

Claims by Anglo American feminists and Chicanas/os for alternative space: The LA art scene in the political 1970s

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Abstract: *Originating in the context of the Civil Rights Movements and political activities addressing issues of race, gender and sexuality, the Women's Liberation movement and the Chicano Movement became departures for two significant counter art movements in Los Angeles in the 1970s. This article explores some of the various reasons why Anglo American feminist artists and Chicana artists were not able to fully collaborate in the 1970s, provides some possible explanations for their separation, and argues that the Eurocentric imperative in visual fine art was challenged already in the 1970s by Chicana/o artists in Los Angeles. In so doing, the art activism by Anglo American feminists and Chicanas/os is comparatively investigated with Los Angeles as the spatial framework and the 1970s as the time frame. Four main components are discussed: their respective political aims, alternative art spaces, pedagogical frameworks and aesthetic strategies. The study found that the art activism by Anglo American feminists and Chicanas/os differed. These findings suggest that a task ahead is to open up a dialogue with Chicana/o activist art, making space for more diverse representations of activities and political issues, both on the mainstream art scene and in the history of art.*

Keywords: *the Los Angeles art scene – art activism – alternative art spaces – Chicanas/os – feminism*

In the historiography of fine art, the 1970s is recognized as the decade when feminism entered the scene. In the USA, the two most important cities for the feminist art movement were New York and Los Angeles. Los Angeles, with the largest concentration of Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os in the

country, was also one of the most important locations in the 1960s and 70s for the Chicano Movement. The Los Angeles art scene in the 1970s has been described as misogynist, sexist and racist with lines of contention characterized by race, gender and sexuality issues.¹ Originating in the context of the Civil Rights Movements and political activities addressing issues of race, gender and sexuality, the Women's Liberation movement and the Chicano Movement became departures for two significant counter art movements in Los Angeles. With Los Angeles as the spatial framework and the 1970s as the time frame, this article investigates comparatively the art activism among feminists and Chicanas/os, who, although separated along lines of class and race, were similarly engaged in initiating alternative art spaces and developing their political aims, pedagogical frameworks and aesthetic strategies.

In 1976, the exhibition *Women Artists: 1550–1950* opened in Los Angeles. In 2007, the thirtieth anniversary of this exhibition was celebrated with two large exhibitions in Los Angeles and New York. In one of the catalogue introductions, a curator claims that “no one questioned in 1976” why the Los Angeles exhibition focused solely on white women artists from America and Europe, since it “would not be until the 1980s that the hegemony of the Western canons themselves was questioned.”² This statement, not strictly true, illustrates the marginalized position of Chicana artists in the 1970s on both the mainstream art scene and the feminist art scene in Los Angeles. The article explores some of the various reasons why Anglo American feminist artists and Chicana artists were not able to fully collaborate either artistically or politically in the 1970s, and provides some possible explanations for their separation, one being, for example, the racialized geography of the city. Throughout the essay, the term Chicanas/os will refer to Mexican Americans engaged in the Chicano movement aiming for empowerment and affirmation of Mexican Americans as minority group, the term feminist movement will refer to the Women's Liberation movement, and the term feminists to Anglo American women engaged in the Women's Liberation movement.

¹ For constructive comments on an early draft of this article, I am grateful to members of the research group KuFo at Karlstad University, especially Elisabeth Wennö. I also thank the anonymous readers for their suggestions and constructive comments to a first version of this article.

Sarah Schrank, *Art and the City: Civic Imagination and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

² Maura Reilly, “Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms”, *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (Eds. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin. New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2007), 27.

Political aims

A main political aim among women artists in the 1970s was their inclusion in exhibitions in the mainstream art scene. As has been documented in the anthology *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (1996), women artists in both Los Angeles and New York protested against their exclusion from mainstream exhibitions and art museums.³ The tipping point leading to action was the *Art and Technology* program at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 1967–1971, followed by the museum's *Art and Technology* show in 1971, which included seventy-six artists, all of whom were white men.⁴ Women artists' protests against the *Art and Technology* show led to the formation of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (LACWA), initially led by artist Joyce Kozloff, which served as a networking agency for artists, collectors, curators, critics and art historians. The members of LACWA shared testimonies of discrimination on the art scene that were gathered by the council.⁵ Meetings in protest against the *Art and Technology* show were held in graphic artist June Wayne's studio on Tamarind Avenue in Hollywood and, in 1971, Wayne's Tamarind Lithography Workshop issued a survey exposing gender-bias in art publication reviews covering shows by both men and women.⁶ LACWA also conducted a survey of works by women artists in the collection of LACMA that was turned into a compilation of statistics.⁷ These combined actions served as a basis for political demands that led to a dialogue with the board of trustees of LACMA and eventually to the 1976 LACMA exhibition *Women Artists: 1550–1950*.⁸

In retrospect it has been claimed that by 1970, “the women's movement had grown to include radicals and conservatives; white, blacks and Chicanas”.⁹ However, very few Chicana artists were included in the political activities going on among white and Anglo American feminist artists in Los Angeles. According to historian Shifra Goldman, the feminist movement to Chicanas was an Anglo American, white middle-class enterprise with non-

³ Judith K. Brodsky, “Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces”, *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (Eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 104.

⁴ Mary D. Garrard, “Feminist Politics: Networks and Organizations”, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 91.

⁵ Garrard 1996, 91.

⁶ Garrard 1996, 91.

⁷ Michelle Moravec, “Fictive Families of History Makers: Historicity at the Los Angeles Woman's Building”, *Doin'it in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building* (Eds. Meg Linton, Sue Maberry and Elizabeth Pulsinelli. Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2011), 85.

⁸ Moravec 2011, 85.

