¡Hijes de su madre! Queer Latine Art and Texas

Dr. Alexis Salas

Abstract:

In this short text I link themes from the exhibition “Chicano/a Art, Movimiento y Más en Austen, Tejas 1960s to 1980s” to my scholarship on Queer Latine art and activism and then conclude with a compilation of resources on Queer Latine art.

Text:

How can a localized Chicano/a visual history re-map the geography of Latinidad and lead to a more expansive history encompassing queer art? **My new book project** *'Con colores resistimos’: Queer Latine Art and Activism* **documents the history of Latine/x art and activism** encompassing the work of a diverse group of artists engaged with political movements from the US Civil Rights movement to the international AIDS crisis to marriage equality.[[1]](#footnote-1) In conducting this research, I find kinship in the way that the exhibition “Chicano/a Art, Movimiento y Más en Austen, Tejas 1960s to 1980s” addresses social movements, particularly equality movements. “Movimiento y Más en Austen” not only offers an important history lesson, but also enables a means to re-map history by documenting practices long understudied.

In 2015, my intellectual pursuits had taken me deep into questions about kinships between Latin America, particularly Mexico, and Chicano/a and Latine/x communities. I was working on my dissertation for what would later become my first book manuscript, *Disparity at Play: Collaboration and Connectivity, Introverted Aesthetics, Neoliberalism, and the Art Market in 1990s Mexico City. Disparity at Play* looks at the artwork of a group of artists based in Mexico by considering the political and commercial uses of their critical and experimental art practices. That year, **I curated the exhibition** “All the Signs are (T)Here: Social Iconography in Mexican and Chicano Art” at the Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin. Through “All the Signs are (T)Here” I sought to not only recognize Texas’ primordial importance in Latine art, but also center a dialogue between Latine and Latin American art.

“All the Signs are (T)Here,” like “Movimiento y Más en Austen,” included works addressing labor issues as a means to trace historical relationships. In fact, “Movimiento y Más en Austen” features photographs by Alan Pogue’s documenting the same strike featured in a work I selected for “All the Signs are (T)Here.” The 2014 photograph[*Protest/Strike Sign*](http://rickyyanas.com/strike_sign)by Ricky Yanas’ (born San Antonio, Texas, 1984),depicting an upside down protest sign stored at a research library, references both art historical tropes and historical events. The clean lines of the sign’s handle and the dark molding along the floor divide the image into distinct planes reminiscent of both geometric abstraction and minimalism. The sign’s text,

ON STRIKE

Upholsterers’ Intl. Union of N.A.

AFL-CIO Local No. 456

Economy Furn., Inc.

*Refuses To Bargain*

succinctly outlines its historical context, namely the nonviolent efforts of the predominantly Mexican American workers to gain more just working conditions from the Austin, Texas-based enterprise Economy Furniture Company, one of the largest suppliers of furniture in the southwest. On November 27, 1968, workers of the Local 456 Labor Union in Austin began a work strike against the Economy Furniture Company. The strikers picketed for twenty-eight months. After going to appeals court, workers were guaranteed annual wage increases, seniority, overtime pay, additional vacation, and other benefits including up to $13,500 in back pay per worker. It was during these strikes that the sign was used in the 1971 Austin Chicano Huelga, a strike led by civil rights leader Cesar Cha7vez. Through Yanas’ use of the sign to protagonize the 2014 photograph, the artist invokes its continued relevance for Texas, a state which continues not to enforce minimum wage laws and fair labor practices to this day. Artworks like Yanas’ informed another of my book-length research projects, *Dále Gas: Art and Oil in the Petrochemical Americas. Dále Gas* will examine the relationship of new media practices, material culture, and political histories shaped by in-demand raw goods, primarily crude oil, in the petrochemical Americas from 1961 to present, addressing both Latin America and the Latine United States.

Like “All the Signs are (T)Here,” “Movimiento y Más en Austen” addresses gender and sexuality. “Movimiento y Más en Austen” ’s section about a group of Austin-based Chicana artists working together in a collective called M.A.S., Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste (Women of the Southwest), brought artist initiative to my attention. Artist Santa Barraza led M.A.S., so I was particularly interested to see her 1984 collaborative (credited to Santa Barraza as well as artists Sylvia Orozco and Pio Pulido) serigraph [*Popo and Itza*](https://www.santabarraza.com/portfolio-item/iztaccihuatl-and-popocatepetl-reversed-1984/) *(Reversed)* In the artists’ version of the classic Mexican tale about the ill-fated Tlaxcala lovers, princess Iztaccíhuatl carries the great warrior Popocatepetl, an inversion of both the story itself and the gender roles within it.

 One of the work’s featured in my exhibition “All the Signs are (T)Here,” was *Guided Meditation,* an audio recording of the March 1, 1984, session led by dyke Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa. When I submitted the bilingual wall labels to a Spanish language copy editor, she suggested that rather than use the Spanish-language phrase *cuir* for the English language ‘queer,’ I instead translate it as *raro* (strange, bizarre). This misguided suggestion invited me to think about how, for great segments of the Latine community, queerness is inarticulable to the extent that it is off the map, a linguistic margin relegated to *raro*. In the exhibition, I insisted on the existence of queer / ‘cuir’, adding contextual information for the visitor, but also held present the sense of erasure or mis-translation even within Latine culture.

