

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

‘EXPERIENCER’, REPORTER, ANALYST, ACTIVIST:
AUDIENCE/COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE ART PRACTICES
OF FOUR CHICANO/A ARTISTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Art in Art
Art History

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother Pierrette Gabrielle Lydie Bouchot

Who supported all my educational endeavors and made this thesis possible.

To my family and friends who gave me *incredible encouragement*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright Page	ii
Signature Page	iii
Dedication Page	iv
Acknowledgment	v
List of Figures	vii
Abstract	viii
Chapter I – Introduction	1
Chapter II – Gronk: Artist as “Experiencer”	16
Chapter III – Wayne Healy: Artist as Reporter	32
Chapter IV – Linda Vallejo: Artist as Analyst	47
Chapter V – George Yepes: Artist as Activist	64
Chapter VI – Conclusion	77
Works Cited	79
Appendix: Figures	85

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
1. Asco. <i>Walking Mural. Photograph.</i> 1972	80
2. Asco. <i>Instant Mural. Photograph.</i> 1974	80
3. Gronk. <i>Hotel Senator.</i> Acrylic on wood. 73 ¼ x 49 ¼ inches. 1990.	81
4. Gronk. Site Specific Painting. Elvehjem Museum of Art, Wisconsin. 1994.	82
5. Gronk. Site Specific Painting. Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA. 2003.	82
6. Wayne Healy. <i>Ghosts of the Barrio.</i> Estrada Courts, Los Angeles, CA. 1974.	83
7. East Los Streetscapers. <i>Parabolic Flight.</i> Olivas Park, Ventura, CA. 2007.	84
8. East Los Streetscapers. Ceramic Tiles. Olivas Park, Ventura, CA. 2007.	84
9. East Los Streetscapers. Metrolink's Slauson Station. Los Angeles, CA. 1997.	85
10. East Los Streetscapers. <i>Slauson Serenade.</i> Los Angeles, CA. 1997.	85
11. East Los Streetscapers. <i>Stairway to Global Health.</i> Lincoln Heights, 86 Los Angeles, 1991	86
12. East Los Streetscapers. Detail.	86
13. Linda Vallejo. <i>A Prayer for the Earth.</i> Mixed media. Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard. 2004.	87
14. Linda Vallejo. <i>A Prayer for the Earth.</i> Detail, Installation.	87
15. Linda Vallejo. <i>Immigration USA.</i> "Censored" Newspaper Series. 2008.	88
16. Linda Vallejo. <i>Immigration USA.</i> Detail.	88
17. Linda Vallejo. <i>Mother Earth's Chemical Waste.</i> 2006	89
18. Los Dos Streetscapers. <i>Moonscapes I: On the Tail of the Comet.</i> DMV. West Los Angeles. 1978.	90
19. Los Dos Streetscapers. <i>Moonscapes II: Cruising through Space/Time.</i> DMV. West Los Angeles. 1979.	90
20. Academia de Arte Yepes. <i>Many Hands, One Heart.</i> Chicago. 2001.	91
21. Academia de Arte Yepes. <i>Many Hands, One Heart.</i> View from Above.	91
22. Academia de Arte Yepes. <i>Cassini Mural Project.</i> Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena. 1995.	92
23. Academia de Arte Yepes. <i>Cassini Mission to Saturn.</i> 12' x 25'. 1995.	92
24. Academia de Arte Yepes. <i>JPL Cassini Spacecraft Project.</i> 1995.	93
25. Academia de Arte Yepes. <i>JPL Cassini Spacecraft Project.</i> 1995.	93

ABSTRACT

‘EXPERIENCER’, REPORTER, ANALYST, ACTIVIST:
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Master of Arts in Art, Art History

This thesis analyzes how audience/community participation is integrated into the work of four renowned contemporary Chicano artists by specifically examining their creative methods. My research expands the theories of Suzanne Lacy and Suzi Gablik in Mapping the Terrain to include community engagement as *global* to the artistic process.

I apply Lacy’s model of artist as “experiencer,” reporter, analyst or activist to the work of Chicano/a artists Gronk, Wayne Healy, Linda Vallejo and George Yepes. I further argue that what Suzi Gablik analyzed as empathy for the audience or community leads these artists to develop specific socio-artistic practices and provide services they wished they had during their youth or formative years. This examination relies on personal interviews and observation, statements from the artists, biographical literature, research and visual information as evidence to support my thesis.

My contribution to the field of Chicano scholarship is based in Lacy and Gablik’s humanistic analysis rather than the traditional political approach to Chicano artist’s role in the community. Furthermore, the four artists analyzed in this paper were established at the beginning of the Chicano Art Movement and significantly exemplify the evolution of audience/community engagement in Chicano art.

Chapter I

Introduction

As Chicano art evolves from its socio-political activist roots borne of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement to its acceptance in the mainstream art establishment,¹ Chicano artists continue to play important roles with their audience and within their community. I examine the artistic process of four Chicano/a artists whose formative years correspond to the political times of the Chicano Movement. Through professional or volunteer work, these artists fulfill various roles as they empathically engage with their audiences or communities.

In the 1995 book Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, artist and writer Suzanne Lacy investigates artists who create “engaged, caring public art” as they develop humanistic strategies to reach audiences² and foster relational work in the community.³ She defines a theoretical model based on interaction with the audience/community during the creation of public art, which she calls New Genre Public Art (NGPA). In this context, she classifies artists’ social roles into four categories according to their aesthetic strategies and overall artistic process.⁴ Also in Mapping the Terrain, artist, art critic and teacher Suzi Gablik speaks of artists who build communities and “make art socially responsive” because they offer empathy based in listening or “seeing through another’s

¹ Shifra Goldman. Dimensions of the Americas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) 394.

² Suzanne Lacy. Preface in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. Ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 11.

³ Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys” in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. 35.

⁴ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art” in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. 173.

eyes.”⁵ In this study, I apply Lacy’s model of artist as “experiencer,” reporter, analyst or activist to the work of Chicano/a artists Gronk, Wayne Healy, Linda Vallejo and George Yepes. I further argue that empathy leads these four artists to develop specific socio-artistic practices and provide services they wish they had during their youth or formative years. My argument further supports Gablik’s assertions regarding empathy and “socially responsive” art.

Contributions, Organization and Methodology

Lacy defines her NGPA model in the context of engagement with the audience or community that takes place as the art is created. I expand Lacy’s model to include engagement that is an intrinsic part of the artistic process but may take place before the art is created. I present further aspects of engagement with audience/community and reveal the empathic motives behind the four Chicano/a artists’ process. My contribution to the field of Chicano scholarship is based in Lacy and Gablik’s humanistic analysis rather than the traditional political approach to Chicano artist’s role in the community. Using Lacy’s critical framework, my examination of Gronk, Healy, Vallejo and Yepes’ art processes adds to the body of literature through close analysis of the psychological and empathic aspects of their work, allowing further integration of these four Chicano/a artists into more recent mainstream art theories.

I examine the artistic process of Chicano artist Gronk as “Experiencer” in Chapter 1, Wayne Healy as reporter in Chapter 2, Linda Vallejo as analyst in Chapter 3, and

⁵ Suzi Gablik. “Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism.” Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. 82.

George Yepes as activist in Chapter 4. Although they do not produce work that Lacy would qualify as New Genre Public Art, they assume roles as artists and engage with the audience or community following principles defined in Lacy's model. Either professionally (Healy, Gronk) or through the art educational opportunities they provide pro-bono (Yepes, Vallejo), these four artists develop specific relational strategies with their audience/community that are led by empathy. Because of the more subjective nature of this study, psychological and spiritual examination relies heavily on personal interviews and observation, statements from the artists, biographical literature, research and analysis of visual information as evidence to support my thesis.

Historical Interpretations of Chicano Artists' Role

Historically, the role of Chicano artists has been mostly discussed within the political context of the Chicano Movement, which developed at the end of the 1960s. Art historians Shifra Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto analyze the impetus behind Chicano art in a 1991 essay entitled "The Political and Social Contexts of Chicano Art."⁶ They describe Chicano art at the end of the 1960s as an art movement "rather than simply a collection of individuals."⁷ Rather than focusing on the role and engagement of individual Chicano artists, much early Chicano scholarship has consequently examined the socio-cultural role and engagement of Chicano collectives and community organizations of the Chicano Art Movement within the political context of the Chicano

⁶ Shifra Goldman and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto. "The Political and Social Contexts of Chicano Art" in Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, University of California Los Angeles, 1991) 83-95.

⁷ Ibid, 83.

Movement. An in-depth examination of the engagement of the audience or community in the art process has been mostly anecdotal (thus my use of quotes in this review) except for a few individual Chicano/a artists who received special attention as art activist leaders, such as Judith Baca. In the following paragraphs and as part of my review of literature, I examine the roles attributed to Chicano/a artists in art historical literature and categorize them according to their description.

Artist as Visual Language Developer

In a 1991 article entitled “The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art,” art historian Tomás Ybarra-Frausto argues that Chicano artists worked with activists and intellectuals to create a visual language that promoted socio-cultural self-determination for the Chicano people.⁸ In order to affirm its culture, Chicano art had to reflect the value and values of its people. Chicano artists assumed the primary role and responsibility to articulate the visual language reflective of the Chicano Movement’s ideologies. Ybarra-Frausto writes of a “socially engaged artistic consciousness” which was facilitated by the practice of working in art collectives and organizations newly established during the 1960’s.⁹ The engagement he mentions supports the social-political role/responsibility of Chicano artists to their community. Indeed, Ybarra-Frausto argues that Chicano art was about “public connection instead of private cognition.”¹⁰ The value placed on collaboration and Chicano visual language conventions to rally Chicanos/as

⁸ Tomás Ybarra-Frausto. “The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art.” Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, Eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 129.

⁹ Ibid, 131.

¹⁰ Ibid, 134.

under the socio-political efforts of the Chicano Movement superseded individual artistic expression.

Artist as Social Consciousness Builder

Chicano artists also acknowledged their responsibility to their community. In a 1990 video entitled “Through the Walls,” Chicano artist Carlos Almaraz declared that artists had a responsibility to help improve the social condition of the community they came from through awareness:

I feel that, since I have learned to paint, my ultimate responsibility and maybe the responsibility of many artists, or Chicanos, or Black, whatever, if they are working class artists, [if] they come from working class backgrounds, their responsibility is to give the talent back to the community from which they come from, and I say that I use my own art to bring about social consciousness and hopefully someday social change and [that] the conditions of the barrio will improve.¹¹

Empathy for the working class motivated artists to make a difference in their community. They assumed the role of social consciousness builder in the community and mass media.

Artist as Educator of the Community

In 1990, art activist and historian Lucy Lippard analyzes the work from artists of many ethnic backgrounds including Latin America.¹² She places their art in the context of politics, culture and personal experience. She further highlights the educational role of Chicano artist Leo Tanguma with the 1986 portable mural *Despues de la Cruz* which was

¹¹ Through the Walls. Produced in conjunction w/ the exhibition CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. Videocassette (Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, 1990).

¹² Lucy Lippard. Mixed Blessings (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

“carefully researched and rendered because Tanguma, who often works with city school students, sees his art as educationally and politically as well as esthetically illuminating.”¹³ Tanguma used political messages in his art and assumed a role of educator as he engaged with youth. Lippard also describes performance art practices in the public space of the street by “politicized artists concerned with outreach into their communities.”¹⁴ In Mapping the Terrain, Lippard embraces the notions of empathy and exchange between artists and others, and defines public art as “accessible work of any kind that cares about, challenges, involves, and consults the audience for or with whom it is made, respecting community and environment.”¹⁵ She argues that knowledge of effect/affect of communication between art and audience may become a type of experimental education that could be taught in studio and art history classes.¹⁶

Goldman and Ybarro-Frausto argue that the educative component of the Chicano Art Movement related to the Chicano Movement’s early philosophy, “the utopian ‘El plan spiritual de Aztlan’ (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlan) [...] called for [...] an emphasis on humanistic and nonmaterialistic culture and education.”¹⁷ Goldman and Ybarro-Frausto describe the response of Chicano artists who assumed many roles in order to educate the Chicano community, “Artists functioning as teachers in the local community, as muralists, and mural art directors, and as exhibiting artists, gathered in centers and

¹³ Ibid, 89.

¹⁴ Ibid, 93.

¹⁵ Lucy Lippard. “Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be.” Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. Ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 121.

¹⁶ Ibid, 128.

¹⁷ Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto. “The Political and Social Contexts of Chicano Art.” 84.

galleries that provided an outlet for their didactic and aesthetic energies.”¹⁸ A Chicano artist who worked in accordance with the philosophies of the Chicano Art Movement’s early years assumed a pedagogical function, led by a sense of empathy promoted by the Chicano Movement. Lacy agrees with Lippard, Goldman and Ybarro-Frausto about the didactic qualities of social art, and further argues that art created to foster audience engagement requires an educative function, which manifests in the content of the art as specific information.¹⁹

Artist as Mural Makers

In the context of identity politics, Shifra Goldman analyzes more specifically the educative role of the murals in the 1982 essay “Mexican Muralism: Its Social-Educative Roles in Latin America and the United States.”²⁰ She argues that Chicano muralists played a crucial role in their community, inspired by the earlier role assumed by the three great Mexican muralists (Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros). The Mexican muralists advocated political action for change in consciousness, and educated the masses about history and social issues.²¹ Goldman mentions that artist Leo Tanguma actually met Mexican muralist Orozco and got inspired to delve into an educational role under his mentorship.²²

¹⁸ Ibid, 86.

¹⁹ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art” 180.

²⁰ Goldman. “Mexican Muralism: Its Social-Educative Roles in Latin America and the United States” in Aztlan: International Journal of Chicano Studies Research (Vol. 13.1 and 2, 1982) 111-134.

²¹ Ibid, 111.

²² Goldman. Dimensions of the Americas. 115.

In 2006, art history scholar Peter Selz analyzes Chicano art and its engagement to the community through a political lens, but goes further than most scholars to describe the actual engagement of the Chicano community in the making of some murals. “Many, perhaps most of the murals were painted by people within the communities, often by untrained individuals and groups under the guidance of professional artists”²³ Selz addresses community participation in the performance art of the United Farm Workers’ Cultural Center in del Rey by Fresno, “The Teatro Campesino arranged impromptu performance and street actions for and by farmworkers.”²⁴ In an overview of Selz’ book, scholar Susan Landauer argues that Chicano community centers fostered engaging collaborative work between artists and the community in the making of the murals. “Plaza de la Raza in East Los Angeles, founded in 1969, and Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco’s Mission District, founded in 1970, were among the first *centros* to bring together artists and residents to create murals throughout their neighborhoods. The spirit of collaboration has been crucial to mural making in Chicano communities.”²⁵ In Selz’ foreword, Executive Director at San Jose Museum of Art Daniel Keegan links social art to empathy and engagement to meaning, as he argues that “art with a cause...has always been about the human condition...Art of engagement is about content.”²⁶

Chicano/a Artist as Community Leader

²³ Selz, Peter. Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 171.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Susan Landauer. “An Overview: Countering Cultures: The California Context” in Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond. 13-14.

²⁶ Daniel Keegan. Foreword in Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond. xii.

