



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Carmen Lomas  
Garza, 1997 Apr. 10-May 27**

The digital preservation of this interview received Federal support  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Carmen Lomas Garza on April 10, 1997. The interview took place at her studio in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Paul Kalstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Carmen Lomas Garza has allowed the interview transcript to be placed online but is currently in the process of correcting errors in translation and identifying correct names. Researchers should contact Carmen Lomas Garza at:

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## Interview

PAUL J. KALSTROM: . . . Smithsonian Institution. This is an interview with Carmen Lomas Garza and the interview is being conducted at her San Francisco studio on April 10, 1997. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom and this is first session, tape 1, side A. So that's enough identification on this. Well, Carmen, we are now sitting, in your studio, which is in. . . .

CARMEN LOMAS GARZA: The Hunters Point Shipyard.

MR. KALSTROM: Right. An old naval shipyard.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Currently deactivated.

MR. KALSTROM: Deactivated.

MS. GARZA: Supposed to be going to the city of San Francisco.

MR. KALSTROM: Eventually?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. And for a number of years there have been-well, at least ten years-artist studios out here, and you said. . . . Oh, what was the figure? How many artists?

MS. GARZA: They say there's over three hundred artists here. I don't know. I'm not sure all of them are artists. I think there's graphic designers . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: . . . and computer programmers. Anybody can rent a studio out here; you don't have to be an artist. But it started out being a lot of artists. There's even a mushroom farm here and caterers and. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: That's right. In fact, we smelled some. . . . The aromas were pretty good, [let's say].

MS. GARZA: [laughing] Garlic in the air.

MR. KALSTROM: And how long have you had your studio here?

MS. GARZA: About ten years, and I think it was opened a couple of years before I came here. So I have a ground-level studio, and it's on the corner of the building and I have this *fabulous* view of the shipyard and the bay beyond. Sometimes I can see all the way to Mount Diablo. It's very quiet. There's no interruptions here, no visitors, no mail, no telephone. I use a pay phone down the hall, and I have my radio and my tapes and I have a little black-and-white TV that has a terrible screen, so I only listen to it, I can't watch it. [laughter]

MR. KALSTROM: Well, that's good.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it's good. That's why I like it.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you know some of the other artists out here? Have you socialized at all?

MS. GARZA: There's just a couple. Actually, Joe [Sam] is out here.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, yeah?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Originally, I was told about this place because Patricia Rodríguez, who was one of the original Mujeres Muralistas, had a studio out here and she turned me on to it, so I came in. And Ralph Maradiaga also had a studio out here. Ralph Maradiaga was one of the founders-co-founders-of the Galería de la Raza.

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm.

MS. GARZA: So I like it here. It's very quiet-though there have been some really interesting times here, though, when the shipyard was much more active and then there was a big blast, explosion . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: . . . not here, but over the hill, in a warehouse building and the explosion moved the air over here and I could feel it, and then stuff falling. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: You were working in the studio?

MS. GARZA: I was in here, yeah. And I turned on the radio, KCBS, to find out what was going on, and that's when I heard that there'd been a blast and that the smoke from the fire might be contaminated, and I looked out the window and there was this stuff falling down, debris falling down. Ash. And I quickly shut down and got out of here. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: Well, I bet everybody else was rushing away, too.

MS. GARZA: No, there wasn't that many people leaving.

MR. KALSTROM: Did you think it was an attack?

MS. GARZA: No, no. I thought it was an earthquake.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. But I felt the air move in here. And it's close but it's not that close. I was really surprised.

MR. KALSTROM: So I gather that what you value here, one of the reasons you've stayed, is that you really have privacy . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . to do your work, and that, although there are other artists around, that there isn't really a lot, necessarily, of interaction or socializing.

MS. GARZA: No, actually I discourage that.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: Because I have my office at home, and I get a lot of. . . You know, I deal with all kinds of interruptions at the house in my home office, so when I come out here I just want to be completely shut off from everything. I don't want to be disturbed or distracted, and so it's perfect. It's kind of small. I outgrew it very fast, but I don't want to give it up.

MR. KALSTROM: But, you. . . I'm trying to think. I was going to say, you don't work large scale. That's not entirely true. You have some pretty big paintings.

MS. GARZA: No, the largest is three feet by four feet. That's my painting. I've done paper cut-outs that are thirty by forty-four. Actually, the biggest paper cut-out was almost five feet by eight feet.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, really?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. It was in ten sections.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, okay, so you work on individual sections and then it's assembled.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Actually, I set it up on this wall. Yeah, I removed everything from this wall and set it up and drew on it and then cut on this table that we're interviewing on.

MR. KALSTROM: Uh-huh. Which is sort of a draftsperson table.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it's a really nice. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Drafting table, I mean.

MS. GARZA: It's a drafting table. It's really nice because it folds up and I can get it out of the way. And then I have my big table that I also work on.

MR. KALSTROM: It's also good for interviewing, as we're finding right now.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: It's a nice clean surface. Well, you've been here ten years. How long have you been in San Francisco?

MS. GARZA: Twenty years.

MR. KALSTROM: Twenty years?! No me digas! [Don't tell me!-Ed.]

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I came here in the summer of 1976.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: The Bicentennial year. I came because I had a friend. . . . Well, I was up in graduate school up in Pullman, Washington.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh.

MS. GARZA: And I had a friend here, an old high school friend, and he invited me to come and visit him during the summer Fourth of July holiday. So I drove down from Pullman, Washington, where I was a graduate student. I had heard about the Galería de la Raza, so I wanted to come and visit it, so I came by and met Ralph Maradiaga and René Yañ ez.

MR. KALSTROM: So that was part of the draw-the Galería.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Then after the vacation I went back up to Pullman and decided to drop out of graduate school and come and work at the Galería de la Raza. They asked me to come and volunteer.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: So I came and volunteered for about three or four months, and then they hired me part-time. And it was the best education that I've ever gotten. It beat out anything that I might have gotten at that graduate school that I was in, anything that I would have gotten at any other art institution.

MR. KALSTROM: Now, when you say "it beat out," in what respect?

MS. GARZA: Well, I was in the Galería. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: What were you learning that you would not have gotten?

MS. GARZA: Well, in lots of ways. Because, first off, it's a nonprofit community arts organization, basically, a Chicano-based organization. And so I was learning about nonprofit structure. I was meeting a lot of artists. I was also learning a lot about the day-to-day activities of the nonprofit organization-you know, working on everything from helping to write proposals to cleaning toilets. Painting walls, curating exhibitions, talking to prospective board members, talking to corporations trying to get funding. Just all kinds . . . in all ways. So I was there for five years.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: Um-hmm.

MR. KALSTROM: And as a volunteer? Or did you get on staff?

MS. GARZA: Well, yeah, for the first three or four months I was a volunteer. And then they hired me part-time. I was part-time and then I got a grant from the California Arts Council, so I was working part-time at the Galería and doing my work the rest of the twenty hours.

MR. KALSTROM: At some other studio? Because you weren't here yet?

MS. GARZA: At home in my dining room. [both chuckle]

MS. GARZA: Well, we're going to have a chance later on in these interviews to really explore the more recent events. I didn't realize that you had been in San Francisco that long. I think that's interesting. But you originally are from the Southwest?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, from Kingsville. Kingsville, Texas.

MR. KALSTROM: Kingsville?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And where is that?

MS. GARZA: It's near Corpus Christi.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, okay.

MS. GARZA: About thirty miles southwest of Corpus Christi. Kingsville is a town that was established by the King Ranch.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So my history ties in a little bit with the King Ranch. Did you see the movie *Giant*?

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, of course. Who hasn't?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, that was based. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: I saw it when it first came out, though.

MS. GARZA: Oh, my God. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: Well, there you go.

MS. GARZA: Not *that* long ago. So that movie's based on the King Ranch. And my grandmother, Elisa Lomas, was born in King Ranch, and so from that side of my family, they were working in the King Ranch.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Gee, then that really. . . .

MS. GARZA: A whole lot of stories about my family and the King Ranch.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, that's fascinating because, then, an important theme in that movie-and especially one incident in the restaurant-must have very special resonance for you.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You remember when the. . . . Of course you do.

MS. GARZA: The son. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: The refusal to serve.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, to be served. Oh, yeah, but I didn't have to see that movie to know it first-hand.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh no, of course not. But, I mean, there it was on the big screen.

