IDENTIDAD

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Content Brief

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Rubén Ortiz-Torres, an artists featured in *Identidad*, states, “As much as we try, we cannot separate Los Angeles from Mexico… geographically, politically, ethnically or culturally.”[1] As a native of southern California I experienced firsthand this international integration and have always taken for granted that Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans compose a significant percentage of the population and play a vital role in American society. Of the 31.7 million Hispanics living in the United States in 2009, 21 million immigrated from or traced their lineage to Mexico. [2] Yet despite the large Mexican American population, many Americans disregard and discount the Mexican community within the United States, leading to what Howard N. Fox, the Curator of Contemporary Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, calls the “invisibility of Chicano culture in the American cultural landscape.”[3]

Just as Mexican Americans are invisible to mainstream America, their art is unseen and unacknowledged by the institutional art world. Mexican immigrant and Mexican American art and artists have been omitted from public exhibition, permanent collections, universities and academies, critical discourse, and canon formation.[4] Therefore these artists developed their own artistic canon.[5] Like Mexican immigrants themselves, their art connotes a sense of “other;” it is not American, not Mexican, and therefore not easily categorized. Yet, Mexican immigrant and Mexican American artists reject placing themselves solely in the “other” box because ethnic labels can lead to a predictable readings of their art and, even worse, serve as a barrier to institutional acceptance. However, these artists cannot completely disregard the influence of their heritage on their lives, nor deny the manifestation of it in their work.[6] Like many elements in a Mexican immigrant’s life, these two motivations, to conceal yet express their

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1 “MEX/LA: Mexican Modernism(s) in Los Angeles 1930-1985,” Museum of Latin American Art, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.molaa.org/Art/Exhibitions/upcoming-exhibitions/MEX-LA-Mexican-Modernism(s)-in-Los-Angeles-1930-1985.aspx.

2 Passel, Jeffrey S. and D’Vera Cohn, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010,” Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, February 1, 2011.

3 Fox, “Theatre of the Inauthentic,” *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, Sara Cody (ed) (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 76.

4 Noriega, Chon A, “The Orphans of Modernism,” *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, Sara Cody (ed) (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 17.

5 Ibid., 20.

6 Gonzalez, Rita, “Phantom Sights: The Official, the Unofficial, and the Oraficial,” *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, Sara Cody (ed) (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 50.

ethnicity and heritage, creates tension in their lives and their art. Art created in the United States by those of Mexican descent is a marginalized art category, just as people of Mexican descent living in the United States are a marginalized population. Just as Mexican immigrants are the most disenfranchised of the Mexican American community, their art is the most discredited. Yet, their art presents, "a cultural psychodrama in which realities that are invisible, alien, and outside of common knowledge begin the difficult movement toward visibility, parity, and understanding."[1] This notion of bringing hidden art to light serves as motivation for the exhibition. *Identidad* presents Mexican immigrant art, to members of their own community, mainstream America, and the art world, not just as an acknowledgement of Mexican immigrant art, but as a means to help express and understand their experience.

Perhaps the first spark of this exhibition ignited when I was eight years old. As my parents, a professor and lawyer, were rarely home in the afternoons, they hired a live-in housekeeper to help watch my brother and sister and me in addition to doing most of the daily chores around the house. Inés, our "live-in," was a beautiful young woman, probably in her early twenties who, when my parents hired her, had recently emigrated from Mexico. On the weekends Inés left our house in the suburbs to stay at her friend's apartment in East Los Angeles. On some Friday evenings I would accompany my mom when she drove Inés to a bus stop in the Valley, where she would then wait for the bus which took her the remaining hour or more ride to her friend's apartment in the city. I remember watching Inés as she stood at the bus stop chatting with her fellow bus-riders, most of them young Latina women, and wondering what her "weekend life" was like, a life that I had no part in, and being thankful that I was warm in my mother's car. One day my mother told me that Inés would be away for a while because she was traveling to Mexico for her brother's wedding. I remember sadly saying goodbye to Inés as she packed her room in my parents' house and wondering why she was taking most of her things. After we said our good-byes, my mother explained to me that Inés was unsure if she could return from Mexico. As an illegal immigrant, Inés was fearful of making it back across the border safely, and was bracing herself for the worst, the possibility of being detained in Mexico.

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1 Fox, "Theatre of the Inauthentic," 90.

It was then that I first realized how different two peoples lives could be - two people who not only lived in the same country, or the same town, but the same house - based almost entirely upon the country in which we had been born. Just as Inés was an integral part of our household, yet lived a separate life, Mexican immigrants in the United States are an essential asset to society, yet live a life separated from and ignored by most Americans who disregard their economic, social and cultural contributions. The art in *Identidad* not only expresses the Mexican immigrant experience in the United States but also asserts its validity and refuses to be ignored.

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Mission Statement

The struggle to preserve their Mexican heritage yet become "American" provides a conflicted sense-of-self for Mexican immigrants living in the United States. Contemporary Mexican immigrant art expresses the tension between these opposing pressures and therefore the complex Mexican immigrant identity.

Target Audience

- Immigrant and first-generation Mexican American adults
- Angelenos interested in Latin American and contemporary art

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Teaching Points

- Opposing issues of place, class and gender contribute to the identity crisis of the Mexican immigrant.
- Mexican immigrant art addresses these issues and therefore represents the hybrid and contradictory Mexican immigrant identity.
- Art is a valid and accessible tool for expressing cultural identity and experience.

Exhibition Goals

- For visitors to understand the struggles and perseverance of Mexican immigrants in the United States and their contribution to the greater American culture through art.

- To expose Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans to the art being produced in their community, and to validate art as a form of expressing cultural identity and experience.

- To serve as a source of cultural pride for Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.

- To encourage first generation immigrants to frequent and feel welcome in cultural institutions and museums.

Latinos, and in particular first-generation immigrants, view museums and other cultural institutions as unattainable. Even at the Latino Museum in Los Angeles, where the mission is to building a broader understanding of the rich history of Latino art and history, only 20% of visitors are Latino. By exhibiting at accessible venues, and through community outreach, *Identidad* emboldens first-generation Mexican immigrants to attend this and other museums and exhibitions.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles County claims the largest population of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the country and is home to more than 14% of the Mexican American population in the United States. More than four million Angelenos are of Mexican descent, accounting for nearly 45% of the County's population. Los Angeles also has a thriving art community and a history of recognizing and exhibiting Latin American art.

Site Selection

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA & Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center

While the primary exhibition will be on view at **The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA**, **Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center** for the Arts & Education, a near-by Latino cultural center, will serve as a satellite location and display a mini-exhibition in its gallery space. Placing a preview of the exhibition at the community center will help to reach the target audience of immigrant and first-generation Mexican Americans and encourage them to attend the main exhibition.

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Site Selection

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

MOCA is the only museum in Los Angeles devoted exclusively to contemporary art. It is committed to the collection, presentation, and interpretation of work produced since 1940 in all media, and to preserving that work for future generations. The Geffen Contemporary typically houses temporary or traveling exhibitions of recent works, often by lesser known artists.

The Space

Acquired as a temporary space for the museum, the building was originally constructed in the 1940s as a hardware store and subsequently used as a city warehouse and police car garage. In the 1990s noted California architect Frank O. Gehry led the renovation of the building, maintaining its industrial nature and thus endowing the gallery with a feeling of accessibility, informality and lack of pretension which may be less intimidating to the exhibition's target audience.

The exhibition will be housed in Building Four at the Geffen, consisting of 13,795 square feet of raw warehouse space.

Location & Access

152 North Central Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

The Geffen is located in Little Tokyo, an area housing several institutions of cultural diversity, and less than half a mile from Olvera Street and El Pueblo Historic Monument, both gathering places for the Latino community of Los Angeles.

Although Metro access is rare in Los Angeles, the Geffen is accessible from the Red and Gold Metro lines as well as three bus lines.

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Site Selection

Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center

The mission of Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center is to foster enrichment of all cultures, bridging the geographic, social, artistic, and cultural boundaries of Los Angeles, and beyond. Plaza is a focus of activity, a popular meeting place, and a regional center for the nearly five million Angelenos of Mexican and Latin American descent. Plaza de la Raza is a vital, exciting, creative force in Los Angeles and central to the cultural growth and development of the Chicano/Latino community, as well as the growth and development of the general public in Los Angeles.

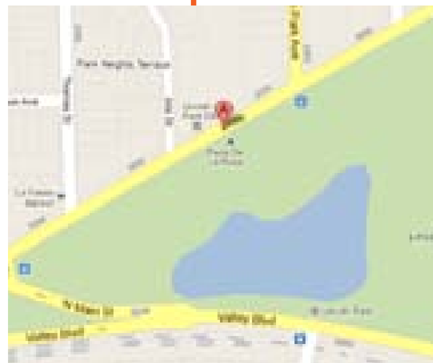
The Space

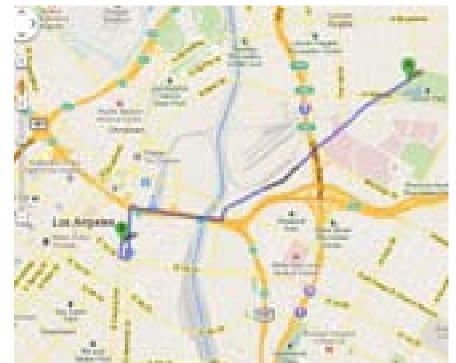
Plaza de la Raza is a complex of one-story, modern, stucco buildings organized around an open patio, adjoining the old Lincoln Park Boathouse. The art gallery displays Latin American art with an emphasis on local Latino artists.

Location & Access

Plaza is situated in the heart of East Los Angeles, the area of the city with the highest concentration of Mexican Americans and Latinos.

There are six bus stops within a half mile of Plaza, including the Metro local line 79 which runs downtown to the Geffen Contemporary.





3540 N. Mission Rd.
Los Angeles, CA 90031-3135
Distance from The Geffen Contemporary : 2.8 miles

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Exhibition Content Outline

I. INTRODUCTION
IA. The introduction provides an overview of the exhibition and its three themes, PLACE, CLASS, and GENDER, and introduces the visitor to the artists featured in the exhibition.

- ERRE: *Toya-an Horse*

IB. Introduction to the Artists

- Margarita Cabrera
- Livia Corona
- Salomon Huerta
- Pedro Lasch
- Rubén Ortiz Torres
- Dulce Pinzón
- Marcos Ramírez (ERRE)
- Jesse Valadez

II. PLACE
Mexican immigrants living in the United States often feel torn between two lands. PLACE addresses the motivations and consequences of physically migrating from one country to another, and the effect on the concept of "home."

IIA. Motivations for Leaving Mexico

IIA1. Living Conditions in Mexico: Poverty and Corruption

- Lack of adequate housing due to chronic poverty
- Housing crisis exasperated by local and national government corruption
- Marcos Ramírez ERRE: *Century 21*

IIA2. Living Conditions in Mexico: Consequences of Urbanization

- Mass housing project in responses to housing crisis
- Consequences of rapid urbanization and lack of community-building on small town way of life
- Livia Corona: *Two Million Homes for Mexico*

IIA3. The Lure of Opportunities in the United States

- Innate and primal desire to migrate
- Employment Opportunities

IIA4. Those Left Behind

- Family members in Mexico come to rely upon remittances from those in the U.S.

IIB. The Journey: A Difficult Passage

IIB1. Physical Difficulties and Dangers

- Physical trials of journey: distance, geography, climate
- Injuries and deaths during the journey
- Physical state of incoming immigrants

- Marcos Ramírez ERRE: *The Comeback Highway*
- Margarita Cabrera: Space In Between

IIB2. Psychological Difficulties
- Desire to carry possessions, culture and traditions with them to the United States
- Margarita Cabrera: *Desert Dreams*

IIC. The Border: A Gateway and Barrier to the U.S.
IIC1. The Border as a Conceptual Construct
- Dividing land into "closed" nations is a conceptual exercise
- Aztlán: Mexico's right to the U.S.
- Human rights should transcend physical and national barriers

IIC2. The Border as a Physical Obstacle and Symbol of Prejudice
- Prejudice attempts to prevent immigration
- Border Control: blocking and endangering potential immigrants
- Marcos Ramírez ERRE: *Prejudice Project*
- Margarita Cabrera: *Hummer*

IIC3. The Border as a Place of Poverty and Crime
- Border towns are places of unparalleled poverty
- Lack of resources leads to racism, crime and imprisonment for Mexican nhabitants

IID. Crossing to the U.S. and Forging a New Home in a New Country
IID1. Forming Communities and U.S. "Barrios"
- Mexican immigrants form strong communities in the U.S.
- Barrios strengthen communities and cultural ties to their homeland

IID2. Housing Available and Importance of Home-ownership
- Inadequacies of housing opportunities in U.S.
- How homes in U.S. differ from those in Mexico
- Cultural importance of home-ownership and why more Mexicans own homes than other minority or immigrant groups
- Salomon Huerta: *Homes*

IIE. Featured Artists
- Marcos Ramírez (ERRE)
- Livia Corona
- Margarita Cabrer

III. CLASS

Faced with economic hardships and social prejudices, Mexican immigrants struggle to succeed in the industrialized economy and materialistic culture of the United States.