In the 1991 essay “El Mundo Feminino: Chicana Artists of the Movement-A Commentary on Development and Production,” artist and art critic Amalia Mesa-Bains analyzes the significance of Chicana artists within the context of the Chicano Movement.²⁷ She argues that, because the role of women was based in relationships, Chicana artists assumed the role of cultural narrator or chronicler, and taught values through oral traditions.²⁸ The artists followed a political desire for social change, and what she calls “a maternal sense of responsibility for the generations to come.”²⁹ Examining the work of several Chicana artists, Mesa-Bains analyzes the work of artist, educator and activist Judith Baca as a “publicly engaged process that employs both narration and social critique” in her murals.³⁰ The author describes the muralist’s methodology: “Each year youth of all races, under Baca’s direction, learned about events such as the Japanese American Internment, the Freedom Bus Rides, and the Dust Bowl Journey as they works on the mural.”³¹ Mesa-Bains explains the motives behind the artist’s work, “Baca is committed to engaging gang youth in work that helps them define themselves and their culture because she was challenged as a youth growing up in Chicano barrios in the Pacoima area to define her self.”³² Judy Baca’s empathy for the audience/community led her to develop specific socio-artistic practices in order to

²⁷ Amalia Mesa-Bains. “El Mundo Feminino: Chicana Artists of the Movement-A Commentary on Development and Production.” Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. 131-140.

²⁸ Ibid, 132.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 133.

³¹ Mesa-Bains. “El Mundo Feminino.” 133.

remedy challenges she faced in her youth, which supports the second argument in my thesis regarding empathy.

Baca has been a community leader for more than thirty years, engaging the public in painting community murals. She has written about the need to create public art that is socially responsible.³³ She is most renowned for *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* considered as the world's longest murals at 2,700' in San Fernando Valley.³⁴ Baca explains the large scale of community involvement in the creation of the *Great Wall*, which "brings 250 young people from different ethnic groups, with about 40 historians and 50 artists to create a narrative on the history of the people who make up Los Angeles."³⁵ The artist founded Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), a community organization that has sponsored more than 500 murals and engaged thousands of youth, their families and artists since its inception in 1976.³⁶ Reflecting on her artistic mission, Baca states that "collaborative art brings a range of people into conversations about their visions for their neighborhoods and their nations."³⁷

Lacy's Model and Chicano Artists Working in NGPA

Scholarship that analyzes the humanistic/empathic impetus of Chicano artists beyond the traditional socio-political theoretical approach is not found until Lacy and Gablik's

³² Ibid.

³³ Judith Baca. "Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society" in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. 131-8.

³⁴ Judith Baca. Biography. <http://www.judybaca.com/now/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=27>.

³⁵ Through the Walls. Videocassette.

³⁶ Baca. Biography.

³⁷ Ibid.

work in 1995.³⁸ They frame their discussion around public art practices where interaction with the audience or community and the art created happen simultaneously. In “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art,” Lacy analyzes interaction between artist and audience/community in a more critical way than has been previously done in art historical discourse. She argues that her model is based on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, political intention, and emphasizes process of community involvement and collaboration with the audience over created product.³⁹ Lacy analyzes the roles artists may assume in NGPA, yet the characteristics and description of each role are quite succinct.⁴⁰ In her effort to categorize the roles of artists who interact with their audience/community, Lacy positions each role on a linear diagram representative of the continuum of role possibilities from *private* to *public* art forms. The artist as *experiencer* is located at the private end of the linear diagram, because the art product is the least influenced by the audience. The next position is occupied by the reporter, followed by the analyst, and last the activist who offers the most *public* art process. The choice of a linear diagram suggests that these four roles are not rigidly defined or assigned, because artists can move between them according to the art process they choose to apply.⁴¹ In the context of Chicano art, Lacy examines the work of three Chicano/a artists as representative of her NGPA model: Judy Baca, Yolanda López, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. They possess characteristics defined in NGPA like many years of experience in the field of public art; a mature and often distinct artistic

³⁸ Suzanne Lacy, ed. Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art.

³⁹ Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 28.

⁴⁰ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 173.

⁴¹ Ibid.

language; engagement of broad, layered or atypical audiences; and clearly stated ideas about social change and interaction.⁴² Baca and Gómez-Peña write essays included in Mapping the Terrain about the need for artists to create socially meaningful art that engages and connects people of all ethnicities.

Suzanne Lacy argues that the New Genre Public Art model of “collective relationship” is spiritual in essence.⁴³ A spiritual tradition manifests artistically through psychological and/or political expression as shared memories and cultural values. Yet a psychological and spiritual examination of art has been mostly superseded by “a focus on its more overt political aspects.”⁴⁴ This is true for Chicano art. As an ethnic movement generated by political activism, the Chicano Movement and its art practices concur with Lacy’s idea that “activist art grew out of the general militancy of the [Civil Rights Movement] era, and identity politics was part of it.”⁴⁵ Beyond its political analysis, Lacy states that engaged, caring public art requires further critical examination and art historical context.⁴⁶ She mentions a more recent practice in art criticism as “descriptive writing,” meant to address the contextual nature of public art in regards to location and audience.⁴⁷ “Some writers have assumed a more participatory role with artists in the process of the work, feeling that recontextualizing the work within other frames of reference -the larger social context prescribed by the issue- is an appropriate critical

⁴² Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 19-47.

⁴³ Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 36.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 26.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁷ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 172.

response.”⁴⁸ Lacy feels that this type of art criticism lacks credibility as it does not investigate the work with critical means of evaluation. I will review such literature pertinent to each of the four artists in their respective chapters.

Social Empathy as Art Activism

In an essay also included in Mapping the Terrain, Suzi Gablik regrets the lack of empathy, or what she calls “more feminine values of care and compassion, of seeing and responding to need” in much modern art.⁴⁹ Lacy relates Gablik’s concept of social empathy to art activism. “Empathy begins with the self reaching out to another self, an underlying dynamic of feeling that becomes the source of activism” explains Lacy’s theoretical approach as psychologically rather than politically based.⁵⁰ She argues that ethnic and feminist art begins with a consciousness of the artist’s community of origin, which becomes the primary audience of the art created.⁵¹ Gablik reflects on the new role of the artist. She defines audience engagement as collaboration with the artist, and work produced as public in essence:

There is a distinct shift in the locus of creativity from the autonomous, self contained individual to [...] a collaborative and interdependent process. As artists [...] reconsider what it means to be an artist, they are reconstructing the relationship between individual and community, between art work and public.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Gablik. “Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism.” 80.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 36.

⁵¹ Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys” 36.

⁵² Ibid, 76.

Suzana Milevska, an Eastern European art theorist, acknowledges that the aforementioned shift was rooted in pre-1990s art practices relating to “post-conceptual, socially and politically engaged art, or by art activism.”⁵³ She agrees with Gablik as she describes the recent shift in the art process as being “greatly influenced by philosophical or sociological theories.”⁵⁴ In 2005, French philosopher Alain Badiou addresses the charitable orientation of certain aspects of contemporary art that lead to a new role for the artist, “[he] becomes a kind of social mediator whose function is to question or welcome new figures of the community.”⁵⁵ In 2006, French philosopher Jacques Rancière mentions the importance of relationship in new art practices⁵⁶ and discusses how art refers to common/public experience.⁵⁷ To him, the new relationship between the artist and the community is based on social issues and expands beyond traditional art venues to engage the audience: “A number of artists to-day [...] want to get out of the museum, and provoke modifications of the space of everyday life, giving rise to new forms of relations. Their propositions engage thereby with the new forms and the new discontents of social life.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Rancière argues that this new type of art and consequent relationship foster a new type of community.⁵⁹ Ultimately, the socio-artistic expression is that of the community, which he poetically describes as “the song of the earth or the cry

⁵³ Suzana Milevska. “Participatory Art: A Paradigm Shift from Object to Subjects” in Springerin: Hefte für Gegenwartskunst “Theory Now” (February 2006).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Elie During. “Alain Badiou: Le 21e Siècle n’a pas Commencé.” Interview. Centre International d’Etude de la Philosophie Française Contemporaine (26 Dec. 2008).

⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière. The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).

⁵⁷ Bettina Funcke. “Displaced struggles: Bettina Funcke on Rancière and the art world” in Art Forum (March 2007).

⁵⁸ Jacques Rancière. “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art” in Art and Research (Summer 2008: Vol.2.1).

⁵⁹ Ben Davis. “Rancière for Dummies” in Artnet Magazine (2009).

of men.”⁶⁰ Not only in the United States but also in Western and Eastern Europe, philosophers, art historians, critics and artists analyze the shift of certain art making practices from object to subject, and the resulting audience/community participation from passive to active. A social agenda, often coupled with a political one, is at the core of this shift where the artist responds from a place of empathy.

Because Chicano art –as an ethnic art- started as a collaborative and interdependent process rather than an individual one, Chicano artists like Judith Baca, Yolanda López, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña have always demonstrated engagement with their audience/community. Yet, many Chicano artists who emerged as collaborative artists during the highly politicized years of the Chicano Movement may experience the reversed artistic shift to a more individual practice. As emerging artists in the 1970s in East L.A., the heart of the Los Angeles Chicano Art Movement, the four artists I analyze engaged in collaborative and politicized artistic processes. As they have evolved into more individualistic practices, they have demonstrated in some of their art practice/process that they continue to assume socio-artistic roles and engage with the audience/community in an empathic way.

Chapter II

Gronk: Artist as *Experiencer*

This chapter analyzes how Gronk’s artistic process reflects Suzanne Lacy’s model of artist as *experiencer*. Lacy explains, “The artist, like a subjective anthropologist,

⁶⁰ Rancière. “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community.”

enters the territory of the Other and presents observations on people and places through a report of her own interiority. In this way, the artist becomes a conduit for the experience of others, and the work a metaphor for relationship.”⁶¹ Led by empathic motives, artists as *experiencers* observe other people and/or places as subjective anthropologists, and interpret their observations in a personal -thus subjective- manner.⁶² Lacy’s role of artist as *experiencer* in the context of New Genre Public Art examines the empathic engagement with the community *during* the actual creation of the artwork.⁶³ I expand Lacy’s role of artists as *experiencer* to include forms of engagement with the community that take place *prior* to the making of the artwork.

In this chapter, I examine Gronk’s engagement with the audience and/or community during his formative years in Asco (Spanish for “nausea.”). I argue that his socio-political role as an artist in the community is based on empathy and established during his formative years. I examine Gronk’s work outside of Asco and the educative role he fulfills in the community. I argue that his artistic process follows the framework that Lacy defines for the artist as *experiencer* throughout his career. Lastly, I examine the empathic motivations behind his more recent work.

In “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art,” Suzanne Lacy titles the paragraph about the first role she analyzes “Subjectivity and Empathy: Artist as *Experiencer*.”⁶⁴ She argues that the artwork of the *experiencer* conserves more

⁶¹ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 174.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 174.

traditional and fundamental characteristics of subjectivity based on artist experience.⁶⁵

Gronk describes the way he sees his role as an artist,

You are where you live, in many respects... the poverty that exists here; the way cultures are now butting up against each other and having to deal with one another . . . and all of those things perhaps will fade away forever. That kind of information is what I'm trying to gather and in some way document by putting it in my artwork. I'm an observer of my time, and I share my observations. That for me is the greatest job of an artist, the ability to share.⁶⁶

Gronk's statement demonstrates Lacy's characterization of artist in the role of *experiencer* as one who empathically makes socio-cultural observations, then interprets them in his art. Lacy states that artists as *experiencer* assume the methodology of a "subjective anthropologist" because their artistic process includes a study of Others. According to Dictionary.com, an anthropologist offers a "scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans."⁶⁷ Gronk subjectively incorporates socio-cultural observations of Others to his art.

Gronk's Socio-political Role in Community Street Performances

Within the context of artist as *experiencer*, Lacy explains that art process is emphasized over art product in art movements from the second half of the twentieth century like conceptualism and performance art.⁶⁸ The way Gronk sees his life naturally leads to performance as his primary art form, emphasizing process over product. Gronk is a Chicano painter, sculptor, performance and multi-media artist who emerged in the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Marisela Norte. "Gronk." Interview in *Bomb Magazine* 98 (Winter 2007).

⁶⁷ "Anthropologist." *Dictionary.com*. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anthropologist>>.

⁶⁸ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 174.

early 1970s in the Latino community of East Los Angeles during the Chicano Art Movement.⁶⁹ Glugio “Gronk” Nicandro was born in East L.A. His middle name is an indigenous Brazilian word which he says means “to fly.”⁷⁰ According to art historian Max Benavidez, the artist’s “adoption of an enigmatic moniker involved the conception of his entire life as a work of art.”⁷¹ Gronk conceived of his life as a dramatic experience, “life itself was going to be this live performance.”⁷²

Gronk emerged as a young artist during the political times of the Chicano Movement. As a teenager, he adopted a socio-political role in the community and the Chicano Art Movement. He was only sixteen when he got involved with Harry Gamboa Jr., Willie Herrón, and Patssi Valdez, and shortly after founded the Los Angeles Chicano avant-garde group Asco in 1972.⁷³ Asco is considered one of the first Chicano collaboratives to bring political activist messages into its art.⁷⁴ In the essay “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),” Gamboa recalls that the four members of the group worked together to create drawings for the Chicano political and literary *Regeneración* journal in their early days together before adopting the name Asco to

⁶⁹ Max Benavidez. *Gronk*. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2007) 17.

According to Benavidez, this is a name possibly made up by Gronk as a teenager.

⁷⁰ Cheech Marin. *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*. (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2002) 150.

⁷¹ Benavidez. *Gronk*. 18.

⁷² Ibid, 18.

⁷³ Marin, 150.

⁷⁴ Marin, 150.

identify their collective.⁷⁵ Gamboa explains the onsets of the public aspect of the members' works, "After several intense months of drawing and eclectic conversation, they decided to manifest their ideas in the public arena of the streets."⁷⁶ The streets of East Los Angeles became the place where engagement with the community took place in the form of performances.

Asco's Empathy as Socio-political Expression of Barrio Youth

Lacy states that artists who act as a means of expression for a social group are compelled by profound empathy.⁷⁷ Asco's views on Chicano identity politics in the 1970s were led by empathic motives based in personal experience. The group's members wished to represent the reality of the urban youth of the barrio. They stated, "We were the true representatives of the street, the real Chicanos who were taking it all the way. We weren't romanticizing or glorifying what the streets were like."⁷⁸ They showed great empathy for community youth in their early efforts, and were influenced by the urban environment, media images, and current trends in performance art.⁷⁹ Gronk and his friends employed "hit and run" tactics as they -often illegally- staged and documented provocative activist art performances to address social or cultural issues. From its inception, the Asco collective showed empathy and expressed it as socio-political urban

⁷⁵ Harry Gamboa Jr. "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)." in Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. 123.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 174-175.

⁷⁸ Max Benavidez. "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility" in Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge. 18.

⁷⁹ Fluxus and Andy Warhol are mentioned.

activism. Empathy remains an important factor in Gronk's artistic process beyond his formative years in Asco.

Asco's emotional and psychological impacts on the community

Asco's artistic process involved the community through interventionist performances meant to generate reactive emotional and physical engagement from the street audience. Artist and scholar Amalia Mesa-Bains notes that Asco adopted a socio-political role that upset the Chicano community as it opposed traditional cultural ideals embraced by the Chicano Movement.⁸⁰ Benavidez explains that Asco members, inspired by their urban environment, assumed a role of cultural provocateur as they experimented with artistic expressions unseen in the Chicano Art Movement until then.⁸¹ According to Gamboa, Asco embraced the controversial response to its art and rejection by socially influential members of the Chicano community as *not Chicano*.⁸² Steven Durland and Linda Frye Burnham, who have extensively written about community arts, describe another role for Asco's members "For some disaffected people in their community, Asco members became anti-establishment heroes. Harry Gamboa [...] described Gronk as a 'personality' even back then. 'He was a myth'."⁸³ Either as socio-political provocateur to some, or anti-establishment hero to others, Gronk as a member of Asco fulfilled an empathic socio-political role that was directly based in the engagement he developed with his audience/community. Because of its performative nature, Asco's engagement with the

⁸⁰ Mesa-Bains. "El Mundo Feminino." 139.

