

L.A. Xicano

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Art Along the Hyphen The Mexican-American Generation

Autry National Center

Icons of the Invisible Oscar Castillo

Fowler Museum at UCLA

Mapping Another L.A. The Chicano Art Movement

Fowler Museum at UCLA

Mural Remix Sandra de la Loza

Los Angeles County Museum of Art



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ROBERTO CHAVEZ
Ladies Art Class,
Sawtelle, 1967
Oil on canvas
50 × 60 inches

Mexican Heritage, American Art

Six Angeleno Artists

Terezita Romo

IN 1952, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES RAN AN OBITUARY for Hernando G. Villa, who died on May 7 at the age of seventy. The obituary cited his forty-four years as an artist for the Santa Fe Railway and his decade-long tenure as a teacher at the Los Angeles School of Art and Design. It also included Villa's beginnings as a blacksmith's apprentice who "shod horses for the livery stable of the late William H. Pierce, then Lincoln Heights Councilman and livery stable owner, and later cofounder of Pierce Bros."¹ The *Times* did not, however, cite either his creation of the iconic *The Chief*, which became the symbol of the Santa Fe Railroad, or the auction record set in 1907 by his painting *Bohero* (ca. 1906) (p. 105). Nor did it mention that Villa exhibited his paintings extensively, including at the Academy of Western Painters in the mid-1930s.² Indeed, Villa's myriad accomplishments during the course of his prolific and successful fifty-year career as an illustrator, draughtsman, muralist, and painter were largely omitted from the final official record of his life.

Within American art history, there are other Mexican-descent artists such as Villa who carved out niches for themselves, excelling at their craft but also forging paths that expanded on artistic trajectories of the time and that countered artistic conventions with a bicultural aesthetic synthesis. They pursued artistic careers, pushing themselves artistically as well as personally, in order to fulfill their dreams of becoming successful artists. However, the majority of these Mexican American artists have been all but erased from the mainstream art canon, rendered nonexistent within public art institutions and absent from art school curricula. Focusing on the period 1945–1980, the exhibition *Art Along the Hyphen: The Mexican-American Generation* presents the work of six Mexican American artists who contributed to the emerging California iconography as well as to the national imaginary. Documenting an overlooked yet significant tributary within the emergence of modern art in Los Angeles, the exhibition focuses on the

artwork of Villa (1881–1952), Alberto Valdés (1918–1998), Domingo Ulloa (1919–1997), Roberto Chavez (1932–), Dora De Larios (1933–), and Eduardo Carrillo (1937–1997). With an emphasis on painting and sculpture, the exhibition explores each artist's dialogue with the various art movements of the twentieth century as refracted through cultural heritage, local observation, and social commentary.

Though the exhibition is by no means comprehensive, the six featured artists are nonetheless representative of a seminal period in American art after World War II. During that pivotal time, Los Angeles artists initiated their own aesthetic responses to the artistic trends emanating from the de facto art center of New York, such as abstraction, surrealism, and expressionism. Art historian Susan Landauer argues that although California artists "had counterparts on the East Coast and in Europe, their art was by no means imitative or homogeneous."³ By the 1960s Los Angeles had contributed to American art a gritty style of assemblage and sleek school of painting known as the Los Angeles Look (or Finish Fetish), as well as a descendant movement called Light and Space art. In addition, California clay artists moved ceramics from craft into art.⁴ Within this artistic environment, Mexican American artists melded aesthetic and cultural influences into an artistic synthesis that would not only define them but also facilitate the flowering that would be the Chicano art movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.

The artistic accomplishments of these Mexican American artists were realized against a backdrop of significant social and political changes. As noted by art historian Margarita Nieto, the accepting artistic milieu in Los Angeles that Mexican and Mexican American artists encountered during the 1920s and 1930s dissipated after World War II. "Incidents such as the Zoot-suit riots and the Sleepy Lagoon murder case helped to eradicate the goodwill established during two decades of cross-cultural influences."⁵ The physical fragmentation of Los Angeles

communities by the proliferation of “white flight” suburbs and by freeways that carved neighborhoods into racial and economic ghettos also informed the personal histories of these artists. In the midst of this, Mexican American artists pursued professional artistic careers utilizing the mainstream vehicles of art schools, studios, galleries, and museum exhibitions. Much like their non-Mexican American counterparts, they, too, sought to make a living from art sales and reap the critical support of art reviewers and critics. They attained various levels of economic success, as reflected by the six artists in the exhibition, yet mainstream critical attention was fleeting at best.

Though the careers of Carrillo, Chavez, De Larios, Ulloa, Valdés, and Villa constitute individual stories of struggle and attainment, they also illustrate the multiplicity of aesthetic responses present within the Mexican American artist community. Even though all six attended art schools, thus drawing their initial inspiration and iconography from a classical Western European canon, there is no overarching style or movement connecting them. Their artworks reflect or react to the prevalent art styles and movements of the day. As expressed by scholars Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Shifra Goldman, there was a “difference between the isolated conditions of Mexican-American artists prior to 1965 in contrast to the sense of a *movement* in the Chicano era, and...of a *national* movement with shared precepts and iconography.”⁶ However, each of the six artists incorporated aspects of Southern California’s marginalized environment and his or her Mexican heritage into a distinctive artistic expression that drew from abstraction, figuration, surrealism, and social realism. In the case of ceramicist De Larios, her work moved clay further into the realm of art. Thus, although the exhibition serves as a testament to their individual artistic accomplishments, it is also a historical documentation of the “Mexican American generation” artists’ contributions to the aesthetic vitality of Los Angeles art.



Figure 1
Hernando G. Villa
in 1905, at the age of
twenty-four. The
photograph was likely
taken on the occasion
of his graduation from
the Los Angeles School
of Art and Design

HERNANDO G. VILLA

Hernando G. Villa’s five-decade career exemplifies the height of financial success and critical acclaim that was achieved by a Mexican American artist in the first half of the twentieth century (fig. 1). His life also serves as a bridge for understanding the social environment faced by post-World War II artists. Villa’s parents, Miguel and Esequia, emigrated from Baja California in 1846—two years before Alta California was annexed by the United States. Villa was born in 1881 in an adobe house at Sixth and Spring Streets, a part of Los Angeles then known as the “Mexican section.”⁷ Villa’s interest in art began early in his life, but he did not attend art school until his twenties, graduating in 1905 from the prestigious Los Angeles School of Art and Design. According to Nancy Moure, this institution was at the time “the most important private art school devoted solely to teaching art.”⁸ Under the directorship of its founder, Louisa Garden MacLeod, the school offered a wide variety of classes, including drawing, painting, woodcarving, photography, and cartooning. It also became an artistic center, hosting lectures, exhibitions, monthly receptions, and art club meetings. Later in his life, Villa would have the distinction of becoming an instructor at the Los Angeles School of Art and Design, a position he held for ten years.

Upon graduation, Villa set up his studio in the historic Alameda district. One of his first clients was John J. Byrne, the Pacific Coast passenger traffic manager for the Santa Fe Railway. Late in 1905, Villa secured a contract with the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad.⁹ Over the course of his career, his illustrations of rail travel grew in popularity, and he was contracted to create them for the covers and pages of various publications, including *Pacific Outlook*, *Town Talk*, *West Coast Magazine*, and *Westways*.



Figure 2
HERNANDO G. VILLA
Mission Ruins, 1920
 Oil on board
 11 × 14 inches

Even as he concentrated on commercial art and illustration, Villa made time to paint subject matter of personal interest: the Southern California missions, Native American daily life, and romantic Spanish scenes (fig. 2). As a result of his mission paintings, he was recruited by the architectural board to serve as a consultant for the restoration of the Santa Barbara Mission.¹⁰ One of his earliest accomplishments as an artist became the subject of a lengthy article published in 1912. A department store commissioned him to create a watercolor mural that was described in the *Los Angeles Times* as “probably the largest work of the kind ever undertaken in the West.”¹¹ Titled *Tourists of the Mission*, the painting was 120 feet long and 12 feet high. Villa focused on Mission San Luis Rey, which was depicted in its contemporary stage of decay yet populated by Franciscan friars and California Indians in an idyllic natural setting. He even added full-size pillars and colonnades in order to mimic the deteriorated masonry at the mission and impart an element of realism to his painting.¹²

In 1915 Villa focused on his interest in Native American culture for a mural commission at the Palace of Transportation building at the Panama–Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Alongside panels with railroad trains, representing the technological advances that denoted progress, he featured proud warriors on horseback, including one waving at the train. The mural *Allegory of Transportation* serves as a poignant juxtaposition of two very different cultural tropes from U.S. history, and not without a sense of irony, given the railroad’s role in accelerating the decline of the Native American way of life. In Villa’s artistic interpretation, the Native peoples welcome this symbol of “progress” with stoic acceptance and a noble stance. The public response to the

mural was very favorable, and after garnering the requisite points from the review committee, Villa received the Gold Medal for Mural Decoration. Thereafter, Native Americans would constitute a major iconographic reservoir for Villa’s art.

After his success in San Francisco, Villa embarked on a year of study in England and Germany. Upon returning to his Los Angeles studio, he was enlisted to teach at the Los Angeles School of Art and Design. However, Villa still found time to paint a number of murals, including one at the entrance of Tally’s New Broadway Theater in Los Angeles in 1916; one on the dome of the New Rialto Theatre in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1921; and a multipaneled mural, titled *The Pioneers*, at the Citizens Trust and Savings Bank (formerly on Hill Street) in Los Angeles in 1926.

It was Villa’s creation of *The Chief* that brought him national recognition and an association with the Santa Fe Railway that lasted over four decades (fig. 3). Though the details are not known, he began working with the railway in 1928, two years after it had launched a deluxe limited train service dubbed “The Chief.” Reportedly, the Los Angeles ad manager, H. D. Dodge, discovered Villa while attending an exhibition of his work. Commissioned to create an emblem for the company’s train, Villa produced a design that underwent several revisions over a three-year period before it was approved. Villa had a lifelong fascination with Native American culture, and he followed through on his interests with careful research. As he commented, “Before drawing a line I spent six months with the Arapahoes, studying them and learning their ways.”¹³ Villa also traveled to Taos and Acoma in New Mexico. Over the subsequent years, the logo was updated and became more stylized, but it never lost its impact. The *Los Angeles Saturday Night* art critic, Prudence Woollett, called Villa a genius, stating, “The Chief’s finely feathered head is thrown back in an air of confidence that accurately conveys an idea of earned supremacy.”¹⁴ Like the critics, the public responded favorably to Villa’s Santa Fe poster designs, and the advertisers continued to use them until 1971, when Santa Fe ceased its passenger-carrying business.

