Angeles. For Morales, navigating the city was indistinguishable from knowing its history, a strategy she used in her now classic documentary Chicano (1979). In that film, knowing one’s "place"—in terms of socioeconomic status, cultural representation, geographical location, and access to social institutions—required historical understanding in order to make effective structural demands for racial and gender equity. As part of a Chicano movement that started in the mid-1960s, Morales and other artists articulated a clear sense of place and mobility—with a starting point and a destination—but they did so within the visual language of historical narrative and social portraiture, not that of mapping. Such an approached sought to make visible the Chicano presence within the L.A. and U.S. cultural landscapes.

L.A. Xicano, a unique collaboration between a research center and three museums, explores the diverse artistic contributions of Mexican American and Chicano artists to Los Angeles's artistic development since 1945. In naming this project, Pilar Tompkins Rivas, Terecita Romero, and I used the alternate spelling of Chicano: with an X derived from the Spanish transcription of the Nahualt sound "ch." We did so to gesture toward what poet Alurista describes as a distinctive Xicano artistic practice first emerging in 1943. But our goal is less to subscribe to a particular historical understanding, or aesthetic framework, than to mark the complexities of describing the diverse Mexican-descent cultural production in Los Angeles in the second half of the twentieth century. In this regard, our use of X draws upon its multiple and conflicting meanings, where it can mark location and destination, but it can also signify identity, indicate affirmation as well as negation, and serve as an ineffable marker of difference—the X factor. The X of our project marks the necessary meeting point between Los Angeles (founded in 1781) and its first and now largest population.

The four exhibitions that make up L.A. Xicano take distinct approaches to Mexican American and Chicano art between 1945 and 1980.

Art Along the Hyphen: The Mexican-American Generation (Atry National Center) focuses on the two decades following 1945, presenting the work of six Mexican American artists who contributed to the emerging California iconography and its connections to the national imaginary. With an emphasis on painting and sculpture, the exhibition explores each artist's dialogue with the various art movements of the twentieth century, which were refracted through cultural heritage, local observation, and social commentary. The exhibition also documents the fluid transition by some artists into the Chicano art movement of the 1970s.

Icons of the Invisible: Oscar Castillo (Fowler Museum at UCLA) presents rarely exhibited photographs that document the Chicano community in Los Angeles beginning in the late 1960s while tracing the major themes and stylistic approaches that have guided the artist's extensive body of work. Castillo's photographs challenge the stereotypical representation of East Los Angeles as violent or exotic, but they do so by maintaining a calm, almost matter-of-fact artistic gaze on everyday barrio life in the wake of urban renewal, as well as on the cultural practices and political events that redefined public space.

Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement (Fowler Museum at UCLA) brings together artifacts and artworks from nine Chicano arts groups active between 1969 and 1980. The artists who worked in and among these groups began a collective reimagining of the urban landscape through ambitious public and graphic arts projects, educational programs, and other works. Their art was at once local, identity-based, and global.
in orientation: it explored the uncharted spaces between Mexican tradition, Chicano vernacular, and American modernism. This exhibition also includes contemporary collaborations with artists who engage with the legacy of these groups.

_Mural Remix: Sandra de la Loza_ (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) presents a visual mash-up created by sampling the incidental or overlooked details from murals produced during the 1970s by Mexican American and Chicano artists. Drawing upon archival and interview sources, de la Loza takes the role of a performative archivist, investigating the Chicano mural movement, L.A. urbanism, the light and space movement, and countercultural aesthetics. In the process she creates new imagery that re-animates and re-figures the past.

While these exhibitions offer distinct perspectives on Los Angeles between 1945 and 1980, they also establish connections to the first half of the twentieth century, with Hernando Villa, whose high-profile career starts in 1905, and to the onset of the twenty-first century, with Sandra de la Loza, whose commissioned installation draws inspiration from Chicano murals painted in the 1970s.

The exhibitions engage a cross-generational dialogue and set of influences as well. Consider Roberto Chavez, whose figurative work in _Art Along the Hyphen_ combines humor, pop cultural references, and stylistic explorations. Chavez taught and mentored Joe D. Rodriguez (the last director of Mechicano Art Center, which is featured in _Mapping Another L.A._), among other artists who would contribute to the Chicano Art Movement.

A photograph of Chavez’s mural _Porque Se Pelean?_ (1972) serves as a source for Sandra de la Loza’s literal reanimation of Chicano muralism in _Mural Remix_. In turn, de la Loza’s interventions into official public art under the rubric of the Pocho Research Society for Erased and Invisible History resonate with Chavez’s defiant struggles against the “false university,” as well as with Asco’s early performance-based work (documented in _Mapping Another L.A._) and Oscar Castillo’s testament to the “erased and invisible history” of the Mexican descent people in Los Angeles (the subject of _Icons of the Invisible_). Chavez’s friend Eduardo Carrillo began his artistic trajectory with the detailed study of European masters, but by the end of his career he was involved with the promotion of Chicano art. As the project director of “Califas Chicano Art and Culture in California” (1982), the first major conference and exhibition of California Chicano artists, he brought together a multigenerational group of artists that included Judith F. Baca, Roberto Chavez, Harry Gamboa Jr., Willie F. Herron II (also the founder of the punk group Los Legitimos), Gronk, and Joe Gonzalez, all of whom are represented in _L.A. Xicano_.

One final connection is worth noting: De la Loza’s solo exhibition gestures back to earlier generations of Chicana artists who have been central to art groups, art spaces, and arts advocacy. One of these women is Dora De Larios, whose ceramics appear in _Art Along the Hyphen_. De Larios was, in 1956, the first Mexican American to be the subject of a solo exhibition in Los Angeles during the period covered here.

_L. A. Xicano_, a component of the Getty Institution’s _Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980_, is the result of ongoing research and archival efforts by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC). Working with artists, community-based arts organizations, community scholars, academics, and art museums, the CSRC has sought not only to preserve the past but also to facilitate future research and public programs. In that way, we can all know L.A.

_Chon A. Noriega_

_Director and Professor_

_UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center_

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2. In addition to the _L.A. Xicano_ project, two other PST exhibitions bear mention in regard to this goal: _Asco elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective, 1972–1987_ at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from September 4 through December 4, 2011; and _Mex/USA: Mexican Modernism in Los Angeles 1930–1983_ at the Museum of Latin American Art from September 19, 2011, through January 29, 2012. The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center is proud to have provided research and archival support through its library for both exhibitions, as well as an Institute of American Cultures research fellowship for _Asco co-curator_ C. Onofre Olvera during the 2009–10 academic year.

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_Oscar Castillo_

Miguel Delgado
as Aztec. 1977
Black and white photograph

_Impresión_

_JUDITHE HERNÁNDEZ_

Reina de Primavera
1976
Silk-screen print
(no. 65 of an edition of 100)
28 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches

Introduction