⁹ Garrard 1996, 91.

white women on the distant periphery.¹⁰ There were several reasons for this. The issues addressed in the feminist movement, such as the marginalization of women, middle class gender roles, women's sexuality, domesticity, lesbianism and sexual abuse, were "blind" to how gender was lived through class and race. Chicanas developed a feminism that understood how gender was lived through class and race oppression, thereby contributing to an understanding of the interlocking nature of oppressions, which has come to be known as intersectionality. Historian Maylei Blackwell describes their political differences the following:

...while Chicana feminists shared their views with other feminists (discrimination and power inequality based on gender and often sexuality), their approach and agenda differed in that they did not view gender as the primary source of oppression (a practice reserved for those privileged enough to see race as invisible or naturalized by their dominant social position). They critiqued male supremacy, sexual violence, and sexual objectification within their own communities and the ways they were enacted along racialized lines by dominant society.¹¹

With Chicana feminism focusing on the ways discrimination and power inequality based on gender were enacted along racialized lines by the dominant society, the feminist movement seemed the "wrong movement" with which Chicanas should engage.¹² Another significant dissimilarity was that Anglo feminism was developed in strategically separatist women's groups, whereas Chicana feminism was deeply embedded in community-based organizing and neither separate nor separatist in relation to the community centered Chicano movement.¹³ Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Chela Sandoval and others have articulated some of the gender inequalities that existed at that time within the Chicana/o community and the tensions between Chicanos and Chicanas.¹⁴ According to Blackwell, Chicana feminism

¹⁰ Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and in the United States* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 199.

¹¹ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 211.

¹² Blackwell 2011, 187.

¹³ Blackwell 2011, 175.

¹⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute) 1987; Gloria Anzaldúa Ed., *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1990); Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (New York: Plume, 1995); Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1983); Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa Eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table – Women of Color Press, 1983); Chela Sandoval, "Feminist Forms of Agency and Oppositional Consciousness: US Third World Feminist Criticism", *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice* (Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. Chicago: University of Illinois Press) 1995, 208–226; Chela Sandoval, "Mestizaje as Method: Feminists of Color Challenge the

was developed in the “pockets” and “gaps” of the Chicano movement, where Chicana “third space feminism” transformed the Chicano movement in spaces within the movement.¹⁵ For example, the very use of the term “Chicana/o” in most current discourse on Chicana/o issues is an outgrowth of the insistence by Chicanas on representation in a movement that frequently tended to be male-centered.

Another reason for the presence of few Chicana artists in the activities going on among white feminist artists in Los Angeles was that in the feminist art movement, Chicanas were met with racism. As Chicana artist Yolanda López and historian Moira Roth recount: “Despite the many efforts and good intentions of white women in the arena of political art, racial separation and racism existed de facto within the feminist art movement from the beginning”.¹⁶ As a consequence of racism, their respective visibility in society also differed. Goldman writes: “Though both the Chicano political movement and the feminist movement were emerging in California at the same time, there was very little political contact. For the community at large, Mexicans and Chicanos were an invisible presence”.¹⁷ Situated within the invisible presence of Mexicans and Chicanos and focusing on how gender was lived through class and race, Chicanas joined the community centered Chicano Movement, while Anglo American feminists focused on gender issues and organized in women-only groups such as the Women’s Liberation movement. Combined, these differences were of consequence for the initiation of their respective art spaces, pedagogical frameworks and aesthetic strategies.

Art spaces

Feminist artists not only protested against their exclusion from the mainstream art scene, but they created their own exhibition opportunities through alternative women’s exhibitions and galleries. According to scholar Judith Brodsky, these art venues allowed women artists “to show work addressing their bodies, their sexuality, and their lives in images that were considered unacceptable to mainstream galleries and museums /.../ [since] these institutions had dismissed their work as not being aesthetically sound.”¹⁸ As Brodsky argues, the goals of alternative art venues were

Canon”, *Living Chicana Theory* (Ed. Carla Trujillo. Berkley: Third Woman Press, 1997), 352–370; Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World”, *Genders: Journal of Social Theory, Representation, Race, Gender, Sex* (Austin: University of Texas Press) 1991, 10, 1–24.

¹⁵ Blackwell 2011, 143, 189.

¹⁶ Yolanda López and Moira Roth, “Social Protest: Racism and Sexism”, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 140.

¹⁷ Goldman 1994, 217.

¹⁸ Brodsky 1996, 104.

multiple: to provide venues for showing feminist art that could not be seen elsewhere, to provide women artists with an emotional and intellectual support system to help overcome their feeling of isolation, and to show that women artists were actively producing work and thereby putting pressure on mainstream institutions to include exhibitions of work by women artists.¹⁹

One important early feminist exhibition in Los Angeles was *Womanhouse* (1972), a Feminist Art Program project at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), initiated in 1971 while the all-men show *Art and Technology* was going on at LACMA. The initiator was Paula Harper, an art historian at CalArts where artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro had started The Feminist Art Program in 1971.²⁰ The exhibition involved installations and performances about gender roles, domesticity and femininity, and was according to Judy Chicago the first public exhibition that openly addressed “female subject matter”.²¹ During the show from January 30 to February 28 in an abandoned building in Hollywood, lent to the project by the city of Los Angeles and later demolished, *Womanhouse* gained national press coverage and received more than ten thousand visitors. On its first day it was open only to women.²²

Various alternative women-run art venues existed in Los Angeles in the 1970s. In 1969, performance artist Barbara T. Smith co-founded the experimental performance venue the F-Space Gallery in an industrial park in Santa Ana that hosted various experimental performances before it closed down in 1972.²³ In 1976, graphic artist June Wayne organized workshops in her Tamarind studio in Hollywood under the heading “Business and Professional Problems of Women Artists”.²⁴ These workshops engaged women artists in role-playing and dealt with how to function effectively in pursuing a career, from documenting and pricing their artworks to negotiating with dealers and galleries in the “male-dominated art world”.²⁵ As early as 1956, performance artist Rachel Rosenthal founded the improvisational art space

¹⁹ Brodsky 1996, 104.

²⁰ Arlene Raven, “Womanhouse”, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 48.

²¹ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, “Conversation with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro”, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 67.

²² Raven 1996, 48, 61.

²³ Alex Donis, “California Dreamin’: Performance, Media Art, and History as Gossip”, *Collaboration Labs: Southern California Artists and the Artist Space Movement* Ed. Nicole Gordillo (Santa Monica: 18th Street Arts Center, 2011), 40. At F-Space Gallery were performances hosted such as Barbara T. Smith’s *Nude Sit-In* (1971) and *Nude Frieze* (1972), and the most famous early performance *Shoot* (1971) by the recently deceased Chris Burden (1946–2015).

