



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Victor Franco, 1972
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Victor Franco in July 1972. The interview was conducted by Barry Schwartz for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

BARRY SCHWARTZ: This is Barry Schwartz. And this is another interview for the Archives of American Art in the series The Art World in Transition. I'm interviewing today Mr. Victor Franco who comes to us from the Los Angeles and San Francisco area. Victor, perhaps we might begin this interview if you would explain a little bit of your background and how you first got involved in community arts?

VICTOR FRANCO: My background in community arts stems from my activity in community development as an activist. I first got into community development in the Chicano area of Los Angeles as editor of an underground newspaper which was directed to the Chicano youth. We were sort of responsible for the walkouts that occurred in the spring of 1968 after we had been in existence for about six months. After a year of, say, the editing approach to community development, I left it because of a lot of political strife within the community itself.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Do you want to identify that community?

VICTOR FRANCO: Yes. This is East Los Angeles. Toward the latter part of the life of the Inside East Side newspaper, which I was founder and editor of, I became involved in trying to establish a gang federation. It was called La Junta. I worked with them for about a year. This ended around 1969, so I was involved with them from 1968 to 1969. I organized gangs and edited a newspaper which was one of the big political forces in the Chicano community in Los Angeles. There was a split between us and La Raza and LUCA – which is the League of United Citizens to Help Addicts. Too much energy was expended in fighting each other, so I decided to leave the political field and get into something that would reach the masses of the people. These activities were just reaching a very minute portion of the community; they weren't affecting the lives of the masses of the people. So I figure we'd have to go into a cultural approach and change. The community was polarized between the anti-activists and the activists, which put the activists in a very, very small portion of the community. So I started the organization called Mechicano Art Center as a result of my leaving the activist role.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: One implication of that, is it not, is that people engaged in direct politics designed to unify a community very often have the opposite effect, whereas people engaged in the cultural life of the community are able to create unity and cohesion among the people in the community?

VICTOR FRANCO: Because the tool of arts – how can I say it? – has a subtle impact on the life style of the community which really isn't very threatening to the people. Everybody wants a change but they don't want to change radically or politically; but if change comes down to them very subtly in the form of culture, then they're willing to accept it. This is true for the majority of people – businessmen, police, activists; everybody is, say, pro-cultural change. Mainly, people have been dealing for too long with the thought that the only way to uplift the public is to uplift them

economically. They all forget that you have to uplift people spiritually too. And if you can't do both, then you can't have successful change or revolution. Well, we filled that gap and we got support from the entire community.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Why don't you tell us a little bit about the Mechicano Art Center?

VICTOR FRANCO: Okay. The way I started the Mechicano Art Center, because of my affiliation in East Los Angeles, was to regroup, leave the community, and get all the institutional contracts I needed. I figured I had to meet the entertainers and so on who would give us support. And get contacts in the galleries. So we got a gallery started on La Cienega, actually right off La Cienega and Melrose. My intent was to do that, then leave that area and go back into East Los Angeles with the tools, and the contacts necessary to implement the project successfully there, because for every project you have initial problems that come down and you've got to be able to deal with those problems in order to survive for the period until funds come in – the funding period takes about a year. The way I planned to do that was to get some kind of recognition for the artists who were participating by selling their paintings in the art world so they could make enough money to feel they were not just wasting their time. That worked out really well. We had exhibits going throughout the city in all different types of institutions, gallery shows, and whatever. So they were getting recognition outside the community, and inside the community, they were getting the energy needed to push for a year without any kind of money. We had to raise the money out of our own pockets. Everybody was starving. The brunt of it came down on me. Basically I financed the entire thing and it got too hectic. Now this couldn't have happened unless you had guys like Rea Tilano and Frank Martinez. Moira Bright is a very key person in this organization. She happens to be co-founder of the Mechicano Art Center. Now after a year of struggle and really pushing hard, we began to get the basic concepts of Mechicano to the community. We succeeded through the media, and through total community support by pulling off, for example, key Chicano festivals. The first one was in 1970 at the Palladium. It was called the Chicano MAD Festival – MAD standing for Music, Art, and Dance.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: What size population are we talking about?

VICTOR FRANCO: We're talking about 600,000 people.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Prior to the Mechicano Art Center, was there very much cultural activity directed at the Chicano community?