The phrase “¡Hijes de su madre!” is a way I think about the relationships extant within Queer Latine art.[[2]](#footnote-2) This iteration of the Mexican expression **“Hijo/a de tu madre”** underscores a tension by simply changing the gender of the word ending to the gender-inclusive form. There are so many **hijes, or children (expressed in a gender-inclusive form), in the form of queer** Latin/a/e/x **art practices and artists from the mother state of Texas; yet, Texas continues to impose violence on queers, Latine/x people, their art, and even the practice of art on the whole.**

A localized Chicano/a visual history of Texas re-map the geography of Latinidad both as understandings of queerness expands and, in a time, when where the Latine populace resides is changing. Texas’ vitality to Latine culture, not only through research centers and museums, but also through local, on the ground movements, has not been given the visibility of Chicano LA, Mexican American Chicago, and Caribbean New York. The Pew Research Center notes that it is in the American south that the Hispanic population is amongst the fastest growing in the United States. Last year I began teaching at the University of Arkansas. My burgeoning knowledge of Latine practices in the region expand as I teach courses which survey Latine muralists such as those working in Atlanta, Latine artists in residence or installing work at nearby art spaces such as Crystal Bridges and The Momentary, Latina Wymen’s Lands such as the intentional lesbian community La Luz de la Lucha, and ‘zines published by the University of Arkansas Press such as those by Taine (Puerto Rican) non-binary maker Juana Maria Paz.

Re-mapping the geography of Latinidad also allows us to conceive of the world differently. Art and queerness allow us to imagine other ways of being, other ways to structure our values, other ways to understand what is interesting about being alive, other ways to understand history, family, and community, and perhaps even other ways to map the world. By thinking about a queer Latine art geography, we reveal our country’s vast colonial imperial past as it is intersectionally bound to race and sexuality. Through a queer Latine geography, we can tell the complex histories of historical disenfranchisement and dispossession ultimately working towards futures redistributing the land.

**Digital Resources**

* [**Mexican American Art Since 1948, University of Minnesota**](https://maas1848.umn.edu/s/mexican-american-art-since-1848/page/home)
* [**Estoy Aquí: Music of the Chicano Movement, Smithsonian**](https://folkways.si.edu/learning-pathway/estoy-aqui/music-of-the-chicano-movement)
* [**Collection, National Museum of Mexican Art**](https://nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/artworks)
* [**Documents of 20th Century Latin American and U.S. Latino Art (ICAA, Museum of Fine Arts Houston)**](https://nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/artworks)
* [**Artist Oral Histories, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian**](http://www.aaa.si.edu/)
* [**Teachers Resources, Smithsonian American Art Museum**](https://americanart.si.edu/education/k-12/resources/latino)
* [**Afro-Latinx: Crossing Cultures, Identities, and Experiences, Google Arts & Culture**](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/afro-latinx-crossing-cultures-identities-and-experiences-national-portrait-gallery/kwWx0Ggno8kmcg?hl=en)
* [**Digital Collections, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA**](http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/library/csrc-digital-collections)
* [**Chicano Art Networks, Texas State Historical Association**](https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/chicano-art-networks)
* [**University of California Digital Collections, Calisphere**](https://calisphere.org/)
* [**Resources, Latinx Project, NYU**](https://www.latinxproject.nyu.edu/digitalresources)
* [**Mariposa Waves: Transnational Queer Latinx & Jotería History Project**](http://www.mariposawaves.com/)
* [**Latinx Studies: Digital Primary Sources, Yale (mostly subscription based)**](https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=512493&p=3511584)
* [**Latine/Latin American Artist Showcase**](https://guides.libraries.indiana.edu/latine/exhibits-lessons)

**Instagram Accounts**

* 100latinxartists
* Angelik.wiki
* Archivotrans
* Atomicculture
* Atx\_barrio\_archive
* Colectivacosmica
* Gallerygurls
* Hiphipphotomusuem
* Itzelalejandra.gif
* latinxartsall
* Latinainmuseums
* Latinoswholunch
* Latinxcurated
* Latinx\_diaspora\_archives
* Mantecahtx
* mujeristasco
* Map\_pointz
* Nepantla.usa
* Nuevayorkinos
* newlatinxartcollective
* Purochingoncollective
* Rockarchivola
* Robincembalast
* uslaforum

**Podcasts**

* Andzalduaing It
* Cabronas y Chingonas
* Café con Pam
* De colored Radio
* Latinos who Lunch
* Locutora Racio
* MexiCan
* Top Rank Podcast
* Songmess
* Radio Menea
* Latinaxe Lit
1. **For the purposes of this text linking the exhibition and my work,** I use Chicano/a and **Latine/x somewhat interchangeable. I recognize that these terms have different relationships to country of historical origin, political and social affiliations, as well as periodization. I use them in this way because despite these differences, there are also continuities of solidarity.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As an expression, **“Hijo/a/e de tu madre” is** largely untranslatable. It literally means ‘child of your mother’ and therefore denotes familial connection.But this literal translation is far from its usage: in its use, **“Hijo/a/e de tu madre”** expresses the rage of illegitimacy, like a child whose father does not claim them, most always **hurled as a frustrated insult.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)