²⁴ Richard Meyer, “June Wayne”, *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* Ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles and London: The Museum of Contemporary Art and the MIT Press, 2007), 313.

²⁵ Meyer 2007, 313.

Instant Theatre that was located in various sites throughout the Los Angeles area by the mid-1970s.²⁶ In 1972, Rosenthal co-founded with artist Linda Levy the Womanspace Gallery, the first women's gallery in Los Angeles. In 1972, Rosenthal also co-founded the Graview Gallery, a woman's art collective. Both were relocated to the Woman's Building when it opened in 1973.²⁷ The Woman's Building was the most important feminist art space in Los Angeles, co-founded by Judy Chicago, graphic artist Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and art historian Arlene Raven. Some of the women who participated in LACWA formed the Womanspace Gallery, and members of both groups became part of the Woman's Building when it opened in 1973.²⁸ The Woman's Building comprised various galleries, studios, large-scale art projects and women-owned businesses. Its first location (1973–1976) was a renovated two-story building at Grandview Boulevard in the Venice district that had housed the Chouinard Art School.²⁹ When this building was sold in 1976, the Woman's Building moved to a house on North Spring Street in an industrial section of downtown Los Angeles, where it closed down in 1991.³⁰

Of the US feminist art scene in the 1970s it has been noted that unlike in New York, feminist artists in Los Angeles were “devoted to the creation of separatist institutions”.³¹ The Woman's Building is the most obvious example, as its separatism in terms of gender is reflected in its name. But it was also a separatist institution in terms of race. The history of the Woman's Building includes very few Chicana artist names and several documented accounts of racism among white feminists against non-white feminists.³² When looking at the exhibitions held in its various galleries during its almost twenty years of existence (1973–1991), the exclusion of non-white artists becomes quite obvious.³³ From its first location at Grandview Boulevard (1973–1975), only two names of Chicana artists can be found: Olivia Sanchez in a juried exhibition at the Woman Space Gallery in 1973 and Rosalyn Mesquite, who was invited to participate in a three-woman show.³⁴ Only one

²⁶ Donis 2011, 21.

²⁷ Donis 2011, 24. In the 1980s, the recently deceased Rosenthal (1926–2015) also founded the performance venue Espace DbD, and later the Rachel Rosenthal Company.

²⁸ Moravec 2011, 85.

²⁹ Goldman 1994, 218.

³⁰ Goldman 1994, 218.

³¹ Lopéz and Roth, 1996, 149.

³² Michelle Moravec and Sondra Hale, “At Home’ at the Woman's Building (But Who Gets a Room of Her Own?): Women of Color and Community”, *From Site to Vision: The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture* Eds. Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2011), 162–189.

³³ Otis College of Art and Design, “Woman's Building: History Timeline”, 2012. <http://www.otis.edu/ben-maltz-gallery/womans-building-history-timeline> (accessed November 14, 2014)

³⁴ Goldman 1994, 218.

exhibition with African American artists was held during its first location: *Black Mirror* with five artists, organized in 1973 by Betye Saar.³⁵ In the exhibition history from its second location at North Spring Street (1976–1991), only one exhibition with Chicana artists can be found: *Venas de la Mujer* in 1976, organized by the group Las Chicanas that included Isabel Castro, Judithe Hernández, Olga Muñiz, Josefina Quesada and Judy Baca.³⁶

Judy Baca is an artist that navigated both the Anglo American and the Chicana/o art scenes. In 1976, Baca, painter and muralist Christina Schlesinger and filmmaker Donna Deitch co-founded the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC).³⁷ In 1977, SPARC moved into a building on Venice Boulevard that had served as a jail and comprises an art gallery, artist studios, mural archives and workshop facilities. Generally considered a Chicana/o art space, the still existing SPARC is oriented towards engaging community members in developing collaborative cultural programs and public murals.

Even though contact existed between feminist Anglo American and Chicana artists, they organized in separate groups. A main reason was the differences in patterns of engagement, distinguished by Blackwell as “Chicano collectivism” and “Anglo individualism”.³⁸ Other reasons were related to the city planning and built environment of Los Angeles. The division of groups of artists reflects a spatial division of Los Angeles by its highway system that cuts through the urban space dividing the city in spatially separated districts. This geographical division is mirrored by social segregation patterns along lines of race and class. In the unincorporated areas east of Los Angeles River, with the lowest incomes and the highest percentage of households without a car, the majority of inhabitants were Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os.³⁹ Chicana/o scholars Pilar Tompkins Rivas and Chon Noriega explain:

Mapping the way in which [Chicana/o] artists navigated the city itself is intrinsically tied to the psychogeography of the built environment. Urban renewal policies during World War II and in postwar Los Angeles left clear thumb-prints on the Chicano community: a schematic of highways overlaid on top of existing neighborhoods, a dead-end public housing system, and a perceived border formed by the Los Angeles River,

³⁵ Jenni Sorkin and Linda Theung, “Selected Chronology of All-Women Group Exhibitions, 1943–83”, *WACK!*, 2007, 478.

³⁶ Goldman 1994, 218, 305.

³⁷ Michelle Moravec, “Raced and Erased: Trapping Narratives of Feminist Art History”, 2014. https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_-n3lLew1cZRUI5X1BWMGRGRG8/edit (accessed November 5, 2014).

³⁸ Blackwell 2011, 175.

³⁹ Chon Noriega and Pilar Tompkins Rivas, “Chicano Art in the City of Dreams: A History in Nine Movements”, *L.A. Xicano* Eds. Chon A. Noriega, Terezita Romo and Pilar Tompkins Rivas (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2011), 84.

which, combined with an inadequate public transit infrastructure, effectively limited mobility within the urban core.⁴⁰

The geographical division of Los Angeles in spatially separated districts and the perceived border formed by the Los Angeles River limited the mobility of Chicana/o artists in urban space. Other significant factors that divided the feminist Anglo American and Chicana/o art scenes along lines of race and class were the audiences they addressed, differences in access to financial support and their economic circumstances. As Goldman writes:

Everywhere the [Chicana/o] movement encountered an insoluble problem: the working-class communities it wished to address did not have the economic resources to support an artistic constituency. In addition, the communities were frequently not conversant with the kind of art being brought to them, and sometimes — being caught up with primary problems of survival — did not welcome it, or were indifferent to it. To solve the second problem, educational programs were organized. To solve the first (since artists must have material, space, walls, rent, transportation, and living expenses), the artists sought support for their endeavors from small businesses, government on all levels, educational institutions, and corporate agencies, in addition to community fundraising.⁴¹

The interlocking nature of the limited economic recourses of the working-class audiences that Chicana/o artists addressed, the working-class conditions in which Chicana/o artists worked and the educational programs Chicana/o artists initiated, were reflected in their intersectional sociopolitical aims.