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And I remember that from way back, the first viewing. It was very powerful.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: How did you respond to that?

MS. GARZA: Well, I didn't get to see the film till I was already . . . I think I was maybe in my early twenties. But I had already heard a lot of stories from my father [Antonio Lomas-Ed].

MR. KALSTROM: Like what?

MS. GARZA: Well, he was in the war. First, when he got drafted into the army. . . . He was in the army first and then, when he finished his duty, the war started and so he went right back and joined the navy and served in the war for the whole duration of the war. And then at the end of the war, when he was coming home-you know, coming home on the bus, still in his naval uniform, carrying his dufflebag-he got off the bus at one of the towns near Kingsville-I think it was in Ellis-to get something to eat at a restaurant, and they refused him service.

MR. KALSTROM: Even though he was in uniform.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Supposedly a hero.

MS. GARZA: The sign still said-you know, the sign on the doorway-said, "No niggers, dogs, and [Meskins]."

MR. KALSTROM: Meskins?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You mean they couldn't spell it?

MS. GARZA: No. Meskins.

MR. KALSTROM: And what about illiterates? Were they allowed? [both laugh]

MS. GARZA: But that was a common sign, you know, "No dogs, no Negroes, and no Mexicans."

MR. KALSTROM: And this was your grandfather, is that right?

MS. GARZA: My father.

MR. KALSTROM: Your father. Okay. Now he wasn't working at the ranch. It was your grandparents

that were. . . .

MS. GARZA: No. Yeah, that was my father. He wasn't working at the ranch. The King Ranch, the ties are through my mother [\_\_\_\_\_-Ed.].

MR. KALSTROM: I see.

MS. GARZA: The maternal side of the family. You want me to tell you stories about that?

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: No, no, I really do. I mean, the point of. . . .

MS. GARZA: I love it.

MR. KALSTROM: The point of this is to try to-well, I mean it's pretty obvious-to try to better understand you and your work through these experiences.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, my. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Anything you think is. . . .

MS. GARZA: My grandmother, Elisa Lomas, was born in the King Ranch, as were her two brothers. Her father was Lazaro Medina, who walked from Michoacan to the King Ranch to come and work as a vaquero.

MR. KALSTROM: What year? About?

MS. GARZA: This is at the turn of the century.

MR. KALSTROM: About 1900.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Because they had heard that they needed vaqueros at the King Ranch. The King Ranch was putting out the word that they needed vaqueros. It was a big ranch. And he came and got work as the cook for the vaqueros, the cookie. You know, the guy who bears the chuckwagon? Except they're vaqueros, they're not cowboys.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: And so he was the cook for the vaqueros. I have a few stories about Lazaro Medina, but the more interesting story is [about-Ed.] my great-great-grandfather, Francisco [Orta], who is my grandmother's grandfather, who was at the King Ranch. He was the head of security at the King Ranch.

MR. KALSTROM: Wow, so this really goes back?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And he was responsible for taking care of Mrs. King when Captain King would go to Austin to do business in Austin. And Francisco Orta, my great-great-grandfather, was Spanish and Texan-Indian.

MR. KALSTROM: Francisco Orta?



MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Spanish and *Texas* Indian?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Tejano.

MS. GARZA: Tejano. Right. You know that the word "Texas" comes from the Spanish version of Tejas, and it comes from the word [qualiteca]. Those were the Indians that lived, basically, from San Antonio down through Monterrey. Just a little north of Monterrey. Basically all along the southern part of Texas and the Rio Grandé on both sides.

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm. So, if you want to look at it *that* way, that was all connected, culturally.

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah. I mean, it was all part of Mexico and it was all part of. . . . Yeah, and then. . . . But my mother thinks that he was a [Karankawa] because he was born in [Drungé].

MR. KALSTROM: That's a tribe?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. [Drungé], Texas, which is near the Gulf Coast. And they were not short; they were a little bit big and tall, and Francisco Orta was a very stately man.

MR. KALSTROM: And head of security.

MS. GARZA: Head of security. He carried two guns, and my mother got to know him even after he retired and wasn't working anymore at the King Ranch, living in Kingsville, he still wore his two pistols, and this is into the early fifties.

MR. KALSTROM: Wow!

MS. GARZA: So he'd be walking around Kingsville. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Texas is one of the places you can get away with it. [both laugh]

MS. GARZA: He'd be wearing his guns out, just. . . . It was really interesting because he hated banditos because he was on the side of having to protect the cattle at the King Ranch. There's another story about him, where he was out taking care of cattle while they were out grazing, some distance away from the King Ranch headquarters. The family knew that he was going to be gone for several days and he was expected on a certain day to return. And when he didn't return, they went out looking for him. The vaqueros got on their horses, and they knew where to look because they knew where he supposed to be grazing the cattle and tending to the cattle. And they found him sitting underneath a mesquite tree. What had happened is some banditos had come in and, of course, tried to steal the cattle and he put up a resistance and started shooting. And they were shooting back. I don't know if there was other cowboys with him, other vaqueros, but my understanding is that he was alone. He got shot through the arm and through the leg. Fortunately, neither bullet hit bone; they just went through the muscle tissue. But he fell off the horse and he couldn't get back on the horse. And so he crawled to a mesquite tree. He was able to get the horse to come to him because they had their horses trained to stay close. No matter what, they had to stay close to their vaquero. He called the horse over to him. He reached up and grabbed his bag, his saddlebag, and went to the bark of the mesquite tree and scraped off the spider web from the mesquite tree. It's a very gnarly tree. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: . . . very deep crevasses in the bark. Scratched off those with his fingers and stuffed the spider web into his wounds to stop the bleeding and then, on top of that, put some dried grass and then tied it off with a bandana. Pulled off his water, his beef jerky, and he just sat there and ate and waited, because he knew they were going to come looking for him. And they knew more or less where he would be. And they found him. They found him late in the evening that day, and they sent off for a buggy because he couldn't get back on a horse. So they sent off for a buggy and the buggy came in the night and they put him in the buggy and they took him back home. And he got back late that night.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, good thing the banditos left him alone-I mean, didn't finish him off or something.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, they probably thought that he had been killed, because he fell off the horse.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, yeah. And this happened. . . .

MS. GARZA: This is in the 1800s.

MR. KALSTROM: So it's on your mother's side that they actually came earlier, before the turn of the century. Right?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. So they were Tejanos. And from that side of the family there was a lot of marriage of Tejanos, who were a mixture of Indian from Texas and Spaniards. And so when my grandmother was born in the King Ranch, she was, oh, maybe about eight years old. She was still a child when her mother [\_\_\_\_\_-Ed.] died-Lazaro Medina's wife. And Lazaro Medina was the cook for the vaqueros.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay.

MS. GARZA: And he couldn't take care of her, and also he wanted to remarry, and he felt, well, if he's got these kids, this girl that can't. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: She's "worthless." [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: You know, the boys could work on the ranch, but the girl is worthless, basically. And so he couldn't take care of her, so he took her to this lady to take care of. This lady lived, actually, not too far from where my parents live now. And her mother died. They thought that she had tuberculosis, but she actually had a childbirth disease. She had infection and died from the infection of childbirth and never really recovered, so she died. Because there was such a hysteria about tuberculosis, they made the whole family get off of the ranch, and so that's when my great-grandfather, Lazaro Medina, decided to take his daughter to this lady, and basically she became indentured to that lady.

MR. KALSTROM: So this is your great-grandmother?

MS. GARZA: Grandmother. Elisa Lomas. Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, Elisa Lomas. The great-grandmother died.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, okay. Good. All right. That's right, great-grandfather.

MS. GARZA: And my great-grandfather took my grandmother Elisa to Kingsville, to town, to be taken care of.

MR. KALSTROM: And basically sold her.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Which I guess is. . . .

MS. GARZA: This lady was not a relative; she was just a friend.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: And so my grandmother had to work as a dairy maid, basically. She took care of milking the cows.

MR. KALSTROM: And this was in Kingsville or somewhere?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, in Kingsville. And she had to sell the milk door-to-door, because the lady had certain subscribers to the fresh milk, and one of those subscribers was my father's mother. For my father [\_\_\_\_\_ -Ed.]. To feed my father. [laughs] So my grandmother sold milk to my father's mother to feed my father. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: Well, of course, it was a small community.

