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## Fowler Museum to host two exhibitions about history of Chicano art in Los Angeles

By Stacey Ravel Abarbanel | July 20, 2011



*Oscar Castillo's "47 Chevy in Wilmington, California"*

In the fall of 2011, the Fowler Museum at UCLA will present two exhibitions that explore the diverse contributions of Chicano artists to Los Angeles' artistic development in the 1970s: "Icons of the Invisible: Oscar Castillo" (Sept. 25–Feb. 26, 2012) and "Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement" (Oct. 16–Feb. 26, 2012).

The exhibitions are part of a collaboration with UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) called "[L.A. Xicano](#)" and are also part of the Getty Foundation's "[Pacific Standard Time](#)," a collaboration among more than 60 cultural institutions that tells the story of the birth of the Los Angeles art scene.

"These two exhibitions give a palpable sense of the expansive cultural presence of the Chicano community that emerged at the end of the 1960s," said Chon Noriega, director of the CSRC and one of the curators of the "L.A. Xicano" project. "One is struck by the aesthetic range of the artwork, informed by both a bicultural

sensibility and a critical engagement with art history, and unified by the artists' ongoing commitment to art-based community making."

### 'Icons of the Invisible: Oscar Castillo'

Since the late 1960s, photographer Oscar Castillo has documented the Chicano community in Los Angeles, from major political events and cultural practices to the work of muralists and painters. This exhibition presents photographs from 1969–80 illustrating the major themes (social movement, cultural heritage, urban environment, everyday *barrio* life) and approaches (photojournalism, portraiture, art photography) that have guided Castillo's work.

These iconic images of the community run counter to the stereotypical or exotic images often circulated by the mass media and museums and have rarely been seen over the last four decades. The exhibition features 38 photographs, drawn from an online digital archive of more than 3,000 images by Castillo at the CSRC library and a forthcoming book on Castillo issued through the CSRC series "The Chicano Archives," bringing many of them to the public for the first time.

Originally from El Paso, Texas, Castillo arrived in Los Angeles at the age of 16 and graduated from Belmont High School in 1963. Soon after, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps (1964–68) and was stationed in Japan and at the Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, Calif. In 1969, he was among the first students to major in the newly formed Chicano studies program at San Fernando Valley State College (now California State University, Northridge), and he also signed on for a second major in the art program.

Castillo's work appeared in movement-era publications including *Con Safos*, *La Raza* and *El Popo*, and he also worked as a producer for the KCET program "Acción Chicano." In the late 1970s, he became a commercial photographer and is currently the official historian of Pico Rivera, California.

In all of his photography, Castillo combines the thoroughness of a documentarian with an artist's attention to framing and composition. Castillo continues his photographic practice to this day, expanding a complex and

multifaceted visual archive of Chicano Los Angeles.

### **'Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement'**

Beginning with the establishment of the first Chicano art gallery in 1969 in East Los Angeles, Chicano artists launched a collective reimagining of the urban landscape through photography, graphic arts, murals and large-scale architectural plans, as well as through painting, sculpture, installation and drawing.

While their approach was collective in spirit and undertaken in the context of the Chicano civil rights movement, these artists engaged in and debated various positions on aesthetics, media, ideology, and the social and community function of their art. Their work was at once local, identity-based and global in orientation, exploring the uncharted spaces between Mexican tradition, Chicano vernacular and American modernism.

The exhibition immerses visitors in this era by mapping the diverse social networks among Chicano artist groups and art spaces in Los Angeles during the 1970s. These include Asco, Centro de Arte Público, Los Dos Streetscapers, Goez Art Studios and Gallery (Goez), Los Four, Mechicano Art Center, Plaza de la Raza, Self Help Graphics and Art, and the Social Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), comprised of the artists David Botello, Barbara Carrasco, Richard Duardo, Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Wayne Healy, Judithe Hernández, Willie Herrón, Gilbert "Magu" Sánchez Luján, Frank Romero, Patssi Valdez, Linda Vallejo and many others.

In showing how these artists mapped another L.A. — as part of a social protest and community empowerment movement — the exhibition presents little-seen work and documentation that reveal the complex history of the artists as they both navigated and imagined the social spaces of Los Angeles.

Produced largely during the 1970s, the artworks in this exhibition are selected and organized to "map" the diverse ways in which these groups created cultural visibility, first through the reclaimed use of public space, then through a broad range of aesthetic principals, public exhibitions and statements on the role of the artist. The exhibition then explores the intersections between artist groups, their use of "style" as a political and artistic strategy, and the new beginnings as the artists and art groups entered the 1980s.

Installed at the entrance to the exhibition is one of the first Chicano murals in Los Angeles, "The Birth of Our Art," which presided over the facade of Goez and The East L.A. School of Mexican American Fine Arts in East Los Angeles (TELASOMAFa) from 1971–81. The mural, which has been in storage for 30 years and was conserved for this exhibition, spans some 33 feet and was designed by TELASOMAFa founder Johnny D. Gonzalez and painted by nearly a dozen artists.