The differences between feminist Anglo American and Chicana/o artist in political aims, the audiences they addressed, their economic circumstances, access to financial support and the geographical division of the city, that limited the mobility of Chicana/o artists, resulted in a spatial division of their art scenes, with the feminist Anglo American art scene located in western Los Angeles and the Chicana/o art scene concentrated to the east of Los Angeles River. In the context of the Chicano Movement in East LA, Chicana/o artists created several alternative art venues. In 1969, the Goez Art Studios and Gallery was co-founded on East First Street by three mural artists, David Rivas Botello and the brothers José-Luis (Joe) Gonzalez and Juan (Johnny) Gonzalez.⁴² Also in 1969, labor union organizer Frank López founded Plaza de la Raza in an old boathouse in Lincoln Park.⁴³

⁴⁰ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 82.

⁴¹ Goldman 1996, 389–390.

⁴² Karen Mary Davalos, “All Roads Lead to East L.A’: Goez Art Studios and Gallery”, *L.A. Xicano*, 2011, 29. Chicana artist Josefina Quesada exhibited here in the 1970s.

⁴³ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 81–82. One Chicana artist who held art classes here was Patssi Valdez.

A third Chicana/o art space was the Mechicano Art Center, initiated in 1969 by journalist and community organizer Victor Franco, artist and graphic designer Leonard Castellanos and a donor, the Russian emigrant Mura Bright. Its first location was as a gallery space on Melrose Avenue in the art district in the western part of the city.⁴⁴ In 1970, Mechicano Art Center moved into the space of a former laundromat on Whittier Boulevard, leased from the East Los Angeles Doctors Hospital, and in late 1975, it changed location again to North Figueroa Street in Highland Park.⁴⁵ A fourth alternative art venue, Self-Help Graphics & Art started in 1970 when a Franciscan nun and printmaker, Karen Boccalero, and two Mexican gay men, muralist Carlos Bueno and photographer Antonio Ibañez, began producing prints in an East Los Angeles garage, holding their exhibitions at the Mexican-style market El Mercado in Boyle Heights.⁴⁶ In 1972, Self-Help Graphics & Art moved into a space financed by the Order of the Sisters of St. Francis, located in an office building on Cesar Chavez Avenue owned by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.⁴⁷ Centro de Arte Público was co-founded in 1977 on North Figueroa Street in Highland Park by muralist Carlos Almaraz, painter Guillermo Bejarano and graphic artist Richard Duardo.⁴⁸

As noted by Goldman in the quotation above, the Chicana/o scene in East LA needed multiple sources of financial support for its survival. The financial support for Plaza de la Raza was organized by the Mexican-born singer and actress Margo Albert, who lobbied both city and federal government.⁴⁹ One of several funding sources for Plaza de la Raza was the Catholic campaign for human development that “provided grants for community organizations, community-run schools, and minority-owned cooperatives”.⁵⁰ The Catholic campaign for human development also sponsored arts education classes at Goez Art Studios and Gallery, Self-Help

⁴⁴ Reina Alejandra Prado Saldivar, “On Both Sides of the Los Angeles River: Mechicano Art Center”, *L.A. Xicano*, 2011, 41–42.

⁴⁵ Saldivar 2011, 43. Affiliated Chicana artists were Judithe Hernández, Sonya Fe, Carmen Lomas Garza, Judithe Hernández, Linda Vallejo, Lucila Villaseñor Grijalva, Isabel Castro, Barbara Carrasco, Maria Elena Villaseñor and Susan Saenz.

⁴⁶ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 78.

⁴⁷ LA History Archive, “The Sister Karen Boccalero & Self-Help Graphics History Projects”, The Studio for Southern California History, 2014. http://www.lahistoryarchive.org/downloads/SHG_Student_Guide.pdf (accessed November 6, 2014). Affiliated Chicana artists were Karen Boccalero, Linda Vallejo, Yolanda Gonzalez, Barbara Carrasco, Yreina Cervantez, Diane Gamboa, Dolores Guerrero, Cecilia Casinera, Margaret Garcia and Ofelia Esparza.

⁴⁸ Highland Park, “Centro de Arte Público”, *Highland Park – Communities*, 2014. <http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/highland-park/painting-the-walls/centro-de-arte-publico.html> (accessed November 6, 2014). Affiliated Chicana artists were Judithe Hernandez, Barbara Carrasco and Dolores Guerrero Cruz.

⁴⁹ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 81.

⁵⁰ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 96.

Graphics & Arts, and Mechicano Art Center.⁵¹ Due to lack of funding, the Mechicano Art Center closed in 1978. Lack of support also led to the closing in 1979 of Centro de Arte Público and the transformation of the space in 1980 into the print studio Hecho in Aztlán Múltiples and the Chicano punk club the Vex. The other Chicana/o art spaces mentioned above still exist. SPARC is still located in the same building on Venice Boulevard, and Plaza de la Raza in Lincoln Park. Self-Help Graphics & Art moved in 2011 to East First Street in Boyle Heights, and the Goez Art Studios and Gallery is now located on East Olympic Boulevard.

Chicana/o artists in the east as well as Anglo American feminist in the west operated outside of and often in opposition to the mainstream art scene and thus applied some shared strategies, such as developing their own infrastructure by initiating independent, non-profit and artist-run or artist-centric art venues. As Brodsky claims for the feminist art scene in an argument that is also valid for the Chicana/o art scene, the alternative art venues made it possible to view works outside museums and for-profit galleries, gave artists training and education opportunities through the pragmatic experience of raising funds, developing press coverage, and running the business side of galleries, and, not least, provided artists with the support and mentor structure that helped many to develop the confidence and long-term commitment necessary for “producing a lifetime body of work”.⁵² The alternative art venues in East LA were according to Goldman, “among the alternative spaces available to Chicano/a artists when most mainstream and commercial galleries were closed to them”.⁵³ Today, a Chicana/o art scene can still be found in East LA, while the feminist art scene in western Los Angeles has evaporated. However, the political issues of the feminist movement in the 1970s have gradually been recognized by mainstream society, and visual art by feminist Anglo American artists is accepted on the mainstream art scene and included in the canons of fine art. If the necessity of separatist women institutions such as the Woman’s Building, which closed down in 1991, is over, the demand in society for alternative Chicana/o art spaces seems to remain.