IIIA. Class Distinctions Between Mexican Immigrants and Mainstream Population

- High poverty levels of Mexican Americans
- Poor job opportunities
- Barriers to quality education
- Livia Corona: *Enanitos Toreros*

IIIB. The Mexican Immigrant as Under class Victim of Prejudice

IIIB1. Preconceived Assumptions about Immigrants' Effect on the U.S. Economy

- Uniformed beliefs that immigrants steal American jobs and drain resources

IIB2. Anti-Immigrant Movements and Laws

- Prop 187: California law refusing rights and services to immigrants
- Current trend of "strong" immigration laws
- ERRE: *187 Pairs of Hands*

IIB3. An Alternative Solution to the "Broken" Immigration System

- Welcome plans: The Welcome Dayton Project

IIIC. The Mexican Immigrant as Working Class Hero

IIIC1. Invisible Contribution to U.S. Work Force and Economy

- Self-sufficient immigrants help the economy and make the American workforce more productive
- Mexican immigrants are a "phantom" society
- Mexican immigrants' contribution to society and the economy goes unrecognized

IIIC2. Supporting Two Economies

- Mexican immigrants contribute to two economies through their labor in the U.S. and remittances sent home to Mexico
- While invisible in the U.S. immigrants serve as heroes to those they support in Mexico
- Dulce Pinzón: *The Real Story of the Superheroes*

IIIC3. Defying the Odds: Escaping Traps of the Under class

- Despite living in poverty, Mexican immigrants tend to evade the conditions that characterize and perpetuate the "under class"
- Strong extended family connections and continual immigration contribute to this

IIID. Consequences of Industry

IIID1. The Importance of Craft in Mexican Tradition

- Craft making is a tradition passed down from generation to generation

- Craft making is a way of storytelling and comunicating community and cultural history

IIID2. Replacement of Craft by Factory Labor
- Factory-produced items have replaced what was once made by hand
- Mexican laborers are forced to abandon craft work in order to make a living, endangering
the tradition of craft
- Margarita Cabrera: *The Craft of Resistance*

IIIE. Car Culture: Representations of Status and Identity

IIIE1. Low-rider Culture of 1970s
- Resistance to conformity and insistence of cultural identity
- Cars as a means to transcend the barrio and attain middle-class status
- Low-riding culture strengthens community, family and fraternal relations
- Jesse Valadez: *Gypsy Rose*

IIIE2. Low-rider Culture of Today: Car Customizing in Los Angeles
- Pays homage to and critiques low-rider culture
- Rubén Ortiz Torres: *La Zamba del Chevy*

IIIE3. The Car as Unattainable Status Symbol
- Cars and car parts are manufactured by Mexican workers who can never afford them
- Luxury cars are the ultimate symbol of status and the materialistic standard of the "American Dream."
- Margarita Cabrera: *Hummer*

IIIE4. Gender Issues and Cars
- Men correlate cars to manhood
- Women's exclusion from car culture
- Margarita Cabrera: *Vocho*

IIIF. Featured Artists
- Dulce Pinzón
- Jesse Valadez
- Rubén Ortiz Torres

IV. GENDER

Gender roles play a large part in the identity formation of the Mexican immigrant. Both male and female immigrants struggle to resolve conflict between traditional Mexican gender roles and the different expectations and opportunities for men and women in the United States.

IVA. Machismo and Traditional Male Roles

IVA1. Mexican Machismo

- Latin American concept and tradition of “machismo”
- How machismo translates in the United States
- Salomon Huerta: *Wrestler Masks*

IVA2. Men’s Role as Breadwinner

- In order to provide for their family, Mexican immigrant men take jobs as day laborers, and are stereotyped as such
- Agricultural work in the U.S. vs. agricultural work in Mexico
- Immigrant contribution to the American agricultural economy goes unacknowledged and
- Margarita Cabrera: *Arbol de la Vida*

IVB. Traditional Female Roles

IVB1. Women’s Place in the Home

- Traditional female roles include that of wife and mother
- Mexican immigrant women often take jobs as housekeepers and are stereotyped as such
- Margarita Cabrera: *Domestic Appliances*

IVB2. Women’s Role in the Tradition of Craft

- Women as craft makers
- Margarita Cabrera: *Domestic Appliances*

IVC. The Struggle to Respect Cultural Traditions and Embrace American Feminism

IVC1. Mexicanas’ role in American Society

IVC2. How Female Mexican Immigrants Interpret Feminism

- Distinct Chicana feminism: tied to desire to benefit family and community, not personal motivations

IVD. Featured Artist

- Salomon Huerta

V. CONCLUSION: GLOBALIZATION AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Although Identidad deals with the search for and assertion of a particular cultural identity, the exhibition concludes by challenging the concept of nationhood and the relevance of national and cultural identities in a globalized world.

VIA. As Globalization Unites the World, Does it Negate National Borders?

- Globalization conceptually redefines nations and nationality
- International mass migration as an eternal and inevitable condition

- Globalization’s effect on art
- Pedro Lasch: *Latino/a America*

VIB. In Light of Our Globalized World, Are Cultural Identities Relevant?

- Race and ethnicity are ambiguous and artificial cultural constructs
- Salomon Huerta: Back of heads series
- Dulce Pinzón: *Multiracial*

IVC. Featured Artist

- Pedro Lasch

"The search for identity is then our primary concern."[1]

-Jacinto Quirarte, Mexican American Art Historian and Scholar

Identidad artist, Rubén Cruz Ortiz says that Mexican American artists engage in a "…love hate relationship with the American Dream," like "a romance gone wrong."[2] While the promise of opportunities lures immigrants from their homes in Mexico, the harsh realities of their lives in the United States sit in stark contrast to their hopes for a better life; for most Mexican immigrants the "American Dream" remains elusive. As they attempt to assimilate yet preserve their heritage, Mexican immigrants grapple with dichotomous and conflicting Mexican and American definitions of place, class and gender. Torn between two different ways of life and expectations of living, they come to identify themselves as somehow neither and both Mexican and American. The art and artists in Identidad express the tensions faced by Mexican immigrants and their struggle to create and communicate the unique Mexican immigrant identity.

Toy-an Horse (Fig. 1) by artist, Marcos Ramírez "ERRE" (1997), symbolizes this dual identity of the Mexican immigrant and the act of immigration itself, thereby serving as an appropriate emblem of, and introduction to, the exhibition. *Toy-an Horse*, a nearly 40 foot tall, wooden, two-headed rocking horse-like structure, alludes to the mythological Trojan horse, used to smuggle the Greeks into Troy, referencing the literal transportation of people and cultures from one country to another. The horse's double heads and permeability symbolizes not just one-way transportation, but also a symbiotic cultural exchange, typical of the globalized world. ERRE originally installed *Toy-an Horse* at the US/Mexican Border. Looking towards both countries, the piece represents the dual identity of Mexican immigrants living in the United States and the duality of place - the tension Mexican immigrants feel between their roots and their new homes in the United States. *Toy-an Horse* serves as an emblem of the entire exhibition and a fitting entry to the first theme of the exhibition dealing with place.

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1 Noriega, "The Orphans of Modernism," 39.

2 Fox, "Theatre of the Inauthentic," 83.

PLACE

Mexican immigrants living in the United States often feel torn between two lands. The first major section of the exhibition, place, addresses the motivations and consequences of physically migrating from one country to another and the effect on the concept of home. The first chapter in the story of the Mexican American immigrant begins in Mexico. Although their homeland, Mexico is an impoverished country presenting challenges to its citizens' desire for a decent standard of living, and an adequate home. According to the CIA world fact book's most recent statistics, more than 47% of the population lives in asset-based poverty. Nearly 20% of the population does not earn enough income to provide sufficient food for themselves or their families and nearly 50% of the population does not earn enough income to acquire essential assets, such as comfortable and sufficient housing. Although unemployment is not staggeringly high, estimated at a little more than 5% in 2010, a quarter of the population may be underemployed; although they hold a job, it is insufficient in meeting the worker's needs.[1] Many Mexican citizens resort to inadequate housing options including slums in cities such as Tijuana or transient communities on the periphery of Mexico's cities and towns. The corruption of the Mexican government, in particular the national and local urban development agencies, compounds the inability to secure standard housing. Despite the poor conditions, the global trend of rampant urbanism, whether sanctioned by the government or initiated by Mexican citizens out of need for basic shelter, is encroaching upon the "small-town" life of Mexico.

ERRE's hybrid sculpture/ installation *Century 21* (1994), comments on the lack of resources and housing opportunities available to nearly half of the population of Mexico and the corrupt government's contribution to the insufficient living conditions of its citizens. Marco Ramírez "ERRE" (nick-named for the Spanish pronunciation of "R") was born in Tijuana, Mexico in 1961. ERRE received a law degree from the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California. In the 1970s ERRE immigrated to the US and worked in the construction industry for 17 years before becoming active in the art world in 1989. ERRE participates in

1 "The World Fact Book," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed October 2, 2011, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/mx.html.

individual and group exhibitions and installations in several countries throughout the world with a focus on Mexico and the US In 2007 he received an artist USA fellowship, which he used to develop an art and culture program for Estacíon Tijuana, a non-profit organization at the San Diego/Tijuana border.[1]

Initially installed at Tijuana's Cultural Center main plaza, *Century 21* (Fig. 2) the full-sized, replica of a wooden nomadic structure typically found in many of the small, disenfranchised, temporary communities on the periphery of Tijuana, represents not only the nomadic and poor life-style of its fictional inhabitant(s) but the encroachment of rogue yet inevitable urban growth in Mexico's cities and towns. The interior of the structure, into which visitors can enter, contains sparse and modest furniture, depicting the humble home and life of its inhabitants. A table displaying computerized architectural plans of the construction sits in front of the structure. Among the documents are authorized construction permits granted by the municipal authorities, without verifying the location and conditions of the improvised settlement. The inappropriate actions and corruption of this particular local urban development office is typical of local and national government agencies within Mexico and compounds the dire housing situation.[2]

To address Mexico's housing crisis, in 2000 then Mexican presidential candidate Vicente Fox promised to build two million low-income homes throughout the country during his six-year term. In a potentially corrupt deal, Mexico's federal urban development agency gave the contract to a small group of private real estate investors. Almost immediately, massive grids of identical homes, ranging in numbers from 100 to 80,000, began to materialize in "remote agrarian territory" across the country.[3] During Fox's six-year presidency, 2.35 million homes were built at a rate of 2,500 homes per day. While preferable to the provisional dwelling of the very poor, this rapid urbanization reduced community building to mere construction. Without the organic involvement and commitment of the local community these grids of houses created neighborhoods void of commercial and financial development and public services, such as

1 Marcos Ramirez (ERRE), accessed October 10, 2011, http://marcosramirezerre.com/.

2 Ibid.

3 "Two Million Homes for Mexico, Livia Corona," News Photographers Assocoiation of Canada, accessed September 16, 2011, http://npac.ca/?p=10468.

schools, parks, and public transportation. Despite the social and economic consequences of these crude "communities" the persistent need for decent low-income housing enabled the continued aggressive urban sprawl of these homes.