Although commercial art provided a steady income, Villa continued to draw and paint other subjects of interest, especially Mexican and Spanish themes. Over the course of his successful career as a painter, he was increasingly referred to as a “Californio” or “Spanish-Californio,” even though his parents were born in Mexico. Californios were descendants of the Spanish/Mexican families that had received land grants when the territory was ruled by the Viceroyalty of New Spain in Mexico City.¹⁵ Claims to an idealized California past predicated

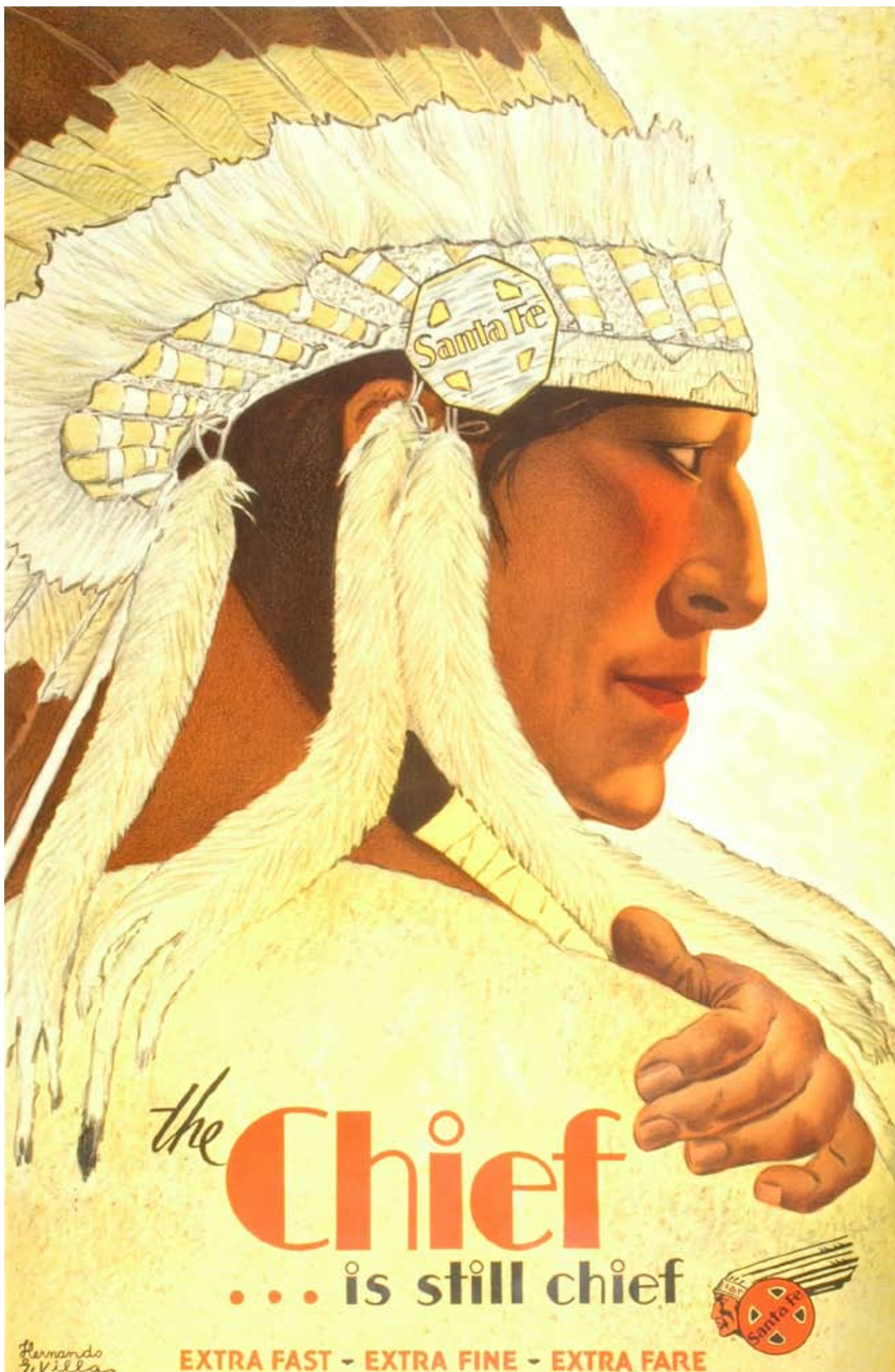


Figure 3
HERNANDO G. VILLA
The Chief, 1930
Offset poster
41 × 27 inches



Figure 4
HERNANDO G. VILLA
 Untitled (Woman with
 White Mantilla), 1945
 Oil on canvas
 56 × 43 inches

on racial purity and economic elite status became part of a “fantasy heritage” that was crafted in large part by Anglo Americans hoping to cash in on the romantic appeal of “rancho life” plays (such as *Ramona*) and mission revival architecture.¹⁶ This also allowed Anglo Americans to sanitize the more recent Mexican history of Los Angeles. At the same time, given the lower social and economic status of Mexicans in Los Angeles, especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was to their advantage to go along with the fantasy heritage that allowed light-skinned Mexicans, at least, to soften if not entirely avoid the racism of the time.¹⁷

Although it is not clear whether Villa originally identified himself as a Californio, it is very apparent that those who wrote about him or his art accepted this false lineage. In the *Rio Grande Review* published in August 1929, the writer went so far as to describe Villa as “a descendant of a pioneer Los Angeles Spanish family,” even though his parents had been born in Baja California.¹⁸ In 1934 an art critic for the *Los Angeles Evening Herald-Express*, Alma May Cook, declared that Villa “may well be termed a native son, for his parents came to the little pueblo of Los Angeles as children in 1846.”¹⁹ Villa also began to dress as a Spaniard, sporting the iconic brimmed hat of flamenco dancers. A newspaper cartoon in 1924 by the *Evening Herald* staff artist, Wyn Barden, depicted Villa in “his authentic bull fighting costume” for the International Artists’ Night of All Nations fete.²⁰ Whatever his motivation, Villa became known for his paintings of Spanish gentlemen,

señoritas, musicians, and dancers, many times set within nostalgic scenes from the Californio era.

He even recast the image of the soldier’s pinup girl into his signature Spanish señorita in 1945 (fig. 4). According to Villa, “I heartily endorse the pin-up girl that has been of such great psychological importance as a morale booster for our service men. But the time has come for a universal symbol embodying the spirit of womanhood as played in this and all wars.”²¹ With Chicago actress Patti Powers as his model, Villa painted the señorita against a dark background that sets off the luscious red of her dress and glowing white of her mantilla, which flows from a Spanish comb. In a flirtatious pose—one arm on her hip, the other holding her skirt and a fan, her eyes glancing sideways, a half smile on her lips—Villa’s señorita successfully merged the mystery of Goya’s *Maja* portraits with the contemporary allure of poster girls à la Rita Hayworth. However, Villa never abandoned “Mexican” subject matter, choosing to return to it sporadically with paintings of Mexican town squares with their churches, shops, and inhabitants.

ALBERTO VALDÉS

Alberto Valdés is representative of the Mexican American painters who did not seek a public artistic career but instead chose to paint for the sheer joy of it (fig. 5). Although he was as prolific as Villa, if not for his nephew David Valdés, who saved much of Alberto’s art from destruction, we would not have the hundreds of paintings that serve as a substantial body of his work. They reveal the talents of an artist who relished experimentation, excelled at abstraction, and was fearless in his love affair with the very act of painting. According to Valdés’s nephew, “He was driven to paint. It was that simple.”²²

Alberto Valdés was born in 1918 in El Paso, Texas, but moved with his family to Boyle Heights, on the east side of Los Angeles, before he was two years old. After graduating from Lincoln High School, he decided to pursue a career as a commercial artist and won a scholarship to attend Harper’s School of Art. The award letter to the school proclaimed, “His work is outstanding.... You should be proud of Mr. Valdés, for we have great faith in his ability.”²³ As a commercial artist, Valdés specialized in magazine advertisements, outdoor billboards, and orange-crate labels. His career was interrupted by his service in the Army during World War II, when he was stationed in France and Italy. Upon his return, he found a position at MGM Studios as an art designer on contract. There he designed movie sets until he retired in his forties. Afterward he concentrated on painting, only occasionally taking design commissions to support himself.²⁴

The 1960s saw the beginning of Valdés's artistic productivity, which would span four decades and encompass a wide range of styles, from pure abstraction to enigmatic forms. A consummate experimenter, Valdés worked in series, painting several paintings at the same time until he was ready to move on to another artistic style or genre. He would immerse himself in painting all day, stopping only to eat. A self-taught artist, he devoured art books and magazines from Europe and Mexico as well as the United States. As a result, he was exposed to myriad influences ranging from pre-Columbian art to various masters, including Caravaggio, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Rufino Tamayo, and Ricardo Martínez.²⁵

Valdés's early paintings exemplify his love of color and his experimentation with the medium. In an untitled acrylic on watercolor paper (ca. 1960), one can discern what looks like a large flower, its stem and petals formed by different overlapping shapes (fig. 6). A sense of texture is created by the subtle differentiation of various hues of the same color. The overall visual effect is one of bright and sensual colors competing for attention as they extend forward and retreat back into the picture frame. Apparent in this simple painting is Valdés's interest in mixing colors and transforming them into interlocking forms. One suspects that his creation of the flower was a pleasant surprise, one that he discovered only when he finished it.

In a subsequent series, figures seem to emerge from abstraction. The painting *Old Man* (1969) is rendered in various shades of blue, with a semidefined figure of a bearded man in the center of the frame, hunching over with arms outstretched (fig. 7). A white circular form in the upper right corner symbolizes a celestial body. In a hazy form above the man's face are the barely discernible outlines of an eagle and a turtle. Another cloaked figure is seen standing next to the old man. The small blasts of color on the man's fingertips add to the visual appeal in an otherwise cool blue palette. Replete with mystical symbolism, the painting brings together the winged eagle and earthbound turtle to make a spiritual statement regarding the interrelatedness of man and nature. In this masterful use of almost transparent figures within an abstract composition, Valdés created layers of meaning, utilizing minimal shapes to transmit a complex concept.

