**The Chicano Art Movement of the 1970s in Austin, Texas**

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**Introduction**

This essay is a Humanist Scholar contribution to the exhibition, “Chicano/a Art, Movimiento y Más en Austin, Tejas, 1960s to 1980s,” organized by Austin’s Mexic-Arte Museum.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is also part of the author’s ongoing study on the history of the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (ESB-MACC), a member of a three-part constellation of Mexican American or Chicano cultural art centers in Austin that includes the Mexic-Arte Museum and La Peña Gallery.[[2]](#endnote-2) Preparing this history has helped me better understand and appreciate Mexic-Arte for its leadership in promoting the Chicano art community in Austin and the larger encompassing Chicano social movement.[[3]](#endnote-3) In Austin as elsewhere, the Chicano art movement contributed to what historians and art critics have call a “cultural florescence,” or an intellectual and artistic flowering of a community’s cultural identity in energized political terms.[[4]](#endnote-4) Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, one of the most insightful observers of the history and meaning of Chicano art underscored its synthetic point of creation: “The Chicano movement was one of cultural reclamation and social redemption, and artists were right in the middle of reclaiming and making social options for people.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

Mexic-Arte’s retrospective exhibition acknowledges the history of the student movement at the University of Texas as a point of incubation for the Austin Chicano art movement.[[6]](#endnote-6) It features artists like Sylvia Orozco, Sam Coronado and Pio Pulido, founders of Mexic-Arte and impressive artists in their own right. Numerous other singular artists and activists participated in the exhibition as presenters and writers.[[7]](#endnote-7) The exhibition includes the work of more than thirty artists using different media and an extensive collection of documentary information and presentations by scholars and artists on the nature and significance of Chicano art. Many of them, including Orozco and Coronado, attended the University of Texas and played important roles in the nascent Chicano art movement of the 1970s.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The virtual exhibition also incorporated the art and photographic images of the early political and art organizations that artists and other activists established at the University of Texas and in the area of Austin. The organizations, the League of United Chicano Artists (LUChA), Mujeres Artistas Del Suroeste (MAS), and the Chicano Art Student Association (CASA), appeared in succession during the 1970s. The more outwardly political organization at the university, the Mexican American Student Organization (MASO), changed its name in 1970 and became the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), the new statewide organization founded in San Antonio by José Ángel Gutiérrez, Willie Velásquez, Mario Compean, Ignacio Pérez, and Juan Patlán. The latter organization shared its membership with LUChA, MAS and CASA.[[9]](#endnote-9)

I have especially benefitted from the documentary materials in the exhibition as well as the presentations by many of the activists, art historians, collectors, critics and artists. The assembly of first-hand observations and autobiographical impressions by participants in the Chicano social and art movements provide the public a rare opportunity to witness historical actors in conversation with each other across time and into the present. My own participant-observer role while a doctoral student at the University of Texas and a member of the Chicano community of Austin offers an additional vantage point from which to comment on this history and its significance. My purpose is to provide a general history of the Chicano art movement in Austin during the 1970s, the early “protest” period in the history of national Chicano art movement, according to art critics Ybarra Frausto and Shifra Goldman.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The exhibition acknowledges that University of Texas students played a singular role in the Chicano art movement in the Austin area, especially when they expanded their work beyond the campus and into the Mexican-origin community of Austin. The literary, theatrical, and visual artists also helped build an art movement within an expansive statewide and national Chicano social crusade that incorporated multiple causes associated with students, farm workers, women and other sectors in the Mexican community. Although some of the artists have left records that allow us to begin preparing the history of their movement, many more of them must make their personal archives and autobiographies available to researchers and the public so that we may eventually benefit from full accounts of their history.

**The University of Texas as a Generative Center**

Numerous individuals from Austin from the 1960s and 1970 entertained the idea of establishing a cultural arts center that would give permanence and focus to the emerging Chicano art movement. Students from the University of Texas at Austin, however, offer the most, compelling and consequential story of an art movement that they initiated and involved the formation of three cultural art centers in Austin—the La Peña Gallery, Mexic-Arte, and the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center. After establishing a presence as artists and activists at the university, the students reached out to the Chicano community of Austin and artists in other parts of the state with a clear sense of purpose as socially conscious activists with multiple oppositional identities and claims for change on behalf of marginalized Chicano communities. Although they often claimed to be a historically-evolved expression of self-determination, the university clearly served as a generative force in their formation and singular contributions to the arts.

The university’s academic programs equipped the students with knowledge in liberal arts, art history and various art forms and techniques that were necessary for them to build professional careers as artists. They also secured a general understanding of artists as producers of knowledge and as socially constructed beings historically engaging society to varying degrees and with different purposes in mind. The process of learning in the university, however, also included a politically charged environment of students entertaining an identity as Chicanos and Mexicans and a social movement advocating for change on behalf of their marginalized communities. Students and artists called on each other to figuratively cross the line in the sand or remain outside a social movement seeking change in society as well as in the mainstream, European-focused art community.

The establishment of the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) in 1970 and the leadership of its director, Dr. Américo Paredes, and assistant director, José Limón (then a graduate student in English), gave inspiration and direction to the student movement. MASO was the leading Chicano student organization at the university until 1971 when it affiliated with MAYO, the statewide organization of public school, college and university students. The activist students addressed numerous campus-based issues including the underrepresentation of Chicano students and faculty at the university and the institution’s seeming reluctance to establish an effective recruitment program to resolve the problem. Impatient with the slow response from university officials, the students often assumed the responsibility of traveling to public schools, including their own, to recruit Chicano students. Another organization, the Mexican American Graduate Student Association (MAGSA), advocated for the recruitment of graduate students and faculty and the establishment of adequate bibliographic and archival materials on Mexican Americans to meet the growing research needs among the students and faculty. CASA, established by Coronado, Orozco and fellow students Victoria Plata and Rey Gaytán, was also a member of the Chicano student community.

The students in MASO, MAYO, MAGSA and CASA also participated in causes originating outside the University of Texas including the United Farm Workers’ Organizing Committee, the Texas Farmworkers’ Union, MAYO, and La Raza Unida Party (LRUP), the third-party organization that challenged the Democratic and Republican Parties in the 1972, 1974 and 1978 statewide elections.[[11]](#endnote-11) The war in Vietnam, Chicana movement issues, and unjust immigration policies also drew the students’ attention. In most instances, they supported community-based causes with information campaigns, protests against the marginalization of their communities and fund raisers on campus, although some of them also took breaks from their studies to join organized activities outside the university.

The students also organized visits by the four major leaders of the social movement, including Cesar Chavez, Reies Lopez Tijerina, Rodolfo “Corky” González and José Angel Gutiérrez, while Chicanas also joined with the other women in Austin in the 1971 Conferencia de Mujeres por la Raza (or the National Chicana Conference) in Houston. In 1977, Chicano and Chicana graduate students from the University of Texas played a central role in organizing the First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration Policy in San Antonio. They were present in all campus and community activities.[[12]](#endnote-12)

**The First Steps**

According to Tejeda, the idea to establish a community-based cultural arts center in Austin emerged when Mexican American artists at the university began a longstanding conversation in the early 1970s that turned into a project to establish a permanent site to host activities that Chicano artists were already organizing on campus. The conversation took on a focused purpose when Alberto “Alurista” Urista, a Chicano poet of international importance, arrived at the university in the fall of 1974. The directors of CMAS recruited him as a Visiting Lecturer to teach courses on Chicano thought and creative writing. His courses became the Center’s most popular offerings, especially among Chicano students interested in the arts, including a small number of them who were majoring in art.

Most of the students attracted to Alurista’s class were mostly non-art majors since most Chicanos at the university sought degrees in art. The few Chicanos who majored in art sought out Alurista and the other students in large part because the Art Department did not offer courses on Chicano art and could only claim to have hired one Chicano faculty, Dr. Jacinto Quirarte, who specialized on Maya culture. According to Santa Contreras Barraza, one of the artists, the art department did not allow student to “do cultural art; you had to do mainstream art.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

Many if not most of the aspiring students who sought out Alurista were already participating in the student movement and were beginning to entertain notions about becoming artists as a political cause. In some important cases, they came with experience as artists or as participants in cultural arts activity in their communities. A young muralist named Raul Valdez from Del Rio and Barraza, for instance, had studied art at Texas A&I University, a small liberal arts college in South Texas now known as Texas A&M University Kingsville. Tejeda, on the other hand, had played the button accordion as a youngster growing up in San Antonio while the poet José Flores Peregrino had played a bajo sexto with a traditional *conjunto* group in his hometown of Laredo. Rumel Fuentes, another musician who often regaled the public in front of the student union with traditional Mexican ballads (some authored by him), also came to the university with experience.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Alurista influenced the students in yet another way. He had served as the principal organizer of the First Festival Floricanto (1973) while teaching at San Diego State University and soon after arriving at the university, he proposed that the students assist in planning the second Chicano national literary festival in Austin. Some students assumed a central role in the effort, all along understanding that the festival would allow them to collaborate with a national network of artists in defining, producing and disseminating art and in advancing their existential search for authenticity as Chicano artists and activists.

The Second Festival Floricanto was held between March 12 and 16, 1975 at the University of Texas, Juárez-Lincoln University (a Chicano college in Texas affiliated with Antioch College), and a local art museum and school named Laguna Gloria. As expected, the Chicano artists joined with more established novelists, essayists, poets, playwrights, actors, short story writers and critics in planning and participating in the historic festival. The event presented over seventy performances involving music, dance, theater and poetry before excited crowds that numbered in the hundreds.

The artists included Alurista as well as Juan Gómez Quiñones, Ines Hernández, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Américo Paredes, Luis Valdez, Ricardo Sanchez, Abelardo Delgado, Jose Montoya, Raymundo Perez and Nephtali de León, all of whom would become well-known authors and artists. Four sixth grade students from Laredo along with their teachers Irene Peña, Olga Piña and Carmelita Cabello stole the show in the auditorium of Juárez-Lincoln University. The 500-member audience gave the young poets an extended standing ovation. According to Peña, the girls and their teachers symbolized the hope that the inter-generational aspect of the Festival Floricanto guaranteed that the Chicano art movement would continue to thrive.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Artists from the university, energized by their participation in the successful Festival Floricanto, continued their work, some of it in classes that Alurista offered through CMAS. They also developed a broader range of skills that involved organizing exhibitions, conferences, musical performances and publishing capabilities. The university artists that participated in expanding the network included Tejeda, Barraza, Sam Coronado, Silvia Orozco, Rey Gaytán, Victoria Plata, Raul Valdez, Pablo Torres, Janis Palma, David Cavazos, Raquel Elizondo, Flores Peregrino and Janis Palma. Inés Hernández Tovar, another faculty hired by CMAS in 1975 joined the group and, along with her students, organized a women’s conference and a collection of mostly poetry titled *Hembra* the following year.