Pedagogical frameworks

On the subject of the US feminist art scene in the 1970s it has been noted that in Los Angeles, feminist protest art was “often developed within feminist pedagogical program which employed consciousness-raising as the teaching tool and performance as the medium for the explosive new content being

⁵¹ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 96.

⁵² Brodsky 1996, 104.

⁵³ Goldman 1994, 219.

generated.”⁵⁴ The project *Womanhouse* of CalArts’s Feminist Art Program is one early example of this pedagogical departure. Shapiro and Chicago engaged the twenty-one women-only art students in consciousness-raising and role-playing in order to explore personal experiences in addressing subjects such as the female body, gender norms and societal taboos. In the process that led to the exhibition, the students were granted the professional status of artists working among artists, not as trainees in an academic program.⁵⁵ The Woman’s Building served as an important site for feminist artistic creations. As recounted by López and Roth:

Major early work was produced within classes and workshops, and in the mentoring situation of large-scale feminist projects. The Woman’s Building in particular, provided an ongoing physical, emotional, and political center for feminist art, supporting a plethora of feminist programs, conferences, networks, activities, and performance collaborations”.⁵⁶

Strategically separatist women-only settings such as the Woman’s Building were instrumental in providing a pedagogical framework for supporting mentoring situations, consciousness-raising processes and the creation of individual and/or collaborative feminist art.

On the Chicana/o art scene was an underlying pedagogy oriented toward education and social mobility of the whole Chicana/o community. The primary focus of Plaza de la Raza, officially becoming a non-profit organization as a Cultural Center for Arts and Education in 1970, was on education through the arts as a “critical means of transforming current social conditions”.⁵⁷ The Mechicano Art Center on Whittier Boulevard hosted community meetings, served as an educational environment with youth-oriented printmaking and drawing classes, ran silk screening and community mural programs, and involved youth groups and gang members as assistants to teaching artists.⁵⁸ Centro de Arte Público was oriented towards producing works in various media that focused on Los Angeles street scenes and urban Chicana/o youth. ⁵⁹ The Goez Art Studios and Gallery organized atelier-style training in various media so that artists who were establishing themselves

⁵⁴ López and Roth 1996, 151.

⁵⁵ Faith Wilding, “The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970–75”, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 32–41.

⁵⁶ López and Roth 1996, 151.

⁵⁷ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 96.

⁵⁸ Leonard Castellanos, “The organization’s mission statement by program director Leonard Castellanos”, *Mechicano Art Center*, 1972, 30.

[http://repository.library.csuci.edu/bitstream/handle/10139/5314/mechicano_art_center\\$.pdf?s](http://repository.library.csuci.edu/bitstream/handle/10139/5314/mechicano_art_center$.pdf?squence=1)
equence=1 (accessed November 6, 2014)

⁵⁹ Highland Park, “Centro de Arte Público”, 2014.

[http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/highland-park/painting-the-walls/centro-de-arte-](http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/highland-park/painting-the-walls/centro-de-arte-publico.html)
publico.html (accessed November 25, 2014)

could become self-sustaining and gain commissions and selling works through the non-profit subsidiary TELASOMAFa (The East Los Angeles School of Mexican-American Fine Arts).⁶⁰ Self-Help Graphics & Art ran silk-screening and mural programs oriented towards education and social mobility, involving Chicana/o artists “as role models for self-expression rooted in cultural identity”.⁶¹ Its first educators were artists Linda Vallejo and Michael Amescua, who together with graphic artist Richard Duardo and muralist John Valadez developed a curriculum that combined theoretical studies with hands-on art training. Linda Vallejo also managed Self-Help Graphics & Art’s Barrio Mobile Art Studio (1975–1985), which took art classes into the streets, reaching “students at elementary schools during the weekday, as well as adults and even gang members on weekends”.⁶² The Barrio Mobile Art Studio was developed in 1975 by the Self-Help Graphics & Art’s co-founder, the Franciscan nun Sister Karen Bocalero, who together with artist Michael Amescua converted a step van “into a moving cultural center on wheels”.⁶³

The pedagogical frameworks of Anglo American feminist artists and Chicana artists differed. Focusing on gender issues and protesting against the marginalization of women, Anglo American feminists engaged in pedagogical programs that employed consciousness-raising and that included individual recollections on psychological levels for raising awareness of structures of gender and the discrimination of women. Chicanas in contrast, by focusing on how gender was lived through class and race oppression, engaged in community-centered pedagogical programs and employed educational programs aimed at social mobility of the whole Chicana/o community.

The ways in which artists in respective group collaborated with other artists also differed. Whereas Anglo American feminists organized in strategically separatist women-only art spaces and artist groups, Chicana artists organized in community-centered alliances that included both women and men and worked in mix-gendered groups and art collectives. One example is mural artist Judy Baca, who worked with adults and youths of both genders and of various ethnicities in her many mural projects. A second example is mural artist Judith Hernández, who became the fifth member in 1974 of the art collective Los Four, which worked in various media in the 1970s and early 80s.⁶⁴ A third example is Patssi Valdez, who from the early 1970s to the mid-80s was one of the four core members in the conceptual performance group Asco that addressed intersectional issues of race, gender

⁶⁰ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 96.

⁶¹ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 85.

⁶² Noriega and Rivas 2011, 81.

⁶³ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 85.

⁶⁴ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 76.

and sexuality with their street performances.⁶⁵ Whereas there existed several women-only groups and collectives among Anglo American artists in the 1970s, the women-only group Las Chicanas that exhibited with *Venas de la Mujer* in the Woman's Building in 1976, and included both Judy Baca and Judithe Hernández, is thereby an exception.