MS. GARZA: It was a small community yeah, but . . .

MR. KALSTROM: But that's really. . . .

MS. GARZA: . . . it's really ironic. And my grandmother used to like to say that she made sure that her future son-in-law was well fed. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: So your grandmother, now, was. . . . It was your grandmother who was, in effect, indentured. How did that play out? I mean, how long did she. . . . Was just as she was growing up?

MS. GARZA: Till she married.

MR. KALSTROM: Until she married?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, she married at the age of fourteen to Antonio Lomas.

MR. KALSTROM: And did you get the sense that she was treated-even though she was indentured in a sense, kind of a servant-that she was still considered part of the family? I mean, was she really reared as, in a way. . . .

MS. GARZA: No, she didn't like the lady. It was not a loving relationship.

MR. KALSTROM: No, I understand. But she was there then through all of her growing up years.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I guess from eight or nine, ten, something like that, until she got married when she was about [fifteen, fourteen].

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. Well, that's true, they got married quite early [then-Ed].

MS. GARZA: Very young, yeah. And my grandfather, Antonio Lomas, who married my grandmother, he was ten years older than her, at least ten years older.

MR. KALSTROM: Now did you. . . . It seems as if you were told-you, as a child-were told many of these stories, family lore, right?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. My mother and one of my uncles, they were very interested in finding out the stories from my relatives and grandparents. My grandmother, too, would tell us the stories. Not so much my grandfather. My grandmother and my mother would tell stories. The story about the shooting incident with the banditos, my mother told me that story. My grandmother told me about her stories.

MR. KALSTROM: And how many siblings do you have-or did you have?

MS. GARZA: There's five of us.

MR. KALSTROM: Five?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. I have an older brother. My older brother's [Museu]. Museu, Jr. Then me, then Arturo Garza, then Margie Garza, and then Mary Jane is the youngest.

MR. KALSTROM: Now how do you fit in? You come. . . ?

MS. GARZA: I'm the oldest daughter.

MR. KALSTROM: Oldest daughter. And one older brother?

MS. GARZA: The second one. Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Did all of you children enjoy these stories? I mean, do you remember this as part of your . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . of the family life? That you would gather around. . . .

MS. GARZA: I think when I started to even pay much more attention was when I was in high school and in college, because with the Chicano movement there was a big push to get to know our family histories and our historical background. You know, dealing with the Southwest and Mexico because we weren't taught that in the schools. We weren't taught, basically, the history of Mexico. To any extent.

MR. KALSTROM: So you have this, like, complementary education through basically oral history.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Through the stories and the. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it's a very personal view. One of the things that I . . . I realized when I was in college that I had a sense that I had gotten from stories and from opinions and just a general feeling from my family was that there was still a lot of hurt and pain and resentment at the fact that our ranchos were lost to the gringos. So that pain, that recent . . . It's not that long ago even though it's been a hundred and fifty years almost. There's still that sense . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Well, memories are long on that kind of thing.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that's what makes it a little bit different from California, in that there were so much shenanigans going on when Texas became a state, and the rancheros, who either weren't aware of the legal changes that were happening and therefore had to pay taxes to the state of Texas-you know, to maintain or keep their ranchos, and they didn't and they got arrears in their taxes . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And they'd lose them.

MS. GARZA: . . . and people would lose their ranchos from back taxes due-and whatever. So there was all kinds of shady dealings going on, and so everything from legitimate sales of the ranchos because of extreme poverty to out-and-out outright stealing. So there's always this feeling of "We haven't forgotten that we lost our ranchos or our ranchos were taken away."

MR. KALSTROM: Was that part of the stories as well? In other words, is that something that you learned later? Or as a child, was that part of describing the system?

MS. GARZA: Well, it became clarified when I was involved with the Chicano movement in my early twenties. But, you know, there was always this sense when I was growing up that there was this . . .

MR. KALSTROM: . . . an inequity.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, that there was this-besides the obvious discrimination-there was this sense of resentment over having lost the land, even though we had been there for many generations-you know, going back to the 1600s to the original Spanish land grants.

MR. KALSTROM: That's interesting. And so . . . well, let's learn something about you as a child. I get a little bit of a picture of what your situation was-a bit, anyway-and of course it's helpful in your case, because one imagines, at least, when looking at your work, that to a certain degree this is a picture of your growing up. Is that a fair assumption?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. I think a lot of my family's history. . . . You know, it shapes you and makes you who you are-their activities, their history-and so it has a way of permeating your life. You just can't help it.

MR. KALSTROM: And so do you feel in a way-although this is getting ahead of us a little bit but I can't help but ask this-do you feel, in a sense, that in your work you're revisiting your own childhood or your own family history? I mean, is it specific in that way? Or is it more general?

MS. GARZA: Well, I can tell you what I say about my artwork. You know, why I do my artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: You're going to tell me that already? [laughter] You can. You can.

MS. GARZA: If you want. I mean, that's the only way I can answer that question.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, sure. Okay.

MS. GARZA: My . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Excuse me, Carmen. Let's turn this over . . .

MS. GARZA: Already!

MR. KALSTROM: . . . because I see it blinking. I don't want to interrupt you when you start telling me this.

MS. GARZA: Okay.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, so we're going to flip the tape.

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Continuing the interview with Carmen Garza, this is Tape 1, Side B. And, Carmen, we decided we would just go ahead and jump into it.

MS. GARZA: Yes.

MR. KALSTROM: I was asking about . . . We were talking about your childhood and family history and experience, and so I asked the obvious question, "How has that been drawn upon in your work?" and you said, "Well, do you really want to know?" And I've got to say, "Yes. You're [tell me]."

MS. GARZA: [laughs] Yeah. Well, I think I should start with the fact that when I was growing up in Kingsville, going to the elementary school, I was very much affected by the kinds of stories and happenings and activities that were going around me, not only in school but in my community, with discrimination and racism. Because my parents were very much involved with the American G.I. Forum, which is a World War II veterans' organization set up to fight for the civil rights of World War II veterans-Mexican-American veterans that were coming back from the war and still finding discrimination and racism after having served in the war. So I was very much starting to become aware of the fact that things were not correct and they had to be corrected by civil rights action. And my parents were involved in that.

MR. KALSTROM: So how early did you come to that recognition of the situation?

MS. GARZA: Well, when I was in high school I knew what was going on, and then when I was in college I was very much involved with the Chicano movement. When I was in high school, the [United-Ed.] Farm Workers came marching through town. That was really a crucial turning point for the Chicano movement because it brought to life in a very obvious way the inequities. And so I became involved with the Chicano movement as an artist. My answer to answering what I could do within the Chicano movement was to do my artwork. And the artwork that I decided to create. . . . Well, first of all, let me tell you that when I was an undergraduate student, I followed all the instructions in the academic training. I was one of their top students and followed the rules totally, as far as complying with all the requirements to get an education.

MR. KALSTROM: And you're talking college now but I suppose. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, at Texas A & I University in Kingsville.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. But still, presumably, you were a good student as well in high school.

MS. GARZA: Right.

MR. KALSTROM: I mean, that's just part of who you were.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. All the way through I was the good student. Because my parents drilled into us that we had to go to college and get a degree. In junior high, we were almost segregated, but my parents, along with many other members of the American G.I. Forum, fought against gerrymandering in Kingsville because. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: What was it, the American G.I. Forum? Is that what it's called.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, the American G.I. Forum. There was only one high school in Kingsville and there used to be only one junior high. And when they built the new one, because there was a lot of Baby Boom kids that needed to go to school, they decided to put the other junior high on the other side of town, and they were trying to gerrymander the division of the town so that all the Mexicans and African Americans would go to one junior high and all the whites to the other. And it was so ridiculous. It was totally ridiculous, so obvious. And so they [the Forum-Ed.] fought it and they won. And so in junior high. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: So the court. . . . I mean, did they actually go to court?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, they went to court and won the case. That was one of the cases that my parents were involved with, among others. My elementary school was all Mexican-American kids. The junior high was mixed. It still was pretty heavy Mexican American, some blacks, and maybe about a third white. And I experienced discrimination first-hand in junior high.

MR. KALSTROM: What. . . .

MS. GARZA: God, it was miserable. [chuckles].

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, well, I mean, this is important. What form did it take?

MS. GARZA: All kinds of things. All kinds of. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Was it subtle . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . or overt?

