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## Foto ése: Floricanto En Aztlán. Banned Books Update. On-Line Floricanto Mid-May

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### UCLA C/S Research Center Re-Publishes Landmark Alurista Collection

Michael Sedano

**Floricanto en Aztlán. Poetry by Alurista Art by Judithe Hernández.** Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2011. ISBN 780895511478 0895511479



**Nationchild Plumaraja** is Alurista's best early poetry collection. At any rate, that extensive collection of gems has always been my preferida of the poet's early work. In contrast, Alurista would sigh longingly in various chats we've had over the years about his work, he always preferred his firstborn, **Floricanto En Aztlán**.

At the 2007 National Latino Writers Conference when he agreed to join the reunion floricanto at USC should one come to pass, he expressed no objection to my revising the anthology he edited initially out of 1973's Festival de Flor y Canto. My plan is an edition adding reunion material to the existing volume, then either publishing a deluxe multimedia resource, or offer the materials as a free webpage.

Then Alurista hit me with his dream, would I republish his first collection, **Floricanto En Aztlán**? If we had but time and lana enough, dang tootin, and my favorite, too.

A couple years later, 2010, Alurista and I worked together in another dream come true, *Festival de Flor y Canto. Yesterday • Today • Tomorrow*. He reiterated his dream then, too. Republish **Floricanto en Aztlán**. The USC grant offered too little other than go first class rasquachi.

Then last year, Alurista and I found ourselves in the lounge at the NLWC hotel and he has a now hopeful dream, he hints that, maybe, UCLA would be republishing **Floricanto**. A ver, I say, a ver.

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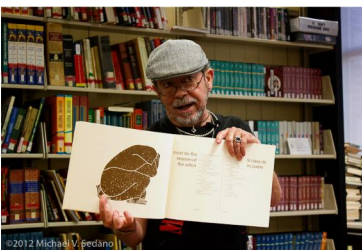


Did you ever see a dream walking? Well, I did. Walking, and flipping through the pages, reading the good old stuff straight from the pages of a republished, casi facsimile of that first collection with the old but new name, **Floricanto en Aztlán. Poetry by Alurista Art by Judithe Hernández.**

The publisher enlarges authorship by including artist Judithe Hernández and changing Alberto H. Urista to puro Alurista, who's penned a 2011 Preface. UCLA CSRC Press elects a photograph of the burlap-covered original cover, keeping price to a mere \$24.95. Otherwise, these 100 pages are exactly what **Floricanto en Aztlán** looked like the first time UCLA published the volume.



Judithe Hernández' linocuts perfectly express a complementary sensibility of their own on pages showing her work. Hernández sends her regrets at missing the event. Her attendance would have added a measure of immediacy when Alurista proudly praises the arte. In addition, the final poem he reads revolves around a Judithe story. She misses that, but the audience enjoys the heck out of work-in-progress *Órale*.



The UCLA C/S faculty exhibits low-key excitement about this significant event. The sparse audience includes Dr. Marissa López, who provides the academic part de rigueur at a University event (one attendee complains "he wasn't introduced right"), staff, and gente from the community. Chon Noriega, CSRC Director, excuses himself to teach a class after he introduces the faculty member.

CSRC's video crew tapes the event, from Noriega's three minutes to Marissa López reworking and extemporizing off an academic treatise. She pulls her punches, thankfully, adapting to the setting and reading the audience interest level.

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López allows herself to grow flustered that some slides haven't shown up or something. Ironically, owing to her numerous apologies, the entire audience shares her discomfort. Otherwise she would have been alone in knowing something went wrong. When something goes wrong, say nothing. No one will be the wiser.

Here was an Oracy moment, another shoulda woulda coulda for lack of the word. Dr. López could have read the absent quotations aloud, guiding her listeners through the agency of practiced oral expression. An effective oral reading of poetry, whether snippets or, mejor, entire poems, reinforces and elucidates conclusions the speaker otherwise supports solely through ratiocination. Life should imitate art, in these instances.

Alurista lends an empathetic posture to the profa's dissertation when she directs a few questions his way. López is particularly aware of *him* as her conclusions put thoughts and intentions in Alurista's mind, or effuse his name.



The poet sets up his **Floricanto en Aztlán** agenda by asking gente to open their copies and call out requests. "Sixteen" the first volunteer chimes out. Then, illustrating the folly of appositional translation, calls out "diezyseis".

The poet leafs through the table of contents, then abruptly stops and gets into it with the requestor. He gets into it a lot these days, muy interactive, the vato.

Look at the titles then give me the numbers como escritos, he advises. The titles come with their numbers, so cinco "libertad sin lagrimas", "in the barrio sopla el viento" sixteen.