VICTOR FRANCO: There was none, absolutely none. This is why it was so successful, and it came about so rapidly because there was none. There was an attempt by the Plaza de la Raza but they're just a paper organization. At this time they're not doing anything and they're not dealing with the Chicano community on the same terms or with the same goals that we have. You see, we're uniting and getting support of the activists. For example, our opening exhibit was a photography exhibit of the riots of August 29, 1969. It was very anti-police. That was the type of photo exhibit we pulled off. The photo exhibit came from *La Raza* magazine. This is the same group that I had split with because they didn't understand my concept in long term organization. But by contributing to the exhibition, they followed with very good backing of the organization by all the activists, so I tied up the activists. After that we pulled off very traditional type of art exhibits. The police weren't too uptight. From the first exhibit we had, they thought we were another activist organization. So you see I tied in both of them by telling them, "Well, that's just a photo exhibit," and then following it up with regular traditional art exhibits. We then had total support of the community – of the businessmen, of the activists, etc. We started to gain momentum. Then I pulled off El Mundo Chicano Festival at the Ash Grove last summer. Ed Pearl happened to be the guy who

contacted me. Again I let the artists themselves program the week-long festival. If the guys in theater – activists – wanted to do street theater, they went ahead and did it. I don't like to dictate what's going to come out. Whatever comes out is the expression of the group. Again it came out very well. After that we got funding from the Catholic Church, from the campaign for Human Development Conference I think. They gave us \$14,900. This shocked me because I only asked for \$9,900. I was after local money. They turned down the local proposal and three months later they had me in their plank for national monies and they came up with \$5,000 more than I asked for. I don't know why they did that. I can't figure it out. But I imagine it was because of the positive program we had in the community. After that we had another big move – the bus bench project.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Would you describe that?

VICTOR FRANCO: Right. The bus bench project came about from the efforts of the community Doctors Hospital which is adjacent to the Mechicano Art Center. They approached Rea Tilano, who happens to be the workshop coordinator, and asked him if he would want to get thirty artists to do thirty bus benches – the artists in turn would receive money from some kind of competition in which the people would vote on the best painting on the bus benches. That gave a little stimulation to the artists. But I think they would have done it even if there were no money involved because it was such a beautiful thing. But, you know, you can't get ripped off by the hospital getting free publicity and the advertising firm that handled the bus bench getting free publicity, so the money was justified in the artists' sense.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Describe the billboards, too.

VICTOR FRANCO: The billboards are actually being done through the Parks and Recreation Department of Los Angeles. They asked us to get some artists and we provided some of the artists for this project. We encouraged our artists to participate. It happens that our artists were the ones who were chosen to do the billboards through some competition. I think there are only two billboards. One happens to be in Echo Park right now, not in East Los Angeles, but it's still a Chicano community. And, at the moment, there's one in West Los Angeles. The trend seems to be going through a lot of favorable response, and I hope it gets into East Los Angeles. What I'm going to try to do is increase the bus bench art program in East Los Angeles along with the billboard art concept. I think we can get these advertising firms to meet the public service requirements by, say, helping to beautify the environment. And I think that might snowball. One reason I'm saying this is because Doctors Hospital has asked us if we want to do fifty more benches this fall. We will be paid for it. I can see Foster & Kleiser Billboard Company doing the same thing. It seems like it's picking up momentum. Now another project that the Mechicano Art Center is involved in is trying to make some kind of transition from the graffiti, which is an environmental pollution problem in our view. Now other people may think it's an art form, but I don't think it's an art form because the concept of art is not taken into account by the guys who do it. So what we're trying to do right now is to get the gang federation to work with us in a program that hopefully will be funded by the Department of Education under the Environmental Education Act. Now, if we do that, then we would have dealt with the total environment that we are conscious of which, I think, has to go through a transition from a polluted state to an aesthetic state. This would make it part of the life style of the community and would spiritually uplift it. So what we're after really is dealing with bus bench art, which would get rid of a lot of the advertisements on the streets, and billboard art, and making the transition from graffiti to fine art in the form either of murals, which would be a representational art, or non-representational art in the form of super-graphics. I can see this happening because we have, I believe, eight murals up right now in Los Angeles. Okay. Now there's one on Downie Road and there's one going up right now on Lincoln Heights. Then I think we have one or two in Doctors Hospital, and those in front of our Mechicano building. Those walls are normally defaced by local

groups writing on them. Now one reason I think this is possible is that all the bus bench art and all these murals that have been up for a period of from two to six months haven't been defaced. We were wondering if they would be defaced or not – how the community would respond to this art. It was a favorable response because they weren't defaced.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Here you're really trying for a new relationship between the artist and the community, aren't you?