Valdés's interest in Tamayo and Martínez is especially evident in his artwork from the 1970s. A contemporary of Los Tres Grandes (José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros), Tamayo refuted the social realism and politically charged work of the master muralists. Though he

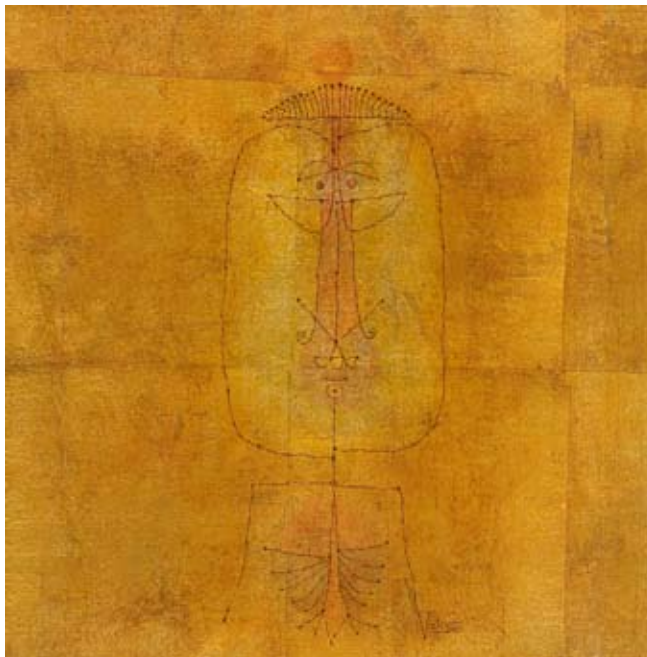


Figure 5
ALBERTO VALDÉS
Self Portrait, ca. 1960
Gold leaf and ink
on canvas
11½ × 11 inches

shared Tamayo's love for pre-Columbian iconography, Martínez "achieved unreal atmospheres in his works by using plays of light and condensations of paint," which impressed Valdés immensely.²⁶ Saturated color and clean interlocking forms are the focus of Valdés's painting from around 1980, *Don Pela Gallos* (fig. 8). The painting is reminiscent of work by Tamayo and Martínez, but Valdés added his own distinctive composition and use of color. Evocative of pre-Columbian stone effigies, the ambiguous figure at the center of a rich red background is part human and animal, yet clearly connected to death. In a deft application of the paint, Valdés created a sitting figure with a stylized skull in profile that is equally stately and menacing. The hand outstretched in the manner of a blessing suggests a regal or religious pose. Aside from its formidable image, the painting is replete with artistic experimentation in the gradual shifts of hues, the subtle handling of interlocking forms to shape the figure, and the play of light on specific parts, which accentuates the work's mysterious, otherworldly quality and adds depth to an otherwise flat surface.

Valdés viewed the art process as more important than the product; often he would paint over canvases or throw the paintings away. Fortunately, his nephew was able to save many of his paintings from destruction. "I remember pulling up one day and I was mortified to see a stack of at least ten to fifteen canvases stacked on top of one another to be thrown in the trash."²⁷ Later in his life, as his ideas for painting increased, Valdés switched from oil to acrylic to minimize the drying time and allow him to continue painting. His focus on process also informed his perspective regarding artists and fame. Although he admired Picasso and considered him brilliant early in his career, he believed fame had turned him into a "whore." "All he's doing is just repeating himself to make money," David recalled his uncle saying. "I'm not going to get caught in that

Figure 6
ALBERTO VALDÉS
Untitled, 1960
Acrylic on
watercolor paper
10 × 13 inches



Figure 7
ALBERTO VALDÉS
Old Man, 1969
Oil on Masonite
19¼ × 23¼ inches





trap.”²⁸ Pursuing exhibitions also represented a form of artistic betrayal for Valdés, who did not see the need for outside—personal or professional—approval. Sadly, in 1998, at the age of eighty, Valdés committed suicide after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. But he left behind a substantial body of work that attests to his technical proficiency and artistic exceptionality.

DOMINGO ULLOA

Even before the civil rights movement took hold in the United States in the early 1960s, there were artists committed to promoting social justice through their artwork. According to art historian Shifra Goldman, for artists working within social realism it “was not a question of style, but of content.”²⁹ Beginning in the 1930s, amid a worldwide economic depression and looming war, social realism exposed the excesses of wealth, the brutality of totalitarian governments, and the failings of societies to safeguard their vulnerable citizens. One of the most accomplished yet underrecognized social realists during the 1940s and 1950s was Domingo Ulloa (fig. 9). Though he exhibited in San Diego and lived most of his life in El Centro in California’s Imperial Valley, Ulloa had artistic roots in Los Angeles.

Born in 1919 in Pomona when his family traveled there to pick fruit, Ulloa spent his formative years in Mexicali, Baja California. While still in high school, he entered and won an art competition for a scholarship to study art in Mexico City in

1936. Ironically, while at the famous Academia de San Carlos, he did not learn about the muralists Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros, but rather was instructed by nonpolitical studio painters and exposed to the art of Spanish painters Diego Velázquez, Jusepe de Ribera, Francisco de Zurbarán, Francisco de Goya, and Picasso.³⁰ He also experienced problems with the course requirements. “They wanted me to take several courses,” according to Ulloa, “such as art history, art chemistry, that sort of thing. I thought it was boring. I only wanted to study drawing, painting, and anatomy.”³¹ When he was caught not taking the minimum number of classes stipulated by the scholarship, his funding was revoked. Even so, Ulloa remained at the Academia for two more years, until 1939.

After his return to the United States, Ulloa continued to create art, but he also began painting houses in order to survive economically. When World War II broke out, Ulloa joined the Army and served in Europe from 1942 to 1945. Upon his discharge, he moved to Los Angeles and used the GI Bill to take classes at the Jepson Art Institute, a short-lived but important art school.³² It was there that he studied with the influential Italian immigrant Rico Lebrun.

Lebrun (1900–1964) was a humanist and one of the most prominent of the post–World War II expressionists. He taught drawing, printmaking, and painting at Jepson, along with his protégé Howard Warshaw (1904–1994). Both felt a moral commitment to depict the horrors of war, and they created an

Figure 8
ALBERTO VALDÉS
Don Pela Gallos,
ca. 1980
Acrylic on Arches
paper
26 × 20 inches

Figure 9
DOMINGO ULLOA
Self Portrait, 1951
Oil on board
22 × 21 inches

Figure 10
DOMINGO ULLOA
Painters on Strike.
 1948
 Linoblock print
 on paper
 9 x 12 inches



art that was certainly courageous, given the dominance of abstraction.³³ According to art historian Susan Landauer, though abstract expressionism caught on quickly in San Francisco, Los Angeles became a center for figurative expressionism and hard-edge abstraction due in large part to “the extraordinary force of individual personalities,” among them Lebrun and Lorser Feitelson.³⁴ Always political and moralistic, Lebrun instructed his students, “If we artists are to survive this period at all, we will survive it as spokesmen, never again as entertainers.”³⁵ Ulloa’s studies at Jepson included exposure to the Mexican muralists Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros and the prints produced at the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP). He even joined a local print shop modeled after the TGP, where he learned to create linoleum and woodblock prints. As a result of his academic and political education at Jepson from 1946 to 1949, Ulloa developed deep respect for the figure, acute observation skills, and the technical abilities of a superb draughtsman. According to Ulloa, this was his “waking-up period,” which he financed by joining the painters’ union to support his family.³⁶ This combination of academic training and political instruction, along with Ulloa’s life experiences as a trade unionist, generated a singular aesthetic that is evident in his prints and paintings.

Ulloa’s linoleum print *Painters on Strike* (1948) is emblematic of his aesthetic (fig. 10). Though it certainly references the work of the TGP and Orozco, the print is personal in that it was inspired by a seven-week painters’ strike in which Ulloa

participated. On the left side of the image, the strikers hold signs and gesture toward the large male figure on the right, who is releasing snakelike figures with male heads and hands grasping paintbrushes from a large barrel. The cigar hanging from the figure’s mouth identifies him as the stereotypical boss. According to Ulloa, the print “shows the company owner bringing in scabs.”³⁷ Though the print is small, it derives a monumental quality from its composition. The clean lines and attention to detail are evidence of the artist’s mastery of a difficult printmaking technique. Each face has an individual personality: one can discern a look of fear on the face of the reptilian strike breaker still in the barrel and determination on the faces of the strikers who confront the grotesque scene. Ulloa made clear that the actions of the strike breakers rendered them inhuman and thus not worthy of support or sympathy.

Even after he completed his studies at Jepson and moved to El Centro, Ulloa continued to create socially engaged art.³⁸ *Racism/Incident at Little Rock* (1957) is a painting inspired by the historic court-ordered desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas (fig. 11). Six African American children of various ages are enveloped by an amorphous crowd of screaming white-robed figures. All the figures have large mouths full of teeth and dangling uvulas, and some are holding rocks in their upthrust hands. The nightmarish background contrasts with the well-defined faces and bodies of the students walking forward, some with books in hand. All the students have serious



Figure 11
DOMINGO ULLOA
Racism/Incident at Little Rock, 1957
Acrylic on canvas
33¼ × 47¼ inches



Figure 12
DOMINGO ULLOA
Braceros, 1960
Oil on Masonite
36 × 49 inches

demeanors: two look at the crowd, three peer straight ahead, and one young woman meets the gaze of the viewer. Through the combination of surreal environment and realistic figures, Ulloa created art that captured the emotion and terror of this traumatic event.

Ulloa's ability to paint the human figure and address a social issue came to full fruition in his iconic painting *Braceros* (1960), which was based on his visits to a bracero camp in Holtville, California (fig. 12). The Bracero Program, begun in 1942, was a temporary, binational effort that brought Mexican nationals to the United States to work during the labor shortages of World War II. However, it continued in agriculture after the initial agreement expired in 1947, and so did the substandard living conditions of the workers.³⁹ In Ulloa's painting the focus is on the men behind a barb-wire fence. The realistically painted wire and faces pressed against the picture plane afford the viewer the perspective of being very close to the scene. Ulloa individualized each face, as if from memory, and some of the men peer back at the viewer. All the figures wear hats, which are multiplied as one looks back, giving the feeling of large numbers of men behind the fence. Visible in the far back is a row of low houses in disrepair. The men appear corralled in squalid living conditions, forced to live in wood shacks that seem unlikely to shield them from the extreme cold and heat of their environment. In this stark depiction of humanity treated like cattle, the viewer must confront not only the iniquities of the Bracero Program but also the conditions of exploited labor universally.