⁸¹ Benavidez. "Gronk." 41.

⁸² Gamboa. "In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms." 124.

⁸³ Steven Durland and Linda Burnham. "Art With A Chicano Accent: Chicano Art in Los Angeles" in High Performance 35 Vol. 9.3 (1986).

community was mostly documented by Gamboa's photographs and writings, and the members' interviews. Herrón graphically illustrates Asco's intention, "we wanted to reach inside and pull people's guts out."⁸⁴ In "Word of Honor," art historian Arlene Raven describes the ephemeral nature of public art works that engage the community. She argues that this type of work leaves emotional and psychological impressions on the public rather than an actual art object.⁸⁵ The response from the community to Asco's street performances was emotional and psychological; it ranged from confusion and verbal hostility to shock and disgust.⁸⁶ This disgust inspired their group name Asco.⁸⁷ To adopt a name based on public feedback demonstrates the importance given to the group's relationship with its audience, the subject-over-object emphasis, and the "passive aggressive" engagement with its community. The term *Asco* further describes the way the artists felt about themselves and about the injustices cast upon the Chicano community during the socio-political times of the Civil Rights Movements and the Vietnam War.⁸⁸

Community's Physical Response

Art historian Chon Noriega explains the community's reaction to the socio-political statement in the 1971 *Stations of the Cross*. He describes the response from the crowd to the Asco performance procession meant to replace a cancelled annual Christmas

⁸⁴ Max Benavidez. "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility." 18.

⁸⁵ Arlene Raven. "Word of Honor" in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. 162.

⁸⁶ Benavidez. Gronk. 41.

⁸⁷ Gamboa. "In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms" 123.

⁸⁸ Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg. "The Pachuco's Flayed Hide: the Museum, Identity, and Buenas Garras" in Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. 104.

parade down Whittier Boulevard where “last-minute shoppers were caught in an impromptu communion between consumerism and death...In the end, *Stations of the Cross* found [a] mode of communication in the rumor and innuendo that attended the performance.”⁸⁹ As a religiously and culturally charged street performance, *Stations of the Cross* further caused demonstrations from outraged community members. Indeed, Willie Herrón who played Jesus remembers the violent reaction of the crowd “I was jumped and crowbarred on McBride and Whittier Boulevard, then I walked bleeding to the Angeles Emergency.”⁹⁰ Beyond the emotional and psychological response of the community, Asco’s engagement was sometimes physical.

Starting in the 1970s, Chicano muralism occupied an important place in the Chicano Art Movement, and muralists fulfilled important socio-political and educative roles. Asco’s early role and engagement in the community is again that of a socio-political provocateur within the Chicano Mural Movement during the same period. In a desire to transform traditional muralism to an art form that would be more representative of its urban experience and conceptual performance approach, Asco decided to release the mural from its static form.⁹¹ Engagement with the crowd in Asco’s muralist art process generated similar public demonstrations. In *Walking Mural* (December 24, 1972-figure 1), each member dressed as a religious or traditional symbol and performed a bizarre mural parade down Whittier Boulevard. Herrón, who was a “multifaceted mural

⁸⁹ Chon Noriega. “No Introduction” in Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr. Chon Noriega, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 10.

⁹⁰ Harry Gamboa Jr. “Gronk and Herrón: Muralists (1976)” in Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr. Chon Noriega, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 41.

⁹¹ Gamboa. “In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms.” 124.

that had become bored with its environment and left,”⁹² explains the public’s aggressive response, “They ripped my cape, man. They tore my tail off as they screamed ‘putos’.”⁹³ Gronk’s 1974 *Instant Mural* idea where Patssi Valdez and George Sandoval were taped to a liquor store wall generated a different reaction from the community (figure 2). Gamboa, who documented the performance with photographs, comments: “Several anonymous individuals, concerned about their welfare, offered to help Valdez and Sandoval escape the confines of the low-tack masking tape.”⁹⁴ Asco’s theatrical play was so effective that passers-by believed Valdez and Sandoval to be helpless. In this way, the public displayed empathy as a form of solidarity because of Asco’s empathic socio-political art. The reaction of the community to Asco’s *Walking Mural*, *Instant Mural* or other performances like *Stations of the Cross* demonstrate Raven’s discourse on emotional and psychological impact on the audience, and support Gronk’s artistic expression as community engaged ephemeral art.

Subjectivity in Gronk’s Work

Gronk and Asco’s artistic expression is based in subjectivity. According to Princeton’s WordNet, *subjectivity* is defined as a “judgment based on individual personal impressions and feelings and opinions rather than external facts.”⁹⁵ Benavidez states that Asco’s street performance “has to be seen as a unique and organic form of rebellious artistic production because it was an intuitive expression that flowed out and reflected the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Gamboa “Gronk and Herrón: Muralists (1976).” 41.

⁹⁴ Gamboa. “In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms.” 126.

⁹⁵ “Subjectivity.” *WordNet*. Princeton University. 5 July 2009 <<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=subjectivity&sub=Search+WordNet&o2=&o0=1&o7=&o5=&o1=1&o6=&o4=&o3=&h=>>>.

personal, cultural and social experiences of the group.”⁹⁶ The terms *intuitive expression* implies that Asco’s work is based in subjectivity. Benavidez’s phrase “reflected the personal, cultural and social experiences” used to qualify Asco’s “rebellious” art form is reminiscent of WordNet’s definition of subjectivity as “based on individual personal impressions and feelings and opinions.” Lacy argues that the role of *experiencer* is subjective in nature. Gronk describes his engagement with the Other as a relational exchange, which testifies to his role as *experiencer*, “Even going back in time to ASCO and pre-ASCO, it was always interesting to mix with other people in a way that you could learn from that experience.”⁹⁷ I will demonstrate this subjective approach below.

Gronk’s “Subjective Anthropologist” Skills

An example of the anthropological *experiencer* process can be seen in Gronk’s 1990 series *Hotel Senator: 23 Portals to the Underworld*.⁹⁸ The artist spent years observing the clients’ traffic in and out of this cheap hotel in his neighborhood in downtown Los Angeles –which he referred to as his archeological site.⁹⁹ He stole the hotel’s beat-up sign as an archeological finding, and became a resident of the hotel for a while to investigate the anthropological aspects of what he called “society throwaways”: prostitutes, drug addicts, homeless, etc. Gronk defines his artistic process, “I did research. I needed to know what it was like to live there. I had to absorb the essence.

⁹⁶ Benavidez. *Gronk*. 9.

⁹⁷ Norte. “Gronk.”

⁹⁸ Benavidez. *Gronk*. 75.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

You've heard of Method actors, I am a Method painter."¹⁰⁰ Feelings of discomfort, fear and alienation are experienced by Hotel Senator's residents in Gronk's subjective representation of the bellhop who aggresses the viewer with his inhuman scream and infernal personality shown as flames escaping from his body (figure 3). The title of this painting, *Hotel Senator*, explains that the figurative representation of the bellhop is in this case a personification of the whole hotel. Gronk turns his non-scientific anthropological observations of Others' feelings/lives into an empathic subjective visual response. The information is shared with the audience who, in its turn, gets to experience the hotel beyond its architecture through Gronk's subjective aesthetic. Art historian Max Benavidez explains the significance of this body of work:

In *Hotel Senator* Gronk elevated transience and horror to the level of the supernatural, where they became that thing that only art can be: the witness to our own being... He was now documenting underclass life in his art... *Hotel Senator* will continue to have an impact after Gronk is gone. With the exhibition, [Gronk] demonstrated that he ...was attuned to the mass disillusionment of our time... he paid homage to the travails of the lonely residents at the Senator Hotel.¹⁰¹

Investigating and visually documenting the Other is anthropological. Paying homage –subjective in essence- to the underclass stems from empathy, the other element employed by the artist as *experiencer*.

Gronk's Engagement with the Community as Relational Interactions

In the introduction to Mapping the Terrain, Suzanne Lacy argues that, in NGPA practice, the space between artist and audience is not filled by the art object but rather by

¹⁰⁰ Benavidez. "Chicano Art: Culture, Myth, and Sensibility." 20.

¹⁰¹ Benavidez. Gronk. 83.

the relationship that develops between artist and audience.¹⁰² Gronk's engagement with his audience/community after Asco evolved into an interactional relationship with the audience/community as he painted on museum walls, sometimes directly in front of the public. The relationship created with the audience is fundamental to the artist's work strategy and requires communicative skills. Art historian Jacquelyn Days Serwer contends that, starting in 1994, Gronk's work evolved into large site-specific painting installations, which fostered a beneficial exchange between Gronk and his audience as he assumed a role as artist (figure 4),¹⁰³

Gronk is a public figure who thrives on social interactions, especially those that derive from his site-specific projects. [...] He enjoys the role of creator, and audiences are captivated by being able to observe art in the making. While the aura of the artist persists, Gronk's ability to interact with the audience during these public encounters establishes a relationship with visitors that gives them a personal basis for appreciating contemporary art.¹⁰⁴

The artist describes the nature of his social interaction during site-specific paintings, "I interact with a wide range of people: elementary age children, staff, visitors and the community. I work and stop to talk to people and work some more and stop and talk some more. It's all improvisation. It's also very different from how I work in my studio."¹⁰⁵ Gronk's site-specific museum work supports that his artistic process continues to be based on audience/community relationship, but evolves into a truer exchange or interaction with his public. His

¹⁰² Lacy. "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys." 35.

¹⁰³ Jacquelyn Days Serwer. American Kaleidoscope: Themes and Perspectives in Recent Work. (New York: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1996) 31-32.

¹⁰⁴ Serwer. 35.

¹⁰⁵ Xavier Cázares Cortéz., "Gronk Speaking in Tongues" in Coagula Art Journal 79 (2006) 18.

site-specific artistic process in the public realm requires direct communication skills in the development of this type of audience engagement.

Gronk as Empathic Listener

Gronk embodies what Suzi Gablik describes as the empathic listener because he listens to others and allows his artwork to change accordingly, as he incorporates some of the comments from the audience into his painting installations.¹⁰⁶ As an Artist on Staff, I observed Gronk at work during his two-week residency at the Carnegie Art Museum in Oxnard in March 2004. Noticing his interaction with the elementary school students who came to the museum to see him work, I observed his methodology, the direct effect this exchange had on his work, and the intention behind his interaction with the audience. On the first afternoon of his residency, Gronk quickly covered the whole wall with black outlined shapes (figure 5), and filled them with a selected palette of colors, working with cheap industrial brushes. The next morning, he engaged visiting youth from local elementary schools with stories of his childhood and the world of imagination he surrounds himself with, and taught them what he calls the “A, B, Cs of art” and the contrast of “push and pull” exemplified in his art. Students questioned and shared what they saw in the painting. This type of verbal exchange is what Gablik describes as a “gentle, diffused mode of listening” where the artist has the empathic responsibility to include some of what he has heard into his artwork.¹⁰⁷ That afternoon, Gronk painted over the whole wall, reinforcing some of the shapes and lines he liked, modifying others,

¹⁰⁶ Gablik. “Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism.” 82.

¹⁰⁷ Lacy “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 36.

layering more colors on top of each other. For example, a student saw a Ferris wheel in one of his circular shapes. Gronk interiorized the comment and carried the amusement park theme across the upper area of the wall installation the following morning. Gronk's site-specific process supports Lacy's analysis of empathic listener, "This process of communication describes not only a way of gathering information but of conceptualizing and representing the artist's formal concerns. The voices of others speak through this artwork, often literally."¹⁰⁸ The cycle repeated almost daily during the first week of his residency, as Gronk kept adding new layers of design as symbols of the layers of people and cultures that create the urban setting.¹⁰⁹ When Gronk left, the wall was painted over. Besides framing his mural practice in the domain of performance and experience, Gronk explains the symbolism behind his decision, "When I do a mural in a museum they're usually whitewashed afterwards, which is a nod to Rivera and Siqueiros who had there [sic] works here in this country destroyed."¹¹⁰

Gronk's Relationship with the Audience/Community as Art Object

Lacy argues that, for some NGPA artists, the relationship *is* the actual artwork. Some artwork requires multiple levels of collaborative relationships, which is what Lacy describes as "'juxtaposition' as an aesthetic practice."¹¹¹ In order to create specific art projects, Gronk uses an artistic process that requires developing relationships for complex collaboration with multiple groups of people of varied talents. In 2002, Gronk completed

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Gronk. Public Address at the Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard. March 2004.

¹¹⁰ Cynthia MacMullin. "Interview with Gronk in his Studio." LatinArt.com. 22 June 2001.

¹¹¹ Lacy. "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys." 35.

a residency at University of New Mexico Arts Technology Center (ATC) where he worked on a Cultural Practice/Virtual Styles project for the 55 foot high dome of the LodeStar Astronomy Center. The Fall 2002 ATC Newsletter described Gronk's artistic process as giving great importance to complex interaction and collaboration: "Interacting with a wide range of faculty, students and staff...Gronk intermingled with a broad cross-section of the university... [He] gave six lectures, participated in discussion groups, visited with students and spent time with the community and staff at the National Hispanic Cultural Center."¹¹² Just as in his wall installations in museums, the artist enjoyed the engagement he created with his audience/community, "Sharing my experience with young artists is one of the good things about a project like this."¹¹³ Gronk creates multiple levels of collaboration and interaction with his audience/community as an essential component to his art process, which may support that his relational practice is the true nature of his art.

Gronk's Empathy for Others Based in Childhood Experience

Gronk's ultimate purpose for his art/role as an artist in the community is to show something that others did not know existed, and to offer youth an opportunity to experience art directly through the physical work of a living artist. The artist explains to his young audiences that he never went to galleries and museums as a child.¹¹⁴ He wished he had had an opportunity as a youth to meet and talk to live fine artists, to see

¹¹² "About Collaboration: Gronk Visits ATC for a Residency in High Performance Computing" in ATC Newsletter (University of New Mexico, Fall 2002) 1.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Gronk. Public Address at the Carnegie Art Museum.

them work, to realize that artists were not systematically dead people who only exist in books today. Art critic Xavier Cortéz explains that Gronk is attempting to bring life to art by “inviting young people in particular to hear a human voice associated with the art. It dispels notions and demystifies the artistic process. It says that artists actually work. ‘We work the same hours, if not longer hours than museum staff. The physicality involved, it’s work’.”¹¹⁵ Gronk wishes to offer his audience/community an experience he never had growing up in East L.A. His comments made to youth or art reporters/critics reveal his empathic purpose. Gronk’s artistic process demonstrates that his role as artist in the community has evolved from socio-political provocateur of the early Asco days to educational and relational facilitator. Yet he has always fulfilled the role of artist as *experiencer*. He may also aspire to be a mentor by encouraging hard-work and community engagement.