VICTOR FRANCO: And the gangs. Well, let's be specific – the community we're being specific with are the gangs – right? The gang members, not the residents, of the community are defacing the walls. So when we're talking about "the community" we're talking about the gangs only. This is why we're being specific in our approach to the community; we're dealing directly with the gangs. You see, if they cooperate, then we can succeed in the program, because they're the ones who use this for status, for recognition. You know, everybody wants status and recognition, and we get it in different ways. The gang members of the community get it that way – it's really gratification of the ego and immortality, the whole thing, you know. So if we are successful in doing this I think that in, say, five or ten years we can really change the face of the community. The approach right now, say, of constructing all these new types of housing projects, new building, parks or whatever, is really ineffective in the environmental development of the community because they are always defaced. And if they're defaced it doesn't make any difference whether they're new or not. You still have dead pollution – you still have the same type of consciousness of the community. So the main thing to do here is to construct these new structures, parks, or whatever, but also to prevent them from being defaced – have them respected by the community. There's a natural tendency to do art work on the walls, so if we can help them along and make it a little bit more aesthetic, which would then be much more appealing to the residents, it would make them happier and you'd have a happier community, say, a spiritually uplifted community. So this is what the Mechicano Art Center is trying to do right now. In the future I think we're going to try to give music to the people in the form of concerts, try to tie up the Parks and Recreation and the Musicians Union Trust Fund, along with some street theater. We would try to get street theater that will be relevant to those particular groups which are the ones that need a type of spiritual uplift. At this point they're the ones that are downgrading or upgrading the community. That is probably the total picture of the Mechicano Art Center past, present and future.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Well, I think one other point is that you have a certain kind of relationship to the Mechicano. There are other people involved in the running of the thing and as a cultural activist, you have chosen for yourself a certain particular role. Maybe you should rap that out.

VICTOR FRANCO: Okay. As an activist I always fade out of a program. And when you fade out, you have to replace the program with those people who have to go through that stage of development which would then in turn fade them out and bring more people into the cultural aspect. You do this through exposure with outside communities, and national people like the conference on community arts and community survival did. Now this type of development tends to develop the consciousness of the neighborhood kids who participated in the project with the conference. This immediately sets up a broader foundation, such as Frank Martinez and a couple of other guys in Center who are only high school kids. And these high school kids getting this kind of exposure is automatically going to have a direct impact on their peers. I feel there's a snowballing effect happening and I see the cultural foundation broadening and having a total impact on the entire community. And as a political force, I don't see any kind of better political instrument than to have the entire community behind a project. If you want to back up certain projects in the community, or denounce certain projects in the community, you have their support as a tool because people are going to have respect for you. You're also going to have tremendous amount of people behind you because they're all involved in

the project. That is what we're trying to do - to get more people involved in participating within the group. I feel that the way to do that is always phasing out the directors and they in turn getting into another phase of the cultural development that's happening in Los Angeles. That's what's happening with Leonard Castellanos. Eventually, next year if the Alliance gets funded, as I see it, Leonard will phase out there, Tilano will become the director, and Armando will become the workshop coordinator.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: What you're saying in effect is that the old model of the community organization, which consists of only a few individuals with a tremendous amount dedication who work for a number of years and then get turned on to something else and the organization falls apart, is changing. You're replacing this old model with a new one which sees the chain of command constantly changing and people constantly growing in the positions they're in, and then going on to a more overview, a larger role, while other people, right out of the community, take over the past positions, providing a financial base, community support, and creating an enduring community organization that doesn't depend on single individuals, and on a kind of economic or fiscal tentativeness.