MS. GARZA: From the kids themselves, the teachers being lazy about not. . . . You know, just overlooking things and letting things slide by. Things like having, like in gym class, all the Mexican American girls and African American girls sit on one side of the dressing room and all the white girls sit on the other side. Of course, there's more of us, so we're all crowded on one side and the white girls get the other side, and they get to go to the showers first. By the time we get in there the place is steamy and muggy and the foot powder bath is mud. You know, all kinds of stuff like that.

MR. KALSTROM: Second class.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, second class. Yeah. And then in high school it was a little bit better but there was still a lot of . . . there were still things that were obvious that were. . . . For example, you could

take language classes. You could take French, Latin, or Spanish. But if you took Spanish class the Mexican American kids could not practice their Spanish in the hallways. Only in the classroom. And all the other kids could practice wherever they wanted. If you spoke Spanish in junior high-in elementary school and in high schools-you were paddled. You were physically punished.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: Yes!

MR. KALSTROM: Huh.

MS. GARZA: So those kinds of things is what I grew up with. You know, there was a lot of. . . . My parents did not trust. . . . There was a lot of mistrust. \_\_\_\_\_ did not trust white people. There was this skepticism about white people because of what they had gone through. And I didn't associate with any white people except when I got to junior high.

MR. KALSTROM: What was the population in Kingsville? The demographics? How was it broken down?

MS. GARZA: Well, the Mexican American population along with the African American population made up almost half of the town. Not quite, actually, less than that.

MR. KALSTROM: And then the rest was Anglo?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So our junior high still had quite a large population of Mexican American kids.

MR. KALSTROM: And this is after the second junior high was built.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And then we had one high school so all the kids went to high school. But then a lot of Mexican American kids dropped out after junior high. They didn't continue on to high school. So it's the same kind of problems that we have today with high percentages of Mexican American kids dropping out from high school.

MR. KALSTROM: What about interacting with your peers-in other words, with your classmates. I mean, in junior high school you were, really, a majority.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: The minority was the majority and you'd think there'd be some muscle that would come along with that. [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: No. One of the things that I remember, talking about gender discrimination, is that at that time in junior high, in the seventh grade, which is the first year of junior high, all of the kids could take biology, the science. In eighth grade, only the boys could take biology and the girls had to go to homemaking.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right. Home Ec.

MS. GARZA: Home Ec. Boy, did that piss me off.

MR. KALSTROM: You wanted to take biology?

MS. GARZA: I wanted to take biology.



MR. KALSTROM: You wanted to cut up frogs and things?

MS. GARZA: I knew how to sew already. I knew how to cook. I knew how to do all those things. I mean, I did research. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: What about typing?

MS. GARZA: I did research and found out what they did in that home economic class, and all they were doing was things that I already knew how to do. And I loved science, I loved biology, and I wanted to take science and I told my mother, "I don't want to take home economics. I want to take biology." So she went with me to the principal, made arrangements for me to take biology in this class. So there was only two girls in this biology class-myself and this other girl-and all the rest were boys. So second year of junior high and third year of junior high it was like that.

MR. KALSTROM: But that also apply to white girls, to any color girls?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: So this is strictly, then, a gender issue.

MS. GARZA: Gender, right, yeah. So that was my first big protest against discrimination.

MR. KALSTROM: So you found out two things about you that needed to be addressed. In two ways you realized you were not getting the same opportunities-or different treatment?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Different treatment in both cases.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, one of things I'm going to. . . . I don't know if we can jump into this yet, but one of the things I hope that we get to is a discussion of those two issues and trying to deal with them and how that played out within the movement itself. But I think that's probably a pretty big subject that we might want to save . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, later.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . for a little later. [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So junior high was pretty traumatic for me and I hated school.

MR. KALSTROM: But you were still good. I mean, you still pride yourself. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I still. . . . Oh, yeah, because I was terrified of flunking out. There was no way. I mean my parents would not have had it, would not have heard of it. There was no way they would have put up with that. So I complied, and then I went on to high school and . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And that was better. . . .

MS. GARZA: I was a very introverted kid. I was a very quiet kid. I was in shock, basically the whole time I was. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Was it better or worse in high school? Did it get. . . .

MS. GARZA: It was a little bit better in high school because finally I could take art classes.

MR. KALSTROM: No art classes in junior high were available?

MS. GARZA: No, no.

MR. KALSTROM: So your first art. . . .

MS. GARZA: I had art in elementary school.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, yeah?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. But junior high there wasn't any, and the first year of high school there wasn't any available, so I had to wait till my junior year in high school to be able to take art classes. So. . . . I decided at the age of thirteen when I was in junior high that I wanted to be an artist.

MR. KALSTROM: How. . . . What examples, what models, would lead to . . .

MS. GARZA: To that decision?

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: Well, my mother is a self-taught artist.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, I see.

MS. GARZA: So I grew up watching her . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm. She did paintings?

MS. GARZA: . . . paint watercolors. Yeah. Actually, she made loteria tablas, which are the. . . . It's like Bingo . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, yeah.

MS. GARZA: . . . except that there's little figures for each number. But we didn't play the Mexican loteria; we played the South Texas version of the loteria, which had seventy-five little figures. Monitos. I call them monitos because that's what my grandmother called them.

MR. KALSTROM: *Monitos*? Monkeys?

MS. GARZA: No. Well. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Monos?

MS. GARZA: Well, that's one definition of the word but *monitos* means "little figures."

MR. KALSTROM: Okay.

MS. GARZA: And that's how my grandmother intended it, as "little figures." The American G.I. Forum would hold these fund-raising activities to raise money for their civil right court cases and for their tuition scholarships to send Mexican American students to the university there, at my hometown university. And the loteria and games were one way of raising money, besides the cakewalk and other things that they did. And so my mother, being an artist, she was asked by other members to paint more of these loteria tablas, which were pen and ink and watercolors, and they were all

framed under glass and you played on them. And I have some of them, some of the old ones that were given to her to copy, that she used as a guide. And she got the list of the figures-the names of each number-and so I saw her doing these loteria tablas for the first time that I realized-you know, I became aware-that she was an artist when I was about eight or nine years old. And I was really impressed, and I thought she was doing magic and I wanted to be able to do the same kind of thing. So by the time I was in junior high. . . . You know, you're going through that phase in your life when you have to start thinking about what it is that you're going to do when you grow up. You know, my parents were already drilling into us that we were going to go to college and start thinking about what it is that you want to do, and so I decided, "Well, I know I like art and so I'm going to be an artist." And I decided I was going to teach myself how to draw because there were no art classes in junior high.

MR. KALSTROM: Did your Mom help you at all?

MS. GARZA: Yes, my mother helped me a little bit, but basically I taught myself. So I started saving notebook paper from the end of school year, when you throw away all your notebook paper. At that time you couldn't write on the back of the paper. So I'd save all my paper, I'd get all my brothers and sisters and my friends and neighbors to give me their paper, and then all summer long-all during the year-I'd be practicing drawing on the back of notebook paper.

MR. KALSTROM: What did you draw?

MS. GARZA: Whatever. Whatever was in front of me. Anything that was in front of me.

MR. KALSTROM: I mean, did you go out and do, as they say, plein aire drawing or something like that?

MS. GARZA: No, no, I was usually indoors or in my backyard.

MR. KALSTROM: Still life, things like that?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, still life, yeah. And I also tried to draw from magazines and from newspapers. At that time there was a lot more artwork in the advertising, a lot of drawings of the models that were pen and ink or were crayon drawings and so I'd try to copy those. And art books. I'd go to the public library and check out art books. And drawing from life. Any time anybody sat down to watch TV or to take a nap or whenever they were still for great long periods of time, I would sit down and draw them. So I had drawings of my father, my parents, my brothers and sister, the dogs, the cats, my bedroom-the girls' bedroom-my hands, my feet, clothing, purses. Anything that was in front of me I practiced drawing. So I taught myself eye-hand coordination so that by the time I got to high school and was able to take an art class, I already had a stack of papers and I was able to show them to my art teacher, Mrs. Newton, [Jorene] Newton, that I was serious about art. And by that time, too, I had saved enough money to buy my own sketchbooks and pencils and drawing crayons to draw instead of using notebook paper. I'd save my babysitting money and my allowance, any money I came across, to buy art supplies, to buy drawing supplies. And at the age of thirteen I also decided that if I was going to be an artist, if I was going to make this my goal in life, that I also could not be a devoted parent at the same time.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, really? So already you. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, because you're going through puberty. You know you're going through puberty to prepare to become a parent . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: . . . become a mother, and I felt, "If I'm going to devote myself to my artwork then I can't be a parent." And I knew . . . I had a rough idea of what it was like to be a parent because I helped to take care of my younger brothers and sisters.