As an *experiencer*, engaging with his audience and/or community is an essential part of Gronk’s artistic process, either to observe the people he wishes to study and connect with as a subjective anthropologist, or to offer the public an empathic opportunity to meet and interact with a live artist. I have demonstrated that Gronk creates opportunities he wishes he had growing up, that are born of personal experience and empathy for his audience/community. His work expands Lacy’s theoretical framing of artist as *experiencer* to include art processes that require engagement with the community -for observational and experiential purposes- and take place before the art is created, rather than simultaneously. Benavidez affirms that Gronk’s artistic process

¹¹⁵ Cortéz. “Gronk Speaking in Tongues” 23.

based on his life views and experimental nature is responsible for changing the course of art in Los Angeles to a more collaborative practice between artist and audience.¹¹⁶

Chapter III

Wayne Alaniz Healy: Artist as Reporter

In this chapter, I argue that Chicano artist Wayne Healy fulfills Lacy's role of artist as reporter in his artistic process, and empathically engages with the community. I expand Lacy's notion of artist as reporter to include engagement with the community that takes place *prior* to the completion of the artwork as an integral part of the artistic process. According to Lacy, the difference between the roles of *experiencer* and reporter

¹¹⁶ Benavidez. Gronk. 57.

resides in the degree of subjectivity: whereas the first one observes the reality of others and retells it in a subjective way, the latter retells it more realistically, which she describes as the “next compassionate step” after experiencing the information.¹¹⁷

The artist as reporter collects information and carefully retells it in a visual language.¹¹⁸ The information is delivered -usually without analysis- simply “reflected” through the artwork, or “reported” with careful selection of the information to be shared. The determination between “reflected” and “reported” is based on artistic intention. The selection of visual message is based on the viewer’s ease of historical and political understanding. Besides information gathering, the engagement of the artist-reporter with the community may require persuasion when disagreements arise between artist and community for aesthetic or structural reasons.¹¹⁹ Because artists are affected by their interaction with the community, Lacy explains that “ambiguities and paradoxes” in the reality of that community may show in the artwork, which may lead to disagreements or even censorship. Reconciliation and preservation of professional integrity resides in the way artists blend the voices of the community with their own during the artistic process and final visual expression.¹²⁰

I analyze the ways in which Healy engages with different members of the community as he collects information to report as socio-political messages in his public commissions. Healy demonstrates persuasive skills in working with the public and

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 175.

¹²⁰ Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 38-39.

relates his engagement to the community as reporter to empathy. I examine his engagement with his community during his formative years in the context of his political involvement with the Chicano Movement, his educative and political role first as a student, then as a muralist at Mechicano Art Center and finally as a member of East Los Streetscapers, and the educative role he fulfills through community outreach art programs. Finally I argue that his personal experience is responsible for his empathic desire to make a difference in the community.

Healy's Educational Role before his Formative Years in the Art

Wayne Alaniz Healy is most renowned as a muralist and printmaker, but his work has expanded over the years into three-dimensional media such as tile, cast bronze, steel—plain or porcelain-enameled, concrete bas-relief, etc.¹²¹ In a 2006 oral history conducted by Donna Granata, Healy explains that, although he is Irish on his father's side (from whom he was estranged at an early age), he grew up with his Chicano mother and step-father in East Los Angeles. He was surrounded by his mother's extended family, which had a profound influence on him.¹²² He recalls that his empathic engagement to the community goes back to his years at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona where he obtained a double bachelors degree in mathematics and aerospace engineering in 1968. He realized that the Chicano student population at Cal. Poly was less than 1% compared to his high school's ratio of about 80%. Led by a desire to help, he became a member of a non-political group called MASA (Mexican American Student

¹²¹ East Los Streetscapers. "About Us." <<http://www.eastlosstreetscapers.com/AboutEls.htm>>.

¹²² Wayne Healy. "Tuesday Talk Oral History." Donna Granata. Focus on the Masters. Ventura. 26 Sep. 2007.

Association) to tutor local high school Latino students and increase their chances for a secondary education. According to Healy, this is also when he learned to “get along with everyone.”¹²³

Healy’s Political Activism as a Muralist

Healy was living in Cincinnati, Ohio where he had obtained his masters degree in mechanical engineering and worked for the aerospace industry, when he heard of the Los Angeles riots and the killing of Latino journalist Ruben Salazar whose *Los Angeles Times* column he read faithfully. “Something was happening in my hometown and I wanted to be a part of it,” he explained.¹²⁴ Humanistic concerns for his community drove him to transfer back to L.A. in 1972. Back in L.A., his brother in-law took him to Mechicano Art Center because Healy was always interested in art. Mechicano was a non-profit community-oriented workshop and gallery located in the East Los Angeles’ barrio that offered artists in the community an exhibition space and programs in silkscreen printing and mural painting, until it closed its doors in 1977.¹²⁵ Victor Franco, activist and co-founder of Mechicano Art center, explained the purpose of the organization in 1972, “I feel that community arts should deal with the masses of the people... all the money that’s going into these programs should be seen visually. The way to do that is to get projects out into the community and away from the center, the center being the focal point of

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Goldman. Dimensions of the Americas. 169.

activity within the community.”¹²⁶ Mechicano’s dedication to the community manifested as public murals, graphics and special events. Healy recalls the influence Mechicano’s art had on him:

I see art with a purpose, a direction, a message that uses great, powerful symbols. This is my first exposure to the Chicano Movement; [Artists] are talking about all these noble things. It’s something that includes other people, which was new to me. It certainly was a cultural revolution that redefined art for me... Something powerful is being made, a movement sweeping along many cities and states.¹²⁷

When Healy was invited to check out a mural painting project directed by Mechicano, he realized the powerful potential and exposure these artistic forms offered the community and the artist. He immediately got “bitten by the mural bug” at the sight of the large piece.¹²⁸ For the next two years, he worked on several Mechicano projects with many other Chicano artists in the Ramona Gardens Housing Project area in Los Angeles. His empathy for his community is evident as he feels that he is contributing to a social change, “You were caught up in something that was good!”¹²⁹ The artist explains his political and educative roles as prescribed by the Chicano Movement and supported by Mechicano’s identity politics, “In all the art is ‘Viva la Raza’, we are proud of our culture, and really positive messages. There is nothing to be ashamed of; we have 3,000 years of history!”¹³⁰ Public murals add value as beautification, and Healy was

¹²⁶ Victor Franco. “Interview with Victor Franco Conducted by Barry Schwartz.” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. July 1972. < <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/franco72.htm>>

¹²⁷ Healy. “*Tuesday Talk* Oral History.”

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Healy. “*Tuesday Talk* Oral History.”

¹³⁰ Wayne Healy. Personal interview. Rosemead. 11 Dec. 2007

empathically willing to do it for free - at least at first - to help improve his community.¹³¹ He attributes the significant decrease in gang-related crimes at the time to the Chicano Mural Movement.¹³² Franco supports Healy's belief in the importance of muralist work to beautify and lower defacement. Mechicano Art Center purposefully involved local gang members in the creation of community murals to foster a sense of ownership, as Franco explained that beautification was useless unless all community members were committed to not deface the murals.¹³³ "Chicano murals became community projects that involved local residents in visually articulating the goals of the Chicano Movement,"¹³⁴ and Mechicano embodied this statement with its community engagement.

According to art historian Victor Sorell, Chicano murals are important "didactive, discursive, and performative" tools of the Chicano Movement that teach communities about their forgotten history.¹³⁵ Healy's first mural, the 1974 *Ghosts of the Barrio* in Estrada Courts (a low-income housing project in East L.A.) has an important educative role as "the most requested [mural] for textbooks"¹³⁶ with its Chicano identity politics message featuring four local boys with Aztec, Spaniard and *mestizo* ancestor images (figure 6). In a 2007 radio interview, Healy explains that muralists further denounced Chicano stereotypes inside and outside of their community, "murals were images meant to bring pride to the community which felt that it had been ignored -or worst- over the

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Franco.

¹³⁴ Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano, eds. Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. 364.

¹³⁵ Victor Sorell. "Articulate Signs of Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Public Art." Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985. 148.

¹³⁶ Healy. "Tuesday Talk Oral History."

years... It was a source of pride to show our culture and to put something on the walls that made the residents feel 'hey, there's a good image of myself' rather than the bad images from the media.”¹³⁷

Healy's Socio-political and Educative Role with East Los Streetscapers

In 1975, Wayne Healy founded Los Dos Streetscapers with his friend David Rivas Botello. The name of the collective changed to East Los Streetscapers (ELS) when the collective grew to add more artists who joined for a while, but later moved on to other endeavors.¹³⁸ Today, Wayne Healy operates ELS and Botello has the title of Master Muralist. Art historian Eva Sperling Cockcroft asserts that early murals by ELS typify the socio-political and educational agenda of the Chicano Mural Movement, and that the two artists have earned respect for the empathic dedication they have shown to their community,¹³⁹

[Their murals are] classics of the early Chicano movement, presenting a positive message to young people regarding their cultural heritage. Botello and Healy painted new walls almost every year, both in the barrio and in mixed neighborhoods, while holding down other jobs to support their families. [...] As experienced and respected muralists from the community, they have been able to win a number of art competitions for public commissions in the 1990s.¹⁴⁰

Cockcroft argues that, although many Chicano artists today have focused on promoting their work through galleries, some continue their social work in the community at the

¹³⁷ “Wayne Healy.” The Connection. Host Maria Sanchez. KKZZ 1590 AM, Ventura. 1 Mar. 2007.

¹³⁸ “East Los Streetscapers.” Muralists in Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles. <<http://www.lamurals.org/MuralistPages/Streetscapers.html>>.

¹³⁹ Eva Sperling Cockcroft. “Contradiction or Progression: The Mainstreaming of a Mural Movement.” <<http://www.zonezero.com/magazine/essays/distant/zcontra2.html>>.

¹⁴⁰ Cockcroft. “Contradiction or Progression.”

same time.¹⁴¹ The promotion of artwork through galleries is what philosopher Jacques Rancière supports in the statement, “an artist today makes several types of work and has several types of income. In this respect he is closer to the general condition of labor.”¹⁴² Healy explains, “For the first 20 yrs, it was painting murals. We started in a rather politically charged time in East LA. A lot of [artists] evolved with it, but sooner or later, they went on their merry way... but we just kept on working!”¹⁴³ Cockcroft adds that ELS continues to make public art socially, culturally and historically meaningful to the intended community, and Healy fulfills the role of socio-political and educational muralist in his work with ELS.¹⁴⁴

Healy’s Early Art Process and Community Engagement

The idea of giving voice to the audience/community in public works has been discussed by many writers including Suzi Gablik and Judith Baca. A Chicana visual artist who has worked to “address social justice issues for ethnic neighborhoods and the working poor,”¹⁴⁵ Baca explains the role she assigns to community minded artists:

Of great interest to me is the invention of systems of ‘voice giving’ for those left without public venues in which to speak. Socially responsible artists from marginalized communities have a particular responsibility to articulate the conditions of their people and to provide catalysts for change... Being a catalyst of change will change us also.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Eva Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez, eds. Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993) 16.

¹⁴² Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey. “Art of the Possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in Conversation with Jacques Rancière” in Art Forum (March 2007).

¹⁴³ “Wayne Healy.” The Connection.

¹⁴⁴ Cockcroft and Barnet-Sánchez. Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Baca. Biography.

¹⁴⁶ Baca “Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society.” 137.

Gablik argues further that socially responsive art has the power to bring a community together through this voice giving practice, and that the exchange between the “listening” artist and the “talking” community is empathic in nature.¹⁴⁷ Healy’s work gives the community the sense that they are given a voice. He recalls the reaction of an old lady who literally started to cry at the sight of a mural he was painting in Lincoln Heights, “You are painting our story, you are painting our history!”¹⁴⁸ He adds that people were appreciative and had good things to say about the ELS murals, but that the community was not involved in the composition of his early murals. Although they were *for* and *about* the community for socio-political reasons, the ELS early murals were not *by* the community.¹⁴⁹ The first Streetscapers mural, 1977 *Chicano Time Trip*, contained an inspirational message in the lower corner that Healy describes as “something that basically says that there are no limits in the hopes that a kid looks down there and says ‘wow, you mean I can do something, even though someone tells me I can’t do that?’.”¹⁵⁰

Healy’s More Recent Role of Artist as Reporter

Eva Cockcroft looks at the historical involvement of the community in public art and argues that what is originally considered as a “once revolutionary idea that community residents should have some say about the art placed in their neighborhood” is now expected of artists who work in the domain of public art.¹⁵¹ In his role of artist as reporter, Healy believes that public art requires knowledge of the community in order to

¹⁴⁷ Gablik. “Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism.” 82.

¹⁴⁸ Healy. Personal interview.

¹⁴⁹ Healy. Personal interview.

¹⁵⁰ Healy. “*Tuesday Talk* Oral History.”

¹⁵¹ Cockcroft. “Contradiction or Progression.”

reflect/report on socio-cultural specificities and be truly site-specific.¹⁵² Indeed, East Los Streetscapers' history website voices this principle clearly. "ESL has always stressed site-specificity. [...] Each mural will speak for, of, and by the people that will see it the most. The research that goes behind each job always results in most historically accurate and visually complimentary artwork for the audience being served."¹⁵³ Healy is adamant that art commissioned for public space belongs to the community and therefore cannot be artist-centered,¹⁵⁴ a conviction that is at the core of the NGPA model. This is a conviction he conveys to artists who collaborate with ELS.¹⁵⁵ Healy follows a model of community collaboration that Baca describes and Lacy refers to in Mapping the Terrain, "In some productions where you are going for the power of the image, you can get a large amount of input from the community before the actual making of the image, and then you take control of the aesthetic."¹⁵⁶

Healy's artistic process includes gathering information about the local history, cultural heritage, and symbolic iconography of a site in order to integrate what he considers as important elements to his visual report.¹⁵⁷ He also gathers information from the people of that particular community, and the narrative they wish to see in that public art.¹⁵⁸ Two examples illustrate this process of information gathering. For the 2007 public art commission at the entrance to the Olivas Adobe Park and Golf Course in a rural area on the outskirts of Ventura in California, Healy combined information about

¹⁵² Healy. Personal interview.

¹⁵³ East Los Streetscapers. "History." <http://www.eastlosstreetscapers.com/images/history_01.jpg>.

¹⁵⁴ Healy. "Tuesday Talk Oral History."

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Lacy. "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys." 44.

¹⁵⁷ Healy. Personal interview.

¹⁵⁸ Healy. "Tuesday Talk Oral History."

the physics and history of golf, the history of the Olivas Adobe's first and second owners, and the history of the Adobe site.¹⁵⁹ He also collected historical images about golf outfits and the Olivas Adobe from the City of Ventura and the staff at the Olivas historic house. He explains his involvement with the local community: "The steel [sculpture] will rise twenty feet and will contain images of golf, and the tile will have images of the Olivas family. The folks that operate that building were very kind and allowed me to use their archive, great old photos of the family and life on their rancho" (figures 7 and 8).¹⁶⁰

Another example of a public art commission that involves information gathering is Healy's 1997 Metrolink's Slauson Station project in South Central, L.A. (figures 9 and 10).¹⁶¹ The Metro's Art webpage describes the extent of information gathered and research involved for the creation of this complex and extensive community-oriented public piece. ESL's concrete and ceramic pieces reflect the neighborhood's way of life, based on its culture and history. An extensive history of the area is also rendered in great detail on porcelain-enameled steel panels:

This time period spans from the first few billion years of cosmic accretion, continental drift, and prehistoric life, to the arrival of the first human beings, Native American cultures, Spanish explorers and European technology, Mexican ranchos, the Manifest Destiny, 19th-century urbanization, population boom, new immigrants, Central Avenue society, community activists, and the 21st century.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ "Wayne Healy." The Connection.

¹⁶¹ "Slauson Station." Metro Art. < http://www.metro.net/about_us/metroart/ma_mrblels.htm>.

¹⁶² Ibid.