VICTOR FRANCO: Right. The only way that this project can ever maintain or perpetuate itself is if you remain relative to the community. That is really important.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: I think the next thing to go on to is that you, as the person who was coordinator of Mechicano, went on to broaden your own scope and range of activities, and that leads us here to the question of the Los Angeles Arts Alliance. What is the Alliance all about, how did it happen, and what role did you play in it?

VICTOR FRANCO: Okay. This will go back about a year ago which would be sometime around July, 1971. For about six months prior to that, say from about January, 1971 to July, 1971 I was visiting the Neighborhood Arts Program in San Francisco just for my own education. I was working with the mission project called Galleria de la Raza which is headed by Rene Yanez. Now they were acting almost as a model for Mechicano at that point. I was trying to implement in East Los Angeles the type of program they were doing. I learned from them. That's the way everything works – everything works by a learning process; very few of us are the creators. So I was just taking what they were doing and trying to implement it in East Los Angeles. That worked very well. After going back and forth to San Francisco it got to a point when I started working with the black knights explosion, which is headed by Michael Catlett, and with Roberto Vargas, who was one of the community organizers for the Neighborhood Arts Program, which is under the San Francisco Arts Commission and with Eric Reuther, who happened to be the administrative director of the Neighborhood Arts Program. So about a year ago I arrived at the whole concept of the necessity for the Alliance to happen in Los Angeles; that is, the necessity of having a neighborhood arts program-type of project for the basic purpose of funding, of support in the form of services and coordination of projects.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: You're talking about a large coalition of separate community organizations that act in unison for funding, avoiding overlap of resources?

VICTOR FRANCO: Right. I'm talking about that in terms of what has to happen in Los Angeles, not what was happening in San Francisco. What's happening in San Francisco is a city project under the Arts Commission, which is a mayor's commission. Now they are limited - they don't have a coalition. They are just a service center for all the neighborhood art centers. They provide money for community organizers and it is very minimal – they deal with two hundred dollars a month for four organizers. They use this money, for, say, the creations of festivals, of workshops, or whatever.

These guys are to just disperse the money as they wish. And the pressures come to them from their peers. So it works out sort of well that way, because you don't have to deal with red tape and bureaucracy; you don't have to make a request for money which goes to the mayor, and comes back to this guy who rejects it. It was so slow, and that seemed the basic reason for this neighborhood arts program failure to begin with. So Eric came in and restructured the program to deal with the success of the program this way. And it became a success. Eric was very good at being innovative in that sense. Anyway, in Los Angeles I was asked to set up a meeting between the Parks and Recreation and a group called the Fine Arts Council of Los Angeles or something like that which was headed by John Stilyun and John Blaine. Now they asked me to set up the meeting in San Francisco between the group – they knew I was dealing with and was friends with Eric Reuther. After I think the first half hour of the meeting we had a break and Eric said he didn't want to deal with them. He said, "Again we're dealing with institutional people who are not going to relate to the street people. This is going to cause a program failure." Eric realized that the only way to have a successful program in dealing with street organizations is by gaining their trust, by directly relating to the street on their terms. So at that point I decided I was going to take the task of organizing this project in Los Angeles. Then I did decide with Leonard Castellanos. He was there and I asked him if he would help me in the undertaking of this project. He said yes. We talked it over and decided that the only way the thing could happen was by not dealing with governmental agencies. When you do that, you're not free to do what you want – you never know what limits you can go to as far as programming goes. So we just said we're not going to deal with the government, nor with institutional people. Therefore we decided to bypass the organization started in Los Angeles that wanted to create a neighborhood arts program type of project. We said we're just going to bypass them and organize the street organizers. They would come to us in the form of directors of the Black Arts Council, the director of the Watts Towers Art Center, the Mechicano Art Center. At this point, Leonard Castellanos was director of the Mechicano Art Center. That's when I stepped out; I said, "Leonard, now you're the director of the Mechicano Art Center. I'll drop out. I'll just be president and I'll take a lesser more background role with Mechicano." Then I had to deal with the Asians. They didn't want to participate in this program. They just weren't ready for it. So John Ito said, "Well, I don't want to be on the board of directors. That's too much for me. I'm merely trying to get the Asian community together." So a rationale behind not getting any more blacks was that I had to deal with Jim Woods. Jim Woods is one of those people who just can't deal with anybody on a peer level. He had to be the super-power in the organization. I figured that this type of organization couldn't have that type of person. There would be too much conflict. We all have to relate to each other and we all have to be social, we all have to be friends. So I got another black person who happens to be a good friend on mine. He's a pharmacist. He helped set up the Big Brothers, which is a nonprofit service organization in Los Angeles. I got him to be on the board. And I got Myra Murphy who was working with Parks and Recreation. She and Dr. Robert Haas are the only two white board members. But I felt that we needed this type of board membership which wasn't really street people. They were the bridge that we needed to have between the street organizations and institutions, and the shock absorbers between the minorities and the majority. We structured the board that way so we won't directly confront the white institutions. We'll have these people deal with the white institutions and it will be easier for them to accept. And that's been working out very well. So we structured the board with five street organizers and two non-street organizers but who are sympathizers. You have to structure things that you, you know. People want to do it democratically, call a huge community arts meeting and have a vote on it, but it doesn't work out that way. That's not the way you organize. I felt that the next step was to get an advisory board which would have no power but which again would be the bridge between the institutions, government agencies and the board of directors - the majority of which were street organizers. I got John Stilyun who happens to be a consultant to the Board of Education in the art department, I guess. Then we got Eric Reuther from San Francisco who is a friend of mine and who