In addition to organizing exhibitions, dances and larger scale events like the Festival, artists established a publishing outlet named CASA Publications that is also documented in Mexic-Arte’s exhibition. One of their early works was a 52-page book of poetry and stories from twelve student writers and Alurista titled *Trece Aliens* (1976)*.* Other publications followed, including ‘Ta Cincho (1977), a collection of the works of fifteen poets and an art piece on the Texas Farmworkers called Huelga (1976) by Amado Peña. Victor Guerra, the editor of *El Despertador de Tejas* (1975-77), also joined with Raquel Elizondo and David Cavazos in preparing ‘Ta Cincho and in publishing a series poetry and essays in *Tejidos*. The journalhas also devoted special issues to music and women. *Tejidos* was founded in 1973 as a national outlet by Rene Cisneros and Jaime Cavillo.[[16]](#endnote-16) Elizondo and Cavazos worked closely Angélica Martínez in editing the journal, however, they have not yet received the recognition that they deserve as writers, editors and a devoted activist couple.

The Chicano artists, encouraged by the successful Floricanto Festivals, expanded further into the local Chicano community. They kept their organizational acronym but changed their name to Chicano Artistas Sirviendo a Aztlán (CASA) in keeping with a broader community-based vision that they were advancing. The use of Aztlán invoked the spiritual homeland of the Aztecs, one of many nationalist symbols that became associated with the social movement, and pointed to a strong attachment to an ancestral, indigenous past. The “Sirviendo” term in the title underscored the purpose of serving and representing communities of Mexican-origin persons.

CASA members took one of their boldest organizing moves in 1979 when they established the League of United Chicano Artists, whose acronym LUChA signified political struggle or cause.[[17]](#endnote-17) Barraza and Raul Valdez had brought together Juan Pablo Gutierrez, Amado Peña, Inés Hernandez Tovar, and the poet Alberto Urista (Alurista) to create the organization as a forum for collaboration among artists and leaders working across artistic lines of division to explore social equity and cultural visibility within the emerging Chicano movement. LUChA supported programs like the Ballet Folklórico Aztlán de Tejas, a local traditional cultural activity, and the Festival Estudiantil Chicano de Arte y Literatura, an annual art appreciation program and festival that involved thousands of East Austin K-12 students and their Austin ISD teachers over a span of seven years.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The artists in CASA collaborated with Tejidos in 1978 to produce Encuentro Artístico Femenil, a book that resulted from a festival by the same name that Juárez-Lincoln University hosted in 1977. Nineteen women poets, musicians, painters, photographers, and other visual artists participated in the Encuentro. The workshop at the Chicano university featured women writers from CASA and Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste. Raquel Elizondo and Inés Tovar Hernández organized the event. The MAS organization emerged from these activities. MAS organized a series of activities between 1978 and 1980, including the Conferencia de Plástica Chicana in Austin (1979), and the exhibitions like the following: Voces Mexicanas (Juárez-Lincoln University, 1978), the MAS y MAS exhibit (San Antonio, 1978); Bésame MAS, at the [Xochil Art and Culture Center](https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/klx01) in Mission (1978-79); Las Compañeras (Austin, 1980); Un Encuentro sin Palabras (Austin, 1980); and Mujeres de Texas, at Mars Studio (Phoenix, 1985).[[19]](#endnote-19)

Barraza took a major organizing lead with members of LUChA and MAS in organizing the Conferencia de Plástica Chicana in 1979. The meeting was the first major public event that convened artists and scholars from the United States and Mexico on the subject of Chicano, Latin American and Mexican art. Orozco was especially important in planning the conference while studying at San Carlos Academy of Art in Mexico City. Alicia Arredondo, Modesta Treviño and Raul Valdez also lent valuable assistance.

Barraza took the initiative in setting up the international collaboration for the conference. She travelled to Mexico City to team up with Sylvia to negotiate the participation of artists and scholars from Mexico and the transfer of art pieces and photographs to be exhibited alongside Chicano works at the Tonantzín Gallery at Juárez Lincoln University. Logistical and funding challenges tested the young artists, but the animated and arguably classist criticism that some of the Mexican participants levelled at them tried their patience and discouraged them. While at Barraza’s home, the Mexican visitors repeated a popular and elitist condemnation of Mexican immigrants, that is, they left the homeland for selfish reasons. They also castigated the quality of the Chicano art.[[20]](#endnote-20) The Chicanos, including Barraza and other established artists and critics, like José Montoya, Pedro Rodríguez and Dr. Quirarte, responded in heated fashion, no doubt disappointed that the purportedly progressive Mexican intellectuals would be so ignorant of Chicano history and reluctant to support a nascent Chicano art movement that looked to them for guidance and encouragement.[[21]](#endnote-21)

Meanwhile, Valdez had established a base of operations at Juárez-Lincoln University as a center for many of the Chicano art activities, including a gallery for permanent showings of Chicano art. Valdez was not new to activism. While still living in his hometown of Del Rio, he participated in the 1969 protest against the decision by Governor Preston Smith to disband the Volunteers in Service to the America Minority Mobilization Program.[[22]](#endnote-22) He also took part in political activity while an art student at Texas A&I University. Valdez participated in a student takeover of the President’s Office, painted murals with political contents and sang movement songs during student-organized political events. Valdez continued with his political and artwork when he moved to Austin in 1975. He began to paint murals with support from the City of Austin and participated in Veterans Peace Action Teams that provided humanitarian aid to the people of Nicaragua. His self-defining participatory approach in producing art started early while enrolled at the University of Texas and reveals a driving idea to make Chicano art part of the record of the community’ patrimony:

We did a survey [while at the University of Texas] and started knocking on people’s doors. . . Whenever I do a mural or public art piece, I hardly ever come up with my own ideas for the whole thing. Even for this mural for the School of Social Work, I interviewed people and asked people what they thought I should include, stories, ideas, issues. So, I have a participatory project model that I employ. It seems to have been working out, because people assume ownership, they feel ownership with the pieces.[[23]](#endnote-23)

*Los Elementos*, the mural that he painted in 1976 on the Juárez-Lincoln University building, announced that the group had arrived in the community with a form of politics that Valdez called “creative activism.” The mural’s long farm rows under the hot undulating sun represented the difficult work performed by farmworkers. Only one of them remained in the fields, a young angel-like woman with a vegetable in hand, flying towards the viewer as if she had finally freed herself of the stifling labor on the farms. The pre-Columbian symbol of the plumed serpent appeared on the left, making sound in hieroglyphic form that two men turned into music that inspired the young woman to fly. A friendly observer, according to Valdez, described her as “the statue of liberty.”[[24]](#endnote-24)

In 1983, Raul Salinas, the poet from Austin who was to achieve national prominence with the poem “A Trip Through the Mind Jail,” memorialized Valdez’ mural when he narrated a short film depicting the demolition of the Juárez-Lincoln University building by another major activist named Gilberto Rivera. The film showed the destruction of *Los Elementos* as well as another of his murals inside the building. When Salinas narrated the catastrophic event with his poem “Feel Good Song,” he gave figurative and dramatic emphasis to the mural as self-knowledge that is essential to life and forever etched in durable memory:

Knowledge is beginning  
Knowledge has no end  
Knowledge is forever  
Knowledge is living

Chicano artists committed other constructive activities to memory, including the Festival Estudantil Chicano de Arte y Literatura.

**Festival Estudiantil Chicano de Arte y Literatura**

Between 1979 and 2008, artists and other community activists worked closely with the teachers in organizing workshops on Chicano art, literature and history that gave youth opportunities to engage the technical and imaginative sides to the creation of art and to share the attendant skills and aspirations with the public and their families. The teachers and the artists selected the top three works in art and literature for each grade level in the participating schools. The selected young artists participated in a citywide contest where three winners were announced for each grade level. The organizers of the *Festival Estudiantil* followed by exhibiting the final selections at a citywide awards program. The festive occasion included food, music, and literary readings of the student’s works. Each student received a Certificate of Participation and the immeasurable benefit of the special attention that teachers, parents and the artists provided them.

El Festival Estudiantil, sponsored primarily by LUCHA and CASA from their offices at Juárez Lincoln University, showed great dedication to the community. Its focus on curriculum, teaching and Mexican subjects in the intellectual development of youth also gave the budding art movement special meaning. The artists were demonstrating the softer side to their politics of protest by giving importance to the idea that art could serve as an engine of generational change through socially conscious and artistically inclined youth. Throughout, they emphasized the appreciation of art in itself as well as a learning experience that could contribute to the social, emotional and intellectual development of the students and their communities.

The artists shared these concerns with the larger protest community at the same time that they integrated traditional cultural practices into their work with sensitivity and with a critical eye towards change outside as well as within the Mexican community. A musical group like El Conjunto Aztlán, for example, adopted the traditional rhythm and style of the music of a *corrido* or *guapango* but included bold lyrics on the oppression of farm workers and the need for Mexicans to organize.[[25]](#endnote-25) A theater group such as Teatro Vivo, on the other hand, performed the traditional Christmas story of the shepherds in search of the baby Jesus but incorporated progressive notions of women’s rights and ideas regarding the evils of capitalism.[[26]](#endnote-26)

It also helped that the artists nurtured a reputation as a service-oriented group. They hosted the Festival Estudiantil, recorded local history through murals, and provided entertainment venues like dances and theater productions free of charge or admission at reasonable rates. They also supported public campaigns in defense of Mexican communities against police misconduct, Ku Klu Klan marches, chemical pollution, urban renewal and public education.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Aside from ingratiating themselves with the community by supporting the intellectual and social development of youth, the artists promoted a broader message of unconditional service that encompassed other activities. They recorded local history through murals, hosted art appreciation workshops for children and provided entertainment venues like dances and theater productions free of charge or at reasonable rates. They also supported public campaigns in defense of Mexican communities against police misconduct, Ku Klux Klan marches, chemical pollution, urban renewal and public education.[[28]](#endnote-28) Some may have disagreed with the artists and other community activists on their political views, but they could rarely, if at all, fault them for their seeming quixotic pledges for community support or defense.