When Ulloa retired on his Social Security and painters' union pension, he was able to dedicate himself to his art full time, filling his home with stacks of paintings until his death in 1997. In the mid-1980s he received critical acknowledgment as a result of community, university, and commercial gallery art exhibitions in San Diego, which led to modest sales. In 1993 the California State Assembly honored him by proclaiming Ulloa the "Father of Chicano Art" in recognition of his artistic contributions. "Most of my paintings," he declared, "are inspired by the common people in their work, in their joy, and their struggle."⁴⁰ Thus, although Ulloa's artistic training may have begun in Mexico, his unique experiences at Jepson and as a member of a labor union shaped him into a universal artist who created art in service to humanity.

DORA DE LARIOS

For Dora De Larios, the attainment of her artistic goals and creation of a significant body of work has been nothing short of remarkable given her background, choice of medium, and gender (fig. 13). De Larios's mother, Concha, was four years old when her own mother brought her to Los Angeles in 1917, having walked from Durango, Mexico. De Larios's father, Elpidio, was born in Mexico City, the son of a business owner. He migrated to the United States later in his life and secured a job in Los Angeles with Max Factor, developing color compounds for face makeup. It was there that he met Concha, who began working for the cosmetics company at age seventeen.

The family's early years were spent in the downtown Temple Street district, close to Silver Lake. The neighborhood was made up of Mexicans and Nisei (second-generation) Japanese families. "I thought all the Japanese were Mexicans from Oaxaca," recalled De Larios. "They all spoke fluent Spanish and fit right into everything."⁴¹ Even though she was young at the time, De Larios still recalls the turmoil surrounding the relocation process during World War II, when her Japanese neighbors were taken away and interned in camps. She also never forgot the feelings of injustice, and she traces her affinity for Japanese art and culture to those early experiences.

Though she was born in the United States, De Larios's Mexican heritage was a major influence. "In my household, California belonged to Mexico," she asserts. "We were not part of the United States. That was the mindset. I lived in a neighborhood where everyone spoke Spanish. That was the attitude at home. The family had a lot of pride in being Mexican."⁴² In order to maintain their cultural and familial connections, the family traveled annually to Mexico. It was during one of her trips to Mexico City that De Larios decided to become an artist. She was eight years old when her father took the family to visit the National Museum of Anthropology, which at that time was located near the Zócalo, or central plaza. "I remember going down this long, dark hallway. We walked into a room and saw a light over the Aztec calendar. It took my breath away. It had an enormous impact on me because I knew that I was a part of it and it was a part of me. Someday I would do something as great as that."⁴³ The visit to the museum also exposed her to the ceramic art of the Maya, Aztec, and West Mexico civilizations.

De Larios's parents nurtured her early interest in art, and she found willing supporters in other members of her family, including two uncles who were painters. Upon her graduation from high school, De Larios's father convinced her to enroll in



Figure 13
DORA DE LARIOS
Plaque (Self-portrait), 1970s
 Glazed porcelain
 14 x 17 inches

the University of Southern California (USC), where she became the only Mexican student and the only other student of color besides Camille Billops, the sculptor and filmmaker. Given her family's economic situation, De Larios was limited to six units per semester the first year. Fortunately, on the advice of a friend, she applied for and received a full scholarship for the rest of her studies.

While at USC, De Larios studied with some of the foremost clay artists and instructors, including Susan Peterson and Vivika and Otto Heino (fig. 14). Master ceramists known for their clean lines and distinctive glazes, the Heinos were committed to producing pieces that were traditional and utilitarian. Of particular importance to De Larios's development, the Heinos were influenced by the Bauhaus movement and by Japanese pottery. At the same time, ceramists and potters in Los Angeles were involved in an aesthetic change brought about by the visit in 1952 of British studio potter Bernard Leach, Japanese potter Shoji Hamada, and Japanese philosopher Soetsu Yanagi, who had founded the *mingei* (folk craft) movement in Japan over two decades earlier. Their workshops and lectures incited a controversy "between the perfection of form and the expressive use of clay that would rage for at least a decade."⁴⁴

Along with class instruction, Vivika took students to visit artists in their studios. One memorable trip was to meet Peter Voulkos at the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design), where De Larios also saw huge clay sculptures being created by artists Paul Soldner and Henry Takemoto. "Everyone in my class was very excited. It was such a break from what had been happening in ceramics."⁴⁵ Experiences such as this led De Larios to major in ceramics with a minor in sculpture, thus ensuring that she would have the freedom to create from both traditions. As a result, one can see in De Larios's work



Figure 14
 Dora De Larios (center) with teachers
 Vivika and Otto Heino at the University
 of Southern California Art Gallery, 1954

textural qualities melded with functional forms, creating an aesthetic distinctly her own.

After her graduation in June 1957, De Larios opened a studio in Los Angeles, choosing to sell her work directly rather than depend on galleries. When sales were not forthcoming, she packed all her pieces in a car and traveled with her husband up the coast of California. In San Francisco, she recalls, she insisted on a meeting with the director of Gump's Gallery and then "demanded that he look at my work."⁴⁶ As a result of her self-assurance and the quality of her artwork, De Larios was given an exhibition, which sold out. Her career now launched, she exhibited and sold her art at Gump's for several years, right alongside ceramic notables such as Voulkos and John Mason.

De Larios has remained steadfast in her art making even during her tenures as a professor at USC and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Her dedication to her studio was matched by her passion for experimenting with the medium and exploring cultural influences. In 1962 she traveled around the world, with an extended stay in Japan. According to art historian Shifra Goldman, De Larios's favored clay slab technique owes a debt both to Japanese *Haniwa* sculpture and to pre-Columbian Mexican clay figures.⁴⁷ Her travels abroad allowed her to expand the early experiences of her multicultural background into a unique aesthetic.

Examples of this synthesis can be seen in her ceramic pieces from the late 1950s and early 1960s. In their execution and composition, *Queen and King* (figs. 15, 16) draw their inspiration from the *Haniwa* tradition that originated in the mid-second century, in which simple cylindrical forms evolved into elaborate figures that were left as decorations on the tombs of nobility. The pair also incorporate aspects of the



Figure 15
DORA DE LARIOS
Queen, early 1960s
 Glazed stoneware
 29 × 16 × 15 inches



Figure 16
DORA DE LARIOS
King, early 1960s
 Glazed stoneware
 29 × 18 × 15 inches

tomb ceramic traditions of pre-Columbian West Mexico that were prevalent in the states of Nayarit and Jalisco, and to a lesser extent in Colima, between 300 BCE and 400 CE. However, as evident in the figures' poses, De Larios has infused a somber tradition with a personal, almost whimsical, touch that enlivens their demeanor. The *Queen* and *King* are equal partners, as demonstrated by their similar size, stance, and symmetrical pose with upheld arms. It is apparent that great attention was paid to crafting the figures, including the addition of many small decorative details that enhance their visual appeal.

De Larios's experimentation led her also to create sculptures in bronze in the late 1960s. One piece, titled *Fallen Warrior* (fig. 17), was made in 1969, after her mother died at age fifty-four from uterine cancer. The experience of losing her mother at such a young age was made even more difficult by the initial misdiagnosis of the illness as a pregnancy. The power of the piece emanates from the simplicity of the two forms: a small, lifeless figure is held by a larger male with his head upraised. There is a monumental quality to the composition despite its small size (27 inches). In the elongated figures De Larios gestures

toward Giacometti's sculptures, which became metaphors for postwar devastation and human despair. Though another De Larios bronze from this period, *Warrior*, is more stylized (fig. 18), both sculptures are stark in their depiction of personal loss, pain, and anguish. According to De Larios, "The sculptures made themselves in a way. By that I mean the pain that I was experiencing in my grief over the loss of my mom had to be as permanent as metal."⁴⁸

In 1977 De Larios was invited to create a dinnerware set of twelve place settings. The commission was for the White House, though she didn't know it. "It was done on purpose. They wanted each potter to work at their own pace without the pressure of knowing that it was going to the White House."⁴⁹ She was one of fourteen chosen nationwide and the only artist from Southern California. Aside from the honor, the commission garnered De Larios national attention, including mentions in articles in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. After they were used at a luncheon for senators' spouses, the pieces were exhibited at the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery and traveled nationally to other museums. De Larios's dinner set, titled *Blue Plate Special*, showed off her ability to create



Figure 17
DORA DE LARIOS
Fallen Warrior, 1969
Bronze
27 x 11 x 5 inches



Figure 18
DORA DE LARIOS
Warrior, 1969
Bronze
27 x 8 x 4 inches

intricate patterns using a cobalt blue glaze over porcelain (fig. 19). Her mastery of a process of inlaying glazes on porcelain allowed her to create a free-form style of “painting” on the circular disks. In its beauty and functionality, the dinnerware is reminiscent of Spain’s Moorish majolica and Mexican Talavera ware, as well as reflective of De Larios’s Bauhaus-influenced training, which put a premium on crafting utilitarian objects that were also aesthetically pleasing.

Since 1963, De Larios has also created large-scale projects. That year, she was invited by artist Millard Sheets to join a group of ceramists to create new designs for Interpace, an architectural tile manufacturer in Glendale, California. In addition to working with tile, she was able to incorporate other materials into her clay work. In 1966 De Larios completed her first commission for Walt Disney at Disney World in Orlando.⁵⁰ Over the years, commissions for hotels, banks, hospitals, libraries, and other community buildings became an integral component of De Larios’s artistic work. In 1979 she was chosen to create a mural as a gift to the city of Nagoya, Japan, from its sister city, Los Angeles. In the process of creating public art, De Larios developed her role as an “architectural artist,” working with each project’s architect to ensure that each commission was integrated as an organic component of the overall plan for the site.

Figure 19
DORA DE LARIOS
Blue Plate Special, 1977
 Porcelain dinner plates from twelve place settings commissioned for the White House



ROBERTO CHAVEZ

Like many other artists of the Mexican American generation, Roberto Chavez was born to parents who came to Los Angeles after the Mexican Revolution (fig. 20). His father, José Salazar Chavez, emigrated in 1920 and a year later arranged for his wife, Ester, and his mother-in-law, Agustina Vasquez, to join him. Roberto was born in 1932, one of the middle children in a total of eight surviving siblings. The family settled in the Maravilla neighborhood, which was then called Belvedere Gardens. His father worked at Eastern Iron and Metal Company until his death in 1944, when Chavez was only twelve years old.