Aesthetic strategies

The 1970s was the decade in art history when performances and installations became common art media, not least among feminist artists. In the exhibition *Womanhouse* more than twenty spaces were designed as separate environments with installations, such as Judy Chicago's *Menstruation Room*, Camille Grey's *Lipstick Bathroom*, Sandy Orgel's *Linen Closet*, Kathy Huberland's *Bridal Staircase*, Karen LeCoq's and Nancy Youdelman's *Leah's Room*. In *Womanhouse* was also performances hosted, such as Chicago's *Cock and Cunt Play*, staged by Faith Wilding and Janice Lester, and Wilding's fifteen-minutes monolog *Waiting*.

In a large artist studio in Venice that served as a "transition point" after the completion of *Womanhouse* in 1972 and before the opening of the Woman's Building in 1973, Judy Chicago, Sandra Orgen, Aviva Rahmani and Suzanne Lacy created the performance *Ablutions* (1972), addressing rape and everyday violence against women.⁶⁶ Several of Lacy's early performances were staged in the Woman's Building and by 1974, Lacy was teaching performance in the Feminist Studio Workshop in the Woman's Building, which served as an important performance venue where individual artists and artist groups "connected, were nurtured and came of age".⁶⁷ As recounted by López and Roth, feminist protest art was also brought out of the environment of the Woman's Building into public urban spaces, where it met diverse public audiences:

In Los Angeles, protest art was often addressed to two very different audiences. When presented in the Woman's Building, it reconfirmed beliefs and energized an audience that already shared the artists' feminist viewpoint. At the same time, women left such

⁶⁵ Apart from the four core members Patssi Valdez, Harry Gamboa, Willie Herrón and Gronk (aka Glugio Gronk Nicandro), Asco comprised from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s a number of Chicana artists, including Diane Gamboa, Barbara Carrasco, Teresa Covarrubias, Sylvia Delgado, Consuelo Flores, Maria Elena Gaitán, Karen Gamboa, Linda Gamboa, Cindy Herrón, Sylvia Hidalgo, Marisela Norte, Lorraine Ordaz, Betty Salas, Debra Taren, Virginia Villegas, Dianne Vosoff, Kate Vosoff and Marisa Zains; C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion", *Asco: Elite of the Obscure* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 38.

⁶⁶ Josephine Withers, "Feminist Performance Art: Performing, Discovering, Transforming Ourselves", *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 168.

⁶⁷ Withers 1996, 168.

sheltered spaces and sallied forth into the streets, galleries, public spaces, and the media to confront and/or convert unknown, often unpredictable audiences.⁶⁸

Feminist artists took to the streets in confronting and converting unknown and unpredictable audiences with provocative public displays of art concerned with raising awareness of feminist issues. Susan Lacy and Leslie Labowitz addressed issues of sexual violence against women and the taboo subject of rape with performances that were brought into the streets as media events. Their performance *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977) was staged on the stairs of the Los Angeles City Hall as a media event, appropriating visual reporting strategies of TV-camera media reporters. Lacy explains:

The performance, staged at City Hall as a media event for an audience of politicians and news reporters, was designed as a series of thirty-second shots that, when strung together in a two- to four-minute news clip, would tell the story we wanted told. We considered, for example, camera angles, reporter's use of voice-over, and the role of politicians in traditional reporting strategies.⁶⁹

By staging the performance in time sequences for news clips and using the camera angles of media reporters, they reached a larger audience than those present on the actual public site, while still keeping control over the story they wanted to be told and how. Lacy's and Labowitz' next project on the subject rape was expanded to the citywide project *Three Weeks in May* (1977), co-organized with Barbara Cohen, Melissa Hoffman and Jill Soderholm, that lasted three weeks with close to thirty public art events taking place across the city of Los Angeles, including rallies, performances, self-defense workshops, educational lectures, ritual readings, and sidewalk chalking of actual rape locations.⁷⁰ *Three Weeks in May* also included two monumental city maps installed in a pedestrian shopping-centre beneath the City Hall, one with RAPE in red letters stamped on each location where women had been raped over a three-week period in May, the other with black markers for rape crisis centres indicating routes to healing. Lacy and Labowitz also organized the project *Record companies drag their feet* (1977), a carefully planned media event on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. Pre-identifying the mediated gaze of TV-camera-reporter-crews, the event was staged beneath a massive billboard for the rock band Kiss with feminist activists dressed in rooster costumes pantomiming record company executives. Developed in collaboration with Women Against Violence Against Women and the National Organization for Women, the project was as a kick-off for a national boycott of albums from three major record companies in protest of their use of images

⁶⁸ Lopéz and Roth 1996, 151.

⁶⁹ Suzanne Lacy, "Affinities: Thoughts on an Incomplete History", *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 267.

⁷⁰ Vivien Green Fryd, "Ending the Silence", *Doin'it in Public*, 2011, 159–184.

with sexual violence against women for selling records.⁷¹ Out of Lacy's and Labowitz' performances grew the umbrella organization *Ariadne: A Social Art Network* (1978–1980), a coalition of artists, activists, media reporters and politicians, with the purpose of mobilizing direct political action to end violence against women.⁷²

Chicana artists Judy Baca, Judithe Hernández, Olga Muñoz, Isabel Castro, Yreina Cervántez and Patssi Valdez also took to the streets addressing large and unpredictable audiences by working with public murals throughout the Los Angeles area, including Boyle Heights, Estrada Courts, Ramona Gardens and San Fernando Valley.⁷³ Patssi Valdez and other Chicana artists in the art collective Asco also took to the streets with street performances.⁷⁴ As Lacy and Labowitz later did in 1976, Asco also appropriated the strategies of media reporters but in a somewhat different manner. In protest against stereotypical media portrayals of the Chicana/o community, Asco staged a performance in 1974 at night in an empty East LA street with Asco member Gronk “sprawled across the asphalt with ketchup all over him, posing as the ‘victim’ of a gang retribution killing”.⁷⁵ A photograph of the scene by Asco member Harry Gamboa was then distributed to various publications and television stations where it was accepted as a real scenario of gang violence in East LA. Commenting on this photograph titled *Decoy Gang War Victim*, scholar Ondine Chavoya writes, “the image was broadcast, for example, on a KHJ-TV L.A. Channel 9, as an ‘authentic’ East L.A. Chicano gang murder and condemned as a prime example of rampant gang violence in the City of Angels”.⁷⁶ As Chavoya argues, Asco's intervention with *Decoy Gang War Victim* into the circulation of stereotypical portrayals of the Chicana/o community as a ‘gang culture’ revealed the manipulative spreading in mass media of unauthentic images as ‘true’.