The following statement from ELS reinforces the humanistic nature of their work, “Our goal for the project is to celebrate the history and culture of the neighborhood and to create an enduring public art work that the community and commuters will embrace.”¹⁶³

ELS Murals and Voice Giving to the Underrepresented

East Los Streetscapers’ subjects include many underrepresented populations such as “Developmentally Disabled, Gender Specific, Homeless, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Multiethnic, People with disabilities, Seniors, Veterans, Youth.”¹⁶⁴ The revision of a proposal for an ELS mural, which was installed at the Barrio Action Youth and Family Center’s basketball gymnasium in El Sereno in 2008, reflected voice giving to the local youth that was not initially represented.¹⁶⁵ Although youth was illustrated in the original blueprint for the mural, the children complained that it was not reflective of their community’s experience but looked more like Disneyland. They wanted the mural to portray their real world with elements of fighting and shooting. The muralist explains with great empathy that gang and domestic violence are too often illustrated in art made by these children, “I understand what these teenagers are saying, ‘Hey, tell the truth!’ We did that in the mural by adding a guy who is holding a gun.”¹⁶⁶ Caring for all sections of the community allowed Healy to build a bridge between the mural’s commission committee and the underrepresented local youth.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ East Los Streetscapers. ARC LA. University of Southern California Library Archives. <<http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/arc/lasubject/records/id25.html>>.

¹⁶⁵ Healy. Personal interview.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Healy's Persuasive Skills

For the gymnasium mural, Healy had to persuade the committee to accept the image of the man with a gun in order for the mural to be a true voice of the community. City-commissioned public art projects require negotiations with city councils, and working through the hurdles of committees, revisions, lawyers, and the public's response. Healy is too familiar with the difficulties of the system, "A lot of artists don't have a stomach for it. One of our projects took nine years to completion! You really love the sport to put up with the officials...sometimes you want to kill the umpire!"¹⁶⁷

Outreach Art Practices

When he works directly with youth, Healy again assumes the role of reporter and helps them tell their stories to the community through art. For example, he was awarded an "Artist in the Community" grant from the city's cultural affairs to paint a mural with youth from the juvenile facility. The teenagers were responsible for the composition of the 1991 mural *Stairway to Global Health* that wrapped around a staircase leading to the Bravo Medical Magnet High School in Boyle Heights. Healy hinted at his power of persuasion by the way he channeled the ideas/voice of the group, "The kids did the drawings for the mural, and they did drawings of terrible stuff. I said we can't put that kind of stuff on the mural, but we can put the consequences of that stuff."¹⁶⁸ The result was an impressive composition with powerful symbols from several religions and cultures-including Mesoamerican-, and images of students from different ethnicities

¹⁶⁷ Healy. "Tuesday Talk Oral History."

¹⁶⁸ Healy. Personal interview.

working together for a common goal of healing, which made the mural site-specific in location, theme, and population (figures 11 and 12). Healy shows great empathy for the troubled realities faced by some the children. In 2005, he offered an afterschool outreach art workshop to teenagers in Canoga Park “who were about to be booted out of the school system; the next stop would have been Juvenile Hall.”¹⁶⁹ The outcome of the program is still fresh in his mind, particularly the demeaning attitude some of the children receive from their parents, “Some of them responded beautifully. But what stories these kids tell you! I remember a girl whose dad refused to believe that she had actually made the mosaic-covered piece she showed him. How can a father tell his kid that he is no good?”

The Message in Healy’s Art

When asked how he wishes to be remembered, Healy simply says, “for beautifying the community.”¹⁷⁰ When asked what he wishes to accomplish with the youth and community, he shares his belief that a few minutes of special support or attention make a big difference in the life of children, because these few minutes spent might show them alternatives to the bad choices they may make.¹⁷¹ When asked what his fundamental message to the community is, he states that he wants to stress the value of family, its strength and importance in the future.¹⁷² Growing up, his heroes were his uncles who spent a few but critical moments here and there, showing him either how to draw, paint, or resolve math problems. “Those little moments I spent with my uncles

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Healy. “*Tuesday Talk Oral History*.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Healy. Personal interview.

showing me new stuff gave me the courage to try something out, to do the same thing over and over again.”¹⁷³ He also feels that he did not get into trouble because he was afraid of the consequences with his parents,

People ask me why I didn’t get into gangs: it’s because I was afraid of my parents. If there are any feelings that these kids should have, especially the ones in juvenile hall, it’s that they are there because someone let them go as far as to pull the trigger. What if someone had shown them something before that moment? To me, something my step dad raised me to do is finish things, ‘Don’t start something and walk away. Finish what you start!’ Some of these kids had never built anything, just destroyed things. So that sense of accomplishment, to me, of creating rather than destroying is critical.¹⁷⁴

Throughout his career, Wayne Healy has continued to give back to the community, sharing his time, talent, knowledge, and skills as a reporter with the next generation. “It sounds bad to call it an obligation, but I feel that I have to pass some stuff on with these kids, although I can’t be called a big fan of kids.”¹⁷⁵

In this chapter, I have examined Wayne Healy’s formative years before and with Mechicano Art Center, supporting scholarly theories about the significance of his empathic socio-political and educational role as a muralist within his community and within the endeavors of Chicano Art Movement. I have analyzed Healy’s artistic process and demonstrated that it evolves to include the skills of information gathering, persuasion, and empathy that characterize the role of reporter, as described in Suzanne Lacy’s framework. I have argued that Healy’s engagement with the community takes place before the actual making of the art, whereas his engagement with community youth

¹⁷³ Healy. “*Tuesday Talk Oral History*.”

¹⁷⁴ Healy. Personal interview.

¹⁷⁵ Healy. Personal interview.

in his outreach endeavors also includes the actual painting of the mural. Consequently, I have expanded Lacy's model of artist as reporter to include community engagement in the artistic process that takes place before the making of the artwork.

Chapter IV

Linda Vallejo: Artist as Analyst

In this chapter, I discuss how elements in Linda Vallejo's artistic process are reflective of Suzanne Lacy's model of artist as analyst. According to Lacy, artist-analysts assume an "enormous" role because they are "contributors to intellectual endeavor and shift our aesthetic attention toward the shape or meaning of their theoretical constructs" as they use a set of skills discussed below to analyze social situations.¹⁷⁶

I expand Lacy's role of artists as analyst to include forms of engagement with the community that take place *prior* to the making of the artwork. Indeed, Lacy's role of artist as analyst in the context of New Genre Public Art examines the empathic

¹⁷⁶ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

engagement with the community *during* the actual creation of the artwork.¹⁷⁷ Although Vallejo does not engage with the community during the actual realization of her art, much of it can be seen as the direct result of her engagement with the indigenous community, and the art she creates reflects an empathic desire to address social issues of personal importance. Her volunteer work in indigenous ceremonies and the business of art are other interactive ways Vallejo gives back to her community.

Lacy explains that the artist as analyst has a more important role than the reporter's because of the analysis the artist does with the information collected from the audience/ community.¹⁷⁸ According to Dictionary.com, to analyze is "1. to separate (a material or abstract entity) into constituent parts or elements; 2. to examine critically, so as to bring out the essential elements or give the essence of; 3. to examine carefully and in detail so as to identify causes, key factors, possible results, etc."¹⁷⁹ Since an analyst is defined as "a person who analyzes or who is skilled in analysis,"¹⁸⁰ the artist as analyst who focuses on a particular social issue is expected to 1. observe/research and collect detailed information about the issue; 2. examine it critically; and 3. break it down into determining factors, probable causes and consequences (the more analytical part). Lacy argues that the art created by the analyst reflects social concerns and requires skills "more commonly associated with social scientists, investigative journalists, and philosophers."¹⁸¹ William Moreno, Executive Director of the Claremont Museum of Art

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ "Analyze" in [Dictionary.com](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/analyze) <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/analyze>>.

¹⁸⁰ "Analyst" in [Dictionary.com](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/analyst) <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/analyst>>.

¹⁸¹ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

in California, explains in a 2007 statement that Vallejo's recent work does address important social issues and is empathic in nature:

Themes of beauty, consumption, war, excess, world pollution, iconic references to international indigenous peoples and earth-based installations all reside in her works... Ms. Vallejo's posture is one of deep concern and commitment. One can't ask for more than that.¹⁸²

According to Lacy, the art object's conceptual message has become more important than its aesthetic result.¹⁸³ Indeed, when talking about her work, Vallejo mostly focuses on its content, symbolism and iconography rather than its formal characteristics.¹⁸⁴

I discuss how Linda Vallejo, Chicana painter, mixed media and installation artist, assumes the role of artist as analyst in parts of her artistic process. I argue that her art praxis includes a diversified but continuous history of community involvement through teaching and volunteering. I further establish that, since her formative years during the Chicano Movement, this artist has worked in her community with the goal of helping others.

Vallejo's Role as an Artist within the Community during her Formative Years

Vallejo's socio-political role as an artist within the community began during her formative years with Self Help Graphics and has been based in empathy. Born in the barrio of East Los Angeles and having moved through most of her youth because her father worked for the United States Air Force, Linda Vallejo came back to her L.A. roots to pursue an art education. She was in her early twenties when the Chicano Movement

¹⁸² Linda Vallejo. "Artist Statement." <http://www.lindavallejo.com/about/about_artist.html>.

¹⁸³ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

¹⁸⁴ Linda Vallejo. "Tuesday Talk Oral History." Donna Granata. Ventura. 7 April 2009.

was in full swing.¹⁸⁵ During these formative years, Sister Bocalero, a nun who was the main founder of Self Help Graphics and Arts – a non-profit art organization- hired Vallejo to teach silkscreen printing. Vallejo discusses Self Help and other similar Chicano art organizations or collectives that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s:

The establishment of all those non-profit organizations was based on the concept of the *collectiva*, a basically Marxist idea where the people run the government, instead of from the top down. That is why education has been important within the context of the development of the Chicano Movement. I was taught that at Self Help; I worked at all different kinds of Chicano organizations all over the place and, basically, that is what I saw.¹⁸⁶

Two practices became fundamental ethics for Vallejo in the early stages of her artistic career: educating and working for a common goal to better her community (the *collectiva*).

Sister Karen's humanistic approach to art and her focus on Mesoamerican culture further influenced Vallejo to have empathy for others, and embrace her indigenous roots. Bocalero believed in the "humanitarian gains [art] activities bring to our lives," and the artists who work at or for Self Help shared a "belief in the transformative power of art."¹⁸⁷ Providing aspiring Chicano artists and the greater East Los Angeles community with a facility where art created would reflect their own cultural identity and encourage social change was Sister Karen's life dedication.¹⁸⁸ Self Help created a unique tool for its educators to reach out to more barrio children - spread out over the vast East

¹⁸⁵ Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas*. 227.

¹⁸⁶ Linda Vallejo. Personal interview. Topanga. 16 Nov. 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Roberto Bedoya. "In Praise of Art and Dedication" in *Los Angeles Times*. (1 Jul. 1997: F1).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

L.A. area – and increase its impact on the Chicano youth community by instilling a positive sense of self, community and culture:

The Barrio Mobile Art Studio, [a] specially equipped van, introduced children to filmmaking, silkscreen, photography, sculpture, batik, painting, and puppetry ... thus provid[ing] a level of multicultural education in the arts to children who currently had none in their curriculum.¹⁸⁹

Besides researching and designing art education lesson plans, Linda Vallejo collected evidence of the program's benefits to the community for grant writing purposes.¹⁹⁰ She describes her experience as an art educator for Self Help, "It was really the idea of reaching out and saying 'it's okay to be an artist' and you can express yourself. I remember the grant-writing buzz words at the time were developing self-esteem, and the idea of the 'oppressed' - which I would prefer to use the word 'poor' instead. I would say that poverty, equity and access to education were critical."¹⁹¹ The exposure to Chicano realities she received in her formative years with Self Help reinforced her empathic understanding and socio-political role in the Chicano community. She also learned that an artist can deliver messages of social importance by reaching out to people through art.

The social messages Linda Vallejo chooses to communicate in her art are based in what she calls her "Chicana indigena experience."¹⁹² During her formative years, Vallejo worked with Mesoamerican iconography for Self Help, which she studied and experienced in her travels, resulting in a continuous passion and involvement with

¹⁸⁹ California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, Department of Special Collections (University of California Santa Barbara Library Services) <http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/lopez_toc.html>.

¹⁹⁰ Vallejo. Personal interview.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Mesoamerican and indigenous cultures.¹⁹³ Vallejo immersed herself in indigenous culture and philosophy, which provided the basis for her indigenous experience.¹⁹⁴ She attributes her Chicana experience mostly to her family upbringing. She explains further that she invented the term *Chicana indigena* to reflect her unique background, which is her core Chicana experience and the relationship she has with the Chicano community superimposed, or what she calls “settled” in her “experience in indigenous circles.”¹⁹⁵ Vallejo believes that she fulfilled the “expected” Chicana artist role in the community, “I was in the community going to art shows, curating art shows, teaching in the community, doing everything.”¹⁹⁶ Since 1980, she has integrated Native elements of connection to nature by studying specific topics of interest and directly observing new ways of life, “the majority of my experience has really been in the Chicano indigenous community. I think I am probably the foremost woman of my generation in the Chicano art movement who has this kind of experience and is a practicing professional painter.”¹⁹⁷ For fifteen years, Vallejo served as community volunteer for the Native American Religious Society at a California Rehabilitation Center, engaging the women community in the art of indigenous ceremonies in the hopes to provide them with healing and show them alternative paths in life.¹⁹⁸ The engagement Vallejo experienced with what she calls “the indigenous community” directly resulted in the subject matter of her artwork.¹⁹⁹ She in turn shares the philosophical love and respect Native Peoples have for nature with her

¹⁹³ Vallejo. “Tuesday Talk Oral History.”

¹⁹⁴ Vallejo. Personal interview.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Vallejo. Personal interview.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Vallejo. “Artist Statement.”

¹⁹⁹ Vallejo. Personal interview.

community, advocates for the environment in her content and aesthetic, and reaches out to distressed groups with great empathy.

Vallejo's Pedagogical Repertoire

Vallejo's pedagogical role later expanded to classes and workshops for adults at several community colleges, universities, and museum institutions. Her artistic process grew to include different forms of community engagement with new pedagogical endeavors, some of which were based in personal experience and empathy. A keynote speaker at the Museum of Contemporary Art for three years, she developed a series of workshops that empowered school teachers to teach art,²⁰⁰ allowing her own pedagogical and artistic impact to grow in an exponential manner, just as Self Help had done for larger impact on the community. It is important for Vallejo to teach artists how to promote and sell their art "It is the emphasis I feel most important, to educate all artists and young people who think about art. Business acumen would help them continue as artists in their life, instead of feeling that they have to put their art aside because they don't have enough money to pay for food, healthcare or clothing."²⁰¹ Her compassion for the financial difficulties faced by emerging artists is obvious, and reflects her reality at one point in her life. Self Help's early socio-political awareness resurfaces. She adds, "To me, that seems a very important point to share with young people and, to me, it is completely connected to self-esteem. The one gift I have honed and understand a little

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Vallejo. Personal interview.

bit –unlike a lot of people- is the business world, and that’s what I would share because that is unique to what other people might provide.”²⁰² Her desire to share what she knows, make a difference and offer something that she wished she had in her formative years becomes evident: “They weren’t offering any business classes in the MFA program when I graduated. It was up for discussion and they were going to offer it, but never did. A few years later, they invited me back to offer a workshop on how to run a gallery and how to sell artwork. Two of my professors were in the audience. They were clueless, that’s why they never taught it.”²⁰³ Vallejo acknowledges a need in her personal artistic development, and later empathically provides the corresponding service for what she considers as the most significant educative role she can fulfill for other artists.