In her project, *Two Million Homes for Mexico* (2004), Livia Corona researches this urban development project through images, films and interviews, ultimately presenting a photo series of multiple developments near Mexico City and Baja California. Livia Corona was born in Ensenada, Mexico and moved to the United States to attend art school. Corona graduated from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena California and currently works in New York City. Primarily a photographer, Corona is also considered a cultural anthropologist. She gathers research and data on human and social phenomenon and captures the lives and experiences of Mexicans and Mexican immigrants in the United States through photography and other means. In 2009 Corona received the Guggenheim Fellowship for her project *Two Million Homes for Mexico*. The photographs explore how these homes are leading to, as Corona describes it, the "rapid redefinition of Mexican 'small town' life and the sudden transformation of the Mexican ecological and social landscape."[1] For better or worse, Fox's homes created a new way in which Mexican citizens define home and inhabit the world.

These conditions provide many incentives for Mexicans to set off for the United States in search of a better life for themselves and their families. Valerie James, a Chicana artist whose work addresses the issue of the Mexican American border, sums up the intrinsic motivations for migration:

> It's about the hero's journey. The intrepid nature of human beings who will walk through a blazing dessert in search of a better life is the same kind of courage that the pioneers crossed the West with and that our own immigrant ancestors scratched out a life within this country. It is in the marrow of our bones to seek and search and quest for a better life.[2]

In comparison to Mexico, the quality of life in the United States is much higher. The United States presents greater opportunities for employment and housing, and a lower percentage of the population lives

1 Ibid.

2 De La Rosa, Vic, "Artists at the Border," Fiberarts (Summer 2008, Vol. 35, No. 1), 48.

in poverty. However, James asserts that this need to pursue a better life is a universal and primordial quality and not necessarily based upon contemporary conditions in specific nations. And, while the standard of living in the United States exceeds that of Mexico, opportunities are not as good as they used to be. The 1990s saw the United States' greatest growth in immigration; immigrants were drawn to abundant jobs in an expanding economy and at the time immigrants were viewed as assets to the labor force.[1] In the current global economic climate jobs are scarce, even in the United States. While this has slowed immigration somewhat, the immigrant population in the United States continues to grow. In addition to personal opportunities, family serves as a strong incentive for immigration to the United States, even those family members who remain in Mexico. Many Mexicans survive upon money sent from family members in the United States. Mexican immigrants not only come to the United States in search of a better life for themselves and their family members who join them, but also in the hopes of providing a better life for their families at home.

In deciding to leave Mexico and relocate to the United States, Mexican emmigrants face a long and arduous journey, both physically and psychologically. Often traveling under concealed and perilous conditions, many Mexican emmigrants are injured or even die during their passage. The US Border Control estimates that almost 2,000 people died along the US/Mexican border from 1998 -2004 from drowning, exposure, car accidents, or violence.[2] There were 500 deaths in 2007 alone, with a disproportionate number of women and children accounting for fatalities.[3] Many Americans feel that increased border control will prevent or reduce Mexican immigration to the United States. However, while heightened border security serves as an impediment to crossing the border, it does not serve as a deterrent to immigration. Instead, strict border control forces immigrants to cross the border at less regulated locations, often with harsher climate and terrain, resulting in a greater chance of injury or death.[4] The voyage is so trying that those who

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1 Singer, Audrey, "Why Immigration Uproar Went Nationwide." CNN.com. October 24, 2011, accessed October 25, 2011, http://www/cnn.com/2011/10/24/opinion/singer-immigration-nationwide/?hpt=us_mid.

2 Akers, Becky and Donald Boudreaux, "Immigration Benefits the Economy," *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration*, Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds). (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 27.

3 Mason, Melanie, "A Border Fence Will Not Deter Immigration," *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration*, Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds). (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009),108.

4 Ibid., 108-109.

successfully arrive in the United States are near physical, mental and emotional incapacitation. As Valerie James says, “By the time most people reach this point [the United States side of the border] they are in really bad shape. The fact that they still have hope in their hearts never ceases to amaze me. They are dull with exhaustion, they are hobbling with blisters and they are completely out of food and water.”[1] The difficulty of the journey reinforces the desperate conditions in Mexico, the extreme adversities Mexican emmigrants will endure to escape, and the power of a hope for a better life in the United States.

ERRE’s *The Comeback Highway* serves as a metaphor for the path of many Mexican immigrants to the United States. *The Comeback Highway* is an installation/ performance piece enacted and installed with the participation of residents of Mexico City. The piece consists of 50 wooden boxes manufactured in Tijuana and filled with cement by four Mexico City citizens, arranged to resemble a highway from Mexico City to Los Angeles, with signs placed on the path, marking cities along the route. On the fresh cement, ERRE walked from the Tijuana marker to Mexico City, symbolically recreating his ancestors’ own migration path. The Mexico City residents walked from the Mexico City marker to that of Los Angeles, tracing the path of many Mexican immigrants to the United States. This path symbolizes contemporary migration and references a metaphorical return to Mexico’s past territories which at one time extended up the coast to the state of California. The markings in the cement made by the travelers resemble ancient “codex,” referring to the Mexican civilizations existing at a time when the nation extended beyond the current border delineating Mexico and the United States. ERRE alludes to physical movement and migration but also questions the notion of land ownership, especially in the Mexican tradition, and the validity of superficial national lines. *The Comeback Highway* represents the Mexican immigrant’s path of migration to “America” and assertion of belonging and cultural worth in a country that categorizes them as alien. [2]

In addition to being physically difficult, the path to the United States can be psychologically trying, forcing immigrants to deal with the emotional baggage that comes with leaving home. Immigrants want

1 De La Rosa, “Artists at the Border,” 47.

2 Marcos Ramirez (ERRE), accessed October 10, 2011, http://marcosramirezerre.com/.

to take a piece of Mexico to America with them, carrying not just their possessions, but also their culture, traditions, and way of life to the new land. Margarita Cabrera's poignant soft sculptures, *Desert Dreams* (2006), represent this desire and challenge. Margarita Cabrera was born in Monterrey, Mexico in 1973. Cabrera spent her childhood in Mexico City and moved to the US with her family when she was ten years old. Unlike most Mexican immigrant families today, Cabrera's family was invited to move to the United States due to her father's profession as a mining engineer. Cabrera recalls, "At that time it was much easier for whole families to come to the United States."[1] Cabrera's family first settled in Salt Lake City then moved to El Paso and Cabrera later attended art school in New York City. From the very beginning of her practice, Cabrera's art has represented her Mexican immigrant identity. Cabrera relates her experiences adapting to the very white environment of Salt Lake City:

> When we first moved to Salt Lake City, I was really alienated because I was Mexican. I wasn't Mormon and I didn't have freckles and red hair… That's when I started to do some watercolor paintings… That was my first real studio experience… So in a way, that is when I started to think about what I was doing in a very specific way, somewhat critically.[2]

Today, Cabrera lives and works in El Paso Texas one of the largest points of contact in the word between a developed nation, the United States, and a newly industrialized nation, Mexico. Therefore much of Cabrera's work addresses issues dealing with the "bi-national border region"[3] and represents a major theme of the exhibition: the duality of place felt by border residents and Mexican immigrants throughout the country. Cabrera herself says, "I feel like I am truly a border kind of person – a border girl. Not only do I live on the border, but everything about me is divided… My work is indirectly and subconsciously drawing me back to a country where I have unfinished business."[4] Cabrera's art is not only cultural, but contemporary and

1 "Margarita Cabrera," Art Slant, accessed September 8, 2001, http://www.artslant.com/ny/artists/rackroom/739.

2 "Margarita Cabrera," Art Slant.

3 Cody, Sara (ed), *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 120.

4 "Margarita Cabrera." Art Slant.

political. Her Oldenburg-esque sculptures represent "…lasting if malleable ways that race and identity are articulated."[1]

Desert Dreams consists of a set of five cloth sculptures of backpacks containing the possessions of the backpack's invisible and fictional owner, also made of cloth. Each backpack represents each family member's desire to keep their family intact and safe during the immigration route. Even though the owners of these backpacks are fictional, the piece personalizes and individualizes the immigration.[2] The sculptures, displayed on the floor with the personal items strewn across the floor, imply some violent or physical act that dislocated the backpack from its bearer, giving the impression that the family did not complete its journey intact. *Desert Dreams* presents the external forces that impede the immigrant's journey, and the internal emotional and psychological turmoil each immigrant faces along the way.

The apex of this journey, the physical US/ Mexico border, serves as both a literal and metaphorical gateway and barrier to the United States. While a legal and physical entity, in a way, the border is a conceptual construct. Although most contemporary societies throughout the world accept dividing land into distinct nations as common place, this was not always so. Civilizations native to the Americas did not believe in land ownership, and that philosophy persists in the contemporary descendants of some native Latin American civilizations.[3] Many cultures in Mexico view the separation of land into "nations" as an abstract and inconsequential exercise. Compounding this feeling of superficiality towards the relevance and validity of the border is the territorial history of Mexico, which, preceding the Spanish conquest of the territory, extended as far north as what is now the Southwest United States. Mexican American culture refers to this region as "Aztlán." Aztlán is a largely mythological lost "homeland of modern-day Mexican Americans."[4] Mexican American folklore and art represents Aztlán as a romanticized ancient civilization that serves as an attempt

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1 Bryan-Wilson, Julia, "Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement," *Artforum*, Summer 2008, accessed September 8, 2011, http://www.sarameltzergallery.com/artist.php?artist=cabrera&p=press.

2 Aukeman, Anastasia, "Margarita Cabrera at Sara Meltzer," *Art in America*, January 2007, accessed September 8, 2011, http://www.sarameltzergallery.com/artist.php?artist=cabrera&p=press.

3 De La Rosa, "Artists at the Border," 50.

4 Fox, "Theatre of the Inauthentic," 76.

to legitimize and validate the cultural lineage of the modern Mexican American.

The “myth” of Aztlán gives credit to a mentality that, regardless of the current national dividing line, Mexicans have a right to inhabit American soil. As Fox states, the “We did not cross the border. The border crossed us,”[1] mentality of many Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans validates their right to live in what is now considered the United States. In fact, in his essay “The United States Should Adopt Open Immigration” Harry Binswanger, a professor of philosophy at the Ayn Rand Institute, argues that Mexican immigrants should not only be awarded the right to make the United States their home, but all human rights so valued and lauded by Americans. He states, “One has rights not by virtue of being an American, but by virtue of being human,”[2] asserting that in human rights issues, borders are irrelevant. Rights are not based upon country of citizenship and should transcend physical and national borders. Yet much of the American population does not share this egalitarian view and instead sees Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans, even those who are legal or naturalized citizens, as aliens opposed to Americans with inalienable rights.[3] In his counter essay to Binswager, “The United States Should Not Adopt Open Immigration,” Vin Suprynowicz, an assistant editor for the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, escalates this mentality to an extreme. Suprynowicz not only criticizes Mexican immigrants for burdening the United States with their “anchor babies,” but calls illegal immigrants “invaders” and likens their “invasion” of the United States to the Nazi’s occupation of France.[4] This mentality is exemplified in the recent interest in heightened border patrol and those American acting on prejudices to prevent Mexican immigrants from crossing the border.

Two of Margarita Cabrera’s works, *Space In Between* (2010) (Fig. 3) and *Hummer* (2006), represent the perils that Mexican immigrants must overcome when crossing the border. *Space In Between*, fabric sculptures of cacti, tightly-woven from border patrol uniforms, and placed in clay pots, more

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1 Ibid., 80.

2 Binswanger, Harry, “The United States Should Adopt Open Immigration,” *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration*, Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds). (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 133.

3 Noriega, “The Orphans of Modernism,” 18.

4 Suprynowicz, Vin, “The United States Should Not Adopt Open Immigration,” *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration*, Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds). (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 142.

closely resemble what they represent than several of Cabrera's other soft sculptures. The cacti therefore exude a rigidity and air of authority appropriate for a piece dealing with border control. Like several of Cabrera's projects, *Space n Between* was a collaborative effort between Cabrera and women of border communities who contributed by sewing the sculptures. Through this collaboration,
Cabrera references life in border towns and the continuation of the tradition of Mexican craft as a survival tactic for marginalized border communities.[1] The cacti are embroidered with images of the journey to the United States conveying the communal immigrant experience of migrating from Mexico to the US and the dangers faced during that journey.[2] *Space In Between* represents "a conceptual link between an unforgiving landscape and the … criminalization of border crossing."[3] The piece deals with the physical and geological difficulties of the border as expressed through cacti, plus the psychological and physical danger of the region, as expressed through border patrol uniforms.