El Conjunto Aztlán offered a dramatic explanation for such unselfish service to community with the chorus line that promised a profound sense of solidarity in their ballad, *Yo Soy Chicano, Yo Soy Tu Hermano*:

Yo Soy Chicano, Yo Soy Tu Hermano[[29]](#endnote-29)

You soy tu hermano, yo soy Chicano, I am your brother, I am Chicano,

Dame tu mano, vamos a volar, Give me your hand, together we’ll fly,

Bien dice el dicho, si sangra mi hermano, As the saying goes, if my brother bleeds,

Yo también sangro, la herida es igual. I bleed too, the injury is the same.[[30]](#endnote-30)

**Building Networks**

In the process of building networks, Chicano artists nurtured close relationship with different community organizations, including the Brown Berets. The Brown Berets, an organization with national standing that was often associated with the Black Panthers and the Young Lords from African American and Puerto Rican communities, established a community center that also lent assistance to the *Festival Estudiantil*. The organization included mostly young people with a reputation for being some of the more nationalist and militant members of their respective social movements. At one point in the early 1980s, El Centro Chicano, headed by Hortensia Palomares, became a cultural art center. Collaborating with the Brown Berets involved direct actions like protests, marches and boldly expressed anti-war and anti-imperialist ideas that reflected a reputational if not substantive departure from more moderate sections of the social movement.[[31]](#endnote-31)

The Austin artists were not limited to generating interest and support for a Chicano art movement in local areas. Work and studying opportunities or the spirit of cooperation animated them to extend their reach and, consciously or inadvertently, helped build networks of artists that overlapped and grew. The institutions that the artists established, according to an essay by Teresa Palomo Acosta and Kendall Curlee, became “Chicano Art Networks,” or crisscrossing lines of cooperation extending across Texas. Although more work is necessary to offer a fuller account of what constituted the Chicano art movement in Texas, we can begin to examine some of the more salient relations that joined artists from different places into a shared history. A case in point involved Texas A&I University, the four-year liberal arts college from South Texas whose artists participated in networks involving Chicano artists from Austin.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Like at the University of Texas, Chicano art students from Texas A&I University participated in a student movement that prompted them to become self-conscious purveyors of oppositional words, sounds, images and shapes in creative service to Mexican American communities.[[33]](#endnote-33) Their movement began in 1967 when concerned students began to meet regularly to discuss pressing issues in their communities and on campus. One of their earliest initiatives occurred in 1968 when student activists established a newsletter and an open-air forum to discuss pressing issues. Writers and speakers addressed the under-representation of Chicanos in the university, the Vietnam war, the marginalization of Mexicans throughout the country and the organized efforts to create change by groups like the United Farmworkers’ Organizing Committee and the Texas Farmworkers’ Union.[[34]](#endnote-34)

The students won elections for student government, the Student Union (the office responsible for campus programming) positions, Homecoming Queen and Lantana Queen (the Lantana festivities were formal, coming out celebrations for young women, all of whom had previously been Anglos). Student demands also led to the establishment of an Ethnic Studies Center in 1969 to provide student services and an academic program in Mexican American Studies.[[35]](#endnote-35) The activist students also helped organize walkouts by protesting public school students in Kingsville (1968) and Robstown (1971) who were calling for the end to corporal punishment and policies against the speaking of Spanish. They also called for the hiring of Mexican American teachers and for adopting courses on Mexican American history and culture.

The art students who participated in the student movement at Texas A&I University included the previously mentioned Barraza and Peña, as well as César Martínez, José Rivera, and Cármen Lomas Garza. Progressive faculty, including Ward Albro and George Coalson in History, Charles Cotrell in Political Science, Stanley Bittinger in Sociology, Dimas Steinbaugh in Education, William Renfro in Art, and Pedro Rodríguez, a young professor who joined the Art Department in 1971, guided their work and intellectual development. According to Barraza, the Chicano students participated in the major political events as university students, and often contributed their skills as artists. She recalled participating in meetings with student leaders and preparing protest posters and leaflets at Professor Renfro’s home and in a community center that Chicano activists had established to give support and direction to the student walkouts.[[36]](#endnote-36)

The student activists, encouraged by their organizing success in the Kingsville area, reached out to other parts of the state with the idea of cooperating with like-minded activists in expanding the social movement. Gutiérrez led the way by moving to San Antonio to become a co-founder of MAYO in 1967. He was soon joined by his partner Bazán in a political campaign to establish MAYO chapters throughout the state, including Texas A&I University and the University of Texas. Two years later, they would return to Gutiérrez’ hometown of Crystal City to lead the Winter Garden Project, an organizing effort that resulted in the establishment of the LRUP as a local organization in 1970 and, later, as a third political party with candidates seeking state offices in the 1972, 1974 and 1978 elections. Other Texas A&I University leaders, including Carlos Guerra and Alberto Luera became succeeding state chairs of MAYO.

MAYO and the LRUP incorporated the work of artists in their organizing work. In 1969, for instance, Gutiérrez commissioned Garza to curate an exhibition of Chicano art at the state MAYO meeting at Mission, Texas. Also, writers like Ines Hernández, Evey Chapa, Emilio Zamora and Martha Cotera, and visual artists like Peña, Barraza and Garza, Martínez and Rivera were regularly featured at MAYO and LRUP regional and statewide meetings. Theater groups performing at these meetings included El Teatro de los Barrios (San Antonio), the Teatro Chicano de Austin, and the Teatro de los Malqueridos (Mercedes).[[37]](#endnote-37)

The MAYO and LRUP meetings were largely devoted to political discussions on the purpose and direction of the organizations. The artists, added meaning and substance to the discourse with narrative histories of the movement, stage productions on issues of current importance, and poetic calls for unity among Native American communities in the United States and Latin America. Presentations on the history of the movement provided a sense of continuity to a righteous cause for equal rights that extended far into an Indigenous past. The claims for equal rights for women in society as well as in the movement itself were also addressed with great passion. Recitations of poems that spoke of a collective will to resist and a sense of worth in being Mexican energized the spirit and encouraged action. Agit-prop performances underscored the plight of workers, often with some humor to alleviate the psychic impact of their exploitation.

The organizers of the MAYO and LRUP meetings gave ample attention to the poster art by Peña. A 1976 image of a murdered twelve-year old named Santos Rodríguez attracted special attention. Police officers had taken Rodríguez out of his grandfather’s home in Dallas without a court order and one of them shot him dead in the back seat of a patrol car while being interrogated about a nearby robbery. Peña had Rodríguez face the viewer with a childish grin, and blood flowing from a bullet hole on his forehead. Bearing witness to the murder, Peña added the following to underscore the widespread violence against young Mexican males in legal custody, “24 De Julio EL NIÑO SANTOS FUE ASECINADO POR LA CHOTA [police] COMO AQUELLOS QUE AQUI NOMBRO.” The “aquellos,” or the others, who faced the same fate, included the names of eight other Mexicans from throughout the state who had died while at the hands of police.

Students and faculty from Texas A&I University and the University of Texas often made use of contacts made in statewide meetings to advance inter-campus relations. A good example is a musical group called Atlantis (also known as Aztlantis) from the University of Texas that performed songs from La Nueva Canción tradition in Latin America in the middle 1970s. The group was an agglomeration of visual artists, poets, writers and musicians that had originally operated as Revolución at the University of Texas and that subsequently became the famed Conjunto Aztlán. They visited the Texas A&I University campus on at least three occasions as part of the cultural programming by the Ethnic Studies Center directors, Emilio Zamora and Ines Hernández, both of whom had close relations with CMAS at the University of Texas.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Another example is the midwestern folk singer, activist and scholar named Jesús “Chuy” Negrete.[[39]](#endnote-39) Originally from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, Negrete settled in Chicago as a child of a family of farm workers. He completed bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education and built a career as a folk or movement singer, first as a member of El Teatro del Barrio and then as a solo artist. Negrete performed at protest rallies, picket lines and scholarly and community conferences throughout the country. His frequent visits to Texas during the 1970s usually involved collaborations between Mexican American Studies programs to minimize costs and afford Negrete fair payment for his performances at places like the University of Texas, the University of Houston and Texas A&I University. In one of his standard presentations, he analogized the aspirations for a just society in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Chicano movement of the 1970s. Negrete’s performances always projected an optimistic view of change and reminded everyone of the powerful influence that artists could have when they performed with skill and confidence.

The life trajectories of Barraza, Garza and Peña illustrate other interconnections that artists established while building their networks. After her undergraduate years at Texas A&I University, Barraza moved to Austin and became one of the most active members in its Chicano art movement. While pursuing a master’s degree in fine arts, she supervised several undergraduate students in art, including Fidencio Durán who was to become the most prolific Chicano muralist in Austin. Barraza also participated in student politics and became well known for her work, including a large charcoal drawing of a bedridden, despondent mother with child overlooking the conference room of CMAS, at Sid Richardson Hall.

Barraza returned to Texas A&I University as a member of the faculty in Art and eventually assumed the position of Chair of the department. As noted earlier, Barraza also assumed major leadership positions in the Chicano art movement in Austin. In the 1980s, she was especially important in advancing art by Chicanas as a curator and general organizer for important exhibitions at Laguna Gloria, Women at Work and Juárez-Lincoln University. Barraza was also instrumental in organizing conferences on Chicana and Chicano art in venues throughout the state.[[40]](#endnote-40)

Garza, Barraza’s older classmate from high school and Texas A&I University, also lived in Austin, although for a shorter period of time. While at Texas A&I University, she participated in social movement events, including the previously mentioned MAYO Conference in Mission. Barraza later noted that she was especially impressed to see the importance that the MAYO leaders gave Chicano art and the appreciation that activists from throughout the state expressed. The Mission conference was consequential. It resulted in the establishment of two higher education institutions affiliated with Antioch College, Jacinto Treviño College and Juárez-Lincoln University.[[41]](#endnote-41) She studied at Jacinto Treviño College for at least one year partly under the mentorship of Martha and Juan Cotera, notable activists and Chicano art collectors. Garza also had a close relationship with Juárez Lincoln University when the Austin institution assumed responsibilities as a cultural art center.[[42]](#endnote-42)

After attending Jacinto Treviño College, Garza joined Mujeres Pro Raza Unida (also known as Mujeres Por Raza Unida), a caucus group within LRUP founded by Martha Cotera and Evey Chapa. The organization was composed of many if not most of the party’s women members, including some of the leading Mexican American feminists in the state like Inocencia “Ino” Alvarez, Luz Bazán, Yolanda Birdwell, Alma Canales, Rosie Castro, Lydia Espinoza, Gloria Guardiola, Belinda Herrera, María Jiménez, Juanita Luera, María Elena Martínez, Irma Mireles and Lidia Serrata. Artists like Barraza, Hernández, Nora Gonzalez Dodson (a graphic artist in Austin) and Garza participated in LRUP exhibitions and programs organized by Modesta Treviño, an Austin curator, historian and life partner to the well-known painter named José Treviño.[[43]](#endnote-43)

While in Austin, Garza was associated with Juárez-Lincoln University and artists like Barraza as well as the Chicana Research and Learning Center, a bibliographic resource center also founded by Cotera and Chapa. Pedro Rodríguez, her former professor from Texas A&I University who had moved to Washington State University, recruited her to study in Pullman. After a short stay in Washington, she moved to San Francisco, California where she worked as an artist with La Galería de la Raza between 1976 and 1981, after which she dedicated her full-time attention to developing her career as a Chicana artist.[[44]](#endnote-44)