MR. KALSTROM: And it was hard.

MS. GARZA: It was hard. [chuckles] Very hard.

MR. KALSTROM: \_\_\_\_\_ .

MS. GARZA: It's a lot of fun, but it's very hard, very time-consuming, and very expensive.

MR. KALSTROM: So this was in high school already?

MS. GARZA: No, in junior high, at thirteen.

MR. KALSTROM: Thirteen? And so you, God, you were already had . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, thirteen. So I made those two decisions when I was thirteen.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . made some big decisions.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, when I was thirteen. So I had to reevaluate that decision a couple of times, when I was an adult, but it's pretty much been the same decision-you know, devoting my life to my artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: Were you encouraged by, was it Mrs. Newton, the high school art teacher \_\_\_\_\_.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And both my parents were very, very supportive, and then Mrs. Newton was very supportive. Poor Mrs. Newton, she had too many students in her classes. Sometimes she'd get really frustrated. But when she had good students-art students that showed a lot of interest-she'd try to really help, and, as a matter of fact, during my senior year she helped me get a tuition scholarship to go to the university, to take art classes at the university.

MR. KALSTROM: I see.

MS. GARZA: And so right after graduating from high school, a couple of weeks later, I was already in college . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: . . . taking art classes. Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And that was. . . .

MS. GARZA: I couldn't *wait* to get out of high school. It was a nightmare, that place. I used to have nightmares about high school when I was in high school.

MR. KALSTROM: But thank heavens you had the art, so at least. . . .

MS. GARZA: That was the only thing that was good, that I liked, was the art class.

MR. KALSTROM: And you were shy and introspective, you said?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I was this skinny little kid, all teeth, all eyes, a big nose.

MR. KALSTROM: Did you hang out with guys at all?

MS. GARZA: I didn't have a boyfriend, but I did have two very close friends. Actually, three very close friends. One girl who dropped out during her senior year because she got pregnant and disappeared. The family moved away and I never found her again. I was really sad because I really liked her. And then two other friends-who later came out as gay.

MR. KALSTROM: Ah-h-h.

MS. GARZA: When they were in college, they came out.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, they make excellent girl friends.

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah, we were all great girl friends. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, that's true. That's true.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, and I was very shy, but also I was very hesitant to get into a relationship with any boys because I didn't want to have to face the issues of having to make decisions about marriage and, certainly, have to make decisions about sex.

MR. KALSTROM: Right. Oh, no.

MS. GARZA: You know, so I [thought, said-Ed.], "It's too complicated, it's too difficult. I'll just, you know, later. All of that later."

MR. KALSTROM: So if I am getting the right impression, your social life was. . . . You know, a lot of kids in high school, that's all they care about.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And in your case it sounds like it was very much the other way-that you were really focused on art and looking ahead to a future as an artist. So you were pretty serious. You were a good student. You were a serious kid.

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah, I had my goals. Oh, yeah. I couldn't *wait* to get out of high school so I could go to college. And college was the most wonderful experience.

MR. KALSTROM: Now, that was still in . . .

MS. GARZA: In Kingsville.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . Kingsville?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, at Texas A & I University. There's no way I could. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Is that a Texas Arts and Industries?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it was Texas Arts and Industries University and now it's Texas A & M.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, okay.

MS. GARZA: And they had an art department, though they didn't have a studio art B.F.A. program. They had a Bachelor of Science and they had art education degrees. They didn't have studio art degrees. But in order to get your art education degree you had to take studio art, so I got to take a lot of studio classes in Kingsville at the university.

MR. KALSTROM: Would you describe the kind of art program that was available to you there?

MS. GARZA: At A&I?

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, in terms of the kinds of classes, what you got to do.

MS. GARZA: Well, the typical academic stuff.

MR. KALSTROM: Life drawing and so forth?

MS. GARZA: Oh yeah, life drawing. I started out with an introduction to art, which is basically a little bit of everything-drawing, ceramics, block printing. It was just a little introduction. And then I started taking more and more studio art classes-drawing, *some* painting, a lot of print-making. Of course, all the required art history and art education. A lot of art education.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, so you got some art history as well? I mean, it was pretty well rounded?

MS. GARZA: Some art history. Yeah, because it was required. Art history.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you remember it as useful?

MS. GARZA: Well, it was typical. . . . Well, I mean, yeah, any knowledge of art is good. But it was very incomplete. The only . . . we had one class on the history of Mexican art, that was taught as a result of all of the commotion that was going on with the Chicano movement. Now, here we were, South Texas. The art department had the highest percentage, more than fifty percent Mexican American students in the art department. And this is outrageous, the amount of Mexican American students they had art students. All of them trying to get a Bachelor of Science in art education. So one semester class was about the history of Mexico. It was like a quick survey. It was not enough. I wanted a lot more; I needed a lot more. So I decided, as the rest of us did in the Chicano movement, that we had to do our own research, had to do our own reading, our own investigation of our own history-the history of Mexico and the history of art. Of course, the Tres Grandes, the muralists [Rivera, Siqueros, Orozco-Ed.], were very important for the Chicano movement.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: I wanted to find out more, what other artists. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Well, were they at least mentioned in this survey, in this one class on Mexican art?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. But there was no mention of any women artists.

MR. KALSTROM: No [Frida, Frieda] Kahlo?

MS. GARZA: No, no.

MR. KALSTROM: Not yet?

MS. GARZA: No. The only way I found out about Frida was through looking at a book on Mexican artists that I found in the library there at the university.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that-even at an earlier stage, what opportunity you had to see examples of great art. You know, art of history.

MS. GARZA: Only from books.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: Strictly from books.

MR. KALSTROM: But you did. . . .

MS. GARZA: But that one survey class did have. . . . Dr. Bailey did show slides. He had slides. He did travel a lot to Mexico. He had slides of sites in Mexico.

MR. KALSTROM: So he was interested, then, in. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, but that was just a one semester [class-Ed.]. I feel that being right there in South Texas we should have had a lot more history of Mexico, history of the Southwest. We got a hell of a lot more about everything that deals with Western. . . . You know, the history of artists in . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Greece. You heard and read a lot about Greece and Rome.

MS. GARZA: Greece, Egypt, yeah. English, French, French Roccoco, the works. Very little about African art. Actually, nothing about African art. Only when it had to do with Picasso and the Bauhaus. Nothing about arts of the rest of the world-India, China. Only that little survey of Mexico and South America, Latin America.

MR. KALSTROM: Was pre-Columbian art treated at that time in this course as . . .

MS. GARZA: Anthropology department.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, that's what I was wondering. And also that carried with it the concept of primitive, perhaps.

MS. GARZA: Primitive, yeah. Exactly.

MR. KALSTROM: So it was not included in the history of Mexican art?

MS. GARZA: I don't remember if it was. I think Dr. Bailey might have included it but, I mean, because he covered . . . tried to hit all the periods all the way up to modern art, so I really don't remember, but I did get some in the anthropology department . . .

MR. KALSTROM: I see.

MS. GARZA: . . . because one of the instructors did go a lot to Mexico, and so there was in the anthropology. . . . But we had to study primitive humans before we got to study Mexican pre-Cuauhtemoc history.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: So there was a lot of frustrations.

MR. KALSTROM: What's your preferred term now for pre-conquest, pre-Columbian?

MS. GARZA: Well, the nice pre-Cuauhtemoc. I like that the best. I like "ancient." The word "ancient."

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, ancient is another. What is it? Pre. . . .

MS. GARZA: Pre-Cuauhtemoc.

MR. KALSTROM: How do you spell it.

MS. GARZA: C-u-a-u-h-t-e-m-o-c.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, good.

MS. GARZA: Cuauhtemoc was the last defender of Tenochtitlán.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, this will help the transcriber, too. [Thanks!-Trans.]

MS. GARZA: Oh, yes. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: This is very interesting, because I get the sense that there were a lot of, kind of, forces at work forming you. You know, raising questions . . .