Chavez showed an early fascination with drawing, mainly cartoons and caricatures. He also loved to create sculptures from metal scraps, nuts, bolts, and other discarded materials salvaged by his father. As Chavez recalled, “My first sculptures were adaptation of breakage—of recycling materials into little toys.”⁵¹ Because of his ability to draw, Chavez received encouragement from his teacher and fellow students. He was a quick study in many subjects at school, and thanks to his sister Victoria’s tutoring, he was able to advance to first grade after completing only the first half of kindergarten. A similar promotion occurred again in second grade, and Chavez went on to earn advanced placement at Belvedere Junior High School. During junior high school Chavez concentrated on singing and participated in the glee club, choosing not to take art classes. It was in high school that he decided to become an artist after viewing an exhibition of art at the May Company downtown:

I was walking by, and in the windows were these paintings, and one of them was by Georges Braque, and it was very compelling. I went inside and there were paintings on every floor, [including] someone’s collection of Renoir still lifes. It was like they were alive in a way that I may have imagined, but not ever seen. I knew that’s what I wanted to do. I wanted to make paintings that came alive.⁵²

When it came time to decide on college, Chavez chose Los Angeles City College and enrolled in the commercial art program, attending drawing classes the summer after he graduated from high school. After interrupting his studies in 1952–1954 for military duty, he transferred to UCLA to pursue an art degree, using funds from the GI Bill. There he studied painting and drawing with the influential painters William Brice and Sam Amato and printmaking with John Paul Jones. “They didn’t insist that you be abstract,” Chavez recalled, “but they made you aware of it. I feel that I incorporated a lot of what I learned from studying and appreciating abstract art.”⁵³





(opposite)
Figure 20
ROBERTO CHAVEZ
Self Portrait with Derby, 1963
Oil on canvas
20 × 16 inches

(above)
Figure 21
ROBERTO CHAVEZ
Masks, 1957
Oil on canvas
60 × 60 inches

Painted in the summer of 1957, *Masks* shows how Chavez synthesized his love of the figure with his appreciation of abstract art (fig. 21). Chavez painted it while teaching art, including mask making, to children in Marin County during a summer break from UCLA. He enjoyed the construction aspect of creating masks, which reminded him of his childhood spent making toys from the recycled items in his father's shed. Though the painting was based on the children in the class wearing their masks, it also reflects Chavez's preference for a loose, playful painting style over realistic portrayal. The figures in the painting are barely there, and clearly the emphasis is on the masks, which seem to float in front of the students' bodies in a series of interlocking shapes. In a further element of playfulness, fish swim above the figures, some dangling from strings to denote their origin as an art project. Overall, the painting suggests the artist's experimentation with painting techniques, but without a loss of attention to his subject matter: in this case, the joy of children transforming themselves through their masks.

While at UCLA, Chavez met other art students who would be influential in his life and work: Louis Lunetta, Eduardo Carrillo, and Charles Garabedian. Though not in the same year of study, they all shared a love of painting and adjusted well to the pedagogy of UCLA. According to Garabedian, "The teachers were all good. They were all very provocative and they made it very interesting."⁵⁴ Thus, Chavez found not only a supportive academic structure but also a group of fellow artists who appreciated figurative art and reveled in experimentation. Along with painting and drawing, Chavez studied sculpture and

printmaking. Yet painting—and especially portraiture—remained his focus, as he had come "to trust the human image as a reflection of myself and of life," as he wrote in his master's thesis. "For I don't always know what I am painting and revelation is as much a part of my painting as is fulfillment."⁵⁵

After obtaining a BA in 1959 and a master's in 1961, both in pictorial arts, Chavez applied for a Fulbright fellowship to travel to Spain.⁵⁶ Though he did not receive it, he traveled by car across the United States during the summer. Instead of painting, he generated hundreds of drawings and watercolors, mostly landscapes. Upon his return, he began teaching extension classes at East Los Angeles College and at UCLA. He also reconnected with former UCLA art students and friends, including Carrillo, Garabedian, and Lunetta, who were looking for a venue for a group exhibition. After pursuing a gallery contact from Edward Kienholz that did not work out, they received a referral from Eleanor Neil, a conceptual artist who had also studied at UCLA. She told them about a couple, Cecil Hedrick and Jerry Jerome, who were looking for artists to exhibit in their new gallery space on La Cienega Boulevard called Ceeje Gallery.⁵⁷ It was the beginning of a relationship that would last several years. The gallery helped nurture a group of artists that grew to include Lance Richbourg, Les Biller, Aron Goldberg, Joan Maffei, Maxwell Hendler, and others who developed their own distinctive "L.A." style focused on the figure.

As a growing number of curators and art historians have noted, Los Angeles art during the 1960s was not completely dominated by abstract expressionism. Nor was it closely aligned only with the homegrown Los Angeles Look (or Finish Fetish) and Light and Space art movements, both preoccupied with the region's landscape and climate.⁵⁸ There were artists "working in a highly personal, eccentric, irreverent, somewhat surreal, deliberately awkward and dynamic figurative style."⁵⁹ These artists found a home at Ceeje Gallery, which became known for exhibiting figurative art, an eclectic mix of "un-cool" art, and a cross section of Los Angeles's ethnic and women artists. Though overshadowed by the media attention paid to Ferus and Felix Landau Galleries, Ceeje had supported, by the time it closed in 1970, the careers of many now prominent artists, carving a place for itself in Los Angeles art history.⁶⁰

On June 25, 1962, Ceeje Gallery opened with the exhibition *Four Painters: Garabedian/Chavez/Carrillo/Lunetta*, which received very favorable critical response (fig. 22). According to *Artforum's* Arthur Secunda:

It matters little that the reincarnated echoes of Chagall, Derain, Beckmann, Munch, etc., are well-spiced into the blazing ragout; what is important is that this ensemble makes up the most exciting, fiercest, most vital debut of

any art gallery opening here within recent memory.... I hope the boys up and down the street take note, and that Ceeje won't fade into the general obscurity that has been the fate of the other new galleries in the past year. *Viva Ceeje*.⁶¹

Los Angeles Times art critic Henry J. Seldis raved about the exhibition as well, stating that each artist contributed a work "that offers the sort of magic rarely found since the time of Blake." He also declared that the exhibit offered "paintings that may be the beginning of another significant local style."⁶²

The picture that ran with Seldis's review was Chavez's *The Group Shoe* (1962) (fig. 23). Loosely following the group photograph that was included in the Ceeje exhibition announcement, Chavez painted the upper torsos of the four artists behind a table, with a large shoe in the center of the table. It was a clever play on the word *show*, which Ceeje co-owner Jerry Jerome pronounced as "shoe." "It's going to be a big shoe! Jerry would say," recalled Chavez. "So I went home and I did the painting."⁶³ Serving as a humorous comment on the excitement surrounding the exhibition, the painting also revealed Chavez's developing artistic style. Though still loose in its painterly execution, the figures are more clearly articulated than in previous works. Each artist in the picture projects his individual personality even though they are sitting side by side, their close physical proximity symbolic of their personal friendship and artistic alignment.

Chavez was the first artist to receive a solo exhibition at Ceeje, held from November 6 to December 1 of the same year. It won critical acclaim, with Seldis applauding his portraits as having "a true magnetism" within an overall "fascinating show."⁶⁴ In his review for *Artforum*, Henry Hopkins lauded Chavez's style, which he called "spiritual expressionist," and compared one of his paintings to Picasso's pre-cubist works.⁶⁵ Chavez exhibited in three more Ceeje group exhibitions, including a sculpture show, and another solo exhibition before leaving the gallery in 1965. Chavez continued to exhibit his art at various community venues, taking time off only in the fall of 1966 to travel with Carrillo to Baja California to help him establish the Centro de Arte Regional in La Paz.

When Chavez returned in 1967, a friend at UCLA asked whether he would be interested in teaching private art classes. Beginning with one student, the class grew until he had to rent a bigger studio from fellow artist John Coleman. The painting *Ladies Art Class, Sawtelle* (1967) is a group portrait of Chavez's Westwood students, whom he taught weekly for two years (p. 2). Along with lovingly depicting each woman, the painting exhibits all the artistic characteristics that came to constitute Chavez's

singular style. One can see his attention to individualizing the people he painted within a very expressionist style. The painting has the intimacy of a drawing, quickly rendered to capture the moment. Although the faces are detailed in their composition and expression, some areas of the painting are purposely left unfinished, such as the body of the first woman on the left, which is more gestural than solid. "They became paint," Chavez recalled. "I have often consciously and just intuitively given my work that freshness or even roughness to remind the viewer that 'this is just paint.'"⁶⁶

After teaching extension classes at UCLA, Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, and East Los Angeles College (ELAC) for five years, Chavez was hired as a full-time instructor at ELAC in 1969. His position was divided between the art and Mexican American studies departments. In 1971 he was appointed chair of the latter, renamed the Chicano Studies Department, a position he held for seven years. His experiences within the department exposed him to the burgeoning Chicano socio-political movement and to the Mexican muralists, whose work influenced him, in particular that of José Clemente Orozco. During his tenure at ELAC, Chavez continued to paint, and he



Figure 22
Exhibition
announcement
for
Four Painters:
Garabedian/Chavez/
Carrillo/Lunetta,
Ceeje Gallery, 1962
Pictured (left to right)
are Louis Lunetta,
Roberto Chavez,
Eduardo Carrillo, and
Charles Garabedian



Figure 23
ROBERTO CHAVEZ
The Group Shoe, 1962
Oil on canvas
50 x 60 inches

participated in a variety of early Chicano exhibitions, including *Pocho Art* (1969), *El Arte de la Raza* (1969), *Chicano Art at the Governor's Office* (1975), *Chicanarte* (1975), and *Los Four Plus One* (1977). He also had solo exhibitions at mainstream venues, including the Santa Monica College Art Gallery (1974), the Contemporary Art Gallery in Van Nuys (1976), and the Vincent Price Gallery at ELAC (1978).