Peña, originally from Laredo, spent sixteen years teaching art in Laredo, Crystal City and Austin where he consistently placed high school students in positions of recognition in University Interscholastic League competition. After obtaining his undergraduate degree in art and education at Texas A&I University, he returned to the classroom in Laredo. Peña began his Master’s work in art and education at Texas A&I University in 1970, at which point he participated in the student movement alongside Barraza and Garza. By 1972, he had moved to Crystal City to join with other young activists seeking to establish a political model of Chicano community control. After a two-year stay in Crystal City, Peña moved to Austin where he taught for six years at Anderson High School. Peña ventured into the business world of commercial art and established a studio and two galleries in Austin and another one in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he continues to practice his art. He also established a long-term relationship with Austin Community College as an art professor and donor of Chicano art.[[45]](#endnote-45)

Peña, the older artist and established businessman that he was, provided logistical and financial support to artists like Barraza and her fellow women artists. He maintained a relationship with the LRUP and the farmworker’s cause and became popular for his poster art that addressed issues like violence against young males in legal custody, the workers’ movement and Mexican history. By the late 1970s, Peña was devoting much of his artwork to the related area of southwestern art largely in recognition of his Indigenous heritage of the Yaqui tradition. He began to give more attention to his Santa Fe Gallery and Southwestern art in the late 1970s when he moved his entire operations to New Mexico.[[46]](#endnote-46)

Peña did not move before joining with fellow Austin artists in establishing yet another network-building connection with a group of artists from San Antonio called Con Safos. The San Antonio group had adopted different names since its establishment in 1969 due to internal differences, however, a core group of artists maintained a continuous presence with exhibitions and other activities. José Treviño and Martínez, Texas A&I University graduates that had relocated to San Antonio, joined the group in the early 1970s and convinced former classmates Barraza, Garza and Peña and an undergraduate art student from the University of Texas named Carolina Flores to follow their lead. It was not long before the Martínez, Rivera and the Austin group had grown disenchanted with the internal divisions in Con Safos. By September 1974, they had left the organization and established Los Quemados, composed of Chicano artists from San Antonio and Austin. Soon after forming Los Quemados, the Mexican American Business and Professional Women of Austin hosted an exhibition in Austin featuring Los Quemados, including Treviño, Garza, Martínez, Vicente Rodríguez, Carolina Flores, Luis Guerra, Barraza, and Peña, and a poetry recital by Alurista. Cotera, one of the founders of the women’s organization, was one of the principal organizers of the exhibition.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Los Quemados hosted their own exhibition between June 20 and July 13, 1975, at the Mexican Cultural Center, on the Hemisfair Plaza.[[48]](#endnote-48) The same artists featured in the Austin event participated in the San Antonio exhibition, alongside a new artist named Santos Martínez. Santos, like César Martínez before him, was to play a special role in expanding the network of Chicano artists even more. He had obtained a bachelor’s degree from Trinity University in San Antonio and his master’s degree in fine arts from the University of Michigan. Soon thereafter, Santos secured the position of Director of the Contemporary Art Museum of Houston and by 1977 had assumed the responsibility of curating a major exhibit of Chicano art called Dale Gas.

The participation of a major art institution located in the largest city in Texas signaled a major advance in the expansion of the network of collaborating Chicano artists. The exhibition featured César, Santos, Peña, Rivera, as well as Jesús “Jesse” Treviño, Melesio “Mel” Casas, José Esquivel and Roberto Rios from San Antonio, Francisco “Frank” Fajardo from San Marcos, Luis Jimenez from El Paso, Joe B. Rodríguez from Houston, and Jorge “George” Truan, a Texas A&I graduate in art from Brownsville. A glaring issue marred the event that otherwise represented a qualitative leap in the history of a growing Chicano art network: the absence of Chicana artists.[[49]](#endnote-49)

Despite the noticeable snub, the Houston exhibition signaled an early recognition by a major art institution of the importance of Chicano art. Local institutions like the previously noted Laguna Gloria and Women’s Work from Austin also stand out as departures of a trend of mostly independent initiatives by Chicanas in sponsoring art activities and building Chicano art networks. The Texas Art Commission (TAC), the state agency responsible for fostering art activity in the state through their local partners, must also be credited with supporting Chicano art projects beginning in the late 1970s including Austin’s Festival Estudiantil Chicano de Arte y Literatura. In all of these instances, Chicano artists were pivotal.

Chicana artists initiated or quickly seconded the collaborations in Austin. Also, the Dale Gas exhibition resulted to a great extent from community pressure and the leadership of Santos Martínez. The fortuitous presence of friendly TAC officials like Rick Hernández and John Paul Batiste in the TAC also contributed to the institutionalization of Chicano art. Their work, however, could not have been possible if Chicano artists had not been prepared to exhibit their work or seek the support of the TAC with proposals for public projects. These initiatives included artists like Evangelina “Vangie” Vigil and Juan Tejeda, and groups like the [Xochil Art and Culture Center](https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/klx01) from Mission, Texas.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Chicano artists, curators and benefactors like Barraza, Garza, Peña, César Martínez, Santos Martinez, Hernández and Batiste did yeoman work in establishing inter-connections, building networks and in advancing Chicano art in Texas. One artist, Sam Coronado, especially stands out for his indefatigable work in maintaining his impressive body of work at the same time that he supported the development of fellow artists.

Coronado, the son of a Dallas migrant family, a veteran, a student activist at the University of Texas and, as noted earlier, took part in establishing the Chicano Art Association at the university and the Mexic-Arte Museum.[[51]](#endnote-51) Upon graduation from the University of Texas in 1975, Coronado established himself in painting, printmaking and graphic arts and achieved national prominence with his work. The Guadalupe Cultural Center (San Antonio, 1987), Mexic-Arte Museum (2011) and the Latino Cultural Center (2012) has exhibited his work.

His printmaking work began after two residences with Self Help Graphics in East Los Angeles in 1991. Coronado founded Coronado Studio, a collaborative print workshop, in the early 1900s. The workshop trained numerous master printers from throughout the country, including Pepe Coronado, Brian Johnson, Paul Fucik, and Brian Rice. He followed by establishing in 1993 the Serie Project, a nonprofit printmaking residency program that has hosted more than 300 residencies for numerous artists, including Malaquias Montoya, Ester Hernández, César Martínez, Celia Alvarez Muñoz, Juan Sánchez, Diógenes Ballester, and Scherezade García. The Serie Project also provided an important service to a national community of artists, and advanced the Chicano art movement as part of a larger cause for art.

**La Peña, Mexic-Arte and the ESB-MACC**

The institutionalization of Chicano art has continued in Austin with Mexican American artists playing central roles in promoting Chicano art through at least three cultural art centers, La Peña Gallery, the Mexic-Arte Museum and the Emma S. Barrientos Cultural Center. The abiding search for a permanent location for Chicano and Mexican art activity has multiple origins, although the students from the University of Texas must be credited for establishing one of the clearest records of bold initiatives and continuous art activity.

The Chicano Center and Juárez-Lincoln University served temporarily as art centers during the 1970s as Chicano artists searched for a more permanent location for their activities. The Brown Berets tried to provide a home to the artists, however, they were primarily focused on initiating social change through direct action. Dr. Leonard Mestas, the President of Juárez-Lincoln University and erstwhile proponent of Chicano colleges at the historic Mission meeting, faced his own challenges. He was mostly preoccupied with maintaining the university.

In fairness to the pioneering institutions, the challenges that they faced prevented them from providing continuous and effective support. The Brown Berets were often too busy responding to harsh police actions that they could not give their undivided attention to the arts. The Chicano university, on the other hand, always faced financial challenges and elected officials who questioned their claim as legitimate institutions of higher learning. Fortunately, three new art-focused centers emerged as central institutions dedicated to giving direction and meaning to the Chicano art movement.

The centers emerged at different points in time and followed distinct trajectories in their development while also sharing important connections with a national and regional Chicano art movement. They represent important accomplishments made possible by the work of Austin-based artists in the 1970s. La Peña opened its doors in 1981, Mexic-Arte followed in 1984, and the ESB-MACC in 2007. They have their own individual histories, although they are also the products a growing Chicano art community that continues to give meaning, recognition and purpose to the work of their artists in concert with like-minded Chicanos in Texas and in other parts of the American Southwest where Mexicans predominate.

La Peña Gallery originated as an adjunct of Las Manitas Restaurant, a downtown eatery owned by sisters Cynthia and Libby Perez. Originally from San Antonio, the Perez sisters attended the University of Houston where they participated in the Chicano student movement. The pair joined in efforts to improve the representation of Chicanos at the university and supported various causes, including the farmworkers’ and women’s movements. They also maintained close relations with student activists at the University of Texas largely through activists that had lived and studied in the Houston area, including Ines Hernández, Richard Ante, John Herrera and Irma Soto. Cynthia Perez also studied at the University of California, Berkeley and participated in the Chicano movement of the San Francisco Bay area during the 1970s.

The restaurant became a downtown landmark both as a restaurant and cultural art center, although it shifted its focus to art programming when the restaurant closed, and La Peña Gallery moved into its present location on Congress Avenue. The exhibitions, readings and music performances that they regularly hosted gave the Mexican-Latino artist community an early opportunity to share their work and gain a foothold in the larger cultural arts scene. La Peña secured cultural arts funding from the city, but it has largely functioned as an independent initiative after rising rental costs led to the closing of the restaurant and a move to a smaller, but more art-focused center on the same block of its original site. Their programming focuses on women as artists and subjects as well as on immigrant and Indigenous causes, especially evident in the **Alma de Mujer** Center for Social Change that the Peña Gallery maintains as a 22-acre retreat center located in Northwest Austin.

Sylvia Orozco, Sam Coronado and Pio Pulido, Orozco’s partner and a transplanted artist from Mexico, established the second cultural art center in 1984. As indicated earlier, Orozco, Coronado and Pulido were trained artists who pursued active careers as artists. Their varied training and interests gave Mexic-Arte its general and extraterritorial identity. Coronado was trained in the United States, Pulido in Mexico, and Sylvia in both the United States and Mexico. The result has been a cultural art center that appeals to the public as an institution with a bicultural identity and an authentic affinity for Mexican and Chicano art.

The Mexic-Arte founders had organized and hosted artistic events years before the official founding of the organization in 1984. Orozco, the organization’s director, added a legitimating influence to its artistic activity by showcasing historical and contemporary Mexican art. Mexic-Arte eventually expanded its program to include Latino art and benefitted from major funding agreements with the city. Orozco has also worked closely with Coronado Studio, La Peña Gallery and the ESB-MACC to offer the public a comprehensive treatment of Chicano cultural arts as well as traditional cultural activities from Mexican communities.