The Chicana/o art scene was primarily characterized street art addressing broad and unsuspecting public audiences and easily distributed art, primarily printing. The street performances throughout the Los Angeles area by the art collective Asco include their No Mural-series with performances such as *Walking Mural* (1972), *Instant Mural* (1974) and *Asshole Mural* (1975). Another form of Chicana/o street art was the Bus Bench Project, initiated in 1972 by the Mechicano Art Center. This project was funded by the East Los Angeles Doctors Hospital and involved affiliated

⁷¹ Donis 2011, 53.

⁷² Judith E. Stein, “Collaboration”, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1996, 233.

⁷³ Goldman 1994, 47.

⁷⁴ For Chicana artists in Asco, see note 65.

⁷⁵ C. Ondine Chavoya, “Internal Exiles: The Interventionist Public and Performance Art of Asco”, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Ed. Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 197.

⁷⁶ Chavoya 2000, 197.

Mechicano artists painting backs and fronts of thirty bus benches along main thoroughfares in East LA, mainly Whittier Boulevard.⁷⁷ Bus benches were thus transformed into sites of public art to which passing pedestrians, car drivers and bus passengers had immediate access.

The main medium among Chicana/o artists in support of street art was murals. Thousands of street murals were produced from the late 1960s through the 70s in the Los Angeles area, either by individual artists or by groups of artists working in art collectives. These public murals reached a large and diverse audience in often poor and working-class neighborhoods, where other forms of permanent public art were scarce. Several mural projects were organized as part of educational youth programs. These include the mural projects initiated in 1972 by the Mechicano Art Center through which eighty-two large-scale murals were produced in the housing projects in Estrada Courts (1973–1978) and in Ramona Gardens (1973–1977) by trained and untrained muralists in collaboration with young residents and gang members from the surrounding area.⁷⁸ Several large-scale citywide mural projects were led by Judy Baca and organized as part of educational youth programs. In 1969, Baca was hired by the Los Angeles department of Recreation and Parks to teach art classes in public parks in Boyle Heights. In 1973, Baca was appointed the director of the East Los Angeles Mural Program and secured funds from the Model Cities Program, a federal urban aid program.⁷⁹ In 1974, the East Los Angeles Mural Program was expanded and became the Citywide Mural Program, through which more than four hundred murals were produced throughout the Los Angeles area under Baca's direction.⁸⁰ As mentioned above, Baca co-organized the alternative art space SPARC in developing collaborative public murals. Baca's first large-scale project through SPARC was the *Great Wall of Los Angeles*, a 700-meter long mural in the Tujunga Flood Control Channel in Valley Glen in the area of San Fernando Valley. Chicana artists working with Baca on the *Great Wall of Los Angeles* include Judith Hernández, Olga Muñiz, Isabel Castro, Yreina Cervántez and Patssi Valdez.⁸¹ The *Great Wall* took five summers from 1976 to 1983 and took more than 400 artists and youths from various ethnic groups to complete. As an educational project uncovering the history of minority groups in California, the mural narrates the history of ethnic groups in California that were excluded from the history books.

⁷⁷ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 85–86.

⁷⁸ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 82.

⁷⁹ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 80.

⁸⁰ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 80.

⁸¹ Shifra M. Goldman, "How, Why, Where, and When It All Happened: Chicano Murals of California", *Signs From the Heart: California Chicano Murals* Eds. Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez (Venice CA and Albuquerque: Social and Public Art Resource Center and University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 47.

Both white feminist artists and Chicana artists were concerned with raising awareness and educating, took to the streets, and engaged in provocative public displays of art. Besides painting, feminist Chicana artists created murals and printed forms of art, while feminist Anglo American artists preferred the media of performance and installation. Performance is an ephemeral art medium that only survives through photographic documentation, whereas mural painting is a more permanent medium. The street murals by Chicanas/os and the street performances by Asco and by Lacy and Labowitz reached a large and diverse public audience. Though many Chicana/o street murals from the 1970s have been preserved and thus still can be found throughout the Los Angeles area, mainly in East LA, installations and photographic documentation of performances by feminist artists are today found in the collections of major art museums. Two large-scale projects were made in the 1970s in Los Angeles: Judy Baca's *Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1976–1983), and Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974–1979). Both projects give voice to neglected and silenced histories. Chicago's project *The Dinner Party* paying homage to significant women artists, authors and scientists in history, engaged hundreds of women working over a span of six years in Chicago's Los Angeles studio, not far from the Woman's Building.⁸² The Great Wall, which narrates the history of minority groups and claimed to be the "longest mural in the world",⁸³ is not only difficult to reach in the San Fernando valley without a car but hard to find. Chicago's installation, in contrast, was exhibited as a large installation at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1979 and then toured the world before it found a permanent home at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007. This was the year when the thirtieth anniversary of the exhibition *Women Artists* was celebrated at the Brooklyn Museum and in Los Angeles.

Celebrating the 1976 exhibition *Women Artists*

As noted above, the exhibition *Women Artists: 1550–1950* that opened at LACMA in 1976 came about after long battles of political action against the systematic marginalization of women artists. This exhibition was organized by two art historians, Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, whose influential article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" had been published in the journal *ARTnews* in January 1971. The two women organized the exhibition as a complement to the male canon of fine art. It surveyed paintings and drawings by eighty-five women artists, all of whom were from Europe and the US, with the one exception of Frida Kahlo.⁸⁴ The

⁸² Moravec 2014.

⁸³ D. Flores Estrella, "Great Wall Introduction", *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide* (Venice CA: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 2011), 3.