In 1974, after painting several murals in the community, Chavez received a grant from the Los Angeles Community College District to create a mural on the exterior wall of ELAC's Ingalls Auditorium. Titled *The Path to Knowledge and the False University* (1975), it measured 35 × 200 feet and took a year and a half to complete. The mural's upper section featured imagery associated with the four obstacles to knowledge according to Carlos Castaneda's book *The Teachings of Don Juan*: fear, clarity, power, and old age. The imagery included tanks, chiles, the sun, and Chavez's depiction of hell. The bottom section of the mural referenced the third voyage in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in which Gulliver lands on the island of Laputa (a homophone for "whore" in Spanish), where an elite group of people pursue esoteric and mindless activities—Chavez's "false university." In this section Chavez incorporated loose geometric designs and nebulous shapes with direct reference to the various academic departments on campus.

On September 11, 1979, a week before classes were to resume, the mural was whitewashed on the authority of ELAC's new president, Arturo Avila, who cited the poor condition of the mural as the reason. "I know not everyone liked the painting," recalled Chavez. "But when I did it, I intended it as part of an educational environment in which the subject matter, the themes expressed, would raise questions in people's mind."⁶⁷ After fighting for more than a year to repaint the mural, Chavez resigned his teaching position at ELAC in 1981 and moved to Fort Bragg in Northern California.⁶⁸

EDUARDO CARRILLO

Eduardo Carrillo was born in Santa Monica, California, in 1937, the youngest of five children. His parents had emigrated from La Paz, Baja California, in the early part of the century. After Carrillo's father died when he was five, his maternal grandmother came to live with them, and he developed close ties to his family in Baja, making annual visits (fig. 24). For both religious and academic reasons, Carrillo attended Catholic elementary and high schools in Los Angeles. He recalled, "My first memory of seeing painting, stained glass and sculpture statuary of religious imagery was in churches while growing up in Los Angeles."⁶⁹ His early religious

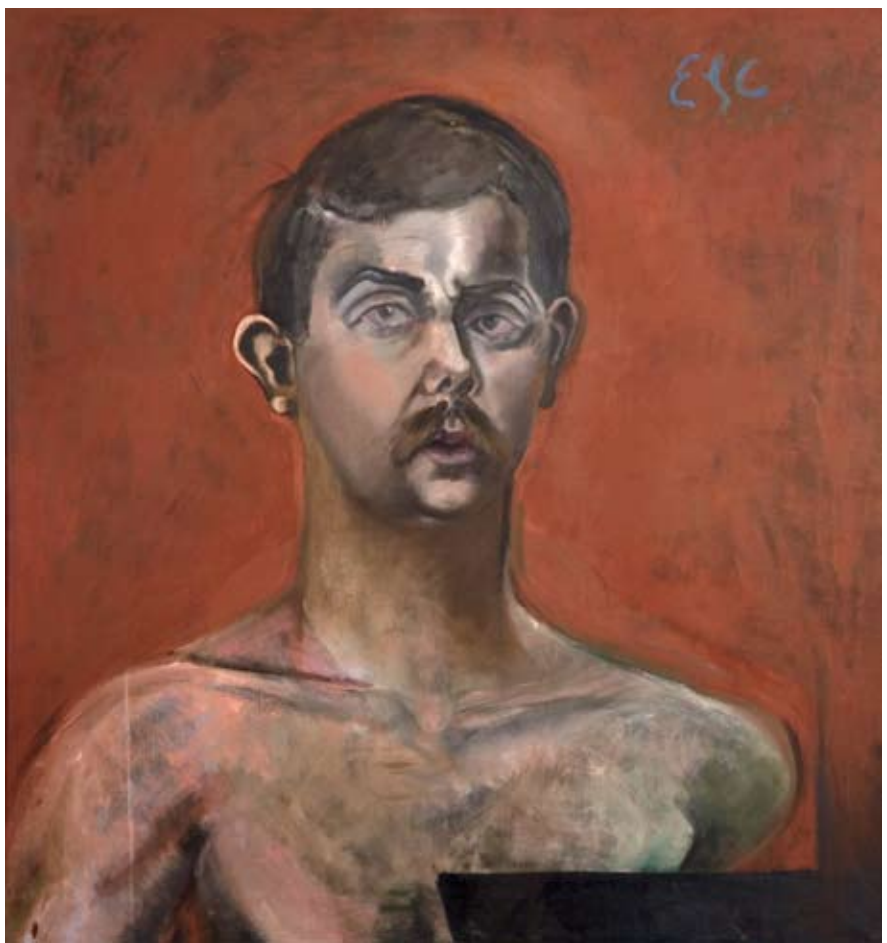


Figure 24
EDUARDO CARRILLO
Self Portrait, 1960
Oil on canvas
31 × 29 inches

training, which included being an altar boy, and the annual visits to Mexico became important influences on Carrillo's art. After high school, Carrillo attended Los Angeles City College and received an Outstanding Student Award from the Art Department.

In 1956 Carrillo transferred to UCLA, where he studied with William Brice and Stanton MacDonald-Wright. MacDonald-Wright became Carrillo's mentor, meeting with him weekly and sometimes spending entire afternoons reviewing his paintings.⁷⁰ In 1960 Carrillo traveled to Spain and studied for a year at the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* in Madrid. Along with taking standard art classes, he created polychrome wood sculptures under the guidance of Antonio Valle and assisted with the restoration of a church altar. That year he also diligently studied the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Diego Velásquez, and El Greco at the Museo del Prado, as well as the work of Giorgio de Chirico. Along with studies in composition, colors, and subject matter, Carrillo explored the glazing techniques used by the masters in an effort to replicate their glow. It was this emphasis on color and light that would allow Carrillo to craft a unique painting style.⁷¹

After returning to UCLA in 1961 to resume his studies, Carrillo reunited with his fellow artists Chavez, Garabedian, and Lunetta and exhibited at the Ceeje Gallery the following year. *Spanish Still Life* (1961) was one of the paintings included in the *Four Painters: Garabedian/Chavez/Carrillo/Lunetta* exhibition (fig. 25). Prominently featured on the right side of the composition is a table with a white tablecloth, a corner



Figure 25
EDUARDO CARRILLO
Spanish Still Life, 1961
 Oil on canvas
 46¼ × 64½ inches

slipping off the picture plane. On top are several objects: a skull, a mirror, a cross, and a cut melon. Hovering above the table is the ghostly head of a Spanish man with the collar ruff typical of the early 1600s. In the foreground is another ghostly head wearing a red devil mask. The dreamlike landscape seen through the archway on the left anticipates the surrealistic compositions that would fascinate Carrillo for the remainder of the 1960s. In its composition, subject matter, and execution, *Spanish Still Life* was a transitional piece in the development of Carrillo's signature artistic and cultural synthesis. His early Catholic schooling, UCLA academic training, study in Spain, and Mexican heritage are combined in a painting that references the mestizo altar traditions of Mexico and European *vanitas* symbolism, as well as Mexico's indigenous roots and Spanish conquest history. In his juxtaposition of objects from the corporal and spiritual world with scenes from the realm of dreams and imagination, Carrillo also imbued the painting with a sense of mysticism.

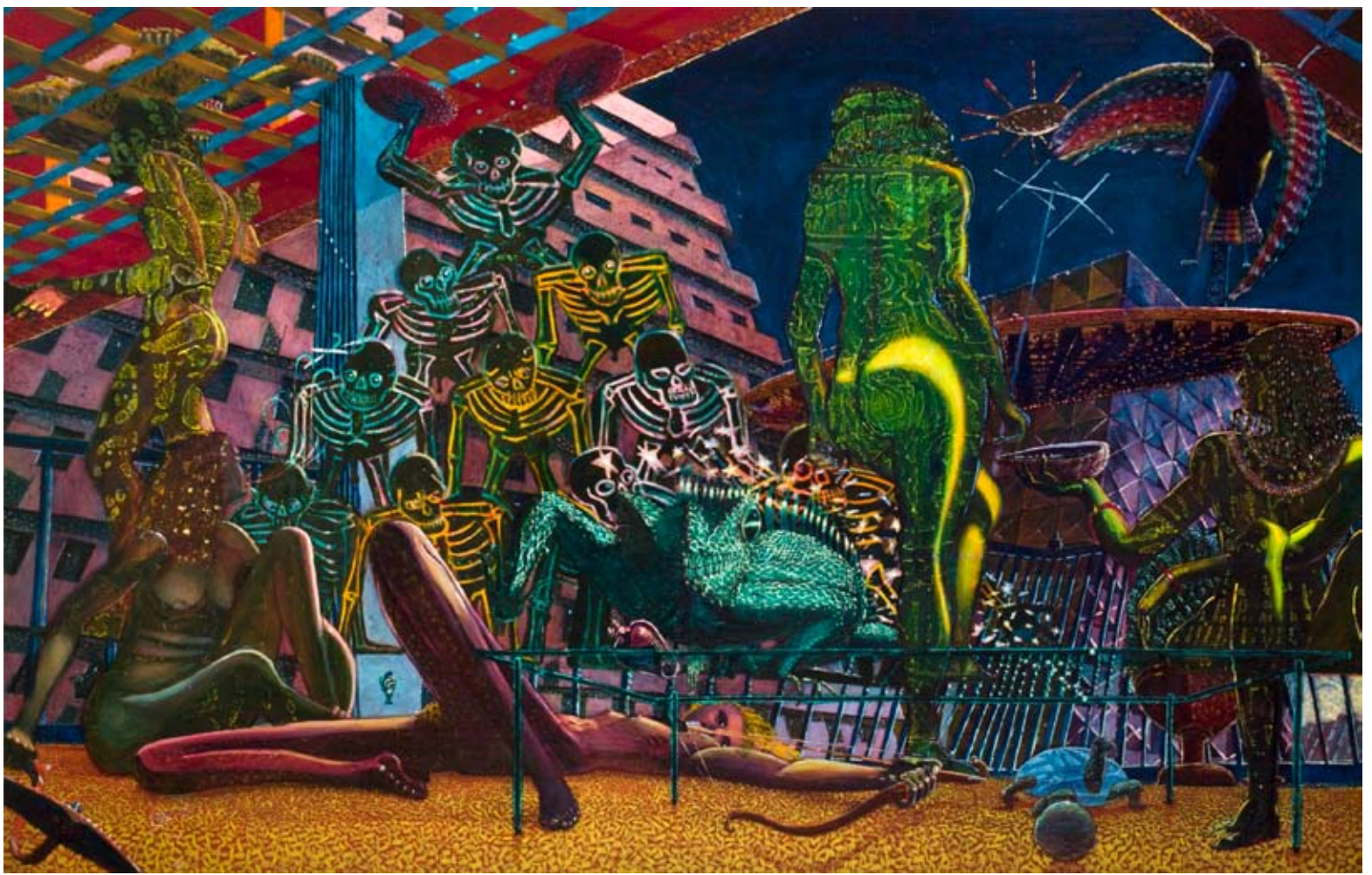
In 1963, while still a graduate student, Carrillo had a solo exhibition at Ceeje Gallery that featured his surrealist paintings along with polychrome sculptures. In her review for *Artforum*, Virginia Allen lauded Carrillo's brilliant colors, which "produce jewel-tone surfaces of remarkable beauty." While noting his other "artist-fantasts" sources (e.g., Bosch), she recognized his ability to derive his own personal vision "unencumbered by the specious gifts of history."⁷² Upon graduating the following year, he accepted a position to teach at the University of California, San Diego Extension. During this period he immersed himself in surreal experiments on large panels that developed his proficiency in the use of space. The oil painting *Cabin in the Sky* (1965) captures his ability to craft a complex space with experimental perspectives, creating an exquisite surreal landscape (fig. 26). The painting offers a view from a courtyard onto a mountain range that blends into a cloud-filled sky, but