"Twenty-six" I call out. I have ganas de hearing *Must be the season of the witch* again.

Back in 1972 I'd crafted a *multimedia* piece--that's what they called those things; six projector three-screen and loudspeakers slide shows--*Alurista: Six Poems* featured young Alurista reading "season of the witch" and "dawn eye cosmos", I remember, from **Nationchild Plumaraja**, published by San Diego's Toltecas en Aztlán publishers, an outgrowth of el Centro Cultural de la Raza. Those interpretive readings sizzle with energy.

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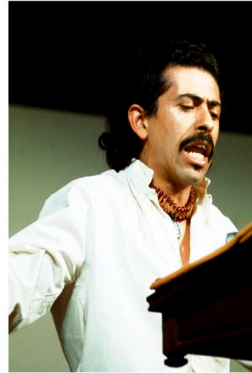
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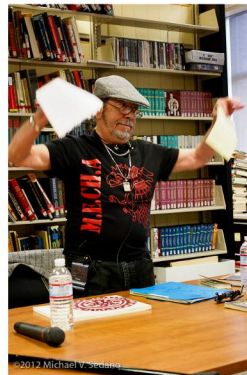
The young reader Alurista reads with the passion of a true believer unleashed. Today's seasoned poet reads with a curious inattention to the audience. Devotion to text keeps his eyes on the page. He makes eye contact with the audience in the transitions. I wonder when he read, or saw, these last, he begins tentatively but intently.

He maintains controlled, restrained vocalic animation that soon takes on a practiced fluidity. His tongue is reviving muscle movements remembered from however long-ago upfloating many readings.



The young Alurista sings of Amerindian genesis, la razared, in a code-switching mezcla that, like fresh cement, incorporates disparate compounds into a mass that assumes a solidity that withstands time, weather, vandalism. Mezcla serves as foundation for new structures that rise to greater heights and increasingly elaborated design. Ay, raza and other gente, you should hear those youthful readings! You can.

The slides from *Alurista: Six Poems*, are long gone, but I still have the technical script—manual slide changes in event the Digicue machine failed--and the audiotape. The audiotape. Seven and a half inches per second quarter inch BASF tape, probably brittle as can be. I will digitize this material and present the program for La Bloga readers. Right now, USC's Digital Archive preserves Alurista's performance program from the 1973 *Festival de Flor y Canto*, giving La Bloga readers access to notables from that era.



Alurista concludes readings by opening his notebook and reading from work-in-progress drafts. Printed neatly in pencil, the sheets are clean, reflecting work that nears "done", or a **well-prepared reader**.





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ably ready for Alurista's next collection after **Aztlán Libre Press' Tuna Luna**, part by **Judithe Hernández**.



Q&A time arrives when a staff member announces we have the room for another ten minutes. One vato, the MEChA Advisor at Santa Monica College, Natividad Vázquez, asks the poet about his MEChA tee shirt. Alurista appears taken aback and gets into it with the vato. A tense moment draws all eyes when Alurista invades Vazquez' space. Momentary quiet takes over an expectant audience, semi-amused, semi-curious.



Then the poet cracks wise and Natividad gets it. It's all part of today's Master Class on Chicano poetry. Alurista has captivated and served his audience, given them the newest stuff, a lot of the old stuff, a firme hour with the vato and a motivation to take that signed copy of one of the world's first collections of Chicano poetry, and read it cover to cover and backwards and all the favorites over again.

You can see the events via CSRC video, once the production team completes the editing and posts it to You Tube. La Bloga and I will keep you posted on its posting.

### Banned Books Update



"Shoot if you must, this old grey head, but spare your country's flag" Barbara Frietchie says in Whittier's poem.

In Arizona, there's a variant on that skein of patriotism, it goes "Teach if you must, your Mexican American Studies, and we'll hand you your heads in a burlap bag. Screw the flag." That's what Sean Arce, curriculum designer of a public schools program **assessed as** "one of the most influential educators in the 20th century" is doing nowadays, carrying his head around.

Arce was called to account by the **TUSD board** who banned his program. With MAS and **all those books banned**, fiscal prudence dictates they fire the guy.

There's a term for TUSD's thinking. "Tautology" might fit. I'll use *ekpleiktonto*, which comes from an Attic Greek verb that says "completely struck out of my wits". If I remember my Xenophon, the Greeks feel like this when they think about the fearsome Persians they are sneaking up on. In campfire light, Greeks see Persians up close for the first time. The cucui are preening and combing themselves as they lounge about the fire. I don't remember if the suddenly puro human Persians are singing home on the range or green grow the lilacs, but they probably were.