While less rigid than the cacti, Cabrera's *Hummer* is no less intimidating or effective in conveying the perils facing Mexican immigrants crossing the border. Border patrol units use hummers to monitor the border, searching for illegal immigrants. *Hummer* represents the very real danger for immigrants of being hunted down and caught in the act of crossing the border. In America the Hummer, this machine originated of war, has also become a symbol of wealth. Cabrera's sculpture represents the unwelcoming mentality of the American upper class, who may not be combing the border for illegals, but are opposed to immigration just the same.

Some of these American civilians feel so strongly against immigrants, and Mexican immigrants in particular, that they have taken it upon themselves to protect the border from these (as Suprynowicz calls them) "invaders" from the south. Jim Gilchrist founded the most famous of these movements, the Minutemen Project, in 2004 in response to the US government's neglect to enforce existing immigration laws. The

1 "Projects." Margarita Cabrera, accessed September 17, 2011, http://www.margaritacabrera.com/?cat=4.

2 Ibid.

3 Cody, *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, 120.

Minutemen Project considers itself a "citizen's vigilance operation monitoring immigration, business, and government."[1] The name of the group references the civilian militia groups of the American Revolution and the Civil War, who responded quickly (in a minute) to those who attacked their village.[2] The Minutemen Project is a militant volunteer group patrolling the border and a form of vigilante justice against those who they interpret to be "attacking" their homeland. ERRE's *Prejudice Project* (2006) refers to the physical border as well as the barrier of prejudice preventing immigrants from entering the United States. For *Prejudice Project*, ERRE installed a billboard off the 5 freeway in California near the US/ Mexico border, depicting the back of a man's (presumably a white, American citizen's) head looking towards the border. Painted above the man's head, in a stenciled, Army-like font, reads the words, "Don't be a man for just a minute. Be a man your whole life."[3] While ERRE insists that the piece is open to interpretation, it clearly references the Minutemen Project and their efforts in the area. As the shape of billboard itself resembles the border fence, *Prejudice Project* represents the barrier of prejudice in America against Mexicans, and the physical, literal and psychological efforts to not just limit or cease immigration but to forcefully keep immigrants out of the country.

While most Mexican immigrants think the land of opportunities lies just over the border, border towns, in both the United States and Mexico, are some of the most depressed, underdeveloped and underserved communities of either country. The highest indicators of poverty in the United States sit along the Rio Grande, which serves as the Texas border between Mexico and the US The poverty rate in Texas border towns is double that of the rest of Texas and triple the average in the United States.[4] These conditions lead to severe poverty, joblessness, residential segregation, a breakdown of community institutions and social services, and "alternate social strategies."[5] While Cabrera's *Space In Between* presents craft as a positive survival tactic, many border town residents turn to more destructive alternatives such as crime,

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1 Minute Man Project, accessed October 2, 2011, http://www.minutemanproject.com/.

2 Marcos Ramirez (ERRE), accessed October 10, 2011, http://marcosramirezerre.com/.

3 Ibid.

4 Valdez, Avelardo, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate.* , Joan and Raquel Pinderhughes (eds). (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1993), 182.

5 Valdez,"Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 173.

drugs and “illicit behavior” in order to survive.[1] Consuelo Jimenez Underwood aptly describes the disasters inherent in this conceptual and physical construct that is the US/Mexico border when she says:

> If we develop a society that has no feelings, no concerns for others but only for separatism, then we are at risk of breeding a society of hate, fear, and coldness. And what about the land itself? When that border goes up, the land will become a wasteland on either side, a giant swath of nothing except suffering, that will truly give us a physically and ideologically separate North and South America.[2]

Both physically and through prejudiced mentalities and actions, the border between Mexico and the United States has already gone up. Instead of deterring immigrants it has led to a region of suffering and a segregated America.

Whether settling in border towns or elsewhere, once Mexican immigrants cross the border they are faced with the challenge of securing a home, and tend to do so within strong Mexican communities in the United States. While other groups often criticize this practice, the formation of tight-knit Mexican communities, or “barrios” serves as a lifeline for Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans and contributes to their success in the United States. In their essay, “Barrios in Transition,” Joan Moore, Distinguished Professor Emerita of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and James Diego Vigil, Professor of Social Ecology at the University of California, Irvine, state, “…in general, Latino immigrants are more likely to live next door to native-born members of their own group than are immigrants of any other ethnic group. Mexican immigrants, in particular, tend to seek out Mexican American areas; many of course, come to live with relatives.”[3] Solid extended families form the strongest social structure in the barrios.[4] Many Mexican immigrants reunite with relatives in the United States and come to depend upon their families as a support system. However, in the absence of blood relatives, Mexican immigrants seek out Mexican communities that become like a surrogate family to them. This causes some to view Mexican immigrants

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1 Ibid., 184.

2 De La Rosa, “Artists at the Border,” 48.

3 Moore, Joan and James Diego Vigil, “Barrios in Transition,” in *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, Moore, Joan and Raquel Pinderhughes (eds) (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1993), 31.

4 Valdez, “Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region,” 193.

negatively, as cliquish or not wanting to assimilate because they settle in Spanish-speaking and Mexican-dominated neighborhoods. However, the formation of ethnic mini-communities is part of a long tradition of immigrants in America.[1] For centuries these mini-communities have helped immigrants to maintain their cultural heritage and in turn have contributed to the multi-cultural landscape of the United States. Within Mexican barrios political integration and mobilization is typical and results in a united feeling of community and often an increase in social services. However, it rarely results in poverty alleviation, and high rates of poverty afflict most Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities.[2]

Housing opportunities, homes, and home-ownership are deeply important to Mexican immigrants both personally, culturally and in determining their potential for success in America. The housing available in Mexican American barrios plays a significant role in the socio-economic structure of poverty within those communities[3] and homeownership in particular improves social stability for those in poverty.[4] Unfortunately the housing available is usually "old, small, crowded," and inadequate.[5] However insufficient, the small and shabby apartments or homes most Mexican immigrants inhabit are still superior to the hovels composing the transient communities in Mexico, as represented by ERRE's *Century 21*. Despite the unfavorable housing conditions, more Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans own homes than other immigrant and ethnic groups. Many Mexicans living in the United States are willing to buy homes in undesirable locations, often in very poor, run-down urban locations in or adjacent to Mexican barrios.[6] Also, Mexicans value homeownership as a sign of self-reliance and, perhaps most importantly, homeownership relates to the Mexican tradition linking houses to community. In Mexico, family, friends and neighbors gather to help build homes imbuing them with community value. Mexican immigrants try to recreate that community experience through not

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1 Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds). *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration* (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 70.

2 Garver, Lloyd, "Efforts to Make English America's Official Language Hide Bigotry," *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration*, Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds). (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 170.

3 Valdez, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 162.

4 Ibid., 200.

5 Moore and Pinderhughes (eds), *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, 30.

6 Valdez, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 161.

always building, but hopefully owning their own homes.[1]

While empirically superior and higher in commercial value to the housing options in Mexico, immigrant homes in the United States, whether rented or owned, lack the community associations inherent to homes in Mexico. Salomon Huerta's series of paintings of homes in Los Angeles (Fig. 5)speaks to the contrast between the different criteria used to assign value to homes in Mexico verses those in the United States. Huerta's homes series is richly painted but not painterly, providing an idealized, and literally glossy presentation of the homes in Los Angeles. In contrast to *Century 21*, an enterable shack, revealing the life of its fictional dweller, these paintings merely depict the "shiny facades" of the lifeless, characterless houses which conceal their interior and the lives of their inhabitants.[2] Huerta paints the houses as from across the street, from the outside looking in, conjuring images of police surveillance, a familiar experience to Mexican immigrants. This surveillance-like quality gives the homes a sense of danger and crime, alluding to the idea that in many places in the United States it is a crime to be Mexican.[3] As with Fox's aggressive housing project, these houses are not as ideal as they seem. The superficial nature of Huerta's paintings refers to the connotations of consumerism and commodity associated with the American home as opposed to a community project and source of pride. In her catalogue essay for Huerta's solo show, "Mirror/Image" at the Austin Museum of Art, Curator Elizabeth Ferrer asserts that Huerta's houses not only represent place and home, but the class issues faced by Mexican immigrants; they, "Connote threatening disenfranchisement wrought by the depersonalization of the lives of the vast lower middle class."[4]

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1 Ibid., 163.

2 Melrod, George, "Mask of a Pro," *Art Ltd* (Jan/Feb, 2009), 36.

3 Ferrer, Elizabeth, "Mirror/Image: Paintings by Salomon Huerta," Austin Museum of Art, accessed October 30, 2011, http://www.amoa.org.

4 Ibid.

CLASS

Faced with social prejudices and economic hardships, Mexican immigrants struggle to succeed in the industrialized economy and materialistic culture of the United States. In America's capitalist society, class distinctions dictate access to opportunities and social status. Moore and Vigel argue that class differences can be a greater cause of discrimination than ethnic or racial prejudice.[1] In the United States, the gap between the wealthy and the poor is aligned with racial, ethnic and national differences and poverty disproportionately afflicts Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.[2] In 2009, 24% of Mexicans in the United States lived in poverty, compared to the national average of 14%.[3] While Mexican barrios create a support structure for the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American community, they are also places of severe poverty. According to Moore and Vigel, one third of the residents of Los Angeles barrios live below the poverty line.[4] The jobs available to those in the barrios are typically temporary or erratic, provide no benefits or health insurance, and no chance for mobility or improvement.[5] Desperate to make a living, Mexican immigrants often accept jobs that other ethnic minorities, including Chicanos, turn-down,[6] including those of extreme physical labor or even dangerous conditions. Due to the large population of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles, and employers' exploitation of their need for income, Moore and Vigil call Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles, "...perhaps the largest pool of cheap, manipulable, and easily dischargeable labor of any advanced capitalist city,"[7] expressing the class distinctions between Mexican immigrants and fellow Angelenos wrought from their respective countries of origin. Although living in an "advanced" and developed nation and city, Mexican immigrants are relegated to low-paying, menial jobs typical of the third world. Lack of access to quality education, especially in the current environment,

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1 Valdez, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 177.

2 Moore and Diego Vigil, "Barrios in Transition," 53.

3 Dockterman, Daniel, "Hispanics of Mexican Origin in the United States, 2009," Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, March 26, 2011.

4 Moore and Pinderhughes (eds), *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, 31.

5 Ibid., 45.

6 Valdez, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 177.

7 Moore and Pinderhughes (eds), *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, 34.

compounds Mexican immigrants' inability to secure a decent job. Mexican immigrants often rely upon free adult ESL classes to learn English. Cutbacks in government spending on adult education and English classes leads to reduced educational and subsequently employment opportunities for Mexican immigrants.[1]

Livia Corona's photo series, *Enanitos Toreros* (1998 – 2006), symbolizes the Mexican immigrant's role as the most disenfranchised worker. For *Enanitos Toreros*, Corona spent nearly ten years traveling with and documenting the lives of dwarf bullfighters in Mexico. The black and white photographs consist of portraits as well as candid and action shots. Mexico's marginalization and exploition of dwarfs parallels and symbolizes the disenfranchised Mexican immigrant worker. Most members of the bullfighting troupe partake in the business because, due to cultural barriers and discrimination, they have no other job possibilities, echoing the lack of opportunities for Mexican immigrants in the United States.[2] Yet, contrary to most depictions of dwarfs in Mexican culture, as comic relief, *Enanitos Toreros* defies stereotypes, displaying dwarfs as powerful and in control not only of their own destinies but of a fierce animal, aptly conveying the determined spirit of the Mexican immigrant.

While Mexican immigrants are prone to poverty and discrimination, due to their class stature as much as their ethnicity, Carlos Vélez Ibáñes, the Director of the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University, insists that using terms such as, "disadvantaged," "minority," and "underclass" to describe and categorize groups of people, objectifies the group and allows others to treat them as market commodities as opposed to individuals.[3] They become the "other," in a wealthy country and society. Due to this double minority, of ethnicity and class, Mexican immigrants are often victims of prejudice from mainstream America. Many Americans harbor preconceived, racist and classist assumptions about immigrants' negative effect on the US economy and the availability of American jobs.