became our advisor. The credibility there is great because he had a successful program in San Francisco and everybody in Los Angeles was looking to them as a model. He agreed to be on our advisory board. Then we got Clare Doossen, who is director of the junior art center which is a city agency – they're trying to be community arts. She accepted our invitation to be on our advisory board. Recently we got the head of the municipal art department, Kenneth Ross, to be on the advisory board. And we got Bill Agee who is director of the Pasadena Art Museum

BARRY SCHWARTZ: I think we have a sense now of how you went about doing that. Perhaps it would be good to indicate how far the Alliance had come along and what role you played this year prior to the American Council of Arts and Education Conference on Community Arts and Community Survival.

VICTOR FRANCO: Okay. Using these people I have just mentioned as the only credibility we had, since we had no background, no track record, we had really nothing concrete to use for any further organizing. So the next thing we had to do was look for a project that we could undertake to be our track record. Two projects came to us. One was an arts expo which was to be held at Cal State, Los Angeles, which was going to be an art exposition of all the community art groups – theater, music, the whole thing. That didn't work out too well because there was going to be a hassle between us and Cal State. We didn't want to be tied down to any kind of institution and be responsible for our actions in dealing with them. I mean I didn't want to be responsible for what we did in direct relationship to the school. They wanted some kind of commitment that we wouldn't blow their scene. So we just said, "Let's drop you." The next thing that came up was this conference which was to be held in Los Angeles. It was going to deal with community arts as a tool for radicalizing the educational system. That's the way it came down to me from Dr. Bob Hawes who was on our board of directors. He was approached by Allen Sap. Okay, now Hawes called me and said, "Would you like to undertake this project?" I talked to the group. They said no, and I don't blame them because I really didn't want to do it anyway. But I felt that if there was anything in it for us that we could use for organizational purposes, then we'll do it. I'd use what we could get to deal with the organizers in the community who don't particularly want to be studied again and be ripped off by the white man again. So I had to deal with the blacks, Chicanos, and the Asians on those terms. I told them that if we undertake this project we can use it for our organizational purposes. I said we can use the project to organize the Alliance in the six months that we're going to document, say, a book and a film for the A.C.A.E. and we'll use this for funding, we'll use this for developing our organization, and everything will be okay then. We don't have the money, so let's use that and give them the conference. But, at that point, we didn't really realize the significance of the conference. As we started getting into the conference, all the organizations started really realizing that they were being ripped off; they, not myself. The guy who was organizing this project was not dealing with them in street terms.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Who was that?