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . that you weren't getting answered-I mean, you weren't alone-and that this became reinforced for a number of reasons, partly the times, through the whole Civil Rights movement. What years . . . when were you actually in college?

MS. GARZA: I graduated in 1967.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay. Yeah, well, the time is. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Right at the height of the beginnings of the Chicano movement on campus. Because the marchers came through in, I think, it was in '65. The Farm Workers. Through Kingsville.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, yeah.

MS. GARZA: And the Chicano students on campus-the Mexican American students on campus-formed groups to meet the Farm Workers when they came into Kingsville on their way to Austin and held demonstrations in front of the courthouse in Kingsville.

MR. KALSTROM: How did you come to. . . .

MS. GARZA: So I was still in high school and was not involved at that time. But then when I got to college, the leaders of the Chicano movement on campus kept coming around to the art department trying to recruit the Mexican American artists to get involved with the Chicano movement, because, of course, visuals can have a very strong impact.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, of course. Yeah. We know that from Rupert García.



MS. GARZA: Yeah. [chuckles] All of us are. . . . The visual arts [was, is] very important for the Chicano movement.

MR. KALSTROM: And so, basically, the movement. . . . Why don't you tell me about this?

MS. GARZA: Let me tell you how I got started in the Chicano movement.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, because this is really important, and I'd like it to proceed in a way we don't miss anything.

MS. GARZA: Well, first, let me say, that from high school it was. . . . I hated it. It was awful. I used to have nightmares, like I said, about it and I couldn't wait to get out of there. When I graduated from high school, I was very introverted, very confused, and very angry. And so when I started college and I started hearing about the Chicano movement and I started becoming aware of it, I was extremely curious. And my parents were discussing it a lot because . . .

MR. KALSTROM: They were?

MS. GARZA: . . . they were old pros of activism for civil rights.

MR. KALSTROM: Would you describe them. . . .

MS. GARZA: And they would have discussions after dinner about the Chicano movement, about the Farm Workers, and what was going on.

MR. KALSTROM: This is in the mid-sixties then?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah. And by that time they were not as active any more in the American G.I. Forum because they had a bunch of teenagers to deal with, and so it was difficult for them to get away and be active. But they would discuss it a lot, the Chicano movement, and the Farm Workers, and the fact that these new wave of Mexican Americans were very vocal and using different tactics than what they were. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Well, did they approve of this? Because some older Mexican Americans. . . .

MS. GARZA: Well, my father was kind of hesitant about it and very reserved about it. But my mother was very spirited about it. She thought it was . . . you know, "Let them do what they need to do, because you know there are still problems, you know that they. . . . And they're pointing it out. And now they're the new energy and the new generation that can do something about those things." So they were. . . . Sometimes they'd get into arguments and, you know, my father would lose out, because my mother's pretty strong-willed. [laughs] And she would not interfere or not keep me. . . . They would not keep me from participating. So the way I got started is. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Excuse me. This [tape side-Ed.] is almost over and, again, I don't want to interrupt.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. This is another part.

MR. KALSTROM: Exactly. But the one thing that we have time for me to ask and for you to answer. I'm interested in your parents. How would you describe their politics? I mean, obviously they were. . . .

MS. GARZA: Well, they're Democrats. They were very pro-Kennedy.

MR. KALSTROM: Liberal Democrats?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Very, very. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Any flirting with Marxist ideas at all?

MS. GARZA: Oh, no, no, no. Very patriotic.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, okay, this fits.

MS. GARZA: Very patriotic. My father, having served in the war, was very proud of his contribution and. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Okay. This was not unusual, I think, to have those two at the same time.

MS. GARZA: No, it was. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, excuse me, let me flip this over because we're just about done.

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is continuing a first session with Carmen Lomas Garza, and this is Tape 2, Side A. We were getting into some really interesting things, I thought, on the end of the last tape, and we have you in college. We've heard a little bit about that and some of your art experience there, but now very much to the point you were talking about your discovery of the Chicano movement and, well, then how you became more and more involved-and just how you became involved.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. I had been in school at A & I for about, what, two years and hearing and seeing the Chicano activists on campus, rallies, soapbox discussions-you know, when the leaders would get up on a soapbox and have discussions at noontime in front of the Student Union Building. A lot of discussion among students, especially in the art department among the art students. We would also go over. . . . One of my art professors-William [Renfrow]-would have these gatherings at his home on Friday nights for the students to come over and discuss the Chicano movement. And so the people. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Let's see, he was Chicano?

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: No.

MS. GARZA: William Renfrow. No.

MR. KALSTROM: No, I didn't think so, but okay.

MS. GARZA: He was a painting and history instructor there, a professor in the art department. And the artists, the people who were going over to his home was José Angel Gutiérrez, a very important leader of the Chicano movement, Carlos [Duran, Tran], Amado Peña, José Rivera, myself, Guadalupe Silva, Billy Nakayama, Santa Barraza, I think. I don't know if she went very much, but she wasn't there when I was there. And so we would have these really long discussions at their house about the philosophy of the Chicano movement and what we were trying to do. And it was great because you could hear it directly from some of the leaders, you know. Carlos [Guerra] was also very, very articulate.

MR. KALSTROM: Now, they would come through and these meetings would take place or were. . . .

MS. GARZA: They would be invited to go to these sessions at the Renfrows.

MR. KALSTROM: But were they. . . .

MS. GARZA: We would listen to music, we would discuss issues, we would watch special events on television-like the landing of the astronauts on the moon-and have these really long discussions late into the night about the Chicano movement and political issues. And most of the time I was listening because to me it was some fantastic sessions that you couldn't get anywhere, not even in an art class, or a discussion class in the university, because it was very informal and. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: How did the moon landing lend itself to discussions of Chicano issues?

MS. GARZA: Well, issues. The Chicano movement was the main topic, but anything that was part of our lives we were discussing.

MR. KALSTROM: I see.

MS. GARZA: We would discuss racism, discrimination, events, marches, protests, problems with drugs, music. We listened to a *lot* of music, a lot of heavy metal stuff, you know. [laughs] All kinds of stuff. And it was wonderful because the Renfrows were older than us. They were our professors. . . . Mrs. Renfrow [\_\_\_\_\_-Ed.] was not a professor but she was also an artist. So when. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: But they were hip, right?

MS. GARZA: Very hip.

MR. KALSTROM: Very hip.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Very hip. So when José Angel Gutiérrez, who was one of the main leaders of the Chicano movement, and Carlos Guerra and [Beto] [Lueda, Luetta], and I can't remember some of the other leaders, decided to pull together a conference of Mexican American youth, by that time, there was already organizations in different universities called MAYO, Mexican American Youth Organization. Kingsville at A & I had a chapter, and some the public schools had chapters, of which the Chicano students-the MAYO students from the university-would oversee and encourage the students in high schools to get involved with walkouts. And so after several walkouts in different towns by the MAYOs in the high schools helped by the college students, they decided to have a conference-a statewide conference-in Mission, Texas, which is right down near the Rio Grande border. It's a small town. And the reason they wanted to have it there was because there was a breakfast or a Head Start program at the Mission there in Mission, Texas, at the old monastery and some of the members were connected to that Head Start program, and so they wanted to do this statewide conference of MAYO youth from all over the state to come for, I think it was almost like four or five days of conference during the Christmas break.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh!

MS. GARZA: And so that fall. . . . Maybe, actually, not even. . . . That fall of '69, Bill Renfrow got a letter from José Angel Gutiérrez, who was no longer. . . . He had graduated; he was already out. Got a letter from José Angel Gutiérrez asking him to put together an exhibition of Chicano art by students from the art department at A & I. And Bill Renfrow came over to me and handed me José Angel Gutiérrez's letter and told me, "Here, I think you should be the one to . . ."

MR. KALSTROM: You do it.

MS. GARZA: " . . . put this together." [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: So all of a sudden you were a curator.