the scene is replete with imaginary and misplaced objects: a Greco-Roman temple floats in the sky above a valley floor that includes a large rabbit along with more improbable inhabitants such as an oversized shell and a tadpole. The contrast between the architectural elements and the natural world is equally sharp, as beautifully crafted walls and tunnels give way to rough, jagged-edged mountains and plateaus. These surprises were intentional, as Carrillo sought to paint "calm places, but populated with tiny surprises; if there is a bomb it has long ago been dropped."⁷³

Two years later, Carrillo and his wife, Sheila, moved to Baja California and established the Centro de Arte Regional in La Paz, which offered classes in weaving, ceramics, and leatherwork, as well as an outlet for saleable crafts.⁷⁴ Carrillo stopped painting and took ceramic pottery classes from Zapotec potter Daniel Zenteno. "Through my work with these little clay vessels, I was introduced to Mexican art!" Carrillo recalled. "The art history classes I had taken at UCLA had not had time to devote to the work of Rivera, Orozco, or Siqueiros, much less the pre-Columbian period."⁷⁵ The family returned to Los Angeles in 1969, and Carrillo was able to secure a teaching position at California State University, Sacramento, the following year. There he came into contact with influential faculty members, including Irving Marcus, Jack Ogden, Joseph Raffael, and the founders of the Royal Chicano Air Force artist collective, José Montoya and Esteban Villa.

In 1972 Carrillo joined the Art and Humanities Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he received tenure in 1976 and taught until his death in 1997. Carrillo credited his years at Santa Cruz with changing the focus of his artwork to "large, elaborate figure compositions which were invented rather than drawn from life."⁷⁶ An excellent example from this period was the large, now iconic painting *Las Tropicanas* (1972–1973), with its complex figural and symbol-laden imagery (fig. 27). Described as "the Aztecs meeting Las Vegas in Los Angeles," the painting is replete with rich colors, patterns, and textures, creating a visual experience that demands multiple viewings.⁷⁷ There is no easy entry into its imagery, which begins in the foreground with nude women in various positions on a balcony overlooking a pyramid-like structure on the left and a night-time sky with a UFO and a large hummingbird on the right. In the center, rising above the women, are several skeletons looming over a huge green iguana. Despite this profusion of incongruous objects and figures, Carrillo is meticulous in his rendering of each, and the intricate patterns of the balcony floor, the iron railing, and the tattoos on one of





(opposite)
Figure 26
EDUARDO CARRILLO
Cabin in the Sky, 1965
Oil on panel
72 × 60 inches

(above)
Figure 27
EDUARDO CARRILLO
Las Tropicanas,
1972–1973
Oil on panel
7 × 11 feet

the females receive equal attention. As Marcia Tucker, founder of New York’s New Museum, observed, “His work combines an extraordinary intensity of color, and a wealth of rich surface texture with a startlingly luminous, majestic, otherworldly quality of light.”⁷⁸

Aside from its technical attributes, the painting is a successful synthesis of Carrillo’s love of European masters—in this case, Hieronymus Bosch—and Mexican pre-Columbian popular art. With the pyramid edifice, skeletons, hummingbird, and iguana, Carrillo incorporated recognizable images from Mexico’s pre-Columbian history and cultural heritage. He also extended the imagery into the psychic realm of dreams and, in his case, nightmares, with an allusion to attack, violence, and death. More important, with the mastery of color, tone, and composition evident in *Las Tropicanas*, Carrillo achieved his goal of making paintings that were “timeless, belonging to both the future and the past.”⁷⁹ In 1978 the work was included in “*Bad Painting*,” an exhibition curated by Tucker at the New Museum.

Like other Mexican American artists active in the 1960s, Carrillo painted several murals. The first was *Four Evangelists*, created within the San Ignacio mission during a visit to Baja California in 1962.⁸⁰ In 1970 he joined Sergio Hernandez, Ramses Noriega, and Saul Solache in painting a mural at UCLA’s Chicano

Library, at that time located in Campbell Hall. While teaching at Sacramento State in 1971, Carrillo painted a campus mural, which was painted over in 1976. In 1979 he received a commission from the Los Angeles Department of Public Works to create *El Grito*, which dealt with Father Miguel Hidalgo and Mexico’s struggle to gain independence from Spain in 1810. The 8 × 44-foot tile mural was installed in the Placita de Dolores within the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument.⁸¹ As a result of his mural research experience, Carrillo decided to undertake a two-year study of Mexican pre-Columbian art in 1980, beginning with the ancient artistic roots of his Baja ancestors. Upon his return in 1982, he embarked on a lengthy discourse on Chicano art, sponsoring statewide conferences and exhibitions, collecting audio and video artist interviews, and initiating a one-hour video project, all under the umbrella of a multiyear initiative, *Califas: Chicano Art and Culture in California*. In the midst of all his projects, Carrillo never stopped painting and exhibiting, right up until his untimely death from cancer in 1997.

THOUGH THE SIX ARTISTS achieved uneven levels of economic success and artistic prominence, they all left—and in the case of De Larios and Chavez, are continuing to leave—their mark within

art history. In 2003 Ulloa's art was rediscovered and included in a major catalog, *At Work: The Art of California Labor*. Villa's *Bolero* set another auction record in 2007. Even after his death, Carrillo's art, life, and legacy continue to inspire through the online presence of the Museo Eduardo Carrillo. In 2010 the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles presented *Sueños/Yume: Fifty Years of the Art of Dora De Larios*, a retrospective exhibition that was the culmination of a dream for De Larios. (The Spanish *sueños* and Japanese *yume* both mean "dreams.") Chavez took an artistic and political stand with his departure from Los Angeles in 1981, yet he never stopped creating art or participating in exhibitions. As a testament to Chavez's impact, images of his ELAC mural and commentary on the whitewashing controversy continue to circulate internationally on the Internet, encouraging future artists to maintain their personal and/or political convictions.⁸²

All but one of these artists began their careers seeking mainstream recognition, or at the very least an opportunity to live from the sale of their artwork. Some found their lives altered as a result of artistic pressures and the Chicano Movement. Certainly, Carrillo, Chavez, and Ulloa played a role as teachers and mentors to an emerging generation of Chicano artists, but they also used their art to participate in the larger social protests that defined the 1960s and 1970s. Equally important, all succeeded in creating an individualized art, a synthesis of Western art with aspects of their cultural heritage without sacrificing aesthetic standards. Yet, in producing this art along the hyphen—blending Mexican heritage with American art—they have more often than not remained outside the canonical history for this period. This exhibition offers an opportunity to look again, closely, at their art and to recognize their contributions to our American art history.

1 *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1952, A11.

2 Ilene Susan Fort and Michael Quick, *American Art: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 285.

3 Susan Landauer, "Painting Under the Shadow: California Modernism and the Second World War," in *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950*, ed. Paul J. Karlstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 61.

4 Lars Nittve and Cécile Whiting, "Interview with Henry Hopkins," in *Time & Place*, vol. 3, *Los Angeles 1957-1968* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2008), 62.

5 Margarita Nieto, "Mexican Art and Los Angeles, 1920-1940," in Karlstrom, *On the Edge of America*, 134.

6 Shifra M. Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Arte Chicano: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965-1981* (Berkeley: Chicano Studies Library Publications Unit, 1985), 27. This historical period was also marked by a growing political activism, as returning American servicemen and servicewomen of Mexican descent refused to acquiesce to discrimination. In Southern California, landmark cases were won to desegregate schools (e.g., *Méndez v. Westminster School Dist. of Orange County*, 1945), as well as to provide basic civic amenities such as bus service, paved sidewalks, and lighted streets. See Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 280-84.

7 Miguel Villa was an artist who established a studio on the Plaza, and Esequia Acevedo was an amateur singer. Hernando Villa's two sisters, Luisa and Rosa, became renowned singers, and along with their mother recorded about twenty songs for Charles Lummis. Hernando also sang Mexican and Mexican Californian folk songs and organized concerts in the 1920s. See John Koegel, "Canciones del país: Mexican Musical Life in California After the Gold Rush," *California History* 78, no. 3 (1999): 174-75.

8 Nancy Dustin Wall Moure, *Loners, Mavericks & Dreamers: Art in Los Angeles Before 1900* (Laguna Beach, CA: Laguna Beach Art Museum, 1993), 48-49. The Los Angeles School of Art and Design began in the city's business district in 1887 and grew until its own three-story building was constructed across from Westlake Park in 1902. Lynn Zelevansky argues that in the 1920s, the city's art schools became the "glue that held the Los Angeles art world together," given the absence of a strong art market and critical press. See Zelevansky, "A Place in the Sun: The Los Angeles Art World and the New Global Context," in *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity: 1900-2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 298.

9 Doris O. Dawdy, *Artists of the American West: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, *Artists Born Before 1900* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1985), 449.

10 Fort and Quick, *American Art*, 285.

11 "Charm of Other Days in Romantic Canvas," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1912, 112.

12 Ibid.

13 Michael E. Zega and John E. Gruber, *Travel by Train: The American Railroad Poster, 1870-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 77.