VICTOR FRANCO: John Blaine. So they felt we were getting ripped off again by John Blaine who is a white man making \$1700 a month and he's just here for the bread – he's not relating to the street people on street terms. He's just cutting them off saying, "Okay, fine, you did your thing, I'm sorry you can't be on the documentation film." You know, after promising them that. He just had no way of dealing with not coming through on a commitment. By the third month of this project everybody was turned off it, everybody wanted to drop out. They didn't understand that there was something beyond John Blaine and that we could patch that up and then go ahead. I had to call a meeting of all the groups and I explained to them that John Blaine didn't understand the psyche of street people and that is not his fault; he still is a good guy, he still has a lot of potential. I finally had to prove that to the groups. After doing that, the project started moving again. But around May the

project was about ready to fall through. People were going to pull out because they just didn't want to deal with John Blaine and more John Blaines who were going to come from back East. Right? I told them, don't worry about it. That was patched up but it was never understood by the people in San Francisco because they felt they were being ripped off. So I had lots of problems. San Francisco was talking about using Los Angeles as a model and here they were the model to begin with in the neighborhood art sense. In the neighborhood art support sense everybody was saying that the Alliance was the model for the country, the model that would be needed to help the growth and the survival of all the organizations by supporting them financially and administratively, too. Most of the problems in community arts are administrative problems. Everybody is dealing with administration and not creating programs. So if those administrative problems are removed from their programming and absorbed by another organization which they trust, then they can be free to create more projects and they will be the artists they want to be and not be administrators as they are at this point.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Well, apparently you got the Alliance together. Now how do you think people felt about the conference by the time it was over?

VICTOR FRANCO: Okay. By the time it was over there were mixed feelings. The Los Angeles area was very happy because the panelists and the conferees were very happy, which means funding, which means their survival, their existence. In that basic sense they're very happy. Whereas San Francisco is very uptight. They feel that the Alliance, or the Los Angeles group, ripped them off by using them as a model. Well, they just feel that we used them in our organizational process.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: They may be sorry they didn't do it in San Francisco?

VICTOR FRANCO: Yes, that's basically what it is.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: But it was a success?

VICTOR FRANCO: Yes. I think it's an ego thing that they're undergoing. They feel that the money will be bypassing San Francisco and that it will be going to Los Angeles. At this point the program is collapsing in San Francisco. They're starving, they want to exist. So in that sense it was a negative response. So we have two responses; the San Francisco and Northern California people were very uptight; the Los Angeles people were very pleased because they can see some kind of security in their future existence.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: How many groups are you talking about?

VICTOR FRANCO: There are fifty groups in Los Angeles County. The problem there is that no one organization knows any other organization and there is not any kind of attempt to have any interaction between these organizations, basically because all of them are barely making it, they're barely doing their own thing. So what I'm going to try to do is to help in the interaction by my directly creating programs which would bring the Alliance into a specific center and pulling off a community function. In other words, I would do the organizing for them and they would get the credit for, say, a festival or a concert or a super graphic project in their community which isn't being done any place else except in Mechicano and Compton Arts Academy. Right? All the other centers are not really community arts programs at this point in my eyes. I feel that community arts should deal with the masses of the people. They're not dealing with the masses of the people. They're training people in film making, and these guys are not making it as film makers. A lot of money is being squandered; a lot of money is being spent in workshops. I feel that all the money that's going into these programs should be seen visually. The way to do that is to get projects out into the community and away

from the center, the center being the focal point of activity within the community. So I'm going to try to implement these ideas myself, knowing that these people here are not going to do it but will support it if somebody else does it for them. We're going to need publicity for these projects. The way we're going to do that is by getting out flyers and posters and what not that are going to be needed to make the neighborhood aware of what kind of programs will be happening in the future. This equipment can also be used for any other fund-raising activities that the centers might have. I think the only kind of equipment we'll have for publicity is a Gestetner. Basically I think the Gestetner can only be used for flyers. All this has to be coordinated. And, well, advertising through newspapers, radio, and television media. And in the proposal we're going to have a small budget for a PR firm which happens to be the Wagner Public Relations firm that did the publicity for the conference. And they're very good, you know. They can take the brunt of just doing that task in, say, relieving the staff and me from having to deal with the press and all that bull shit. So within a year I see this will be coordinated by a newsletter which will be mailed out to every community arts organization, to every arts institution in the city and hopefully might be mailed to a lot of national institutions if they request it. With this newsletter I think we'll try psychologically to stir up some kind of spirit in community arts which isn't there right now.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: We don't have a hell of a lot of time left and it might be good at this point if you would just reflect for a moment on what you see is the importance of community arts and what role it has to play.