⁸⁴ Sorkin and Theung 2007, 485–486.

artworks were arranged in a linear narrative, hanged on the walls in dark rooms and highlighted by spotlights so the audience could slowly walk through the exhibit and thus according to traditional art museum rituals.⁸⁵ After the show at LACMA from December 1976 to March 1977, the exhibition was mounted at the University Art Museum of Texas in Austin, the Museum of Art at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh and the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

The thirtieth anniversary of *Women Artists* was celebrated with two large exhibitions in the first and last cities of its tour. In Los Angeles, *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, was organized by Cornelia Butler at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. This exhibition, which later toured the country and Canada, showed contemporary artworks in various media by more than 120 women artists from around the world.⁸⁶ Of these 120 artists, over 50 were from the USA. Of these 50 only one was Chicana: Judy Baca. At Brooklyn Museum in New York City, the exhibition *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* was organized by the curator Maura Reilly and one of the organizers in 1976 of *Women Artists*, art historian Linda Nochlin. This exhibition, which later travelled to the Davis Museum and the Cultural Center at Wellesley College, showed contemporary artworks in various media by 87 women artists from around the world.⁸⁷ Seventeen of these artists were from the USA, twelve of whom were born in different parts of the world but live and work in the US. No Chicana artists were included.

Even though several large historical survey exhibitions with women artists were organized at various major museums in the late 1960s and 70s in USA and Canada, curator Maura Reilly, in her catalogue introduction to *Global Feminisms*, declares the *Women Artists* exhibition a “pioneering exhibition”, “a landmark event in the history of feminism and art”, and “by far the most significant curatorial corrective in the 1970s”.⁸⁸ In the catalogue essay by art historian Linda Nochlin, the selection criterion that she and Sutherland Harris applied for the 1976 exhibition, which included paintings and drawings only, is defended in retrospect, when she writes that “back

⁸⁵ For museum rituals, see Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁸⁶ *WACK!* 2007.

⁸⁷ *Global Feminisms* 2007.

⁸⁸ In 1965, *Women Artists of America, 1707–1964* including one hundred twenty-nine artists was held at the Newark Museum, New Jersey. In 1972, *Women: A Historical Survey of Works by Women Artists* including seventy-eight artists was held at Salem Fine Arts Center in North Carolina and later travelled to the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh. Also in 1972, *Old Mistresses: Women Artists of the Past* including thirty-five artists was held at Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. In 1975, the international women’s year, *Artfemme ‘75: An Exhibition of Women’s Art* including ninety-four artists was held at Musée d’Art Contemporain in Montréal, Canada. See Sorkin and Theung 2007. Quotation Reilly 2007, 27.

then, the word ‘artist,’ female as well as male, implied that the individual was primarily a painter”.⁸⁹ Considering the many kinds of visual media that artists, “female as well as male”, worked in “back then”, in the 70s, in particular street murals and printing among Chicanas/os and performance and installation among Anglo American feminists, this statement is quite surprising. Nochlin’s definition of the meaning of the word ‘artist’ reflects the focus ‘back then’ among art historians (female as well as male) on easel painting. The selection criteria Nochlin and Sutherland Harris used for the 1976 exhibition are also defended in retrospect by curator Reilly, who writes:

No one questioned in 1976 /.../ why the exhibition focused solely on artists from America and Europe, or that it included only one woman of color [sic] (Frida Kahlo). The academic canons of fine art, literature, philosophy, and so on were being challenged by feminists at that time for their masculinist tendencies, for the most part, not their Eurocentric and imperialistic ones. It would not be until the 1980s that the hegemony of the Western canons themselves was questioned.⁹⁰

Considering the political activism on the Los Angeles art scene in the 1970s and the rising Chicana/o art scene in East LA, Reilly’s statements above are not only surprising but historically inaccurate. Chicana/o artists both questioned and challenged the Eurocentric imperative in the canons of fine art before the 1980s. One example is an art intervention against LACMA in the early 1990s by the performance group Asco. When Asco member Harry Gamboa visited LACMA in 1972 and asked one of the curators why the museum never exhibited any art by a Chicano artist, the reply was: “Chicanos they don’t do art, you know, they’re in gangs”.⁹¹ As a response, Asco members Harry Gamboa, Gronk and Willie Herrón returned the following night and tagged the museum entryways with their graffiti-styled signatures, thereby claiming the whole museum and its contents. On the basis of Gamboa’s photographic documentation the next morning of their graffiti-styled signatures on the museum walls, including Patssi Valdez, and the circulation in various contexts of these photographs referred to as *Spray Paint LACMA / Project Pie in De/Face*, Asco claimed their intervention as “the first conceptual work of Chicano art to be exhibited at LACMA”.⁹²

⁸⁹ Linda Nochlin, “Women Artists Then and Now: Painting, Sculpture, and the Image of the Self”, *Global Feminisms*, 2007, 47.

⁹⁰ Reilly 2007, 27.

⁹¹ Harry Gamboa, *Del Zamora Actor Reel Part 39*, 2010. Videotaped interview with Harry Gamboa, Jr., uploaded August 30, 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2ieIoWvz3c> (accessed November 6, 2014)

⁹² Harry Gamboa, “In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms: Asco, a Case Study of Chicano Art in Urban Tones (or; Asco Was a Four-Member Word)”, *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr.* (Ed. Chon A. Noriega. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 79.

Regarding the US feminist art scene in the 1970s, Brodsky states: “Before the 1970s, women artists were almost invisible”.⁹³ Since then, feminist art has been shown in major exhibitions, incorporated in the collections of art museums and included in the canons of fine art. Chicana/o activist art from the 1970s, in contrast, is still quite invisible in both the canons of fine art and on the contemporary mainstream art scene. Thus, Chicana/o artists remain in a marginalized position. In discussing Chicana/o art from the 1970s, Noriega and Rivas point out: “Chicano artists understood their work in community-based, social movement, and art historical terms, but their ability to open up a dialogue within art criticism and with respect to museum curatorial frameworks remained extremely limited”.⁹⁴ The inverse to this statement is also true: the ability of art critics and museum curators to open up a dialogue with respect to activist art by Chicana/o artists has been regrettably limited. A task ahead for critics, curators and art historians is therefore to make space both on the mainstream art scene and in the history of art for more diverse and balanced representations by including multiple categories of identities, perceptions and political issues.

⁹³ Brodsky 1996, 104.

⁹⁴ Noriega and Rivas 2011, 91.