The ESB-MACC opened its doors to the public in 2007, after a period of about fifteen years of protests and the negotiated establishment between city officials and groups of community activists and artists, many of whom were associated with La Peña Gallery and the Mexic-Arte Museum. The city’s adoption of a downtown renewal project in the early 1980s provided community groups an opportunity to insert themselves into the politics of development with the claim that “urban renewal” had done irreparable harm to the physical and spiritual integrity of the Chicano community in East Austin.

Once the ESB-MACC, community representatives petitioned the city to name the center after Emma S. Barrientos, a longtime activist known for numerous community activities that she led, including the recovery and practice of important cultural practices like the Ballet Folklórico. The assignment of the name Barrientos acknowledges her dedicated service to the community as well as the Center’s cultural arts programming that includes traditional cultural activities as well as new artistic expressions. The purpose of the cultural arts center is to preserve, create, present and promote the cultural arts and heritage of the Mexican Americans in Austin and the surrounding area. It is part of a collection of twelve museums and community centers overseen by the city’s Parks and Recreation Department. Center staff has incubated and incorporated numerous projects into its repertoire, including theater groups, educational projects and children’s activities.

One of the differences in the histories of the three centers is their degree of independence from the City of Austin and other funding sources. La Peña—operating as both an art and social center—has followed a relatively independent process of development in managing, funding and programming its activities. The ESB-MACC, on the other hand, has been the most reliant financially and programmatically on its relationship with the city’s Parks and Recreation Division. This explains both the stable support that it has received as well as its vulnerabilities to the vagaries of city politics.

Mexic-Arte has also assumed contractual obligations with funding sources and accepted protocols and understandings with their advisory groups. However, it has also followed a course of development theoretically situated between La Peña and the ESB-MACC. This explains its longevity as well as its innovative programming like the linking of Chicano art with Mexican art and projects like the “5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor” with other preservation initiatives in the Mexican American community.

Despite different historical trajectories, the three cultural arts centers have maintained constructive relationships that have often included collaborations by its founders and staff in organizing public events and in supporting each other. This is not to say that tensions and even conflicts have not occurred, but that cooperation has been the major theme in their relations. A shared origin at the University of Texas and long-standing relations among the artists account for much of this cooperation.

**Breaking with the Past**

The Chicano art movement found expression throughout the United States, mostly in different parts of the country where Mexican-origin persons predominated, and most Chicano artists self-identified as activist members of the larger Chicano social movement for dignity, justice and equal rights. Like other activists, artists typically looked to the history and art movements in Mexico for symbolic meanings and inspiration, including the Mexican masters Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo. They did this partly to compensate for the failure of the educational system in the United States to value local or regional Mexican history and culture, that is, the Chicano artists themselves were generally unaware of the artists that had preceded them.

A narrowly constructed education no doubt kept Chicano artists from practicing their art in dialogue with artists that came before them in their own communities. The schools, in other words, did little to equip Chicano youth with knowledge of the Mexican artists of the past. The segregation of Mexican youth into separate schools and a tracking system within schools, both of which offered a substandard academic preparation, also disallowed the possibility of a fusion of the past with the present during the post-WWII period. The Chicano artists themselves, however, may have to admit some responsibility for breaking with the past if the historical record continues to demonstrate that they did not engage the work of earlier artists.

Two artists that achieved different degrees of prominence but remained distant from the Chicano art movement in the 1970s and 1980—Humberto N. Cavazos (1908-99) and Porfirio Salinas (1910-73)—illustrate the failure to fuse the past with the present. Cavazos, originally from Rio Grande City, studied with the famed Spanish painter José Arpa Perea at his Academia de Pintura of San Antonio in the 1920s, as well as with Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera, possibly during the 1930s. Despite an impressive career, Cavazos remained an industrial arts teacher for most of his adult years and outside of the purview of the Chicano art movement during the 1970s.[[52]](#endnote-52)

Salinas was born in Bastrop, Texas and, like Cavazos, left home in search of the training and experience as an artist that only a place like San Antonio could offer him. Various artists in San Antonio trained or influenced the young Salinas, including Arpa Perea, the same painter who had earlier taught Cavazos. According to one of his biographers, Jacinto Quirarte, the local art establishment did not pay much attention to his masterful work of bluebonnets in the Central Texas countryside until President Lyndon B. Johnson and First Lady Bird Johnson made it known that they were avid collectors of Salinas paintings and decorated the White House and in his home near Johnson City with his works.[[53]](#endnote-53)

Cavazos and Salinas built prodigious careers as Mexican-origin artists. Despite this, historians, art critics and especially Chicano artists have not accorded them the recognition that they deserve. Also, Chicano artistic work from the 1970s, truncated as it was from its natural past, failed to integrate their work and sustain an intentional transmission of customs and beliefs that would allow us to speak of an early phase in a tradition of Chicano art.

In an article on Salinas, Ricardo Romo, a historian, Chicano art collector and art critic from San Antonio, offers an explanation for the break with the past among the Chicano artists from San Antonio that may apply to other places in the state. The Chicano artists of the 1970s, including the members of Con Safos, according to Romo, looked away from Salinas as well as from Quirarte and the pre-1970 Mexican-origin artists that he included in the first major publication on the subject in 1973.[[54]](#endnote-54) They did this at the same time that they were faulting the U.S. art establishment for largely failing to incorporate them. They disregarded Quirarte because he, and Salinas, represented the kind of mainstream or commercialized art that was anathema to them. Chicano artists, consequently, looked to the south, to the “Mexican masters of an earlier era.”[[55]](#endnote-55)

**Conclusion**

The work of the Chicano artists ranged broadly, from paintings, posters and novels to poetry, theater and music. Visual artists took many of the organizing leads, and women were among the most prominent in advancing Chicano art and networks. Most were academically trained, although some were self-taught. They gave intellectual and spiritual expression to the everyday and traditional cultural practices in their communities and, although they expressed diverse opinions on the nature and purpose of Chicano art, they often joined together in organized fashion to build what they called the Chicano art movement.

The movement had a presence in college and university campuses throughout the state and offered the young artists the opportunities to tie their fortunes to the cause. And they did. They prepared by participating in a fledgling student movement that was making political and organizational connections with various other components of the growing social movement. The artists developed their own identity as socially responsible Mexican Americans with creative affinities at the same time that they sponsored exhibitions, performances and presentations at places like the University of Texas.

They also engaged important questions regarding the content and purpose of the art that they were creating. The most basic questions that they asked themselves were, What is Chicano art, was it to be defined its Chicano subject or the cultural identity of the artist? The responses varied, according to Goldman and Ybarra Frausto, the two well-known art critics who are credited with mapping parts of the history of this movement. Most Chicano artists from the 1970s, claimed that the term Chicano should signify an identification with the culture and social experiences of Mexican-origin people and the social movement that spoke on their behalf.

The artists declared in their publications and public statements that Chicano art was as legitimate as any other form of artistic expression and that their creative work did not abide by the conventional practice of doing art for art’s sake or by offering a representational form of art that was devoid of social purpose. Angélica Martínez, the editor of *Tejidos*, made this clear when she pointed out in an early interview that Chicano artists had a responsibility to give voice to their communities, although she also predicted that Chicano art would vary in its social purpose.[[56]](#endnote-56)

With a high-sounding purpose, they meant to convert the commonplace, the everyday experiences into elevated points of beauty. They also used the mundane realities of the Chicano experience, including what Tejeda called “el dezmadre,” or the chaotic reality of oppression, to creatively expound on the liberating purpose of their art and, in the process, reclaim the basic human worth of Chicanos. In other words, before art could be made to recover its being and claim its rightful place in the world, it had to establish that Chicanos were subjects worthy of recognition in and of themselves and that the artists were the authentic and effective purveyors of that art. The act of recovery and affirmation was as revolutionary as other movements of liberation from which they drew inspiration, lyrics and techniques, including La Nueva Canción, the hybrid music that combined traditional and European songs in the anti-colonial movements from Latin America that began in the 1950s.

Chicano artists in the initial phase of protest embraced the singular responsibility of critically engaging the social realities that accounted for Mexicans as a bottom segment of the working class and an ethnic minority. That is, they gave their art the social purpose of encouraging acts of political engagement on social justice issues. According to Tejeda, the artists spoke of a “revolutionary aesthetics.” They proposed, supported and celebrated culturally sovereign communities that exercised a right to practice and advance their beliefs, values and customs with pride, legitimacy, taste and beauty.[[57]](#endnote-57)

Valdez, on the other hand, was more relaxed in his views. He was just as determined to address social inequalities, however, he also underscored that once he finished a mural, it was up to people to make it their own and to speak for its importance or allow developers to demolish a work like “Elementos.” The women artists were as firm with their views on the constructive representation of women in their works. They invoked Indigenous and more recent iconic figures like Tonantzín and the Virgin of Guadalupe to support their formidable claims as prior occupants in the hemisphere and foundational elements in the cultural identity of Mexicans.

According to Mel Casas, a leading Chicano artist, art professor from San Antonio and thought leader Chicano artists had to make ready when called upon to decide who they were going to be in the world. He called this orientation the “contingency factor.”[[58]](#endnote-58) They had to prepare to affirm their social identity as Mexicans and hope that the visual congruity in their art “will in turn give us psychic harmony.” The social marginalization of Mexican Americans required no less. The alternative was to become what Casas believed to be inauthentic members of their communities. He added social purpose to his observation:

Chicano artists are duty bound to act as spokesmen and give visual reality to the Chicano vision. We are iconoclasts, not by choice but by circumstances—out to destroy stereotypes and demolish visual clichés. We hope, in the process, to encounter new pure forms that will act as catalysts for a visual nascence and awaken the dormant Chicano potential.[[59]](#endnote-59)

Ultimately, Chicanos had to establish the authority to speak on behalf of their aggrieved communities. In other words, they were not simply producing or performing works of art to demonstrate the skills, deftness or visions exclusively attributed to established Anglos artists or to object to the treatment of their people. Eduardo Díaz, the former Executive Director of the Smithsonian Latino Center and now the Interim Director of the Latino History Museum in Washington, D.C., uses the work of another thought leader, the eminent scholar Américo Paredes, to make this point. When Paredes authored *With His Pistol in His Hand* to tell the story of the Mexican who stood up for his rights with a Mexican source of information, the Mexican ballad, he led the way in claiming the cultural authority to speak for himself and others like him at a time when Mexicans were denied a voice, that is, the right to speak on their own behalf as the sovereign people that they were.[[60]](#endnote-60)

# Díaz, himself an artist and activist from the 1970s, calls the historically rooted desire to identify with the community and to act on its behalf a response to a collective “inner voice,” or a righteous sense of consciousness, which led him and his contemporaries to join the social movement of the 1970s. He uses the fight over Chicano Park in San Diego, California to demonstrate how members of the Logan Park neighborhood joined with activists to prevent city officials from building a California Highway Patrol substation on the site of a community park. Chicano Park became an important symbol of reclaiming a part of “the homeland,” as well as an expression of group empowerment, community-building and a sense of belonging. The artists gave added meaning to the eight-acre site with striking murals on bridge supports and retaining walls, beautiful, stylized images drawn from history, contemporary issues and movement-inspired visions of a better future.