VICTOR FRANCO: Let me just deal with one more thing. After this is done you have to deal with the State of California. I feel that if you organize the State of California, create an arts commission which will directly fund all these organizations, then you will have the survival of these organizations secured. But unless you do that you're not going to have a successful program. So the ultimate aim right now is to get the entire state organized along these very basic lines and have money secured by the state government. That can only happen if we get a new governor. I can see Jerry Brown, Junior being that next governor and he's very receptive to this type of program, to this type of community development. I can see that within two or three years, if everything goes right, that the funds will be secured for these organizations and their survival will definitely be there. But unless this is done I can't see community arts going any other place, I can see community arts dying in the near future. To get to your question, the direct role in community arts basically is just the spiritual uplifting of the people, the masses of people that are downtrodden right now. The minority communities are spiritually dead and I think our main goal is to awaken them spiritually to the point where they can become politically conscious of their environment and what's happening to them and their lifestyle and hopefully to stimulate them to do something about their condition. I think basically that's what community arts is. It's a tool for social change. It's a tool for community development, which is social change. I can't see any other reason for community arts.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: So community arts have the potential of unifying a community and creating a cohesion among so many diverse groups that are often antagonistic to one another. It might well be that the community arts organization might become somewhat transformed into dealing more with the political and social needs of the people once they were together?

VICTOR FRANCO: I can't ever see the people being together so I can't see it becoming a political tool overtly; I think it will always have to be done covertly. I can't see it ever transforming to, say, an overt political tool.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Well, I think in that comment there are a few indications that the situation in Los Angeles is very unique and different from places like Minneapolis and New York. You told me the other day that you had a little theory about Los Angeles; the point you made was that when

you begin to implement certain ideas in Los Angeles the community is so spread out and is not so sophisticated or troubled politically that you can carry off certain things.

VICTOR FRANCO: I feel that this is also true for California as a whole. I think that's why California will be implementing the first type of community Arts commission that's needed for the survival of the community. And I don't think it could happen in any other place. I can't see that, because you're dealing with politics and politicians and that gets pretty heavy because the power thing in California isn't as tight in politics as it is in Chicago, Illinois, or in New York. I think a direct action by the governor's office to create under executive order a community arts commission won't have any kind of repercussions on his part, and he won't have any kind of challenge by the traditional art institutions if it's done right. Whereas I think a lot of hassle would come about in New York and maybe Minneapolis or Minnesota. I think California is very unique and I think Los Angeles is where constructively it's going to begin. You know a lot of the burden is borne by the people in Northern California – Berkeley - and at the same time in New York. They're the ones who are getting all the bumps on the head suffer all the political strife, whereas in Los Angeles the next stage in development comes less hard; you know it gets smoother and easier; and from there I think it goes back to the state.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Might it be that the problems that arose at the conference between San Francisco and Los Angeles might be the beginnings of the kind of strife you see in other places?

VICTOR FRANCO: I don't think so because Eric and I are very good friends and all we have to do is iron out an understanding between each other's roles in this whole thing and I think everything else will follow. The neighborhood art centers in San Francisco listen to Eric as the organizer for the northern groups, and in the south I think people more or less trust what I say; if we both get together I think everything else will follow. And since we are personal friends I can't see that kind of problem happening.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: How would you feel if you saw Community Arts, Community Survival Conferences in a number of major cities across the country?

VICTOR FRANCO: Dealing directly with the cities?

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Right.

VICTOR FRANCO: I don't know because I don't know how many community arts groups there are like in Minneapolis or in Pittsburgh, etc. In Pittsburgh I hear there are only three or four. So I don't know what kind of successful conference you could have in Pittsburgh or in New York. I'm not aware of the significance of it in these cities. But if a national conference happened, then I think that would be a very constructive thing. You know all these art schools from the East Coast and maybe several in the Midwest can only see Minneapolis and Chicago having something. The West Coast getting together and having a national Community Arts, Survival Conference, creating a national community arts alliance, I could see that being a very, very positive move in this country. Not within the cities on the East Coast or in the Midwest which I think would just be a waste of a lot of money. I think the next step is to create a national community arts alliance.

BARRY SCHWARTZ: Well, Victor Franco, I want to thank you very much for this interview.

VICTOR FRANCO: Well, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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