These often unfounded and incorrect assumptions have resulted in several anti-immigration movements

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1 Ibid., 39.

2 Livia Corona, accessed September 16, 2011, http://www.liviacorona.com/#.

3 Valdez, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 214.

contributing to violence and prison overcrowding, and burdening social services.[1]

These often unfounded assumptions have resulted in several US anti-immigration movements and laws. One of the first and most influential of these laws was California's Proposition 187. Prop 187 was a 1994 ballot initiative prohibiting illegal immigrants from using health care, public education, and other social services in California. During the election period pro-Prop 187 commercials depicted "hoards" of undocumented Mexican immigrants crossing the border and "invading" California. The advertisements described illegal immigrants threatening the "economic, political, and cultural character" of the United States.[2] Due in part to the strength of this propaganda, the proposition was passed in November of 1994, signaling the first state-initiated legislation related to immigration, in the past an issue for federal policies and programs. While the law was later challenged in a legal suit and found unconstitutional by a federal court, it began a pattern of state-instigated immigration policies.

In response to Prop 187, ERRE created his photography series and installation piece, *187 Pairs of Hands* (1994) (Fig. 6). Through black and white photography, ERRE documented 187 different sets of hands performing everyday jobs in California, most of them Latino workers conducting manual labor.
Included in the installation was a desk with book containing personal information of those photographed, giving personalities to the 187 faceless, nameless, sets of hands. The requirements ERRE used for choosing who to photograph were the same as those the INS used to "approach, question, and request, any person's legal documentation and residency status," – namely physical appearance and ethnicity.[3] ERRE's subject matter and format allude to racism against Mexican immigrants as well as Americans' motivation and justification for it. By showing just the hands of the workers, ERRE records their contribution to society through their work, which often goes unacknowledged. By not showing their faces, ERRE strips the subjects of their individual identities, just as Americans group all Mexican immigrants together, stripping them of their

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1 Akers and Boudreaux, "Immigration Benefits the Economy," 30.

2 Flores, William V. and Rina Benmayor (eds), *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 3.

3 Marcos Ramirez (ERRE), accessed October 10, 2011, http://marcosramirezerre.com/.

individuality. Americans tend to not think about who is cooking their food, picking their produce, and mowing their lawns, but see Mexican immigrants as faceless laborers or even an identity-less labor-force, not as individuals deserving of basic civil rights. Dehumanizing immigrants allows for the support of callous state laws such as Prop 187, and those recently passed throughout the country.

The last few years have seen a dramatic increase in state-initiated "strong" immigration laws which deny basic civil rights to illegal immigrants and often result in racial profiling and unfair and/or unwarranted consequences for Mexican immigrants. The controversial Arizona law, known as SB-1070, which went into effect April 22, 2010, aims to identify, prosecute, and deport illegal immigrants. Considered the most comprehensive and strictest immigration action taken in generations, the law gives police the right to detain anyone not carrying immigration documents or merely suspected of being in the country illegally.[1] Arizona Governor Jan Brewer echoed the sentiments of the Minutemen Project by claiming that Arizona is "under attack"[2] and called the law a "tool" to combat a "crisis we did not create and the federal government has refused to fix."[3] Critics condemn the law as condoning racial profiling.[4] At the federal level, President Obama criticized the law saying it threatened to "undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans,"[5] and the administration has subsequently sued the state of Arizona to overturn the law.[6] Following this trend, a new Alabama law, which went into effect September 29, 2011, is now considered the strictest immigration law in the country. It allows authorities to question people suspected of being in the country illegally and detain them without bond, and to check the immigration status of students in public schools. While contested in court, these elements of the law were upheld by a federal judge, yet three suits against the law, including

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1 Archibold, Randal D, "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration," The New York Times, April 23, 2010, accessed November 30, 2011, http://www/nytimes.com/2010/04/24/us/politics/24immig.html.

2 Florida, Richard, "20 US Cities with the Most Immigrants," The Daily Beast, July 29, 2010, accessed October 1, 2011, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/07/29/us-cities-with-the-most-immigrants.html.

3 Archibold, "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration."

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Schwartz, David, "US Judge Dismisses Arizona Lawsuit Over Border," Reuters.com, October 21, 2011, accessed October 25, 2011, http://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USTRE79K71J20111022.

an appeal by the Obama administration, are pending.[1]

Despite increased attention and legal opposition to immigration over the last few years, immigration to the United States was slower over the last decade than in the previous; from 1990 – 2000 the US gained 11.3 immigrants, while from 2000 through 2010 the US gained only 8.8 million immigrants. The weaker economy and fewer jobs account for the reduction in immigrants yet, because of these factors, immigrants are met with greater resistance and seen as greater competition for jobs and resources.[2] The back lash against immigration is most ardent in cities and states where immigration has continued to grow, often because these locations are unaccustomed or unprepared to deal with new immigrant populations.[3] Nine metropolitan areas experienced at least a doubling in immigrant population from 2000 to 2010. This increase was met with almost universal resistance; eight of the nine states in which these cities are located, introduced, if not passed, restrictive immigration legislation.[4] In some cases these actions seem like overreactions. While Alabama's Hispanic population grew by 145% over the last ten years, Latinos still only represents 4% of the population. Therefore the reaction to what Alabamans see as an encroaching Latino immigrant population is irrational. And, while proponents claim their motives are strictly economic-based, strict state or regional immigration laws can hurt the economy because they can scare away needed Latino immigrant workers.[5]

In his CNN.com article, "Why Immigration Uproar Went Nationwide," journalist Audrey Singer writes, "It is a widespread agreement that the national immigration system is broken, but no consensus on how to fix it."[6] Yet, instead of fighting immigration with bigotry and injustice, some forward-thinking communities are responding with an alternative solution to what some deem a crisis. An example of this is Dayton Ohio's

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1 "Alabama to police to enforce America's strongest immigration law," MSNBC.com, September 29, 2011, accessed October 3, 2011, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44713323/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/ala-police-enforce.

2 Singer, Audrey, "Why Immigration Uproar Went Nationwide," CNN.com, October 24, 2011, accessed October 25, 2011, http://www/cnn.com/2011/10/24/opinion/singer-immigration-nationwide/?hpt=us_mid.

3 Singer, "Why Immigration Uproar Went Nationwide."

4 Ibid.

5 "Alabama to police to enforce America's strongest immigration law."

6 Singer, "Why Immigration Uproar Went Nationwide."

progressive and pro-active response called “The Welcome Dayton Plan.” The immigrant population of Dayton has grown by 57% over the last 10 years. Instead of passing anti-immigrant laws, the city developed a plan to both assist immigrants and utilize their resources to benefit the city through a plan drafted by 130 members of the community outlining a framework to make the city more supportive of immigrants.[1]

Many Americans believe immigrants are detrimental to the US economy by stealing jobs and draining resources. But in the essay, “Immigration Does Not Harm US workers,” Rakesh Kochhar, Associate Director for Research at the Pew Hispanic Center, argues that self-sufficient immigrants benefit the economy. In a case study, US born workers fared better in states with a larger immigrant workforce.[2] Contrary to the notion that immigrants are a drain on government resources, most immigrants pay taxes and often pay for services they are not entitled to or do not use. In “The United States Should Adopt Open Immigration,” Binswanger asserts that the concept that immigrants “take work” is irrational because there is limitless work to be done. If an immigrant takes a job, then a citizen who would be doing that work gets a better one. Immigrants make the American workforce more productive by increasing the total work output and improving the overall economy.[3]

While some communities welcome Mexican immigrants, and others resist them, the majority of Americans refuse, whether consciously or unconsciously, to see what Chon Noriega deems a “phantom culture.”[4] Although invisible to many in the United States, immigrants serve as heroes to the families they support in the US and Mexico. Mexican immigrants contribute to two economies through their labor in the United States and the remittances they send home to Mexico. Dulce Pinzón’s photo-series, *The Real Story of the Superheroes* (2006) (Fig., depicts this phenomenon and speaks to the “quiet dependence” of two economies on hard working, unappreciated, Mexican immigrants.[5] Dulce Pinzón was born in Mexico City in

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1 Ibid.

2 Kochhar, Rakesh, “Immigration Does Not Harm U.S. Workers,” in *Opposing Viewpoints Series: Immigration*, Haugen, David M., Susan Musser and Kacy Lovelace (eds) (Deroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009), 47.

3 Binswanger, “The United States Should Adopt Open Immigration,” 133.

4 Noriega, “The Orphans of Modernism,” 16.

5 Dulce Pinzón, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.dulcepinzon.com.

1974 and studied Mass Media Communications at the Universidad de las Americas in Puebo Mexico, after which she move to the United States to study Photography at Indiana University in Pennsylvania. In 1995 she moved to New York where she practiced and studied photography at the International Center of Photography. Although immigrating to the US at an early age, Pinzón only came to fully understand the difficulties of the Mexican immigrant experience when she moved to New York. Pinzón recalls:

> I'd grown up in a middle-class household; my dad owned a construction business. But after my savings ran out in New York, I had to do service work to get by: I worked as a waitress and a nanny, and realized how difficult it was to be an immigrant… Before I got my green card, I also had to go back and forth across the border every six months. It was a very humbling experience.[1]

Pinzón expresses not only the difficulties of immigrants to forge a livelihood, but the toll of being treated without the common decency deserving of all people regardless of their legal citizenship. She also reveals her initial inspiration for the *Superheroes* series.

The Real Story of the Superheroes chronicles the lives of 20 Mexican immigrant workers in New York City, performing their everyday tasks, but dressed in American superhero costumes. Below the photographs Pinzón presents captions with the name and age of the subject, his or her profession, hometown, and how much of their wage they send home to Mexico each month. Through *Superheroes*, Pinzón attempts to address the issue of immigration in a more humanistic, relatable, and positive manner. Inundated with news surrounding the immigration debate, which tends to be either dismal or controversial, people tend to turn a deaf ear to the struggles of immigrants.[2] Pinzón reveals the invisible, working class Mexican immigrants in New York City, and the ignorance and indifference of mainstream society to what she calls, the "workforce that fuels our economy."[3] Due to the nature of their jobs, immigrants are often "hidden" in kitchens, homes, warehouses, and other service facilities.[4] By dressing her subjects as symbols of American pop-culture, Pinzón not only makes the individual immigrants she profiles visible, she imbues them with

1 Pinzón, Dulce, "The Magnificent Migrants: Extraordinary Photos of Ordinary Mexicans," *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2010, accessed 10/10/2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/28/the_magnificent_migrants.

2 Ibid.

3 Dulce Pinzón, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.dulcepinzon.com.

4 Pinzón, "The Magnificent Migrants: Extraordinary Photos of Ordinary Mexicans."

qualities of American values, making them relatable to mainstream America. *Superheroes* elevates the everyday common worker to hero. They withstand trying conditions and through their tireless, thankless work, improve the lives of others, without the aid of superpowers. As with American superheroes, Mexican immigrant workers have alter egos; they are invisible in the big city but courageous heroes to those they support at home, both in the US and Mexico.[1] Superficially, Pinzón's seemingly whimsical scenarios renders the immigration issue approachable, yet there is something darker lying within – the contrast between the superhero fantasy and the realities of immigrant life. The vibrant colors of their costumes stand out against the dreary background of the places immigrants work and live, making the poor realities, of laundromats, valet stands, and construction sites even starker.

Despite living in poverty, Mexican immigrants and immigrant communities tend to escape the conditions that characterize and perpetuate the "underclass." The United States government accounting office defines the term underclass as "people who are predominantly black or Hispanic."[2] Yet, a large percentage of the Mexican American urban population engage in political organization and activities, community resistance to exploitation, and, in the face of no institutional support, form community-based self-help activities.[3] Unlike most poverty-stricken areas, and many minority communities, the barrios are not demoralized, devastated inner-city neighborhoods, plagued by a violent drug market and single parent homes.[4] This is due in part to continuous immigration from Mexico. Upwardly mobile members of the community are replaced by recently arrived immigrant workers, preventing an "exodus" from neighborhoods and the "social vacuum," which often takes place in other developing minority communities.[5] Aspects of Mexican culture are regenerated within the community by newly arrived Mexican immigrants. Therefore, strong Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities and extended family connections not only

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1 Pinzón, "The Magnificent Migrants: Extraordinary Photos of Ordinary Mexicans."