Influenced by his travels in Europe, Gonzalez borrowed the compositional strategy that Michelangelo used inside the Medici tombs, but he also drew upon the aesthetic approach of the Mexican muralists who integrated site architecture into their murals. Thus, Gonzalez placed the mural's two figures — Cortez and Malinche, representing the cultural origins of Chicano art — as if they were lying on the window frames.

At the other end of the gallery, the portable mural "Uprising of the Mujeres," created in 1979 by Judith F. Baca, offers a feminist perspective while serving as an allegory of Baca's experiences studying in Mexico. In 1977, she spent six weeks at the Taller Siqueiros in Mexico City, training with a group of Mexican and Chicano artists. She was the only woman at the *taller* (workshop), one of the few female muralists in the Chicano community and one of the few Latinas in the women's movement.

Amidst hundreds of other objects on display in "Mapping Another L.A.," one will be able to see video and film footage of mural painting and performance art, a wide array of graphic styles from across the art groups, and early works prior to the start of the Chicano art movement. The final work visitors will encounter is Carlos Almaraz's painting "Beach Trash Burning" (1982). A member of Los Four, Almaraz incorporated political messages into his work, producing written manifestos and activist murals and graphics. Later, when working with the artists in the Centro de Arte Público, he developed a distinct studio style. In "Beach Trash Burning," Almaraz turns his focus to the urban landscape around him.

Additionally, to engender a cross-generational dialogue, contemporary artists Ana Serrano (Los Angeles, b. 1983), Arturo Romo-Santillan (Los Angeles, b. 1980) and Reyes Rodriguez (Tijuana, Mexico, b. 1957) have created installations in the gallery that reflect on the works of, respectively, Los Four, Asco and Mechicano. Kathy Mas-Gallegos, an artist and director of Avenue 50 Studio, will explore the continuing legacy of community-based art in an exhibition and related programs at the Highland Park gallery.

### **Additional Information**

The Fowler exhibitions "Icons of the Invisible" and "Mapping Another L.A." are part of a collaboration with UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) called "L.A. Xicano," which examines crucial dimensions of Chicano history through four interrelated exhibitions at the Autry National Center, the Fowler Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. All of these exhibitions are also part of "Pacific Standard Time," an unprecedented collaboration initiated by the Getty that brings together more than 60 cultural institutions from across Southern California for six months, beginning in October 2011, to tell the story of the birth of the L.A. art scene. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.

"The diversity of U.S. Latino art and culture requires the kind of multi-institutional collaboration signaled by 'L.A. Xicano,'" said Marla C. Berns, the Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum. "We are proud to contribute to this effort as part of the Fowler's ongoing commitment to the Latino and Chicano communities of Los Angeles, not just as audience members but as vital tributaries of global arts and cultures."

"L.A. Xicano" is curated by Chon A. Noriega, director of the CSRC; Terezita Romo, an independent curator and scholar and program officer for arts and culture at the San Francisco Foundation; and Pilar Tompkins Rivas, arts project coordinator at the CSRC, director of the Latin American branch of the Artist Pension Trust and an independent curator. Noriega and Rivas are the lead curators for "Icons of the Invisible: Oscar Castillo" and "Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement."

"L.A. Xicano" is also the title of a forthcoming book about the four exhibitions edited by Noriega, Romo and Tompkins Rivas, with essays by Karen Mary Davalos, Harry Gamboa Jr., Sandra de la Loza, Noriega, Tompkins Rivas, Romo and Reina Alejandra Prado Saldivar. The book is published by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press and distributed by the University of Washington Press (hardcover; 240 printed pages; 185 color and 47 black-and-white illustrations, ISBN: 978-0-89551-145-4, \$39.95).

Support for these exhibitions comes from the Getty Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the California Community Foundation. Conservation of "The Birth of Our Art" was made possible through generous support from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation and from Elyse S. and Stanley J. Grinstein. Additional conservation support was provided by the Walt Disney Company, Armando Durón, Kathleen McHugh, Ricardo Muñoz, Terezita Romo, David Valdés and Tamar Diana Wilson. Other support for "L.A. Xicano" comes from the Annenberg Foundation.

**The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center** (CSRC) was founded in 1969 and houses a library and special collections archive, an academic press, community partnerships, competitive grant/fellowship programs and research funds dedicated to the study of Spanish-language music and culture, art history, education and urban poverty. CSRC public programs and exhibitions have reached audiences across the U.S. and in Latin America

**The Fowler Museum at UCLA** is one of the country's most respected institutions devoted to exploring the arts and cultures of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. The Fowler is open Wednesday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. and Thursday from noon to 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA Arts, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$10 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310-825-4361 or visit [www.fowler.ucla.edu](http://www.fowler.ucla.edu).

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