Vallejo explains that she offers to help anyone and/or any endeavor she gets involved in because she is willing to share everything she knows about art. “It is hard to find people who will be that open with you, who will be that candid with you and will share... because the art community tends to be very myopic, self centered, even insecure, ‘I better not tell you because you will get it and I won’t’ and that is kind of silly, it’s a silly thing. [...] So sharing is very important to me.”²⁰⁴ Her ethics are to be forthcoming in order to increase the significance of her role as an artist in the community “Ask me what you want and I will tell you the best I can. I hope that anything shared with a young person is actually going to make a difference in someone’s career, efforts, or impact as an

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Vallejo. “Artist Statement.”

artist.”²⁰⁵ The empathic desire to make a difference in someone else’s life is directly related to her sense of helplessness as an early adult, “I like to share what I learned with other people because I know that when I was a young person, I didn’t know what I was doing and there weren’t any mentors who could help me in that area.”²⁰⁶ Although her audience has now expanded from a Chicano to a multi-cultural artistic community, Linda Vallejo still assumes an educational role as an artist. For example, she has been teaching volunteer business of art workshops before the annual Topanga Canyon Gallery Studio Tour since 2004 to help artists be more successful with their sales.²⁰⁷ The purpose in her business of art classes is to prevent others from feeling the same sense of helplessness she did as an emerging artist. Vallejo’s altruistic motives support Lacy and Gablik’s theory of community engagement based in empathy.

Vallejo’s Social Scientist Skills

Linda Vallejo’s artistic process reveals what Lacy refers to as “skills more commonly associated with social scientists.”²⁰⁸ Social sciences encompass the study of the social life of human groups and individuals. Although Vallejo does not study social groups in a scientific way, she has studied philosophical and religious beliefs in several cultures.²⁰⁹ She explains that a minor in philosophy and religion, constant reading, and exposure to psychology through her husband’s knowledge at the Master’s level constitute the basis of her spiritual understanding of social groups. Vallejo’s deep involvement in

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 176.

²⁰⁹ Vallejo. Personal interview.

indigenous practice requires significant engagement with the members of the Native community and her art transforms into an aesthetic representation of Native philosophies reflecting a fundamental tie to nature.²¹⁰ She adapts to the environment she studies in order to understand it and become a true part of that experience.²¹¹ Vallejo explains, “It’s really about experience, more than theory. Prejudice and stereotype come from not understanding enough about how much variety there is in life.”²¹² In this way, Vallejo is no longer an observer but a participant/doer, allowing her to gather more data and gain a deeper and more extensive understanding, which supports that she uses “skills more commonly associated with social scientists.” Vallejo’s first artistic process can be interpreted through what Lacy describes as the overall artistic process in NGPA,

Whether it operates as symbolic gesture or concrete action, NGPA must be evaluated in a multifaceted way to account for its impact not only on action but on consciousness, not only on others but on the artists themselves, and not only on other artists’ practices but on the definition of art. Central to this evaluation is the redefinition that may well challenge the nature of art as we know it, art not primarily as a product but as a process of value finding, a set of philosophies, and ethical action, and an aspect of a larger sociocultural agenda.²¹³

Vallejo’s Philosopher Skills

Lacy mentions that the artist-analyst requires skills “more commonly associated” with philosophers.²¹⁴ To her, the philosophical and socio-political convictions of artists

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Vallejo. “*Tuesday Talk* Oral History.”

²¹³ Lacy. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 46.

²¹⁴ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 176.

are their belief systems regarding “people, culture, and action.”²¹⁵ I argue that Vallejo’s philosophical and socio-political views are fundamental to her artistic process. Art historian and critic Lucy Lippard explains the importance of social meaning in art. “Meaning exists only when it is shared, and in our society, meaning tends to rest in the domains of politics and the spirit. They are both fundamentally moving forces, acts of faith, and their innovations are often doubly nourished by tradition and personal experience.”²¹⁶ Vallejo’s indigenous work for more than thirty years has contributed to a personal process of values finding which affect who she becomes and what her ethical action with her audience/community reveal through the meaning of her art.²¹⁷ She integrates traditional Native symbology to her own interpretation of nature, such as the four elements of earth, wind, fire and water as part of many of her art pieces.

Lippard sees art as having a role in society, “At the vortex of the political and the spiritual lies a renewed sense of function, even a mission, for art.”²¹⁸ Vallejo’s artistic mission directly derives from her philosophical beliefs. Her message is spiritual in essence, universal in nature, and political in content. Of her philosophy and artistic content’s impact, art critic John Mendelsohn says, “Linda Vallejo’s work is an artist’s vision of the state of our planet through the lens of culture, spirituality, and her own individuality. Her art seeks to make visible our profound connection to nature and the dire consequences of our separation from it.”²¹⁹ Over her career span, Vallejo’s artistic

²¹⁵ Ibid, 181.

²¹⁶ Lippard. Mixed Blessings 11.

²¹⁷ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²¹⁸ Lippard. Mixed Blessings. 14.

²¹⁹ John Mendelsohn. “Linda Vallejo.” <http://www.lindavallejo.com/about/about_artist_JohnMendelsohn_2008.html>.

process supports the impact of her engagement with indigenous groups. She in turn shares with her audience/community her philosophy through traditional indigenous symbology and personal artistic expressions meant to raise questions from her audience and consciousness by association of images of binary opposite meaning (beauty of nature versus ugliness of pollution, healing peace versus destructive war, etc.).

An artwork that combines both social and philosophical processes is *A Prayer for the Earth*, an installation environment exhibited at the Carnegie Art Museum in Oxnard in Fall 2004 (figures 13 and 14). The central element of this installation, a mandala, is an earth-based mixed-media assemblage piece “focusing on a symbiotic relationship to nature” that contains manipulated photographs of indigenous ceremony and effects of urbanism and pollution.²²⁰ The installation has Native American symbology and shows Vallejo’s reverence to the healing power of nature. The viewer is enticed by the pleasing aesthetic to get a closer look at the details within the mandala. The inserted images reveal a reality quite different to the overall calming effect of the room. The beauty and solace of nature are now violated by a sad take-over: human technology has resulted in urbanism and pollution. The somber reality of the condition of our planet becomes more powerful than the beautiful pictures of nature in the audience’s mind, and the message becomes clear: we are destroying the natural beauty of our environment. Lacy explains that artist-analysts “shift our aesthetic attention toward the shape or meaning of their theoretical constructs”²²¹ and Vallejo does just that with her “sacred circles.” It is up to

²²⁰ Vallejo. “Artist Statement.”

²²¹ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 176.

the audience or community to accept the visual and conceptual connections within the work and gain meaning from each of these connection.

Vallejo's Investigative Journalist Skills

Linda Vallejo's art process presents what Lacy calls "skills more commonly associated with [...] investigative journalists."²²² When Vallejo has selected a topic of interest, she investigates it through in-depth research online, and collects related items of aesthetic or socio-political value, such as newspapers, non-biodegradable items, images/photographs, etc.²²³ She does not know what she will do with these items initially, and she might save them for years until she finally has an idea how she will approach her artistic product. "I spend a lot of time ruminating over how I would interpret a piece of my own based on my own experience, what that would look like, how I would interpret my contemporary racial or feminine experience, because I always describe it from a feminist point of view."²²⁴

Vallejo's newspaper series (figures 15 and 16) can be related to what Suzanne Lacy describes as the analyst's work where "the visual appeal of imagery is often superseded by the textual properties of the work, thus challenging conventions of beauty."²²⁵ The series is conceptual and more analytical in nature than her earlier

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²²⁴ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²²⁵ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

work.²²⁶ On a newspaper page containing an article of socio-political interest, Vallejo adds collaged images (digitally manipulated copies of her own paintings) that are analytically related to the article's topic. Lacy stresses that it is the relationship or coherence between the idea and the images that determines the aesthetic result of the piece.²²⁷ To avoid being accused of defamation or copyright infringement, the artist censors all names and numbers printed on the newspaper article with White Out. The process adds visual rhythmic elements as white strips throughout the piece. The viewer may associate the censored segments with hidden truths the media may not publish, issues governments may hide from their people, censure one may not be aware of but subjected to. Through the use of text as background (the newspaper), the associations she creates with collaged images, the "white out" process, and the overall layering effect, Vallejo's aesthetics become "superseded by the textual properties of the work."²²⁸

By using the skills of a social scientist, investigative journalist and philosopher, Linda Vallejo fulfills Lacy's role of artist-analyst. Vallejo's social concerns are mostly based on the condition of our environment, and the harmony to be gained by women if they would reconnect with Mother Earth. A final element that needs to be analyzed is the nature of participation of the audience/community in Vallejo's art process.

Although Vallejo describes the creative process as a very lonely process, the participation of the audience and/or community in her art process is nevertheless important. Philosopher Jacques Rancière explains that artwork actually reflects universal

²²⁶ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²²⁷ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

²²⁸ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

feelings and represents the feelings of the collective, “The solitude of the artwork is a false solitude: it is a knot or a twist of sensations just as the cry of a human body is. And a human collective is a knot and twist of sensations in the same way.”²²⁹ In Vallejo’s artistic process, the first type of participation of the audience/community is actually that which inspires the artist. It comes from the indigenous community and affects the artist. Indeed, the fundamental role this community plays in her life permeates in the environmental subject matter of most art she generates, as it reflects what she describes as her indigenous experience.

The second type of participation is seen with the audience/community’s reaction to Vallejo’s work. This is the part that Lacy describes as “communication [that] proceeds from the artist, through the artwork, toward a receptive audience.”²³⁰ Vallejo comments that some people who came to see her *Prayer for the Earth* installation immediately got the message of her work and the connection to the devastation of human behavior on our planet, because they were sensitive to indigenous practice.²³¹ This is what Lacy describes as the participation circle of the audience who has a direct experience of the artwork. She explains that they “bring a deep level of experiential engagement (and account in large part for the work’s success).”²³²

Another effect Vallejo’s work has on members of her audience and close community is that some people voluntarily collect objects for her recycled art. Inspired by works like *Postmodern Trash*, a series that uses post-production materials and

²²⁹ Jacques Rancière. “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community.”

²³⁰ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 177.

²³¹ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²³² Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art” 179.

materials that are not degradable (figure 17), members of her community have brought her Styrofoam packaging and other products that they identify as impacting nature in a negative way.²³³ This shows that Vallejo's recycled sculptures make these people think about the impact these non-degradable items have on the earth, whereas they probably would not think twice about throwing them away otherwise. Lacy states that the "effects of the work often continue beyond the exhibition...and are magnified in the audience that experiences the work through reports, documentation, or representation."²³⁴ Community participation that continues beyond the art follows criteria established by Lacy as expanding the reach of the work, possibly being an integral part to the art process - depending on the artist's intent for each piece - "At this level, the artwork becomes, in the literature of the art or in the life of the community, a commonly held possibility."²³⁵

The audience/community participation is sometimes difficult to quantify, which is why Lacy explains that it is not always palpable, but might remain in the realm of possibilities.

The [artist's] work might, for example, hypothesize potential collaboration among people rather than demonstrate actual interaction. It might suggest a possibility for cooperation and exchange that does not currently exist, or it might be a model for artists themselves, stretching the boundaries, incorporating new forms, giving permission for invention. It is possible that process-oriented public art is more powerful when, as with most visual art forms, it operates as a symbol.²³⁶

Linda Vallejo sums up her relationship to her audience and community "My goal is to create a space that communicates the idea that without nature humanity, history and

²³³ Vallejo. Personal interview.

²³⁴ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 180.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid, 183-4.

culture as we know it are lost, that nature is the thread that encircles and describes all of us, regardless of gender, race, age, or creed, and finally, that nature is beyond politics, religion, market, and even art!”²³⁷ This statement shows that she fulfills the role of nature activist in order to allow the audience to experience the universality of our human condition in nature and its critical importance above all other concerns. Furthermore, she boldly states that her work as a message to her audience or community goes beyond politics and even her own success as an artist to be fundamentally humanitarian in essence, reflecting her philosophy.²³⁸ Regarding evaluating the effectiveness of one’s artwork in NGPA, Suzanne Lacy states, “When approaching work that intends toward social meaning [...] the audience’s beliefs and intentions with respect to the art and its subjects become part of the total picture.”²³⁹ It is obvious that the type of art Vallejo creates would not achieve its purpose without affecting the beliefs and/or intentions of her viewers when it comes to her social content, i.e. the importance we need to place on our environment. Furthermore, Lacy also explains that the intention of the artist suggests his or her “real or potential contexts for art,” which determines the meaning of art based on its messages.²⁴⁰

I have analyzed how elements in Vallejo’s artistic process support Lacy’s model of artist as analyst and is reflective of Lacy and Gablik’s theory on empathic community engagement. Although Vallejo does not involve the community during the actual

²³⁷ Vallejo. “Artist Statement.”

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 182.

²⁴⁰ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 181.

realization of her artwork, her art expression is the direct result of her engagement with the indigenous community. Furthermore, some of her artistic process reflects an empathic desire to address social issues of personal importance. Vallejo's volunteer work in indigenous ceremonies and the business of art are other interactive ways Vallejo empathically gives back to her community. I have expanded Lacy's role of artists as analyst to include forms of engagement with the community that take place *prior* to the making of the artwork.

Chapter V

George Yepes: Artist as Activist

In this chapter, I argue that Chicano artist George Yepes fulfills Suzanne Lacy's role of artist as activist with the free Academia de Arte Yepes' (AAY) eight-year program he offers to youth. Lacy examines the engagement with the community and the empathic role fulfilled by the artist as activist as a complex process that culminates with the creation of artwork as New Genre Public Art.²⁴¹ I expand on Lacy's idea of the artist as activist to include engagement with the community that is part of the artist's volunteer endeavors, rather than his professional practice. Lacy argues that the activist has the largest public impact of the four artist roles locally, nationally and even globally, and that the audience actively participates in the making of the artwork.²⁴² Assuming the function of "citizen-activist," the artist as activist consequently needs to become familiar with

²⁴¹ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 176.

²⁴² Ibid.

social systems in order to collaborate with them. Facing requirements that are not a part of usual art practice, the artist develops “multilayered” audiences, cross-disciplinary practices, meaningful public site selection, and educative skills relating to visual symbolism.”²⁴³

I first examine Yepes’ formative years to show that he is originally influenced by the socio-political and educative principles of the Chicano Movement as he assumes the role of muralist in the service of Cesar Chavez’ United Farm Workers, and in the East Los Streetscapers collaborative. I shortly address his solo career to focus on his community educational mural program. I analyze the skills involved in directing his Academia de Arte Yepes (AAY) and argue that he fulfills the role of artist as activist in the artistic process he demonstrates with AAY, as defined in Lacy’s theoretical framework. Lastly, I argue that his engagement with the community through AAY is based in his own experience and the empathic drive to create an opportunity that he did not have as a child.

Yepes’ Childhood Experience and Personality.

George Yepes, whose full name is Jose Jorge Yepes Loreto, grew up in a neighborhood of East Los Angeles with very little but a private education.²⁴⁴ He witnessed much violence in the streets where he lived. He remembers finding an oil paint case in an alley which he started to paint with on old t-shirts stretched on a chair’s back, until the paint was used up. Because his family could not afford it, Yepes did not

²⁴³ Ibid, 177.

²⁴⁴ George Yepes. “Biography.” <http://www.georgeyepes.com/George_Yepes/Biography.html>.

get paints until he was eighteen and was able to pay for them himself.²⁴⁵ Although he did well in school and was elected class president from first to eighth grade, he got involved in gang activity and lost twenty-seven friends to gang violence by his eighteenth year. Although he was always the one called whenever artistic talents were required at school, he did not join many art classes because he felt that his artistic needs were never met by the instruction he received.²⁴⁶ Instead, his secondary education focused on a business administration degree, which armed him with business savvy and the marketing sense he applies in his artistic career today.

Yepes as a Muralist in the Chicano Movement

Journalist Anna Kevorkian notes that Yepes became involved in the Chicano Mural Movement as he worked with muralists of Mechicano Art Center and other Chicano organizations.²⁴⁷ Eager to paint on a large scale and get involved with the Chicano Movement, he worked with artists Gilbert “Magu” Luján and John Valadez among a few to create a 40 by 60 feet mural on canvas for the 1977 United Farm Workers’ (UFW) convention in Fresno.²⁴⁸ Shifra Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto discuss two important symbols of UFW, “In the organizing process [of UFW], two strong visual symbols became central to Chicano visual artists: the Virgin of Guadalupe and the

²⁴⁵ George Yepes. Personal Interview. Ventura. 3 Mar. 2009.