MS. GARZA: All of a sudden I'm a curator. Not only that, a curator of Chicano art. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: Wow! In '69, huh?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And so for the first time I had to think, "Well, wow! I mean, first off I have to answer, what is Chicano art? Because I have to ask these Mexican American students to lend me their artwork for this Chicano art exhibition at this conference. And so I'm sure they're going to ask me, 'What is Chicano art?' and even though we had been discussing the Chicano movement and people were doing different . . . different people . . . a few individuals were doing artwork for the Chicano movement-namely posters and bumper stickers and that kind of a thing-there was nothing really concrete that I could grasp onto and say, "Well, this is the definition of Chicano art." And so I had just a few weeks to put the show together. Unfortunately, a lot of the art students had taken their artwork home because it was going to be the end of the semester and so they had already been taking their best artwork home. So I had to scrounge and I'd go to every Mexican American in the art department and ask them, "Would you like to lend me your artwork for this exhibition on Chicano art in Mission, Texas?" And they'd say, "What is Chicano art? What do you mean? What is that?" And I'd tell them, "Well, at this conference there's going to be a major session where we are going to discuss Chicano art, and I will come back and I'll tell you what it is. Just lend me your artwork for right now and I'll put this show together." [laughing]

MR. KALSTROM: And you did.

MS. GARZA: I did. And the most memorable piece that I remember getting was from José Rivera, who's a sculptor-and a printmaker also but mostly. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And he was in the department also?

MS. GARZA: He was in the department. He was from the King Ranch. He was born and raised on the King Ranch, and he started high school in Kingsville, but elementary and junior high he was in the King Ranch. And he's a fabulous sculptor-carver of mesquite and welder of steel sculptures. So the organizers of the conference sent over one person with an old Chevy car with a trailer hitched onto it-an open trailer, a little trailer, dumptruck, basically, a dump . . .

MR. KALSTROM: To take the art.

MS. GARZA: . . . to take the artwork to this conference.

MR. KALSTROM: How far away is Mission from. . . .

MS. GARZA: From Kingsville it's about a, oh, about two-hour drive. And so Beto Lueda came to pick me up after the arrangements were made through Bill Renfrow, and we loaded everything onto this little hitched-on trailer and covered it with a tarp, with plastic and a tarp. I can't remember what else we used. And I had my things together. And my parents were very worried about me going to this conference, because by that time the MAYOs were very militant, you know, and they were being scrutinized and investigated and kept a watchful eye on because they were militants.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: And so I remember, right before I was about to leave, my parents were having this real heavy discussion about me going to this conference and taking a risk being involved with these guys, these people, and my mother kept saying, "Let her go. There's going to be a lot of other young people there, and I'm sure that it'll be okay, she'll be okay. It'll be okay, don't worry." [laughs] I'm surprised my father let me go! And I was already, what, twenty? Yeah, I was about twenty. I was still living at home because I couldn't afford to go to school anywhere else. So got to the conference with this trailer of artwork. The monastery was one big building. It was three levels. It had a basement, the ground floor, and an upstairs. And that's where the conference was going to be, and all of us were going to be staying there, sleeping in and attending the sessions. And the cafeteria was in the basement. And that's where they had the Head Start program for the children. And they set aside this one big room in the basement for the artwork. And they assigned two guards for me, two security guards.

MR. KALSTROM: \_\_\_\_\_.

MS. GARZA: These guys, you know, these Chicanos all dressed up in their brown beret militia-type. You know, they looked like brown berets. [Your] version of the brown berets with their khaki pants and their khaki jackets and their brown berets and their pins-you know, tons of pins-and they're all bundled up and it was cold. It was very cold, and you just couldn't tell what they were wearing underneath those military khaki coats that. . . . You know, it was just like . . . you didn't ask, you know? [laugh] So they said, "Here's the room."

MR. KALSTROM: They were assigned by whom?

MS. GARZA: The organizers.

MR. KALSTROM: The MAYO organizers, okay.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, and all they did was stand in the doorway. They didn't help me with the artwork. It was up to me to hang this artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: All by yourself?

MS. GARZA: All by myself I hung this artwork. [laughing] I think I had one afternoon to put it up, and I don't remember where we got the hammer and the nails and all that, but I hung it up. It got done.

MR. KALSTROM: How many objects?

MS. GARZA: I don't remember, but it was a room that was. . . . Oh, I think it must have held at least thirty pieces, and there was everything-prints, drawings, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, everything. Whatever I could grab from any Mexican American student. [laughs] A lot of it, of course, was images dealing with, like, self-portraits. José Rivera's piece was a welded self-portrait. It was a fabulous self-portrait, all done with wrought iron . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Wow!

MS. GARZA: . . . he had welded, cut, and shaped into a self-portrait. And at that time he had an Afro. It was a fabulous piece. And I had some of my work in it. I didn't know at the time that the curator doesn't put his or her own work in the show. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: I don't know. I mean, you weren't getting paid, so it seems to me you could. . . .

MS. GARZA: No, that was my pay. That was it, yeah. Well, so then I set up the show, and these guys wouldn't help me because their job was to guard the door, make sure that none of the artwork would be stolen. There was no door on the doorway. I slept in that room on the concrete floor, because I was supposed to also watch the show. You know, take care of it. So I spent a lot of time in the room. So when the MAYOs would come down from the sessions-they would come down during the breaks-I had to be there to talk to. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: So you didn't get to go to the sessions?

MS. GARZA: I went to some of the sessions, but I missed out on a lot of them because I had to be there whenever they would come through. And, of course, during lunch and during supper and then after supper.

MR. KALSTROM: And you slept there?

MS. GARZA: And I slept there.

MR. KALSTROM: It doesn't sound like much fun.

MS. GARZA: It wasn't. It was very, very cold. But it was exciting in that I was meeting a lot of people. And to this day I have very close friends in Texas that still remember meeting me at that conference. And they were so impressed with that show, and they remembered it.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, do you remember what the show was like? You mentioned a couple of works that. . . .

MS. GARZA: I just remember a couple of artists and their work because I liked their works.

MR. KALSTROM: But I mean, did it have a feeling, some kind of a unifying quality about it?

MS. GARZA: No, a lot of it was student work.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. Okay.

MS. GARZA: A lot of it was. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: So exercises, really.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. A lot of drawings and paintings from . . . still lifes and portraits and some political images, some posters, but the great majority was college stuff.

MR. KALSTROM: So, basically, this early Chicano art show, the only unifying theme was that these were works by Chicano art students.

MS. GARZA: Mexican American.

MR. KALSTROM: Mexican Americans.

MS. GARZA: Some of whom did consider themselves Chicano artists and . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And others, no.

MS. GARZA: . . . most of them didn't know-didn't know that they were in a Chicano art show.

MR. KALSTROM: How was the show received? This is like a first, it seems.

MS. GARZA: It was a first, and like I said, years later people would remember having met me and seen me at that conference and seeing the artwork and. . . . Of course, I didn't remember them at all. There were so many students that came through-both high school and college students that came through. But they remembered. It made an impression on them. Of course, when I came back, I still didn't have a clear definition of what is Chicano art, and to this day, I still don't have a clear definition. [said with a smile in her voice-Ed.] Nobody has a real clear definition. Some people are very sure and clear about what Chicano art is, and they try to exclude others, and include, and this and that. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right. Exactly so.

MS. GARZA: It's very difficult, and finally what I decided is that the only way that I can define Chicano art is to do what I. . . . how I just define it, with my artwork. Beyond that I can't speak for other artists, for other people. Because my artwork is not very political-on the surface. [both laugh/cackle]

MR. KALSTROM: On the surface, yeah.

MS. GARZA: Right.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, let's see. You included some of your works-or a couple of your works-in this show. What were they like at that stage?

MS. GARZA: I had a lot of drawings of. . . . I had woodblock prints. I had a lot of pen and ink drawings and a lot of pencil drawings. I was, at that time, still very much afraid of color, so I didn't have any painting, any works in color in that show. It was all black-and-white work. I did have a print of figures that were. . . . Let's see, there's two prints that I remember putting in that show. One was one that I had done in high school of figures-very generic-looking figures-reaching out for the peace dove, and not being able to reach it and falling down. And the other was a print-an etching, actually-of figures forming the trunk of a mesquité tree and intertwined like lovers rejected, reaching out, all forming this mesquité tree. I think I had a self-portrait or a block print that was a portrait. And I can't remember what else I had in the show.

MR. KALSTROM: But apparently not similar to your work as it then developed later and it is now.