In the mouths of TUSD majority, "Aye" becomes a code word for that standard seven-letter repartée hurled by woefully inarticulate racists, the blinded by hatred TUSD electeds.

And they are getting away with it. Hatred is defended by the US Constitution right now. TUSD has legal authority that allows the board to ban books, fire competent educators, erase raza.



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inues to fray to tattered, disrespected rags. Left untended, symbols disappear.  
untry for gente decente.  
everything it stands for.

## Line Floricanto

- "Cry in the Night" by Matt Sedillo
- "Lote Bravo" by Pedro L Ramirez
- "Our Serpent Tongue" by Daniel Garcia Ordaz
- "Who Will Answer?" by Esmeralda Bernal
- "Give Me Books on a Stick!" by Diana Lucas-Joe

### **Cry in the Night** by Matt Sedillo

Cry in the night  
 There is a cry  
 In the night  
 There is a terror  
 In these times  
 From which  
 The poor cannot hide  
 And whatever  
 Is left of a little bit of money  
 In this country  
 Is only to be found  
 In the divide  
 Between  
 The blood in the streets  
 And the blind eye  
 Anastasio Hernandez Rojas  
 Was beat to death  
 By border cops  
 For half an hour  
 As he joined  
 The chorus of  
 Eye witnesses  
 Begging for whatever life  
 Was left in his body  
 There is a terror  
 In these times  
 There is a cry  
 In the night  
 It is Anastasios  
 It is Traevons  
 It is Oscar Grants  
 It is Ryan Kellys  
 It is Luis Ramirez's  
 It is Sean Bell's  
 It is Manuel Jamimes  
 Turn deaf ear  
 At your own peril  
 Tomorrow  
 It may be yours

### **Lote Bravo An Offering to the Familias de Juárez** by Pedro L. Ramirez

In the scorched Mexicano-Tejano bordered  
 Sonoran Desert where the young  
 Migrate like swells of swallows  
 and dwell to sift wind and sand  
 just as the Jicarilla, Mescalero, Chiricahua, Lipan,  
 And Kiowa Apache traversing across  
 A stick drawn line in the sand,  
 La Tierra roja burned on the souls of their bare feet  
 driven to the homelands  
 in flight to shantied dwellings  
 on a lote of settled space with  
 a blanket, toothbrush, family pictures, toiletries,  
 And clothing essentials  
 planted like rows of corn  
 for the work place.  
 Las Niñas de Juárez in the palm of the sun  
 brush downward-stroking their



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The Juárez avenues with strikers  
Bannered names like Raquel, Maria, Elizabeth, Elodea...  
Cienes y cienes de no sabemos,  
And the Young women are  
Las nombres de nuestra abuelitas  
but the truth sucked  
Into the Sonoran sand like  
Quince cotillions with waltzes  
on Aztlán dance floors.  
The Juárez civilized lights  
Bursting desert dreams as  
border police dream catchers raise  
Their absolved arms  
Uttering "they are not ours, not our own or of us, our  
flesh.  
Pero  
"Era mi hija comenzando la vida,  
Solo iba a trabajar, nos traía dinero para  
Comida, zapatos y ropa para los niños.  
Y le decía  
que Dios la cuida, guarda y quita de todo peligro."  
And the Mexica lullabies hummed by Mamá  
of oh Señor Santana  
Sunk deep like fracked spirit songs  
into Apache sand where Joshua tree roots  
drift into the ears of our children and soothe  
palmless dessert rivers with  
Cragged stone parchments.  
The crimson dried blood of  
Our daughters spilled on lote bravo,  
On a trashed strewn spot,  
where squatters dwell in  
lawless bliss.  
© Pedro L. Ramirez

**Our Serpent Tongue**  
by Daniel Garcia Ordaz

*For Dr. Gloria E. Anzaldúa*

Your Pedro Infanteicide stops here.  
There will be no mending of the fence.  
You set this bridge called my back  
yard ablaze with partition, division  
labelization, fronterization  
alienization  
Yo soy Tejano  
Mexico-Americano  
Chicano Chingado  
Pagano-Christiano  
Pelado Fregado  
I drop the fork  
at the tip of my tongue  
con orgullo  
knowing  
que ¡Ahi viene  
visital  
a woman is coming  
a woman with cunning  
a woman sin hombre with a forked tongue is running  
her mouth—¡hocicona! ¡fregona!  
a serpent-tongued ¡chingona!  
a cunning linguist  
turning her broken token of your colonization  
into healing  
pa' decir la verdad  
You are not my equal  
You cannot speak like me  
You will not speak for me  
My dreams are not your dreams  
My voice is not your voice



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*Lilly Mederos 2010 - 2012*

Who gave the key to life,  
so callously, to a mad jackal  
willing to do the devil's work .