Chicano artists from Austin responded to the inner voice with high principles and hard work. Their abiding view of service and righteous cause defined them as socially responsible persons at a young age in their social and intellectual development. They also modelled the kind of caring behavior that reinforced important mutualism, cooperation and even altruism in their communities. Their impressive devotion to the social and psychic well-being of their communities also involved sacrifices associated with the giving of one’s time and efforts in service to the needs of others. And they did this with personal and professional dedication to creative thought and action.

1. Notes

   . The exhibition opened on April 14, 2002, at Mexic-Arte’s location, 419 Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas. It was curated by Isabel Servantez. The Chicano art movement refers to one of the many constituent causes that made up the Chicano social movement. <https://mexic-artemuseum.org/event/chicano-a-art-movimiento-y-mas-en-austen-tejas-1960s-to-1980s/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. . I use the term Chicano when referring to Mexican-origin people. The term is of long usage. At one time, U.S.-born Mexicans and older immigrants used the term to deride recent immigrant of working-class origins. The young activists of the 1970s, assigned it a positive meaning in keeping with a popular self-determining principle associated with the social and art movements of the period. To call oneself a Chicano, consequently, became a bold statement of self-valorization and actualization that signaled membership in a new generative social movement for dignity and social justice. I also use the terms Mexican and Mexican American interchangeably to acknowledge their use as self-referents, usually by older persons. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. # . I characterize the Chicano social movement as the recent iteration of a social cause for dignity, equal rights and social justice that the Mexican American community has consistently staged over an extended period of time. The cause that begins in the 1970s, in other words, is part of a larger movement that has generated distinct identifying ideological constructs, leadership, organizations and histories of political setbacks and advances. I borrow this theoretical concept from the work of Juan Gómez-Quiñones, especially the following: *Chicano Politics, Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990); *Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994). The following works speak to Mexican American history and the idea of succeeding social movements in Mexican American history, including the following: Arturo F. Rosales, Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996); Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Guadalupe San Miguel, Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, “Chicano Movement (1965-1980)” In Vickie L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol, Eds., *Latinas in the United States, a Historical Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 151-5; Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization; Ignacio García, Mexican American Youth Organization, Precursors of Change in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 2007); Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican America from the Colonial Period to the Present Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966–1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vásquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966-1977* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014); Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican American Experience in Texas: Citizenship, Segregation, and the Struggle for Equality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. . The literature on the Chicano art movement is extensive. The following general references offer a useful point of departure in the study of Chicano art and its cause: Jacinto Quirarte, [*Mexican American Artists*](https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/809688#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-249%2C210%2C1481%2C829) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973);Shifra M. Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965-1981 (Berkeley: Chicano Studies Library Publication Unit, 1985); Goldman, “The Iconography of Chicano Self-Determination: Race Ethnicity and Class,” Art Journal, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 167-73; Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Eds., Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, University of California Los Angeles, 1991); Gary D. Keller et al., *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art: Artists, Works, Culture, and Education*, 2 vols. (Tempe: Bilingual Review Press, 2002); Ybarra‐Frausto, “[Imagining a More Expansive Narrative of American Art](https://search.lib.utexas.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_gale_infotracmisc_A143605006&context=PC&vid=01UTAU_INST:SEARCH&lang=en&search_scope=CentralIndex&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=CentralIndex&query=any%2Ccontains%2Ctomas%20ybarra-frausto&offset=0),” *American Art*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2005), pp. 9-15; Holly Barnet Sanchez, “Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Amalia Mesa Baines, A Critical Discourse from Within,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (December 2005) pp. 91-93; Carlos Francisco Jackson, Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009); E. Cármen Ramos, “The Latino Presence in American Art,” *American Art*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 7-13; Teresa Palomo Acosta, “Chicano Mural Movement,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 17, 2023, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/chicano-mural-movement. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ## . Ybarra-Frausto, “Imagining a More Expansive Narrative of American Art,” American Art Vol. 19, Issue 3 (Fall 2005), p. 13.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. # . The exhibition opened on April 14, 2002, at Mexic-Arte’s location, 419 Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas. It was curated by Isabel Servantez. The following provides access to the images as well as six videotaped lectures, a historical essay and two panel discussions, and a historical essay: <https://mexic-artemuseum.org/event/chicano-a-art-movimiento-y-mas-en-austen-tejas-1960s-to-1980s/>. See the following study for an ethnographic account of the Mexican American students at the University of Texas during the 1970s: José Limón, “The Expressive Culture of a Chicano Student Group at the University of Texas at Austin, 1967-1975,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1978.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. . Orozco has served as the Executive Director of Mexic-Arte since its founding, while Coronado and Pulido, Orozco’s former husband and an academically trained artist from Mexico, remained active and well-known artists associated the center. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. . A reviewer of the exhibition described the well-attended display of visual artwork, music, dance, poetry, literature, and film as “an exhaustively researched, enlightening study that puts the central Texas Chicano art scene in full view.” Lauren Moya Ford, “Unearthing Austin’s Overlooked Chicano Art History,” *Hyperallergic*, May 8, 2022. Teresa Palomo Acosta, “Chicano Mural Movement,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 17, 2023, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/chicano-mural-movement. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. # . The electronic site to the exhibition contains a useful autobiographical essay by Juan Tejeda, one of the participants in the Chicano art movement at the university and Austin: “A Personal Testimonio, The Convergence of the Chicano Movement, Chicano Studies and the Xicano/a Cultural Renaissance in Austin, Texas, 1972-1980.” The exhibition provides additional informative essays on other related topics as part of its Humanities Scholars Lecture Series. They include works by Dr. Cynthia Orozco, **Dr. Ricardo Romo,**Dr. Lucía Abramovich Sánchez,” Dr. Gilbert Cárdenas, Dr. Amelia Malagamba Ansótegui and Dr. Brenda Sendejo. Mexic-Arte has also made available electronic recordings of two panel discussions entitled “Memories, Recollections y MAS.” Artists and scholars participated in the panels. For information on MAYO, see the following: Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Teresa Palomo Acosta, “Mexican American Youth Organization,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican-american-youth-organization>.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. . The history of the Austin Chicano art movement is relatively underdeveloped, although the aforementioned essay by Tejeda and other sources in the Mexic-Arte exhibition provide important records on the subject. For basic readings by Ybarra Frausto and Goldman, consult the following: Shifra M. Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965-1981 (Berkeley: Chicano Studies Library Publication Unit, 1985); Goldman, “The Iconography of Chicano Self-Determination: Race Ethnicity and Class,” Art Journal, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 167-73. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. . Ignacio M. García, United We Win; The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party (Tucson: University of Arizona Mexican American Studies Research Center, 1989); Armando Navarro, *The Cristal Experiment; A Chicano Struggle for Community Control* (Madison: University of Note Dame, 1998); Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party; A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. . Marianne M. Bueno, “Conferencia de Mujeres por La Raza,” In Tiffany K. Wayne, Ed., Women's Rights in the United States; A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Issues, Events, and People (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2015), pp. 61–62; David G. Gutiérrez, "Sin Fronteras?" Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968-1978,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Summer, 1991), pp. 5-37. Although I did not attend the women’s conference, I knew some of the Chicanas from the university and Austin that did. I left the University of Texas in 1976 to teach at the University of Texas at San Antonio (1976-78) and, subsequently, at Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M University Kingsville) and collaborated with fellow members in a research and political collective at the university (Zero Work) that was instrumental in organizing the immigration conference. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. . Interview with Santa Contreras Barraza by Cary Córdova, November 21-22, 2003, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-santa-barraza-13254. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. . Tejeda and Flores headed a Chicano musical group named *Reforma o Revolución,* that subsequently became an indigenous *danza and* El Conjunto Aztlán, a traditional ensemble that wrote, produced and performed Chicano movement songs. Numerous University of Texas students participated in these groups. The early groups included Tejeda, Flores, David Cavazos, Raquel Elizondo, and Ines Hernández. Tejeda, Flores, Daniel Mendoza, Bobby Ramírez, Kiko Ramírez, and Alfredo Cruz were early participants in El Conjunto Aztlán Photographs of El Conjunto Aztlán and related leaflets announcing their performances can be found in Mexic-Arte’s online exhibition. Interview with Raul Valdez, June 13, 2016, [Civil Rights in Black and Brown](https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/CRBB/) Project, Mary Couts Burnett Library, Texas Christian University, [The Portal to Texas History](https://texashistory.unt.edu/), https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth992326/m1/. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. . Phone conversation with Irene Peña with the author, February 21, 2020. She is the sister of the renowned Southwestern artist, Amado Peña, who attended Texas A&I University and joined the Chicano art movement in Austin in the middle 1970s. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. . The following electronic site includes numerous recovered interviews with Chicano activists from the 1970s, including one that focuses on Tejidos and Martínez. “Chicano Poetry,” *Onda Latina*, Interviewer, Armando Gutiérrez, November 1, 1978, University of Texas Austin, <https://www.laits.utexas.edu/onda_latina/program?sernum=000524511&header=Culture>. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. . Barraza was born in Kingsville. She received her bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1975 and her Master’s in the same field in 1982 from the University of Texas at Austin. Santa taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Pennsylvania State University, and La Roche College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and ended her college teaching career at Texas A&M University in Kingsville, where she chaired the Art Department. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1975 and her Master of Fine Arts in 1982 from the University of Texas at Austin. Santa Barraza was also a member and cofounder of two pivotal Chicano art collectives: Los Quemados and Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste (MAS). María Herrera-Sobek, *Santa Barraza, Artist of the Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001. Mary Thomas, “Teaching and Creating Art in the Borderlands; A Conversation with Santa C. Barraza,” *Panorama, Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2022); Interview with Santa Contreras Barraza. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. . LUCHA, Museo del Barrio (Austin: LUCHA, 1979); Greg Stephens, “LUCHA, The Message Hasn’t Changed, Only the Delivery,” *The Austin Chronicle*, September 17, 1982; Tejeda, “A Personal Testimonio.” [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. . Teresa Palomo Acosta and Kendall Curlee, “Chicano Art Networks,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/chicano-art-networks>; María-Cristina García, “Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mujeres-artistas-del-suroeste>; Kendall Curlee, “Xochil Art and Culture Center,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 11, 2023, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/xochil-art-and-culture-center. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. . Barraza had received an art degree at Texas A&I University before she arrived in Austin. Soon after the conference, Barraza enrolled as an MFA student at the University of Texas, making her the first Chicana graduate student in the art department studying at the University. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. . Montoya was one of the best known poet and activist in the Southwest by the time of the Austin conference. Born in New Mexico, Montoya was a veteran and one of the founders of an art collective of activists called the Rebel Chicano Art Front that later adopted the title of the Royal Chicano Air Force. Montoya already had an extensive record of published poetry and had served as the poet laureate of Sacramento, California. Rodriguez mentored artists that were to achieve success in Texas, including Barraza, Garza, José Treviño, César Martínez, and Amado Peña. He also served as the Director of the Guadalupe Cultural Art Center (1983-1998), one of the most successful cultural arts centers in Texas. Quirarte served as a member of the art faculty at the University of Texas and published the first major book on Mexican American artists. He was a specialist in Maya history and culture and served as the dean of art at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Ella María Díaz, *José Montoya* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, 2020); Jessica Fuentes, “Pedro Rodríguez, 1936-2022,” *Glasstire,* December 8, 2022; Interview with Santa Contreras Barraza; Quirarte, “The art of Mexican-America,” (Houston: Humble Oil & Refining Co., 1970); Interview of Jacinto Quirarte by Paul Karlstrom, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1996, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jacinto-quirarte-13553>. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. ## . Ruben Barrera, “Memories Of the VISTA Minority Mobilization Program and of An Earlier Self,” *Ibero Aztlán*, August 25, 2021, https://iberoaztlan.com/articles/memories-of-the-vista-minority-mobilization-program-and-of-an-earlier-self/.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. # . Jen Reel, “Direct Quote, True Colors,” *The Texas Observer*, February 4, 2016. Valdez has been one of the most prolific Chicano muralist and activist in Austin. He attributes his politicization to the failure by the public schools to teach about Mexican American history and culture, Vietnam and the mural movement in Mexico. For images of the mural at the School of Social work, see: Mikala Compton, “See the Historic Mural at UT School of Social Work,” *Austin American-Statesman*, June 2, 2023.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. # . Valdez painted his first mural at El Centro Chicano, a community center established by the Brown Berets organization. See the following for images and a short history of the mural: “Gentrification (El Centro Chicano Mural),” *Echoes from the Archives Amplifying Latinx Voices*, <https://hiddenhistoriesut.org/items/show/199>. A review of his mural work appears in the following: Nancy Flores, “Inside life of Raúl Valdez, One of Austin’s Top Muralists,” *Austin American-Statesman*, December 11, 2018.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. . El Conjunto Aztlán began at the University of Texas as a musical group called Reforma o Revolución. Its first performance on campus occurred in 1976, in conjunction with an art exhibit organized by the Chicano Art Student Association whose membership included Santa Barraza, Sam Coronado, Silvia Orozco, Rey Gaytán, Victoria Plata, Raul Valdez, Pablo Torres, Juan Tejeda, José Flores and Janis Palma. Tejeda, “A Personal Testimonio.” [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. . Rupert Reyes and Jo Ann Carreon, the artistic and executive producers of Teatro Vivo, respectively, founded the theater company in 2000. They participated in the Chicano theater movement while in California. They were associated with El Teatro de la Esperanza from San Francisco, as well as with the well-known playwright and scholar Jorge Huerta from the University of California at Santa Barbara. El Teatro Vivo has become one of the most popular *teatros* in Austin. It has been staging plays, including La Pastorela, at the Emma S. Barrientos-Mexican American Cultural Center since its opening in 2007. Interview with Rupert Reyes and Jo Ann Carreón, by Dr. Alice Batt, How We Write, University Writing Center, University of Texas at Austin, September 2017, Podcast and transcription, https://uwc.utexas.edu/about/how-we-write-podcast/. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. . The following interviews address multiple controversial issues and include biographical information on major historical figures like Susana Almanza, Ernesto Fraga, Paul Hernández, Sabino “Pio” Renteria, Gilberto Rivera and Jane Rivera, as well as organizations like the Brown Berets and People Organized for the Defense of Mother Earth and Her Resources (PODER). The artists from the University of Texas gravitated towards the Brown Berets and PODER, the community organizations that were best known for their bold public statements of protest and direct actions during the 1970s. Interview, Ernesto Fraga, by Gloria Espitia, Austin History Center, June 15, 2013; Interview, Susana Almanza and Sabino “Pio” Renteria, by Gloria Espitia, Austin History Center; Interview, Gilbert Rivera, by Steve Arionus and Vincio Sinta, June 15, 2016, the [Civil Rights in Black and Brown](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth992337/#collections) Collection,  [Mary Couts Burnett Library](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth992337/#partners), Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas; Interview, Gilberto and Jane Rivera, by ATXN/Watershed Department, City of Austin, Austin History Center February 24, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. . The following interviews address multiple controversial issues and include biographical information on major historical figures like Susana Almanza, Ernesto Fraga, Paul Hernández, Sabino “Pio” Renteria, Gilberto Rivera and Jane Rivera, as well as organizations like the Brown Berets and People Organized for the Defense of Mother Earth and Her Resources (PODER). The artists from the University of Texas gravitated towards the Brown Berets and PODER, the community organizations that were best known for their bold public statements of protest and direct actions during the 1970s. Interview, Ernesto Fraga, by Gloria Espitia, Austin History Center, June 15, 2013; Interview, Susana Almanza and Sabino “Pio” Renteria, by Gloria Espitia, Austin History Center; Interview, Gilbert Rivera, by Steve Arionus and Vincio Sinta, June 15, 2016, the [Civil Rights in Black and Brown](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth992337/#collections) Collection,  [Mary Couts Burnett Library](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth992337/#partners), Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas; Interview, Gilberto and Jane Rivera, by ATXN/Watershed Department, City of Austin, Austin History Center February 24, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. . El Conjunto Aztlán began as Reforma o Revolución, a musical group that made its first appearance at an art and musical exhibition at the university in 1976. The group became a Danza in the Indigenous Conchero tradition from Mexico once the artists had migrated into the Mexican community of Austin. At one time, the group adopted the name of Atlantis and Aztlantis. It later became El Conjunto Aztlán, led by José Flores Peregrino on the bajo sexto, the twelve-string bass guitar, and Juan Tejeda, on the button accordion. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. . “Yo Soy Tu Hermano, Yo Soy Chicano,” *Rolas de Aztlán, Songs of the Chicano Movement*, Performed by Conjunto Aztlán, 2005, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5jqQr7PXXU>. Translation of the chorus line by the author. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. . The social movement registered underlying differences and even divisions at the same time that its leaders professed unity as a political goal and a shared cultural identity based on discrimination, inequality and a widespread dissatisfaction. The divisions involved substantive issues. The members of La Raza Unida Party and the Brown Berets, for instance, opposed the war in Vietnam as an imperialist project, while their counterparts in the American G. I. Forum and the League of Latin American Citizens generally supported it as an expression of ethnic loyalty to gain public approval. Accompanying differences were not always as consequential. The Chicano artists as well as the members of La Raza Unida and the Brown Berets, for example, expressed strong critiques of U.S. military policy that reflected intellectual affinities with the anti-colonial movements in the African, Asian and Latin American continents. A youthful perspective borne out of personal fears that they could be drafted and sent to Vietnam added to their aversion to war. Despite these divisions and differences, a general unity prevailed that underscored racialized experiences as marginalized Mexicans and the broad-based and unified action that this social reality seems to require. For comprehensive reading on Mexican American political history, including its divisions and differences in the social movement, see the following: Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics, Reality and Promise, 1940-1990;* Gómez Quiñonez, *Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940*. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. . The following essay argues for networks of collaborating Chicano artists that suggest an art movement: Teresa Palomo Acosta and Kendall Curlee, “Chicano Art Networks,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 11, 2023. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/chicano-art-networks. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. . Consult the following for histories of Chicano student walkouts, Texas A&I University, the Chicano movement and salient Chicanos historical figures in Texas. Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo; The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); José Angel Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant; Lessons from Cristál* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Cecilia Aros Hunter and Leslie Gene Hunter, *Texas A & M University Kingsville* (Mount Pleasant, NC., Arcadia Publishing, 2000); Miguel A. Guajardo, Francisco J. Guajardo, “The Impact of Brown on the Brown of South Texas: A Micropolitical Perspective on the Education of Mexican Americans in a South Texas Community,” *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 501-26; James B. Barrera, “The 1960s Chicano Movement for Educational Reform and the Rise of Student Protest Activism in San Antonio’s West Side,” *US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal*, Vol.1 (2017), pp. 82-97.I was an undergraduate student (1965-69), a master’s student (1970-71), and a member of the faculty and Director of the Ethnic Center (1977- 80) and participated in the student movement as a student and as a faculty sponsor of the Raza Unida Club. Also, I knew the persons noted in this section on Texas A&I University and draw on my memory to comment on them and their work. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. . The following autobiography by one of the major student leaders at Texas A&I University provides first-hand information on the Chicano student movement in Kingsville and Robstown: Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant.* [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. . The university reneged on its commitment to maintain the Center as a permanent administrative and academic unit by denying it the necessary budgetary and staffing support. The decision by the Provost in the Fall of 1981 to transfer the Center’s courses to the conventional departments largely in response to criticism by students led to the resignation by the director and the end of the Center. The succeeding directors were Victor Nelson Cisneros, José R. Reyna, Emilio Zamora, Ines Hernández (interim) and Emilio Zamora. Mexican American Studies was brought back to Texas A&M University Kingsville in 2022 when President Robert H. Vela Jr. and the Texas A&M System Board of Regents established the Mexican American Studies Institute and appointed Dr. Alberto Rodríguez as its new director. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. . Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. . Ines Hernández, originally from Galveston, participated in the student movement at the University of Houston and secured a teaching appointment at the University of Texas in 1975, where she became a feminist poet and, in keeping with her Nez Perce and Mexican heritage, a champion for alliances between Mexican and Indigenous community. Chapa, from Alice, became one of the major feminists in the state that co-founded, Mujeres por La Raza Unida, a major women’s group within the LRUP. Zamora, from La Feria participated in the student movement at Texas A&I University and the University of Texas where he was enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Mexican American history. Cotera and her husband, Juan, hailed from El Paso. They worked at Jacinto Treviño College, the first Chicano college in Texas that was affiliated with Antioch College, as well as in Crystal City after the 1970 Chicano takeover and in Austin. Martha, also a major feminist leader in the state, has continued working in the Chicano movement and has become one of the major benefactors of Chicano art. The biographies of Peña, Barraza and Garza, Martínez and Rivera are addressed more fully in the text. Most of this history is based on the author’s memory, as well as in some of the already cited sources, especially the essay on “Chicano Art Networks,” by Palomo Acosta and Curlee. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. . Phone conversation with Juan Tejeda by Emilio Zamora, June 2, 2023. Zamora became the director while enrolled in the Ph.D. Program in Chicano Studies at the University of Texas, while Hernández replaced him on an interim basis in 1979-80 while he served as a faculty member with the Raza Studies program at the University of California, Berkeley. As was customary when an area studies center sponsored a group like Atlantis, administrative staff from the Ethnic Studies Center would collaborate with area programs to provide the traveling groups additional opportunities to perform. This was the case in 1978, when Atlantis arranged a performance with Canto al Pueblo, an art festival originating in Corpus Christi. The artists included David Cavazos, Victor Guerra, Eduardo Garza, Jose Flores Peregrino, Juan Tejeda and Bernardino Verastique. Leonardo Carrillo, *Canto al Pueblo, An Anthology of Experiences* (San Antonio: Penca Books, 1978). For a history of Festival Floricanto and Canto al Pueblo, consult Chapter Seven in the following: Arnoldo Carlos Vento, Mestizo: *The History, Culture and Politics of the Chicano and Mexican* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997) 237-42. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. ### . Linda Fregoso, Chuy Negrete; Historian, Musician, Composer, Playwright, Organizer, Activist, *Onda Latina*, The University of Texas at Austin, https://www.laits.utexas.edu/onda\_latina/program?sernum=000510979&header=Culture Rubén Martínez, “In Memoriam: Jesus ‘Chuy’ Negrete,” Julian Samora Institute, Michigan State University, https://jsri.msu.edu/publications/nexo/vol-xxv/no-1-fall-2021/in-memoriam-jesus-chuy-negrete.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. . Prior to her faculty appointment at Texas A&I University, Barraza taught at Pennsylvania State University and La Roche College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. ## . Jacinto Treviño College was established in Mercedes, Texas, under the direction of Dr. Leonard Mestas, an ordained minister who obtained his Doctor of Education in Administration from the University Northern Colorado. Mestas and another administrator, Dr. Andre Guerrero, split with the college in 1971 and established the second Chicano college in Fort Worth, Juárez-Lincoln University. Jacinto Treviño closed its doors within a few years, while Juárez-Lincoln continued until 19879. Juárez-Lincoln moved to Austin in 1972 where it operated at St Edward’s University and, subsequently, at its own campus, on 715 East First Street. Both institutions were affiliated with Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio. Juárez-Lincoln operated out of Austin but administered satellite campuses in at least four locations in the state. Until 1975 the school was known as Juárez-Lincoln Center, but with the addition of a Bachelor of Arts program to its Master of Education program, it changed its name to Juárez-Lincoln University. Juárez-Lincoln ultimately administered three components, the master’s program, an undergraduate program and the National Farmworker Information Clearinghouse, a national resource center collecting data on migrant farm workers and programs serving migrant families. Aurelio M. Montemayor, “Colegio Jacinto Treviño,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed May 4, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/colegio-jacinto-trevino>; María-Cristina García, “Juarez-Lincoln University,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed May 4, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/juarez-lincoln-university>; Jaime Puente, “Juárez-Lincoln University; Alternative Higher Education in the Chicana/o Movement, 1969-1983,” Master’s Thesis, Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 2013.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. . Interview with Cármen Lomas Garza by Paul J. Kalstrom, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1997, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-carmen-lomas-garza-13540>; “Entrevista con Cármen Lomas Garza, Chicana Artist,” by Olivia Evey Chapa, Olivia. *Tejidos: A Bilingual Journal for the Stimulation of Chicano Creativity and Criticism*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter 1976), pp. 23- 46. The exhibition contained 30 pieces, including drawings, prints, ceramics and sculptors, all of which were transported by Alberto Luera, student activist from Texas A&I University and a MAYO member who eventually became its state director. The self-portrait of welded steel by José Treviño, a Texas A&I University art student, was one of the major attractions, according to Garza. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. . Phone Interview with Martha Cotera by Emilio Zamora, July 4, 2023, Notes in author’s possession; Cynthia E. Orozco, “Mujeres Por La Raza,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 05, 2023, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mujeres-por-la-raza. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. . Interview with Cármen Lomas Garza. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. # . Howard L. Anderson, *Amado Maurilio Peña, Jr.* (Albuquerque: R. S. Young Publishing Company, 1981); “Amado Peña—In His Own Words,” *Latinopia*, March 6, 2010, <http://latinopia.com/latino-art/amado-pena/>; “Interview with Amado Peña by Ada Hardin,” It’s Your Future, Austin Independent School District, October 29, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIWrNMlLCVU>.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. . Interview with Amado Maurilio Peña Jr. by Emilio Zamora, July 4, 2023, Interview notes in author’s possession. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. . Garza, Martínez and Peña submitted their letter of resignation to Con Safos on September 6, 1974. They participated in the Austin exhibition nine days later. A copy of the poster, designed by Peña, can be found in the electronic version of the Mexic-Arte exhibition. Treviño Garza, Martínez, Barraza and Peña have been identified. Rodriguez was from the Austin area, a former student at the University of Texas and the head of the art department at Juárez Lincoln University. He mostly painted geometric figures great detail and depth. Flores, originally from Fort Stockton, was also an undergraduate enrolled in the Bachelor’s in Fine Art program at the University of Texas. She obtained her master’s in fine arts at the University of Texas at San Antonio is known for her renditions of life in her family history. Guerra, a native of Laredo, former student at the University of Texas and once a member of the faculty at Austin Community College. He is especially known for his 1977 silkscreen depiction of the Texas farmworkers’ march to Washington, D.C., entitled Hasta La Gloria. Their works also appear in the Mexic-Arte exhibition. Letter from Garza, Martínez and Peña to Mel Casas, the Chair of the Board of Directors of Con Safos, September 6, 1974, Copy of letter in possession of Cesar Martínez. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. . “Artistas Chicanos, Los Quemados,” Chicano Archives, Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, <https://www.tumblr.com/chicanoarthistory/123300677217/chicano-archives-artistas-chicanos-los-quemados>. A copy of the above leaflet announcing the exhibition is in the private collection of César Martínez. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. ## . The following sources provides information on Martínez, the exhibit and the participating artists. Santos Martínez, *Dále Gas: Chicano Art of Texas. An Exhibition of Contemporary Chicano Art* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1977); Martínez, Biography from Vogt Auction Texas, askART, <https://www.askart.com/artist/Santos_G_Martinez_Jr/11304776/Santos_G_Martinez_Jr.aspx>.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. . Phone Interview with Rick Hernández by the author, June 1, 2023. Anonymous, “Texas Commission on the Arts,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed July 16, 2023, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/texas-commission-on-the-arts. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. . Reinoza, “Coronado, Sam Zaragosa, Jr.” [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. . Beginning in the 1930s, Cavazos also taught art in a New Deal-sponsored program in McAllen, painted a battlefield scene that appeared on the cover of a WWI memoir authored by José de la Luz Saenz, enrolled at Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M at Kingsville) and graduated Cum Laude from Pan American University with a Bachelor’s degree in art and history and maintained membership in Brownsville Council No. 3 of the League of United Latin American Citizens, and chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion. Some of his murals are available for viewing, at the Museum of South Texas History, St. Michael Archangel Church at Los Ebanos, Chec’s Restaurant, La Borde House, Rio Grande City. Cavazos co-created the mural at the Museum of South Texas with a person named Joseph Brennan. Based on a search in Ancestry.com, Brennan may have been a 23-year-old student at the University of Texas originally from Edinburg. The following sources address his biography and related topics: “Interesante exposición de acuarelas, ciento cincuenta obras de Javier Gonzalez y de sus discípulos San Antonianos se exhiben en el Museo White,” *La Prensa*, November 15, 1927; “Los triunfantes en la exposición de pintura de Mission, Texas,” *La Prensa*, November 20, 1928; “Exito Pro Clase de Arte,” *La Prensa*, February 19, 1934 “Educators of the Week,” *Rio Grande Herald,* November 23, 1972; “Obituary,” *The Monitor* (McAllen), March 30, 1999; Interview with Cavazos by the author, June 8, 1996, Notes in the author’s possession. Caroline Remy, “Arpa y Perea, José,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/arpa-jose>; “La obra de los pintores Arpa y Gonzalez en San Antonio,” *La Prensa*, Octubre 2, 1927, pp. 6-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. . Ruth Goddard, *Porfirio Salinas* (Austin: Rock House Press, 1975); Quirarte, “Salinas, Porfirio, Jr.,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/salinas-porfirio-jr>; Jeffrey Morseburg, “Porfirio Salinas, the Bluebonnet Painter,” *WordPress*, January 5, 2011, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://porfiriosalinas.wordpress.com/tag/hispanic-artists/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. . Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973). Although Quirarte included Salinas in his book, he left out Cavazos. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. . Ricardo Romo, “Porfirio Salinas, A Pioneering Latino Artist,” La Prensa Texas, August 26, 2022, accessed June 10, 2023, <https://laprensatexas.com/porfirio-salinas-a-pioneering-latino-artist/>. Their contemporaries, historians, feminists and essay writers like Hernández, Zamora and José Limón, on the other hand, did incorporate the work of writers such as Sara Estela Ramirez (Laredo, 1890-1910), Clemente Idar (Laredo, 1883-1934) Jovita González (Rio Grande City, 1904 – 1983) Emma Tenayuca (San Antonio, 1916-1999) and Américo Paredes (Brownsville, 1915-1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. . “Chicano Poetry,” Onda Latina. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. . Phone conversation with Tejeda, by the author, February 15, 2023. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. . Ruben C. Córdova, “A Contingency Factor, Mel Casas and Con Safo,” In Scott L. Baugh and Victor A. Sorell, Eds., *Born of Resistance: Cara a Cara Encounters with Chicana/o Visual Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), p. 171. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. . Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. . Paredes, “*With His Pistol in His Hand,” A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955). Earlier Texas authors and contemporaries with Paredes that contributed to a growing literature with the same self-determining impulse include Elena Zamora O’Shea, Carlos Castañeda, George I. Sanchez and Jovita Gonzalez. Zamora O’Shea, *El Mesquite* (Dallas, Mathis Publishing Co., 1935), Castañeda, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, 1519-1936*, 7 Vols. (Austin: Von-Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1936-1958), Sanchez, [*Forgotten People, A Study of New Mexicans*](https://search.lib.utexas.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991041922779706011&context=L&vid=01UTAU_INST:SEARCH&lang=en&search_scope=MyInstitution&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=LibraryCatalog&query=any%2Ccontains%2Cgeorge%20i.%20sanchez&offset=0) (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), Gonzalez, *Among My People* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1932). [↑](#endnote-ref-60)