2 Valdez, "Persistent Poverty, Crime and Drugs: US-Mexican Border Region," 195.

3 Ibid.,198.

4 Moore and Pinderhughes (eds), *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, 36.

5 Ibid., 46.

help immigrants to thrive, immigrants allow for the survival of those very communities and help lead to the success of their fellow members.

Although successful in escaping the underclass, Mexican immigrants face differences in the industrialized United States that carry class and cultural implications to their way of life. Craft plays a central role in Mexican tradition, history and communities. For the most part, craft is not as highly valued or essential to American culture. In explaining the importance of craft to her work, Margarita Cabrera says, "…craft making is such a part of the culture in Mexico…I see craft as a real cultural documentation of people's experiences and people's emotions. In some places in Mexico, there is no written text. You can't pick up a history book and read about the town. When people stop making their craft, they stop recording their history."[1] In Mexico craft-making is part of the cultural framework, like a religion. It not only preserves and passes on history and tradition, it reveals beliefs.[2] In the United States, and increasingly in Mexico, factory-produced items have replaced what was once made by hand, devaluing and in some instances extinguishing craft. In order to make a living, Mexican laborers, in the United States and Mexico, must abandon craftwork, endangering the tradition of craft and Mexican cultural heritage.

Cabrera addresses the perilous predicament of the Mexican craft tradition, as well as the class structures imposed on the Mexican immigrant by industrialization, in her piece *The Craft of Resistance* (2008) (Fig.8). In an art gallery, Cabrera created an austere makeshift factory, with cubicles for each step in the production of handcrafted decorative monarch butterflies. Cabrera trained community volunteers, mostly Mexican immigrant women, to hand-make the copper butterflies. Cabrera then installed the mass of butterflies, 2500 in total, in a local affluent San Antonio home. In the gallery space, near the abandoned "factory," a photograph displays the installation in which the butterflies swarm over the ceiling walls and furniture. *The Craft of Resistance* dissects the act of craft into steps as on an assembly-line, suggesting repetitive labor and commenting on "the destruction of craft-making in an industrialized economy."[3]

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1 "Margarita Cabrera." Art Slant, accessed September 8, 2001, http://www.artslant.com/ny/artists/rackroom/739.

2 Ibid.

3 "Projects," Margarita Cabrera, accessed September 17, 2011, http://www.margaritacabrera.com/?cat=4.

The empty cubicles speak to the replacement of the craftsman's artistry by factories and, as the actual fabricators of the butterflies remain anonymous, echo the invisibility of the factory worker. Noriega says Cabrera's craft "links two sides of a cultural border: the all-American consumer-based home… and the cheap foreign labor that makes that home possible."[1] The wealthy home, full of upper-class comforts, contrasts to the sparse assembly line in the gallery, and the conditions of the working-class labor force in the factory.

Regardless of class, citizenship or homeland, in the United States, cars serve as symbols of status and identity and as inspiration for artists tackling these issues. Rubén Ortiz-Torres describes the importance of cars within American culture when he says, "If the Catholic Church produced churches for the Kingdom of Heaven, then American society produced Cadillacs."[2] In American culture, cars are a religion and the epitome of the American Dream. When describing the meaning of cars within the Mexican immigrant community, Margarita Cabrera says, "It was representing the American Dream. When people come here, from across the border to come and make a better life here, they are very car oriented. It's like a trophy."[3] For Mexican immigrants, cars serve as an emblem of their status and their effort to become American. Yet, some Mexican Americans use cars to assert and preserve their cultural identity and heritage. As Margarita Cabrera says, "A car is an identity object, for everybody."[4]

The profound importance of cars in Mexican American culture was born in the low-rider community's proclamation of resistance and cultural identity through cars. A "low-rider" refers to a car customized so it sits low to the ground usually with hydraulics to enable height adjustment. These low-riders often also included fantastically bright, candy-colored paint jobs, decorative chrome features and elaborate customized upholstery and interiors.[5] Although some debate the origins of low-riding culture, Chicano low-riders in Los Angeles claim it began in LA in the 1940s and gained popularity with the boom in the automotive industry

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1 Cody, *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, 120.

2 "Rubén Ortiz Torres: Featured Artist," LatinArt.com, accessed October 8, 2011, http://www.latinart.com/faview.cfm?id=8.

3 "Margarita Cabrera," Art Slant.

4 Ibid.

5 Sandoval, Denise M, "La Vida Lowrider: Cruising the City of Angels, " Petersen Automotive Museum, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.petersen.org/default.cfm?docid=1058.

following World War II.[1] The increased demand for new cars at this time allowed for cheap used cars to become available to those who could previously not afford cars, including young minorities. For these populations cars were symbolic and literal means of escaping the lower class. Cars represented middle-class status but also provided, "…an avenue to transcend the limits of territory, like the barrio or ghetto, through the mobility of their cars."[2] While the car itself remained a status symbol and means of physical and social mobility, for Mexican immigrants and Chicanos, the low-riding culture was about more than just cars, it was a way of life. Low-riders used their cars to visualize and communicate not just status but personal, community, and cultural identity. The Los Angeles Police Department targeted low-riders as a form of racial profiling and coined the term "low-rider" as a derogatory expression connoting underclass and minority troublemakers. But for Mexican Americans the term took on a new meaning of cultural resistance and pride.[3] Los Angeles Times writer Dan Neil says, "Born of Mexican pride and defiance after World War II, low-riding … has become a quintessentially American tradition."[4] Although originating as a distinctly Latino tradition, and an assertion against conformity, low-riding culture has become ingrained in and embraced by the greater American culture. While Mexican immigrants often use cars to fulfill a desire to become or seem more "American," through their assertion of identity, low-riders influenced and expanded American car culture.

Low-riders used the speed, look, and sound of cars to express resistance against conformity culture, and used the décor of the car as an artistic expression, classifying the cars themselves as works of art.[5] No low-rider was more artistic than Jesse Valadez, the man who some considered the father of low-riding culture. Born in Nueva Rosa, Mexico in 1946, Jesse Valadez moved to San Antonio in 1959 before settling in East LA in 1961. In East LA in the 1970s, low-riders, and Jesse Valadez in particular, were considered

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1 Sandoval, Denise M, "La Vida Lowrider: Cruising the City of Angels, " Petersen Automotive Museum, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.petersen.org/default.cfm?docid=1058.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 McLellan, Dennis, "Jesse Valadez Dies at 64; Pioneer of L.A.'s Lowriders," Los Angeles Times, February 12, 2011, accessed, October 10, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/12/local/la-me-jesse-valadez-20110211.

5 Sandoval, "La Vida Lowrider: Cruising the City of Angels."

heroes. With his sumptuous, expensive, and artistic style Valadez brought artistry and connoisseurship to the hobby of low-riding.[1] Valadez's most famous work, *Gypsy Rose* (Fig. 9), epitomizes low-rider cars and serves as an emblem of low-rider culture. Valadez adorned *Gypsy Rose*, a fuscia 1964 Chevy impala, with painted multi-colored roses, and a hot-pink interior complete with swivel seats in the front and a cocktail bar in the back. Through its life, Valadez continued to customize *Gypsy Rose* and drive it through the streets of LA, until his own death in early 2010, solidifying his status as a low-riding legend and *Gypsy Rose* as an icon of the low-riding world.[2]

Rubén Ortiz-Torres provides a contemporary interpretation of low-rider culture and car-customization through his collaborative car projects. Born in Mexico City in 1964, Rubén Ortiz-Torres lives and works in Los Angeles and Mexico City. Ortiz-Torres studied visual arts from la Escuela Nacional de Artes Plasticas, UNAM, Mexico City and moved to California in 1990 after receiving a Fulbright scholarship to study at CalArts, where he earned his MFA.[3] Ortiz-Torres' traditional Mexican art schooling, focusing on drawing and painting, combined with the very untraditional and conceptual artistic values of CalArts, helped to form Ortiz-Torres' hybrid art. Fox asserts that Ortiz-Torres' art is "bi-national and bi-cultural" and "transgresses and transcends" the identities of what he combines, "leading to a new and viable 'mestizo,'" the Spanish word for hybrid.[4] Ortiz-Torres' pieces not only combine cultures, but are amalgamations of genres of art, using cars to create combinations of ready-mades, kinetic sculptures, and performance pieces. Ortiz-Torres' cars move but must be operated, then reassembled once the "performance" is over. The baroque, irrational and surreal aesthetics of low-rider cars inspire Ortiz-Torres and his car pieces and dissolves the line between "high" and "low" art.[5]

Ortiz-Torres utilizes a 1960 Chevy Biscayne low rider – customized with hydraulics, to create *La Zamba del Chevy* (2000) (Fig. 10), dispalyed by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Through Ortiz-

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 "Rubén Ortiz Torres: Featured Artist," LatinArt.com, accessed October 8, 2011, http://www.latinart.com/faview.cfm?id=8.

4 Cody, *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, 179.

5 "Rubén Ortiz Torres: Featured Artist." LatinArt.com.

Torres' remote control, *La Zamba del Chevy* exaggerates movements of low-rider cars. Ortiz-Torres' use of the Chevy

pays direct homage to Valadez and *Gypsy Rose*. Ortiz-Torres also addresses the specific car culture of Los Angeles and the social and class connotations of the American car and Latino low-rider tradition. He explains his interest in customizing and its importance in representations of cultural identity:

> Ok, so I like this Chevy… this Chevy responds to my economical position and satisfies certain aesthetic needs I have as a middle class American. However, because I am Mexican… then, this product exists for me in a certain way but does not fully express me. So then, I adapt this to my particular taste and necessities, while always paying homage to the original product. In other words, a low-rider is not producing a new car, he is participating in this process of dialogue and negotiation.[1]

Ortiz-Torres over-exaggerates the movement of cars so they, "lurch, buck, fling, careen, and all but run amuck," performing "automotive peacockery."[2] Ortiz-Torres transforms his version of low-riders into vehicles "that verge comically on self-destruction."[3] By making low-rider cars unwieldy, comical, and self-destructive Ortiz-Torres both honors and critiques the low-rider car tradition, perhaps even suggesting it to be a counter-productive representation and stereotype of Latino society. Unlike *Gypsy Rose*, *La Zamba del Chevy* is not a working vehicle, but instead a non-functional art piece, and therefore more of a "performance" of cultural identity than a serious political and social declaration of cultural existence and pride.

While some Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans use cars as an assertion of pride in their social stature and cultural identity, cars can also symbolize unattainable economic status. Luxury cars, such as the Hummer, represent the epitome of the consumerist American Dream. Ironically, many car parts, including those of both Hummers and Volkswagen Beetles are manufactured by Mexican factory workers. Therefore, those who are essential to the production of luxury cars can never afford them and the status symbol, just as their pursuit of class status and the consumerist American Dream, remains elusive.

1 "Rubén Ortiz Torres: Featured Artist." LatinArt.com.

2 Fox, "Theatre of the Inauthentic," 90.

3 Ibid., 90.

The juxtaposition of Margarita Cabrera's two, full-size, soft-sculpture cars, *Hummer* (2006) (Fig. 11) and *Vocho* (2004) (Fig. 12), sewn of vinyl, and car parts made in Mexico, displays the economic disparity between Mexico and the United States. As Cabrera says, "The Hummer for me represents many things: power, excess, consumerism, waste, even fear because it represents war and death… It's very much the opposite for me

from the VW."[1] Cabrera, and many Mexican immigrants view the VW

as the utilitarian car of the everyday man, in contrast to the unattainable Hummer. For Cabrera, the VW carries more personal connotations, as growing up the VW Beetle was her family car. Cabrera sees the Beetle as a "national icon" which made car-ownership and transportation economical and feasible for many people, including her family.[2] While the Hummer and the VW carry very different connotations for the Mexican immigrant, they are united by their circumstances of manufacture and the overwhelming number of Mexican laborers, who contribute to their production. Cabrera's use of soft, humble materials renders the objects limp and fragile. Their lack of robustness and, in contrast to the cars of the low-riding culture, lack of self-assertion, critique the consumerist view of the American Dream[3] and comment on the impotence of Mexican immigrants to attain that dream. Cabrera's use of craft to depict cars, as with Ortiz-Torres, also creates a hybrid of American and Mexican values, uniting the American "religion" of cars with the Mexican "religion" of craft.