Who placed this child into  
the center of rage unbound,  
to be hit by the fist of its hell?

Who allowed this distorted mind  
out of its cage? What party gave  
him the evil spirits to imbibe?

Who, who, will answer  
to this? Silence cannot be allowed.  
I only hear Lilly's sweet breath.

Who is now hiding? Your crime  
is known! There are many  
criminals! Don't hide!

*Esmeralda Bernal 5/5/2012*

**Give Me Books on a Stick!**  
by Diana Lucas-Joe

Give Me Books On A Stick!  
Tie them there for me.  
Let me be seen with their weight.  
Let me be seen with their worth.  
Give Me Books On A Stick!  
Chicano written books, read by Chicanitas.  
Books that inspire the day, seen in the light!  
Books that are banned in Arizona by haters of the raza!  
Give me string made of hemp to tie them to the stick!  
The stick long and strong, cut from the tree of life!  
The stick that was once a part of something rests now, on my shoulder!  
Give me books on a stick that will be seen as my companions over hills and valleys  
and on down the stream!  
There on the many streams reflecting in the cooled waters that I will walk in and barefooted!  
Just give me books on a stick!

*By Diana Lucas-Joe  
Brownsville, Tejaztlan*

**Bios**

"Cry in the Night" by Matt Sedillo  
"Lote Bravo" by Pedro L Ramirez  
"Our Serpent Tongue" by Daniel Garcia Ordaz  
"Who Will Answer?" by Esmeralda Bernal  
"Give Me Books on a Stick!" by Diana Lucas-Joe







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University as an EOPS student and holds both a B. A. and M. A. from San Pedro has been teaching at Delta where he has taught in the Migrant Transition urban youth, but Pedro now teaches in the English Department, teaching basic literature, and Creative Writing. He also taught in the Puente Project. He is a Programs (CAP). Pedro is dedicated to promoting diversity and cultural has published poetry in Iowa Review, Blue Unicorn, La Opinion of Los Angeles, e SF, La Voz de Aztlan and many other journals. A native of Fresno, Pedro co/Fresno State University and Fresno City College. He credits the rich creative writing community there for inspiring him to write and teach. Pedro has published a semester poetry magazine which is student generated. He has worked as a farm worker, janitor, and a gas station attendant. He loves working with students.



**Daniel Garcia Ordaz**, from McAllen, Texas, is a founder of Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival and the author of *You Know What I'm Sayin'?* Garcia has been featured in Texas Latino Voices and Dallas International Book Fair, among others. His work is being taught at several colleges and universities. Garcia also appears in "ALTAR: Cruzando Fronteras/Building Bridges," a documentary about Gloria Anzaldúa.

In addition to "Our Serpent Tongue," Garcia's poem "Immigrant Crossing" also appeared in La Bloga's online Floricanto on Jan. 11 and has been accepted for the forthcoming anthology, *Poetry of Resistance: A Multi-Cultural Response to AZ SB 1070 and Other Xenophobic Laws*.

~Daniel Garcia Ordaz, a.k.a. The Poet Mariachi  
poetmariachi@hotmail.com

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Baby Lilly and her mother Amber Mederos

**Esmeralda Bernal** was born in Raymondville, Texas; spent the major part of her life in California and currently resides in Phoenix, AZ. Her poetry has appeared in *Yellow Medicine Review*, *La Bloga* and is forthcoming in *Nahualliandoing II*, *MALCS Journal Spring 2012*, *HaLapid Spring/Summer2012*, and *Poetry of Resistance: A Multi-Cultural Response to AZ SB 1070 and Other Xenophobic Laws*.

Posted by [msedano](#) at 12:01 AM

Labels: [Alurista](#), [Arizona](#), [banned books](#), [Floricanto Movement](#), [poems](#), [poetry](#)

## 1 comment:

[jmu said...](#)

Damn, that must have been a great event. I wish I had been there. Oh, wait, I was there. I just wish I could be as grandiloquent as you. And, no, I am not lambisconeando. It is just that your lyricism describing the event helps me



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ortunately, you left out the tale of the santo árabe. Ni modo, probably length downright vergüenza that the event was not better attended. UCLA has a the audience should have been SRO. After all el chaparrito is a founder of transplantado, but still!) and responsible for the poetry in the Plán Espiritual de respect for our raices and/or elders? The effects of long-ago burnt bridges? 't talkin'...

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