²⁴⁶ George Yepes. “*Tuesday Talk* Public Interview.” Donna Granata. Focus on the Masters. Ventura, 3 Mar. 2009.

²⁴⁷ Anna Kevorkian. “Paint N the Hood: Lone-wolf Painter George Yepes Survived East L.A.’s Gang Life to Become the City’s Preeminent Badass Muralist.” Feature in Los Angeles Times. 15 June 2000: 1.

²⁴⁸ Ibid

red, black, and white thunderbird flag.”²⁴⁹ It is important to note that the Virgin of Guadalupe is still represented in many works of Yepes, along with other traditional Chicano symbols such as Zapata. The muralist also works with artists who later form the seminal Chicano collective Los Four, such as the late artist Carlos Almaraz.²⁵⁰ Working for the UFW and with artists whose role is critical to the Chicano Art Movement solidified Yepes’ socio-political and educative aspirations, “[He] wanted to make socially relevant murals.”²⁵¹

Yepes and East Los Streetscapers

Between 1979 and 1985, Yepes painted 28 murals with East Los Streetscapers – still called Los Dos Streetscapers at the time-, becoming a more accomplished muralist and visual narrator.²⁵² One of five murals painted between 1979 and 1987 on the Department of Motor Vehicles’ building in Culver City,²⁵³ *Moonscapes I: On the Tail of the Comet* (figures 18 and 19) by Los Dos Streetscapers (Healy and Botello) assisted by Paul Botello and Yepes, is a mural that offers thematic and compositional elements reminiscent of Academia de Arte Yepes’s work for NASA. The mural combines aerospace images with “ancient Mayan characters and modern day scientists such as Albert Einstein.”²⁵⁴ The combination of past Mesoamerican and modern American scientist characters serves as identity boosters and reflect the political agenda of the

²⁴⁹ Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto. “The Political and Social Contexts of Chicano Art.” 85.

²⁵⁰ Kevorkian. “Paint N the Hood.”

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ East Los Streetscapers. Mural Files in Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles. <<http://www.lamurals.org/MuralFiles/Westside/Moonscapes.html>>.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Chicano Movement. The similarities in the ELS and AAY murals are indicative of Yepes' formative social and educative development with ESL.

Yepes' Solo Work

The transition between collaborative and solo work were dramatic for Yepes. He quit painting for two years until he felt the inspiration and confidence to aesthetically define his own style, "I had to allow time to purge from my psyche a decade of collaborative painting experiences and methods."²⁵⁵ Some of the negative consequences of his collaborative work were costly to him. Although the artist describes himself as "one of the more prolific painters in the Chicano Mural Movement of the late 70's,"²⁵⁶ gallerist Robert Berman explains that Yepes' temperament isolated him from the Chicano art community which he was an active member.²⁵⁷ Berman's statement, along with other negative comments from Chicano artists and scholars²⁵⁸ may explain the lack of historization of Yepes' socio-political role in the Chicano Art Muralist Movement. Writings about Yepes have mostly been in the form of Chicano art or business-related articles and interviews. In 1997, L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan recognized Yepes as one of the "Treasures of Los Angeles" who specializes in "eloquent social, historical, and sacred images" which he has painted on over 800,000 square feet of walls.²⁵⁹ His eventual successful commodification in mainstream galleries such as Berman's afforded

²⁵⁵ Kevorkian. "Paint N the Hood."

²⁵⁶ Yepes. "Biography."

²⁵⁷ Kevorkian. "Paint N the Hood."

²⁵⁸ See Kevorkian. "Paint N the Hood" for further comments about Yepes' characterization.

²⁵⁹ Yepes. "Biography."

him to follow his childhood dream: to offer free challenging art instruction to talented children.²⁶⁰

Academia de Arte Yepes

George Yepes created the free Academia de Arte Yepes in 1992 in the printing room of Salesian High School.²⁶¹ When AAY later received a notice to vacate, he showed dedication to the youth art community by pursuing teaching for two years “from the trunk of his car, going from school to school.”²⁶² In 1998, he could afford a studio to house the academy in downtown Los Angeles from the sales of his own artwork. AAY is now an eight-year program that Yepes describes as the “first free art academy in Los Angeles,” where students join when they are ten and graduate at eighteen.²⁶³ It offers painting instruction and mural application to children recommended by school teachers around East Los Angeles as exhibiting early artistic talent.²⁶⁴ Yepes explains that most of the students have never painted before because the neighborhood schools do not offer painting.²⁶⁵ AAY has given “Interdisciplinary Fine Arts Masters courses in Painting for Elementary, High School, and College students from Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin”²⁶⁶ to over 1500 low-income students.²⁶⁷ Yepes calls it “a one-man operation.” He directs it without the structure of a board of directors, and funds it without

²⁶⁰ Yepes. “*Tuesday Talk* Public Interview.”

²⁶¹ Kevorkian. “Paint N the Hood.”

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ George Yepes. Lecture. Ventura College Library. [Ventura College](#). Ventura. 17 Apr. 2008

²⁶⁴ Yepes. Personal Interview.

²⁶⁵ Yepes. Lecture.

²⁶⁶ George Yepes. “Academia de Arte Yepes.” <http://www.georgeyepes.com/George_Yepes/Academia_de_Arte_Yepes.html>.

²⁶⁷ Yepes. “Biography.”

the support of sponsors- except for a few commissions which moneys go right back into the program.²⁶⁸ Yepes trains AAY students in the conception and execution of murals.²⁶⁹ Students who master painting skills climb the hierarchic levels from learning, to teaching, to leading others, following the art studio apprenticeship system which tradition dates back to European Middle Ages.²⁷⁰ Kevorkian explains the highly beneficial social and pedagogical role Yepes' art program has on the students of his community, "They gain self-confidence, learn how to reach goals -- notable during a time when school, government, and family fail children -- and experience the business of painting."²⁷¹

Yepes' direct engagement with the students, the spontaneity in his teaching method, and the expectations for excellence he places on his students create a unique learning environment for the youth art community. The program produces artwork of high standards.²⁷² Yepes describes his pedagogical approach, which is part of his art process with AAY, as an engaging hands-on learning experience rather than a lengthy theoretical lecture about all the steps involved in creating a community mural.²⁷³

AAY has received many commendations for its community educational efforts. Among them are L.A. Unified School District in 1993; Mayor of Los Angeles, City and County of Los Angeles, and United States Congress in 1995; State of California

²⁶⁸ Sonia Mercado. "The Lone Wolf: George Yepes, the Painter that Refuses to be Caged" in Oye Magazine 13 (Mar. 2006) <http://cache.zoominfo.com/CachedPage/?archive_id=0&page_id=714370476&page_url=%2f%2fwww.georgeyepes.com%2flonewolf.htm&page_last_updated=7%2f22%2f2008+3%3a11%3a23+AM&firstName=George&lastName=Yepes>.

²⁶⁹ Yepes. "Tuesday Talk Oral History."

²⁷⁰ Yepes. Personal Interview.

²⁷¹ Kevorkian. "Paint N the Hood."

²⁷² Mercado. "The Lone Wolf."

²⁷³ George Yepes. Interview. Life and Times. "Best of Life and Times." Transcript. KCET. Los Angeles. 6 Dec. 2000.

Department of Education in 1997.²⁷⁴ In 1999, the Council of the City of Los Angeles adopted a resolution to start a “new Art Educational model for the students of the Second Millennium Renaissance,” based on AAY’s mission and high professional-quality standards “through a school-to-work-career program.”²⁷⁵ It also included its adoption of California Department of Education’s visual standards and interdisciplinary approach consequent to the 1995 seven murals created for NASA:

Be it resolved that by the adoption of this resolution, the Los Angeles City Council hereby congratulates the ACADEMIA DE ARTE YEPES for its artistic talent, vision, dedication, and hard work in establishing a visual arts training program for teachers, and further commends the Academia for assisting teachers to more effectively implement learning standards for the visual arts in ways that will result in improved student achievement, which is of great value to the community and to the City of Los Angeles, and in furtherance of our common goal of making this city a better place in which to live.²⁷⁶

The commendations Academia de Arte Yepes receive over the years support the socio-political and educative role George Yepes fulfills in the community, and the engagement he demonstrates with his AAY students as part of his artistic process. Yepes is a catalyst for change in the way art is taught. Although the Chicano artistic community may not have historically recognized his socio-political and educational role as muralist,²⁷⁷ his role in the community has obviously been acknowledged and awarded by socio-political and educational institutions. By integrating California visual arts standards to the AAY curriculum, Yepes demonstrates that he is knowledgeable and works in collaboration with the state’s educational system. The recognition Yepes receives from public

²⁷⁴ Yepes. “Biography” in Art Scene. <<http://artscenecal.com/ArtistsFiles/YepesG/YepesGFile/GYepesBio.html>>.

²⁷⁵ Yepes. “Academia de Art Yepes.”

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Kevorkian. “Paint N the Hood.”

organizations at the local and state levels supports the role as artist as activist that Lacy defines for the “citizen-activist.”²⁷⁸

Yepes’ Collaborative Qualities of Artist as Activist

Lacy argues that collaborative skills are critical for the artist as activist, creating “multilayered” audiences, cross-disciplinary practices, meaningful public site selection, and educative skills relating to visual symbolism.²⁷⁹ Judith Baca argues that collaborations also allow people from different areas to come together and share “their visions for their neighborhoods and their nations.”²⁸⁰ The 2001 *Many Hands, One Heart* mural project (figures 20 and 21) for the 3,000 student Farragut Career Academy illustrates the “multilayered” audiences, meaningful site selection, and educative skills involved in the large collaborative project. Commissioned by the Latino Initiatives for the 21st Century, its site was meaningfully located in a Chicano barrio of Chicago, Illinois. The three-month project involved Farragut Career Academy’s 122 faculty members and art department.²⁸¹ Yepes’ comments at his 2008 lecture at Ventura College Library support his activist role in the Chicago endeavor. The project gathered a mixed audience and taught skills beyond art:

When I got to Chicago, I was going to work with 6 students, then they told their friends and I had 28 students, then those 28 told their friends and I had 850 students. A 14 yr old is in charge of 850 students. Boys are in

²⁷⁸ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 176.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 177.

²⁸⁰ Baca. “Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society.” 138.

²⁸¹ Minerva Poe. “The Master Painter” in *Oye Magazine*, 13 Mar. 2006. <http://cache.zoominfo.com/CachedPage/?archive_id=0&page_id=714370445&page_url=%2f%2fwww.georgeyepes.com%2foyeyes.htm&page_last_updated=7%2f22%2f2008+3%3a11%3a23+AM&firstName=George&lastName=Yepes>.

charge of the construction. 50 to 60 panels go up, so lots of math and engineering are done by the students with measuring. Five tiers of scaffolding are put up by high school kids. Girls organize everything. It took 2 days to teach them how to divide the mural. The first day they put up 8 panels, the second day they put up 32, etc. I challenged the students in LA to come and paint with the students in Chicago, and high school kids took the train to paint with them.²⁸²

The City of Chicago awarded a Certificate of Merit to Academia De Arte Yepes “In recognition of your dedication of mind, heart, and hand, to the people of Illinois, friends, neighbors, and fellow students of Chicago; A symbol of your devotion and service to the people.”²⁸³

The seven murals commissioned by NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena (JPL), California demonstrate that AAY’s founder possesses all the skills listed for artist as activist (figures 22 and 23). Lacy argues that the activist requires understanding and collaboration with “social systems and institutions.”²⁸⁴ Yepes is well aware of the skepticism most organizations have for what a group of children can accomplish, so he starts AAY’s projects as getting a “foot in the door,” and he later talks the organization into more complex ones.²⁸⁵ Fernando Peralta, a NASA scientist invited by Yepes to talk to the students about aerospace, was impressed by their skills. When he asked them to present AAY artwork to other staff including the project engineer, he commented “I gave the floor to Octavio [Gonzales], who back then was 10, and he started talking. [...] Here was a 10-year-old talking to big shots -- these people design space missions. By the end of the lunch, Kohlase [the project engineer] said, ‘We need to talk

²⁸² Yepes. Lecture.

²⁸³ Yepes. “Academia de Art Yepes.”

²⁸⁴ Lacy. “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art.” 177.

²⁸⁵ Yepes. “*Tuesday Talk* Public Interview.”

about these kids.”²⁸⁶ Over time, seven murals were painted by AAY for JPL’s Cassini spacecraft project (figures 24 and 25).²⁸⁷

Not only does Yepes know the “system,” but the AAY students learn it by osmosis and exposure, becoming young artists as activists themselves. Indeed, Daniel Gonzales, a fifteen year old student who had been with AAY for five years, matter-of-factly described the process, “We learned about the politics that go on around our neighborhoods. We learned what an artist has to go through just to get a painting on the wall. [...] You have to go through certain people and talk to them, sometimes go around fifteen rounds with them.”²⁸⁸

Yepes’ Ultimate Goal

George Yepes works for children who love art and cannot afford it, either because they cannot afford art classes or, like him, cannot even afford art supplies. His experience fostered a deep understanding of tough choices “Art classes in East L.A. were \$10 a month. My family's house was \$75 a month. Ten dollars a month meant you didn't buy groceries.”²⁸⁹ Students’ testimonies to the benefits of AAY support the importance of Yepes’ role through his engagement with community youth. Jose Gonzalez, age seventeen, entered AAY at age nine and co-managed the JPL project. He asserted that AAY “brought everything to me. [Yepes] taught me how to paint.”²⁹⁰ Other AAY

²⁸⁶ Poe. “The Master Painter.”

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Yepes. Interview. Life and Times.

²⁸⁹ Kevorkian. “Paint N the Hood.”

²⁹⁰ Poe. “The Master Painter.”

students mentioned self-esteem validation, an important goal for the earlier Chicano Movement, “One thing I have learned from this art class is to be confident in yourself [sic] that you can achieve the goal that you want,” and “It makes me feel good about myself because I did a mural. This is my first time and we’re doing a mural with a professional.”²⁹¹ Juan Solis who graduated from AAY after eight years, worked on the Cassini project, and is now an artist in his own right, reveals the same empathic aspirations to help his community.²⁹² Yepes further believes that his students can serve as role models to adults with the level of dedication and passion they demonstrate at AAY.²⁹³

Yepes has already expanded the Academia de Arte Yepes to other communities than East Los Angeles. In addition to his Chicago work, he has done projects throughout Texas. Yepes explains that Academia de Arte Yepes is not defined by geographic location but by his presence in a location; wherever he goes, the academy happens.²⁹⁴ In March 2009, he moved to Las Vegas to expand the benefits of the academy to new students.²⁹⁵ Yepes’ strong empathic drive to give local talented children free art education, so they can achieve far more than what they would in the traditional art educating system, has turned him into an activist, a doer rather than a preacher. His role as artist-activist has gone beyond the state level to reach a national level with the significant work in Chicago and Texas.

²⁹¹ Yepes. Interview. Life and Times.

²⁹² Juan Solis. “Featured Artist.” Galeria Mijares. <http://www.galeriamijares.com/j_solis/about_js.htm>.

²⁹³ Yepes. Interview. Life and Times.