14 Michael E. Zega, "Hernando G. Villa and the Chief," *Vintage Rails*, no. 11 (1998): 83.

15 The majority of these grants went to families after the missions were secularized, beginning in 1834. A few prominent families built large ranches with an emphasis on raising cattle and horses. After Alta California became part of the United States in 1848, the Californio families lost much of their land through violence, intermarriage, or lack of "legal documents." See McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 51.

16 The term *fantasy heritage* was introduced in the 1940s by Carey McWilliams in his penetrating look at the myth of the California missions as idyllic havens. It evolved over the decades into a more general claim to pre-U.S. ancestors with "pure" Spanish blood (*sangre pura*), an ancestry considered superior to a Mexican's indigenous or mestizo (mixed-race) heritage.

17 Certain historians have contested the myth of the "fantasy heritage" as one-sided and argue that the Mexican claim to a racially superior Spanish lineage actually developed in colonial Mexico. See F. Arturo Rosales, "'Fantasy Heritage' Reexamined: Race and Class in the Writings of the Bandini Family Authors and Other Californios, 1828-1965," in *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage, Volume II*, ed. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and Chuck Tatum (Houston: Arte Público, 1996), 81-104.

18 *Rio Grande Review* was published by the Rio Grande Oil Company.

19 Alma May Cook, "News of the Art World," *Los Angeles Evening Herald-Express*, November 1934, A7.

20 Wyn Barden, "International Artists' Club Plans 'Night of All Nations,'" *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, November 7, 1924, B1.

21 Stephen Romayne, "Noted Artist to Paint Again," *Westlake Post* (Los Angeles), July 13, 1945, 1.

22 David Valdés, oral history interview by Terezita Romo, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, August 27, 2010.

23 Letter to Miss Elliott, Harper's School of Art, Los Angeles, June 15, 1936. Collection of Joan Churchill, Santa Barbara, CA.

24 David Valdés, interview by Terezita Romo, August 27, 2010.

25 Ibid.

26 From the biography of Ricardo (de Hoyos) Martínez on *LatinArt.com: An Online Journal of Art and Culture*, <http://www.latinart.com/faview.cfm?id=154>. Rufino Tamayo chose a more individual approach, combining European-influenced abstract art with indigenous (Zapotec) iconographic elements from Oaxaca. While Tamayo is internationally known for his modernist paintings, Ricardo Martínez's work received less attention. Martínez was born in Mexico City and never received any formal art training. After a period of still-life painting, he became less narrative and more figural in his artwork, a style he continued until his death.

27 David Valdés, interview by Terezita Romo, August 27, 2010.

28 Ibid.

- 29 "El realismo social no fue cuestión de estilo sino de contenido." Shifra M. Goldman, "El Arte Social de Domingo Ulloa," *La Comunidad* (Sunday supplement of *La Opinión*, Los Angeles), November 10, 1985, 8.
- 30 The Academia's director was Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, and Ulloa's drawing instructor was Julio Castellanos. As noted by Shifra Goldman, both were members of Los Contemporáneos, a group formed in the 1920s and composed of writers and artists who looked outside Mexico for their artistic inspiration. *Ibid.*, 8.
- 31 Virginia Horn, "An Undiscovered Master: Domingo Ulloa; An Artist Whose Works Are a True Reflection of Life," *Imperial Valley Press* (El Centro, CA), ca. 1987, 57. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto Research Material on Chicano Art, 1967-2008, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.
- 32 The Jepson Art Institute was founded by artist Herbert Jepson in 1945 and remained open until 1954. It was an important center for experimental figure drawing, aesthetics, and printmaking.
- 33 Peter Selz, "The Art of Political Engagement," in Barron, Bernstein, and Fort, *Reading California*, 340.
- 34 Landauer, "Painting Under the Shadow," 62.
- 35 From the profile of Lebrun on the website of the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University, <http://www.sou.edu/sma/exhibitions/permanent-collect3.html>.
- 36 Mark-Elliott Lugo, "El Centro's Ulloa an Undiscovered Master?," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, May 31, 1985, C1.
- 37 Lincoln Cushing, "Domingo Ulloa: A People's Artist," *Community Murals* 10, no. 1 (1985): 23.
- 38 Ulloa's move to El Centro was motivated by a shortage of affordable housing in Los Angeles and the artist's fear that he would fall victim to the McCarthy-era witch hunt because of his political art. See Lugo, "El Centro's Ulloa an Undiscovered Master?," C1.
- 39 *Bracero* is derived from the Spanish word for arm (*brazo*) and means one who works with his arms. The program officially ended in 1964, and, not coincidentally, César Chávez began his union organizing of farmworkers the following year.
- 40 Cushing, "Domingo Ulloa," 21.
- 41 Dora De Larios, oral history interview by Terezita Romo, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, August 24, 2010.
- 42 Dora De Larios, interview by Camille Billops, November 30, 1984, in *Artist & Influence*, vol. 4 (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, 1986), 58.
- 43 Dora De Larios, interview by Terezita Romo, August 24, 2010.
- 44 Elaine Levin, "Golden Clay: California Ceramists," in *Yesterday and Tomorrow: California Women Artists*, ed. Sylvia Moore (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1989), 310.
- 45 Elaine Levin, "Dora De Larios," *Ceramic Monthly* 26, no. 8 (1978): 50.
- 46 *Sueños/Yume: Fifty Years of the Art of Dora De Larios*, exhibition catalog (Glendale, CA: Huerta Quorum, 2009), 3.
- 47 Shifra Goldman, "Mujeres de California: Latin American Women Artists," in *Yesterday and Tomorrow: California Women Artists*, ed. Sylvia Moore (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1989), 211.
- 48 Dora De Larios, e-mail to author, November 3, 2010.
- 49 Dora De Larios, interview by Terezita Romo, August 24, 2010.
- 50 *Sueños/Yume*, 4.
- 51 Roberto Chavez, oral history interview by Terezita Romo, Chowchilla, CA, May 30, 2010.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Charles Garabedian, oral history interview by Anne Ayers, Los Angeles, August 21-22, 2003, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.
- 55 Roberto Chavez, "Record of Creative Work in the Field of Painting" (master's thesis, UCLA, June 1961), 3.
- 56 At UCLA, Chavez received four scholarships: an Art Council scholarship (1959), the Jerry Wald Award for Graphic Design (1960), a teaching assistantship (1960), and a graduate fellowship (1961).
- 57 According to Charles Garabedian, "Ellie [Neil] was doing decorative work with them, and down the street from Ceeje was...Joan Ankrum Gallery. One day she had a Morris Broderson show. Broderson was an artist who was very popular in the early '60s. They had so much work that they needed the two galleries to show all the Broderson work. They asked to rent the Ceeje space while it was still a decorator's space. All the Broderson work sold...and Jerry and Cecil said, 'God, we're in the wrong business.' So they asked Ellie, 'Do you know any painters? We want to turn this into a fine arts gallery.' That was the birth of Ceeje." See Charles Garabedian, August 21-22, 2003, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
- 58 Zelevansky, "A Place in the Sun," 294.
- 59 Faith Flam, introduction to *Ceeje Revisited*, exhibition catalog (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, 1984), 6.
- 60 More research is needed on the pivotal role of Ceeje Gallery in Los Angeles, with a view to presenting a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the city's diverse arts scene during the 1960s and 1970s. Some important curatorial research has been conducted, most notably by Faith Flam in her seminal 1984 exhibition *Ceeje Revisited* at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.
- 61 Arthur Secunda, "Group Show, Ceeje Gallery," *Artforum* 1, no. 3 (1962): 6.
- 62 Henry J. Seldis, "Four Painters Join in Fascinating Exhibit," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1962, C6.
- 63 Roberto Chavez, interview by Terezita Romo, May 30, 2010.
- 64 Henry J. Seldis, "Unusual Talent Marks Chavez Works," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1962.
- 65 Henry T. Hopkins, "Roberto Chavez, Ceeje Gallery," *Artforum* 1, no. 8 (1963): 17.
- 66 Roberto Chavez, oral history interview by Terezita Romo, Chowchilla, CA, October 20, 2009.
- 67 Roberto Chavez, "Chicano Muralist Interviewed," by Carlos Tovar, *Nuestra Cosa* (Riverside, CA) 8, no. 1 (1979): 7.
- 68 For a detailed report of the mural whitewashing, community protests, and Chavez's unsuccessful efforts to restore the work, see Bob Ross and George Lyndon, "The Case of Three California Muralists: Roberto Chavez, Eduardo Carrillo, John Chamberlin," *Arts and Entertainment*, July 1981, 15-16.
- 69 Eduardo Carrillo, "Four x Four Artist Statement," Santa Cruz Art League, August 3, 1993, on the Museo Eduardo Carrillo website, <http://www.museoeduardocarrillo.org/html/biography/ownwords/index.htm>.
- 70 John Fitz Gibbon, *California Connections: Sacramento State College, The Early 1970s*, exhibition catalog (Sacramento: Sacramento State College, 1982).
- 71 John Fox, "Ed in Spain," on the Museo Eduardo Carrillo website, www.museoeduardocarrillo.org/html/biography/remember/edinspain.htm.
- 72 Virginia Allen, "Ed Carrillo, Ceeje Gallery," *Artforum* 2, no. 7 (1964): 48.
- 73 Eduardo Carrillo, "Record of Creative Work in the Field of Painting" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, June 1964), n.p.
- 74 Peter Selz, *Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 174.
- 75 Eduardo Carrillo, "Narrative Account" (Collection of Museo Eduardo Carrillo, n.d.).
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 Roberta Ruiz, "Painting Life," in *Eduardo Carrillo*, exhibition catalog (Santa Cruz, CA: Museo Eduardo Carrillo, 2009), 19.
- 78 Marcia Tucker, "Bad" *Painting*, exhibition catalog (New York: New Museum, 1978), n.p.
- 79 Carrillo, "Record of Creative Work in the Field of Painting," n.p.
- 80 *Eduardo Carrillo*, exhibition catalog (Sacramento: Crocker Art Museum, 1986), n.p.
- 81 The mural was commissioned to complement a replica of the Bell of Dolores, which the Mexican government donated to Los Angeles in 1968. See the Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles website, <http://www.lamurals.org/MuralFiles/Downtown/FatherHidalgo.html>.
- 82 Chavez produced a twenty-minute video art piece in which he commented on the experience, titled *The Execution* (1982). It was performed and filmed in Fort Bragg and screened at the 1982 "Califas: Chicano Art and Culture in California" conference in Santa Cruz. Jeff Boice was the videographer.