Cabrera's cars speak to the tradition of craft in Mexican culture, but also to gender issues associated with cars. While the low-rider tradition of the 1970s helped to build community relationships, it excluded women almost entirely. In the catalogue essay for the exhibition *La Vida Low Rider* at the Petersen Automotive Museum, Curator Denise M. Sandoval describes low-riding as a family tradition that builds relationships between fathers, sons, and brothers. The idea of "carnalismo," or family and fraternal relations,

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1 "Margarita Cabrera," Art Slant.

2 "Margarita Cabrera," Art Slant.

3 Gonzalez, "Phantom Sights: The Official, the Unofficial, and the Oraficial," 68.

saturates low-rider tradition, leaving no room for female participation.[1] The overtly crafty nature of Cabrera's cars impose female qualities on "macho" cars, mocking the correlation of manhood with vehicles. Cabrera's cars parody the originals;[2] satirizing the male-oriented car culture and critiquing its exclusion of women.

GENDER

As represented in Cabrera's cars, gender roles play a large part in the experience and identity formation of the Mexican immigrant. Both male and female immigrants struggle to resolve conflict between traditional Mexican gender roles and the different expectations and opportunities for men and women in the United States.

One facet of Mexican American male identity is "machismo," which literally translates to "masculinity." In the traditionally patriarchal Mexican culture, machismo refers not only to manliness, but the expected male role at the head of the family and society. In Mexico, men control labor, businesses and politics. Even in 21st century United States, Mexican men often oppose women's involvement in such activities.[3] Therefore, machismo and male-dominated organizations permeate and monopolize social empowerment, movement, and activism in the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American community.[4]

Salomon Huerta's Wrestler Mask series (2008) (Fig. 13) represents Mexican machismo and its relationship to Mexican immigrant and Mexican American identity. Salomon Huerta was born in Tijuana Mexico in 1965 and today lives and works in Los Angeles. Huerta moved to Los Angeles as a child where his family settled in Ramona Gardens, a housing project in East Los Angeles. Growing up, Huerta's the public murals by Chicano art activists provided his earliest artistic inspiration. In 1989 Huerta enrolled in the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena where he focused on illustration and honed his technical skills.

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1 Sandoval, "La Vida Lowrider: Cruising the City of Angels."

2 Cody, *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*,120.

3 Flores, William, "Mujeres en Huelga: Cultural Citizenship and Gender Empowerment in a Cannery Strike," *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights,* Flores, William V. and Rina Benmayor (eds) (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 238.

4 Flores, William V. and Rina Benmayor (eds), *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 212.

Huerta furthered his artistic practice at UCLA where he earned an MFA in 1998. At UCLA Huerta was the only Latino in the program and his professors seemed surprised and disappointed that his art did not conform to typical Chicano art of the time. Because he understands its potential to limit a career, Huerta has fought against being labeled “Latino” or “Chicano” and instead seeks to present his work with neutrality in order to attract a “the average viewer.”[1] Huerta asserts this importance of neutrality when he says, “…whatever I see, whatever I’m going to do, it’ll be from my point of view, living here. I don’t live in Mexico… I’ve been fortunate not to be labeled. Every review I’ve had they’ve reviewed the work, they haven’t reviewed me. I haven’t been pigeonholed, I haven’t been ghettoized. And that’s great.”[2] Ferrer states that through his depiction of identity, yet assertion of neutrality, Huerta’s paintings “reinvigorate” the genre of portraiture.[3]

Huerta’s paintings also communicate the redefinition of Mexican machismo in America, and its effect on identity for Mexican immigrant and Mexican American men. For his Wrestler Mask series, Huerta paints large-scale portraits of masked Mexican wrestlers which reference the Mexican culture of “lucha libre,” or free-form wrestling. Huerta utilizes a looser, more expressive technique for this series, more overtly representing the hand of the artists, as well as the sitter. Like the personalities of Mexican wrestlers themselves, the portraits are “larger than life”[4] and heroic in scale, paralleling the wrestler’s revered status in Mexican society. As Huerta says, “American culture has Superman and Batman, but you can only see them on screen. Mexican culture has these guys but you can actually meet them.”[5] Like Pinzón, Huerta is interested in hero culture in the United States and particularly in the Mexican American culture. While Pinzón elevates humble laborers to the level of superhero, Huerta takes heroes and presents them as compassionate and vulnerable, making them more humble and human. Huerta renders these violent, frightening characters elegantly, creating a sense of tension between the beautiful and the brutal,[6] like the

1 Melrod, “Mask of a Pro,” 34.

2 Ibid., 36.

3 Ferrer, Elizabeth, “Mirror/Image: Paintings by Salomon Huerta,” Austin Museum of Art, accessed October 30, 2011, http://www.amoa.org.

4 Melrod, “Mask of a Pro,” 34.

5 Melrod, “Mask of a Pro,” 34.

6 Ferrer, Elizabeth. “Mirror/Image: Paintings by Salomon Huerta.” Austin Museum of Art.

tensions Mexican immigrant men feel between Mexican traditions of machismo and the more egalitarian society of the contemporary United States. In his article, "Mask of a Pro," art critic George Melrod describes this dichotomy, and its influence on identity issues, when he says, "That his work actively engages a culture of blustery machismo and lays out an insinuation of latent threat and physical violence even as it openly embraces beauty, subtlety, delicacy, and vulnerability elevates his work above mere 'identity art.'"[1] Still, Huerta unequivocally addresses the issue of identity. Huerta depicts subjects that engage the viewer but he masks them, raising the question, what are these wrestlers hiding: gender, race, personal or national identity?[2] While the masks conceal their individual character, they are overtly Mexican, ironically revealing their cultural and ethnic identity. Again, as with Pinzón's *Superheroes*, the masked wrestlers represent the invisibility of Mexican immigrants in US society and their layered and hidden identity.

In Mexican patriarchal society men serve as sole provider for the family. In order to support their families, Mexican immigrant men are often forced to take low-paying manual labor and agricultural jobs, and are thus pigeon-holed as such by larger American society. Margarita Cabrera's large sculpture series, *Arbol de la Vida* (2007), addresses the stereotype of the Mexican immigrant male as a day-laborer. *Arbol de la Vida* (Fig. 14) consists of life-size farm tools and machines made of clay. Unlike her soft-sculptures, which possess a whimsical quality, these sculptures are very raw and direct. Their neutral, fleshy color invokes a human characteristic and gives the impression of "something being laid bare."[3] In her *Artforum* review of the sculptures, Annie Buckle goes on to say, "The sculpture is at once ambitious and vulnerable, and its fragile physicality is an echo and an affirmation of regional cultures and traditions imperiled by globalization."[4] The farm tools and machines, in particular the life-size tractor, have a large, physical presence but because they are made of clay, they are fragile, unstable, human constructions. Like Huerta's wrestlers, Cabrera imbues a very masculine subject with vulnerability, alluding to the vulnerability of the Mexican immigrant in the United

1 Melrod, "Mask of a Pro," 36.

2 Ibid.,36.

3 Buckle, Annie, "Margarita Cabrera: Walter Maciel Gallery," *Artforum*, Summer, 2008, accessed September 8, 2011, http://www.sarameltzergallery.com/artist.php?artist=cabrera&p=press.

4 Buckle, Annie, "Margarita Cabrera: Walter Maciel Gallery,"

States economy and job market. *Arbol de la Vida* speaks to two very different agricultural existences – the life of the Mexican farmer and the life of the Mexican American immigrant. Most who engage in agriculture in Mexico own their own farms or work as part of a farming community. In the United States, Mexican immigrant agricultural workers are usually migrants providing difficult manual labor for below minimum wage, with little opportunity for advancement or ownership. As with ERRE's *187 Pairs of Hands, Arbol de la Vida* gives physical presence to those often forgotten or ignored – the unseen or unacknowledged laborers behind the labor.

Arbol de la Vida translates to "Tree of Life" which refers to an ancient form of Mexican craft dating to Olmec civilizations. This variety of craft tells the story of the beginning of life, in the shape of a tree, and weaves in personal, family and community stories. Cabrera replaces the tree with a tractor and uses it to tell "her" story or, as she puts it, the story she is interested in telling – that of immigration.[1] The tractor represents the male Mexican immigrant's contribution to the history of agriculture in the United States, becoming his means of survival and defining his role in the United States.

Mexicanas play a unique and evolving role in American society. As William V. Flores, William V. Flores, President of the University of Houston-Downtown, and former deputy secretary of the New Mexico higher education department, states in his essay, "Mujeres en Huelga: Cultural Citizenship and Gender Empowerment in a Cannery Strike," "Women of color experience gender, class and race statuses concurrently."[2] Mexican immigrants and Mexican American women are triply disadvantaged, belonging to ethnic, class, and gender minorities groups, and therefore deny standard social categorization.[3] Despite their complex classification, as with Mexican men, Mexican women also fill traditional roles. In Mexican culture, the woman's place is still in the home. Even when they hold jobs and contribute to family income, their main responsibilities are still child rearing, cooking, laundry and housecleaning. This burden of two jobs leaves

1 "Margarita Cabrera," Art Slant.

2 Flores,"Mujeres en Huelga: Cultural Citizenship and Gender Empowerment in a Cannery Strike," 246.

3 Flores,"Mujeres en Huelga: Cultural Citizenship and Gender Empowerment in a Cannery Strike," 212.

Mexicanas with little time for anything outside of the home, such as improving their education, or engaging in social activism, thus furthering their confinement to their traditional role. In the United States, this relegation to the home extends to other people's houses. Just as Mexican immigrant men serve as a significant source of agricultural and manual labor in the United States, and are therefore pigeonholed as such, Mexican immigrant women often become housekeepers for wealthier Americans. As a traditionally female activity, and one which can be done in the home, women also take the main responsibility for creating craft and carrying on the craft tradition which is so integral to Mexican culture.

Margarita Cabrera's *Domestic Appliances* (2006) speak to the traditional role of Mexicana immigrants as homemakers and craft-makers. This series consists of full-size, soft sculptures of domestic appliances including: vacuums, sewing machines, cleaning supplies, blenders, and toasters, among other commodities. As with her cars, Cabrera replaces appliance parts with hand sewn vinyl, emphasizing and re-instilling the work of the hand in these very industrial products.[1] In addition to gender roles, these sculptures reference class distinctions between the housekeeper or factory worker and the consumer. Domestic machinery, such as that depicted in

Domestic Appliances (Fig. 15), is part of the effort to define the US middle class as one of leisure, design and affluence. *Domestic Appliances* alludes to the traditional female roles as craft-maker and homemaker, as well as the work of female Mexican immigrant laborers as the "servants" of upper and middle-class American housewives, and the factory workers who construct the real product. [2]

Traditional Mexican female roles influence Mexican immigrant and Mexican American impressions of a very American theory, feminism. Even though a distinct form of Chicana feminism has developed over the last 30 years, most Mexican immigrant and Mexican American women do not consider their social engagement or assertion of rights "feminism."[3] Most Chicanas perceive feminism as a condition of middle or upper class white women who strive to be just like men. While they may not see it as such, Chicana

1 Gonzalez, "Phantom Sights: The Official, the Unofficial, and the Oraficial," 66.

2 Gonzalez, "Phantom Sights: The Official, the Unofficial, and the Oraficial," 66.

3 Flores,"Mujeres en Huelga: Cultural Citizenship and Gender Empowerment in a Cannery Strike," 212.

assertion of women's rights is a different interpretation of feminism – one based much more upon communal issues than individual rights. Although limited by machismo and traditional cultural roles, social activism and involvement for Mexicanas in the United States is uniquely tied directly to their family and community. According to Flores, the desire for Mexican mothers to make a better life for their children drives their community and political activism, which in turn changes their roles in society.[1] Often Mexicana activists or feminists receive criticism from families, and resistance from the men in their lives – husbands, fathers, brothers and even sons – who find it hard to accept women's social engagement. Chicana feminist and activist groups are often successful because they utilize extended family and work-based connections to incite change. While their relegation to the home can be seen as a means of disempowerment and confinement, it also serves as a convening place for women's groups. This exclusively female space allows women the "opportunity for developing networks, support and a sense of self-worth."[2] Chicana feminism is also tied to culture and class. As Flores says, "Women did not develop a 'feminist consciousness' that cuts across race or class. Rather, they adopted a working class feminism that sought to build solidarity with other women whose lives were similar to their own."[3] While traditional gender roles still persist, Chicana feminists have made vast strides. Through empowerment, Mexican immigrant and Mexican American women gain confidence in their abilities and accomplishments, and expand their claim to social "space," even within Mexican American culture and the Mexican immigrant community.