²⁹⁴ Yepes. Personal interview.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

In this chapter, I have examined George Yepes' painting for the United Farm Workers and East Los Streetscapers, which place him in the heart of the Chicano Art Movement with its socio-political and educational aspirations. Even though his rejection by the art community may have resulted in a lack of scholarly work on Yepes' early role and engagement with the community, the artist affirms his intention to make murals that are socially significant. I have analyzed his artistic process within the context of his community work in Academia de Arte Yepes. His process supports that Yepes has evolved to fulfill a role of artist as activist. Following Suzanne Lacy's activist description, I have argued that collaborative skills including "multilayered" audiences, cross-disciplinary practices, meaningful public site selection, and educative skills relating to visual symbolism are demonstrated in Yepes' artistic process within the context of Academia de Arte Yepes. I have supported that AAY has gained importance at the local, state and federal levels, and that Yepes shows an understanding of social systems in order to work with them. The many awards and commendations he has received for his educative and community efforts support further his role as activist. Consequently, I have expanded Lacy's model of artist as activist in the context of New Genre Public Art where community engagement takes place during the practical making of the artwork, to include community engagement in the artistic process as volunteer work rather than as a professional endeavor .

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the roles of four Chicano/a artists and their engagement with their audience and /or community as part of their artistic process. I have examined scholarship addressing the role of Chicano/a artists with their audience and/or community, and demonstrated that most Chicano scholarship has been written from a political rather than a humanitarian stance. This study has drawn on Suzanne Lacy's theoretical model which categorizes the role of artists as *experiencer*, reporter, analyst or activist in the context of New Genre Public Art²⁹⁶, and Suzi Gablik's analysis of empathic motives in art.²⁹⁷ I have used personal interviews and observation, statements from the artists, biographical literature, research and analysis of visual information as evidence to support my argument and to foster a deeper understanding of artistic process related to audience/community engagement.

Lacy designs her model to reflect the direct participation of the audience and/or community during the actual making of the art. I have expanded her model to include participation of the audience/community that has been an integral part of the artistic process, but often has taken place prior to the creation of the art. I have dedicated chapters to Gronk in the role of artist as *experiencer*, Wayne Healy in the role of artist as the role of reporter, Linda Vallejo in the role of artist as analyst, and George Yepes in the role of artist as activist.

²⁹⁶ Lacy. "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art." 171-185.

²⁹⁷ Gablik. "Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism." 74-87.

I have supported that the four artists' empathy for the audience or community developed during the political times of the Chicano Movement, and led them to create specific socio-artistic practices in order to provide services they wished they had had during their youth or formative years. Lacy explains that artists who work with the audience/community may create "new conceptions of community" where

the fragmented elements of personal experiences and the epic scale of urban dramas collaborate to define a contemporaneous idea of public. [...] Meaning is not missing in action; it is made through the constructive, collaborative process called 'the public.'²⁹⁸

Beyond the call for political activism that surrounded them as Chicana/o artists during the Chicano Movement in the 70s, Gronk, Wayne Healy, Linda Vallejo and George Yepes have continued to empathically give back to the community. As their community has expanded beyond Chicano neighborhoods, these four artists have continued to construct social meaning through art forms that are based in community engagement. In this thesis, I have therefore integrated Gronk, Wayne Healy, Linda Vallejo and George Yepes' artistic process further into mainstream scholarship through the use of Lacy's theoretical framework on public art that is not specific to Chicano art.

²⁹⁸ Lacy. "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys." 70.

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APPENDIX: Figures



Figure 1
Asco. *Walking Mural*. Photograph. 1972. From left: Valdez, Herron, Gronk.
Both photographs by Harry Gamboa Jr.



Figure 2
Asco. *Instant Mural*.. Photograph. 1974. Patssi Valdez is taped to a wall by Gronk.

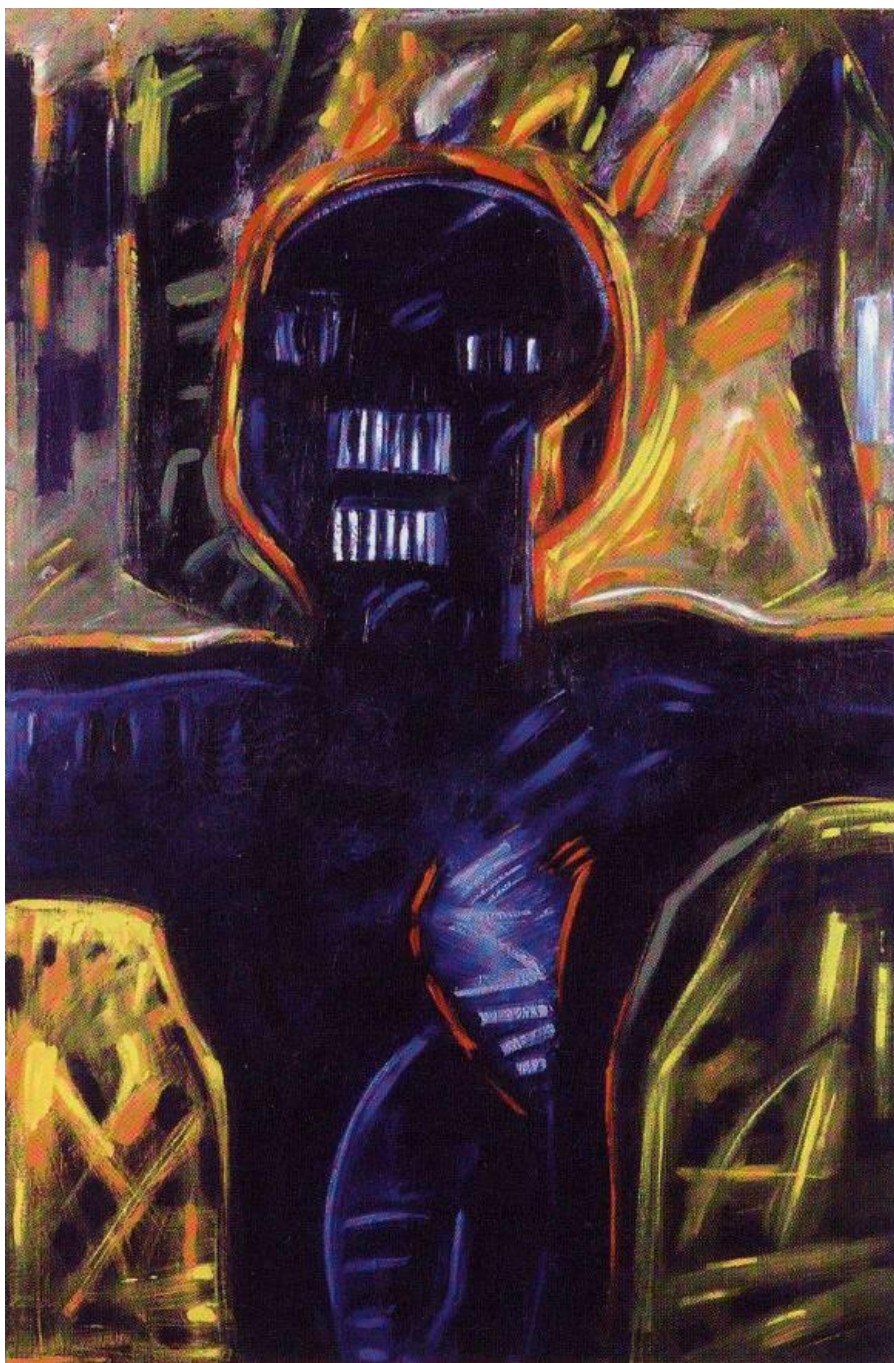


Figure 3
Gronk. *Hotel Senator*. 1990.
Acrylic on wood. 73 ¼ x 49 ¼ inches.
Private Collection. Photograph by William Nettles.



Figure 4
Gronk. Site-specific painting installation. Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 1994.

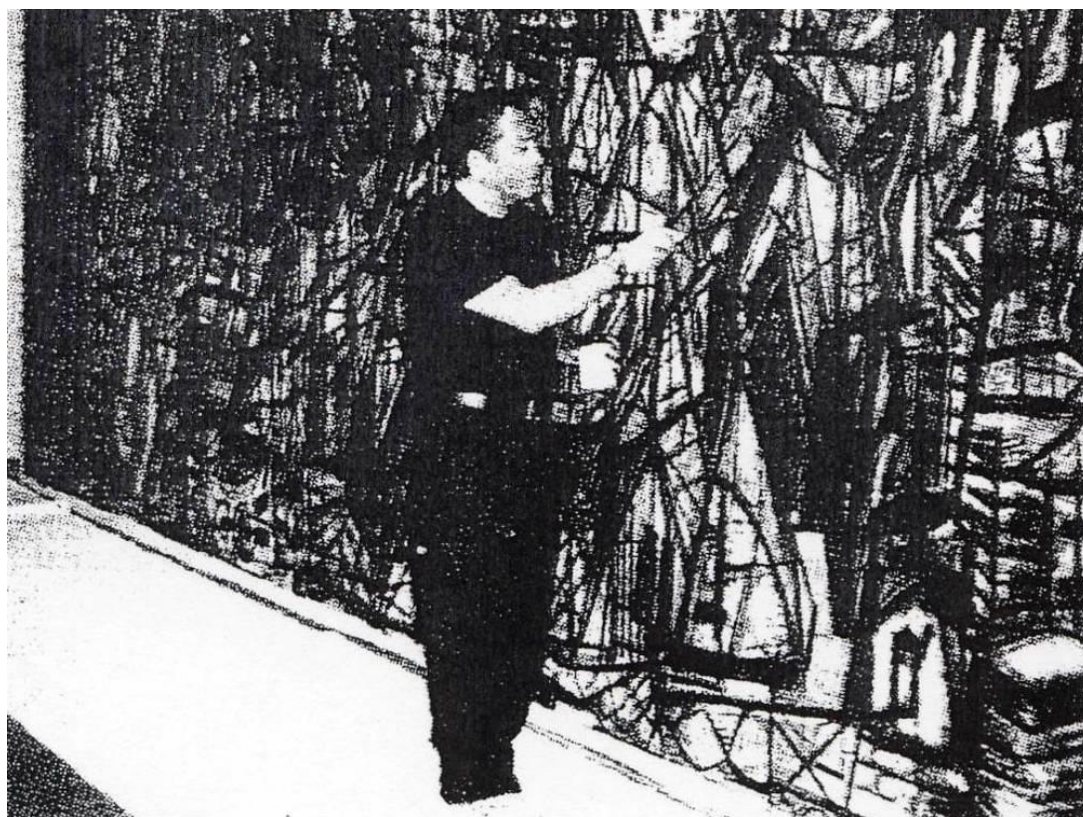


Figure 5
Gronk. Site-specific painting installation. March 2003.
Carnegie Art Museum. Photograph by Roberto Torres.



Figure 6
Wayne Healy. *Ghosts of the Barrio*, Estrada Courts, Los Angeles, 1974



Figure 7
Wayne Healy. *Parabolic Flight*. Steel, ceramic tile. Olivas Park, Ventura, CA. 2007
Photograph East Los Streetscapers.



Figure 8
Detail. Photograph by Donna Granata.



Figure 9
East Los Streetscapers. Metrolink's Slauson Station, South Central, Los Angeles, 1995
Photograph by Metro.



Figure 10
Detail. *Slauson Serenade*. Photograph by East Los Streetscapers.



Figure 11
 East Los Streetscapers. *Stairway to Global Health*. Lincoln Heights, Los Angeles, 1991
 Both photographs by Ikkoskinen's Photostream



Figure 12
 Detail
 97



Figure 13
Linda Vallejo. *A Prayer for the Earth*. Mixed media. Carnegie Art Museum Oxnard.
2004. Photographs Linda Vallejo



Figure 14
Detail, Installation. Photograph Linda Vallejo.
98



Figure 15

Linda Vallejo. *Immigration USA*. "Censored" Newspaper Series. 2008.
Recycled Newspaper Collages. Manipulated photographs, acrylic, Mylar, and whiteout.



Figure 16

Detail. Both photographs Linda Vallejo.



Figure 17

Linda Vallejo. *Mother Earth's Chemical Waste*. 2006
Recycled Styrofoam, rubber tubing, manipulated photographs, original art, Mylar.
24 x 7 x 20 inches. Photograph Linda Vallejo.



Figure 18

Los Dos Streetscapers (Wayne Healy and David Botello) asst. Paul Botello, George Yepes. *Moonscapes I: On the Tail of the Comet*. DMV. West Los Angeles. 1978.

Both photographs by Rich Puchalsky.



Figure 19

Los Dos Streetscapers (Wayne Healy and David Botello) asst. Paul Botello, George Yepes. *Moonscapes II: Cruising through Space/Time*. DMV. West Los Angeles. 1979.



Figure 20
 Academia de Arte Yepes. *Many Hands, One Heart*. Chicago. 2001.
 Both photographs by George Yepes



Figure 21
 View from Above

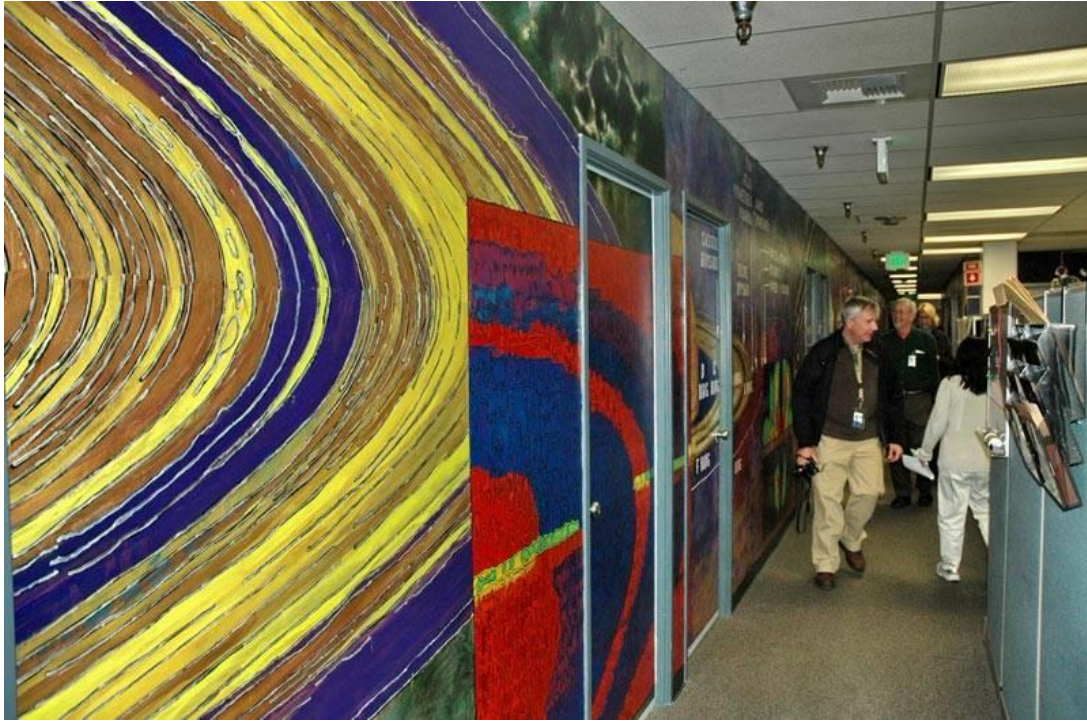


Figure 22
Academia de Arte Yepes. *Cassini Mural Project*. Jet Propulsion Laboratory,
Pasadena. 1995. Both photographs by NASA/JPL



Figure 23
Academia de Arte Yepes. *Cassini Mission to Saturn*. 1995. 12' x 25'.



Figure 24
 Academia de Arte Yepes. *JPL Cassini Spacecraft Project*. 1995.
 Photographs courtesy of George Yepes.



Figure 25