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1 Flores,"Mujeres en Huelga: Cultural Citizenship and Gender Empowerment in a Cannery Strike," 212.

2 Ibid., 240.

3 Ibid., 249.

GLOBALIZATION

Although *Identidad* deals with the search for and assertion of the Mexican immigrant identity in the United States, the exhibition concludes by challenging the concept of nationhood and the relevance of national, ethnic, and cultural identities in a globalized world. We live in a world where instantaneous global communication and near universal accessibility of information makes the concept of national borders irrelevant and the identities established by those borders obsolete. The mass global migration of people, and their ideas and ideals, whether physically or virtually, is redefining nations and nationality. (Ironically, this progressive mentality of a borderless land emulates that of the ancient native people of the Americas, discussed earlier.) In relation to the US/ Mexican border issues, James says, “It’s a regional experience, but it’s emblematic of what is happening all over the world. These are universal issues. This is about human migration and economic refugees. As artists, we have a role not just as activists but as cultural archivists… This is part of our…cultural history – living history right now. ”[1] Globalization makes us aware that the issues Mexican immigrants face are universal, and the artists who address these issues contribute to living global history.

Global interconnectivity affects the creation and categorization of art in America and throughout the world. Noriega asserts that American art history has recently taken a “global” turn, with the institutional art world beginning to look beyond the traditional paradigm of what makes American art “American.”[2] This does not necessarily mean that Mexican immigrant and Chicano art is being incorporated into the American art canon, but rather its impact, as well as that of artists of all nationalities working in and outside of America, has made that canon irrelevant, or at least challenged its validity. Therefore it is not just Mexican immigrant or Mexican American art that cannot be classified, but American art itself.

Pedro Lasch addresses the issues of a globalized art world in his community-based mural project, *Latino/a America* (2006). Pedro Lasch was born in Mexico City in 1975 where he lived until moving to New

1 De La Rosa, “Artists at the Border,” 51.

2 Noriega, “The Orphans of Modernism,” 40.

York City when he was 19. Lasch teaches fine arts at Duke University and works in New York City where leading projects with immigrant communities and art collectives to create what he describes as, “socially engaged art forms an essential element of his work.”[1]

Latino/a America (Fig. 16) exemplifies Lasch’s community work and personifies the effect of mass physical and ideological migration on the deconstruction of national border and definitions. While Lasch led the project, local community members painted the majority of the mural. *Latino/a America* consists of abstract images that relate to the traditions of Latin American painting, mural, and graffiti art and other cultural customs. Traditionally, Mexican American serve as an assertion of presence and value and as a means of questioning the relevance of traditional art institutions that exclude muralists both for their artistic worth and ethnicity. As with many contemporary murals, *Latino/a America* both pays homage to, and questions, murals as an effective urban intervention, and their function as, “material embodiment of historical identity” by manipulating or abstracting standard Latin American mural iconography.[2] As a background for its abstracted iconography, *Latino/a America* presents a new map of the Americas and therefore a new global continent, “Latinidad,” redefining the borders of the English and Spanish speaking world, and redefining what it means to be “American” in the United States and in all of the Americas. *Latino/a America* acknowledges mass, epic, global migration as redefining the meaning of nationhood and cultural identities. Similarly to how Valerie James describes the US border condition as universal, Lasch asserts that the phenomenon of hybrid cultures and countries is not unique to the Americas. He says, “..that condition that I thought was Latin American, now is becoming more universal… it acts something like a dual life for dual realities.”[3] As with Mexican immigrants in the United States, and Latinos throughout the Americas, people world-wide experience conflicting and merging realities and identities due to the unification of the world through globalization, making it hard, if not impossible, to define cultural identities.

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1 “Pedro Lasch,” Duke University, accessed October 10, 2011, http://exhibits.library.duke.edu/exhibits/show/hyman/part1/biography-pedro-lasch.

2 Gonzalez, “Phantom Sights: The Official, the Unofficial, and the Oraficial,” 66.

3 “Pedro Lasch, Games, Non-Habitual Habits, Temporal Re-arrangements, selected Works Catalogue, 1998 – Present,” Pedro Lasch, accessed October 10, 2011, http://en.pedrolasch.com/.

In her photo series *Multiracial* (2001), Dulce Pinzón addresses the issue of the superficiality of identies based upon race and ethnicity. *Multiracial* (Fig. 17) is composed of sixteen color portraits of people of mixed ethnic backgrounds, wearing bright primary colors and standing in front of bright primary-colored backgrounds. The photographs present a stark contrast between the bright, identifiable and "pure" primary colors backdrops, and the wide spectrum of skin tones of the subjects. Without the tag at the bottom of each photograph, identifying the race of its sitter, the viewer would find it difficult to determine the subject's ethnicity, and even more difficult to distinguish one ethnicity from another. The primary colors create a foil for the "ambiguous and artificial, yet commonly accepted, boundaries between the different races."[1] The subjects gaze directly at the viewer, giving the portraits an intimacy and directness that allows and forces viewers to confront this issue. *Multiracial* questions and challenges the notion of race as an intrinsic quality, instead deeming it a social construct.

In contrast to *Multiracial*'s directness, Salomon Huerta's series of paintings presenting the back of men's heads is ambiguous and mysterious, yet equally pertinent in discussing the construct of ethnic identity. Huerta represents his sitters with no ornamentation, in functional, minimalist clothes. The subjects sit or stand squarely with their backs to the viewer, arms at their sides with their heads or bodies taking up the entire picture plane (Fig. 18). Like the sitters in Multiracial, Huerta places his subjects symmetrically in front of flat, graphic, brightly colored backgrounds, contrasting with the skin tones of the sitters.[2] Huerta's portraits hide and negate the identity, gender and ethnicity of their subjects. "By eliminating his subject's facial features, their cultural origins, and other attributes, Huerta creates a vacuum that viewers are compelled to fill with their own perceptions, biases, and experiences."[3] Huerta says, "I want to make work that makes the viewer question his own identity."[4] By doing so, Huerta creates a "non-portrait" which reflects

1 Dulce Pinzón, accessed October 10, 2011, http://www.dulcepinzon.com.

2 "In Depth Art News: Salomon Heurta: Paintings," *Absolute Arts*, accessed October 30, 2011, http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2001/05/12/28547.html

3 "In Depth Art News: Salomon Heurta: Paintings," Absolute Arts.

4 Ibid.

more about the viewer than the sitter. Huerta calls these works "mirror images," or as Ferrer describes them:

> ...works upon which viewers project a certain identity and then reflect back upon the prejudices or values they call forth. The fact that we have little basis on which to judge these figures forces us to fall back on our own experiences and, ultimately, to scrutinize how we relate to people or things unfamiliar.... His larger purpose... is to explore how we perceive and assign identity to others, and what generates our need to do so.[1]

Huerta presents a psychological rather than a physical mirror; these images do not reflect the viewers' physical image but force them to reflect upon the impressions they apply to others. As with his home series, Huerta utilizes a smooth, crisp, and exacting painting style which negates the hand and identity of the artists, just as the portraits negate the identity of the sitter.[2]

Although attempting to present ethnically neutral portraits, Huerta's series emulates mug-shots or police line-ups, stripping the paintings of their objectivity. Intentionally or not, the figures suggest gang members, violent males, street kids, or other such clichéd identities associated with minorities.[3] Therefore the series is far from ethnically neutral, but harkens to a world where young Latino and Black males are subject to racial profiling and discrimination.[4] Huerta examines issues "central to Chicanos and others outside the social and economic mainstream: how we, in the United States, think about and act upon questions of race, class, and gender."[5] The work compels us to consider "the terms by which we each negotiate personal and social politics of identity. " Huerta's series turns race from a matter of "us and them" to a discussion on, "how do I relate to you, to him?"[6] Huerta's mirror reflects questions back to the viewer creating an endless circle of inquiry and confrontation.

According to contemporary art critic Sharon Mizota, Mexican immigrant and Mexican American art

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1 Ferrer, "Mirror/Image: Paintings by Salomon Huerta."

2 "In Depth Art News: Salomon Heurta: Paintings," Absolute Arts.

3 Ferrer, "Mirror/Image: Paintings by Salomon Huerta."

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

"…presents race as an issue intrinsic to all our cultural and political debates… being post-racial does not mean that we are done talking about race, but rather that we should be talking about it more."[1] *Identidad* enables the visitor to confront and understand the issues of race and identity faced by Mexican immigrants in the United States. As exemplified in Huerta's "non-portrait" series, the exhibition explores not only the Mexican immigrant experience with conflicting issues of place, class and gender, but how Americans view and understand this experience and how that understanding effects the lives of Mexican immigrants and all Americans. *Identidad* brings to light Mexican immigrant art as a reflection of the Mexican immigrant struggle for identity and a recognition of Mexican immigrants' contribution to contemporary American art creation, society and culture. Yet the art work also enables viewers of all backgrounds to reflect upon the part they have played in the universal struggles of marginalized groups, how they view identity, and how, in the future, Americans and global citizens will construct and value ethnic, social, and national identities.

1 Mizota, Sharon, "Phantom Sightings: Los Angeles County Museum of Art," *ARTnews*, November, 2008, accessed September 8, 2011, http://www.sarameltzergallery.com/artist.php?artist=cabrera&p=press.

Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

Identidad is not a traditional academic art exhibition. Instead of organizing the exhibition by formal qualities or categories of art or artists, *Identidad* utilizes art to tell the story of the Mexican immigrant's struggle to form identity through the themes of Place, Class, and Gender. *Identidad* leads the visitor through the Mexican immigrant experience, from the act of migration to the challenges and accomplishments they face in their new life in the United States.

The exhibition experience begins by passing under ERRE's 40 foot *Toy an Horse*. The piece embodies dual identity and also serves as a physical gateway to the exhibition, imbuing the visitor with a sense of awe and encapsulating the simultaneous wonder and poignancy present in so many pieces of the exhibition.

The linear floor plan of Building 4 at the Geffen lends itself to a linear story-line and visitor path, guiding visitors from Place, to Class, to Gender. Although maintaining some of the industrial feel of the Building 4, the design creates separate environments that appropriately reflect the issues raised in each main section of the exhibition. The visitor's walk through the area devoted to the theme of Place emulates the immigrant's journey from Mexico to the United States. A shift in atmosphere as the visitor transitions between the two "countries" of the exhibition (with ERRE's *Prejudice Project* serving as a metaphor for the border) conveys the immigrant's physical and psychological transition from Mexico to the United States. Car culture serves as a central hub of the exhibition both for its visually enticing objects and its correlation to all three major themes of the exhibition. The cars themselves sit in environments representing the context in which they were created. In contrast, the section dealing with Gender provides a more intimate, home-like space as gender is a more personal and individual experience.

Paramount to the success of an identity-based exhibition, is conveying the identity of the storytellers of the exhibition, the artists. *Identidad* presents the universal story of the Mexican American immigrant as a cultural group experience and identity. Profiling the artists gives individual faces to the story of the Mexican immigrant and allows visitors, especially the target audience, to better understand art as an outlet for expression of individual and group identity. The opening section of the exhibition briefly introduces the artists to the visitor with each artist's complete story presented through the "featured artists" of each section.

Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center

With limited space at Plaza de la Raza, the exhibition is limited to Cabrera's *Hummer* and a profile of the artists. Cabrera created several *Hummer* sculptures which therefore can be shown simultaneously at the Geffen and Plaza de la Raza. Even more than other cars in the exhibition, *Hummer* represents all three themes of the exhibition. The Hummer epitomizes cars as an identity object and status symbol in the Mexican immigrant community. Cabrera's hand-sewn *Hummer* raises issues of the genderized tradition of craft in Mexican culture and gender issues associated with cars and class. In addition to an unattainable status symbol, the Hummer is used for border patrol and therefore represents the migration from Mexico to the United States addressed in Place. Providing just a "teaser" at Plaza de la Raza encourages visitors to visit the main exhibition at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA.

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