MS. GARZA: No. So after that conference, I became totally convinced that "I am a Chicana artist and I have to find my place within this movement, that this is what I will be doing for the rest of my life." Because I learned so much from that conference and from talking, you know, and the movement itself. I learned so much about what had happened to me in the public schools, why things happened to me, what my parents. . . . why the things that happened to my parents, the history, and all of that. Just becoming aware-politically aware-and feeling that the answer to my contribution is through my artwork. What am I going to do to contribute to our well-being? It has to come through my artwork, because that's the best thing that I know how to do.

MR. KALSTROM: But at that time is it possible that there were some very specific needs of the movement and that artists \_\_\_\_\_ . . .

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah. They needed people to make posters and bumperstickers and. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: . . . posters, and polemical kinds of things.

MS. GARZA: Banners.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: I don't remember T-shirts. The posters were the heavy thing. But. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: But you weren't attracted so much to that, or did you do some of that [as well]?

MS. GARZA: Other artists were doing that. I didn't do very much of that. I did a little bit but not very much of that. Others were doing that. I just felt that the personal artwork that I created would be what would be my contribution. And since I was very interested in prints, in printmaking. . . . Because in high school I only did black-and-white artwork. . . . That was my forte was black and white: pen and ink drawing, pencil drawing, charcoal drawing. So printmaking was a natural to flow into after doing so much black-and-white drawing and work, because printmaking is basically black-and-white artwork. And it served the purpose of dissemination of the image. You have multiples. You have a lot of the image. And so prints became very important for the movement. Later we got an instructor coming in, a Chicano instructor-our first Chicano instructor, which we got as a result of our demanding to have more Chicano faculty and art being taught by Chicanos. We got Pedro Rodríguez, and he set up a silkscreen print shop in the art department. By that time I was in and out. . . . After the conference. . . . It was decided during the conference that La Lomita, which is where the monastery was-it was called La Lomita because it was up on a little hill-that they would continue the programming at La Lomita-the breakfast program and other programming there for Chicanos, and that murals would be painted in the monastery. And so they invited me to paint murals, to participate in helping to paint these murals.

MR. KALSTROM: You were still in college.

MS. GARZA: I was still in college. So I dropped out.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I dropped out to go back to La Lomita. And waited for the thing to happen, but it didn't happen.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, no.

MS. GARZA: Instead, the Colegio Jacinto Treviño was formed, and that's another long story.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, we have to hear it. Is now the moment? But the mural project never came to fruition.

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: So you dropped out for no reason, in a sense.

MS. GARZA: So after. . . . I had dropped out for one semester and went back to school, and then I went to school up at University of Texas for one semester and came back to Kingsville and decided to finish my undergraduate degree in Kingsville-my undergraduate degree in art education. And so in order to get my undergraduate degree in art education, I had to do student teaching. That was one of the requirements.



MR. KALSTROM: Right, right.

MS. GARZA: You don't finish your student teaching, you don't get your teaching certification, and you don't get your degree. So I was taking my art education class, and you get assigned to a public school that participates in this training of education students. So I got placed in [Robbstown] High School.

MR. KALSTROM: In where?

MS. GARZA: Robbstown High School, which is just north of Kingsville. It's about half an hour's drive from Kingsville. Robbstown is heavily populated by Mexican Americans *and* Mexicans. The high school was over eighty percent Mexican American.

MR. KALSTROM: Wow!

MS. GARZA: At that time there was only one faculty that was Mexican American, and he was the assistant coach. There was on campus a lot of unrest because the Chicano movement was being known, now it's becoming more aware, and some of the organizers of the Chicano movement on campus at the University were from Robbstown and were very much aware of the discrimination and racism and inequities in Robbstown, the public school system. And it only had one high school. So I was student teaching in Robbstown High School. I had the morning classes. And the art teacher gave me some instructions. In the art room-it was in a building that was connected to adjoining auto shop. . . . In between the auto shop and the art room was the auto shop's teacher's office, and in the auto shop teacher's office was a radio, which he kept on, piped into the auto shop, and it was also piped into the art room. The radio station it was always tuned into was a country-western station, and the shop teacher told me, "You cannot change the radio. It has to stay on this country-western station. You can turn it off, but you can't change the radio station." So, okay. So I started with the classes and, of course, the Mexican American students, after a while, would say, "Can you change the radio station to la-la-la?"

MR. KALSTROM: To some good music?

MS. GARZA: [laughing] Yeah. And I'd tell 'em, "Well, I can't because the shop teacher won't let me do that." And so in this class the great majority was Mexican American, and I had some high school students that were recently arrived from Mexico that did not speak English. So I was not allowed to speak Spanish to the students. I had to do all of my instruction in English. So what I would do is, I would give the instructions in English and then when I was going around talking to the students . . .

MR. KALSTROM: You would cheat. [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: . . . I would cheat. The students would ask me in Spanish to explain what I had said, so how am I going to not explain to them?

MR. KALSTROM: Of course.

MS. GARZA: So I would explain to them.

MR. KALSTROM: Besides, you're interested in them learning something.

MS. GARZA: Exactly, right. So I would explain to them. And eventually they would say if I could change the station so I . . . "No." So what I decided to do is, I turned off the radio and I went to the library and I checked out a record player, and I told the students, "You can bring your records from

home. The first half hour will be country-western, the second hour will be whatever you bring from home, of your records." So we did that; we started to do that. About the third day I put on a Carlos Santana album, and that was too much for one of the white students. He got up, yelled at me- obscenities-said, "How dare you put. . . . I'm tired of hearing this Mexican music and I don't want to hear any more of it, and I don't have to listen to this. I'm going to talk to the principal." He was the principal's son.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, no!

MS. GARZA: So he left without my permission.

MR. KALSTROM: He obviously had no good taste in music. [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: Well, whatever. So the art teacher got in trouble, because the principal then went and complained to her. So I got into trouble. "No more records." So from then on I was on watch.

MR. KALSTROM: You mean country and western was the only accepted popular music?

MS. GARZA: Right. In these classes that were eighty percent Mexican American and Mexican. So I stopped that. No more records, no more music. I just kept the . . . I turned off the radio. But then, from then on, I was being watched by the art teacher and by the white students, because he won. He got it over me. So then when I kept on talking in Spanish to the students, again, he got up and went and complained to the art teacher.

MR. KALSTROM: He was a spy. He was plant.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, he was. . . . This was just a high school student, you know?

MR. KALSTROM: M-a-a-n.

MS. GARZA: So again I got chastised by the art teacher and I got put on notice. You make another mistake, and you're out of here.

MR. KALSTROM: This was what? Like one semester appointment or something?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. You do it for one semester. So, okay, so no more speaking in Spanish, no more music. And then a few weeks later-not too long after that, actually-one morning I had the first class. The high school is not an enclosed building. It's got these wings, outdoor wings, so that the hallway's just a porched area. I started hearing, "Chicano power! Walk out! Chicano power!" And it kept getting louder and louder and louder, and the windows were open because it so hot, and the students came by and right then about one third of the kids got up and was about. I had no idea it was going to be happening. I was not told by the MAYOs on campus that they were going to stage a walkout in Robbstown High School. And I knew what it was about, though, because it had been happening in other towns, and so I knew. I didn't stop the students. I couldn't have stopped them physically, anyway.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, so they got up, the boys. It was mostly boys that got up and left. A couple of girls got up and left. And they were yelling, "Chicano power!" and "Walk out!" and "We want our history, we want Chicano teachers," and na-na-na. And so then they left, and there were still some kids in there, and they were asking me, in Spanish, "¿Me voy? ¿Me voy o me quedo?" [Should I go?

Should I go or stay?-Ed.] And I said, in English, "Whatever you feel you have to do, do. I cannot physically stop you." So some more girls left and a few more boys left. And I went ahead and conducted the classes. It was sparsely populated, but I still conducted the classes, all the morning classes, and then at lunch time I took my sack lunch, which I did every day, and went to go eat my lunch across the street from the school grounds, directly across the street from the principal's office, in this little park where there was a picnic table and scrawny little trees. And that's where all the students were.

MR. KALSTROM: So you were in the midst of it.

MS. GARZA: I went to sit down and eat my lunch and, "Well, I'll talk to the students and ask them, "Well, do they know what they're doing?" while I was eating my lunch. [laughs]

Session 1, Tape 2, Side B

MR. KALSTROM: Continuing the Carmen interview, this is Session 1, Tape 2, Side B.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You're having lunch in the park, right across from the principal's office.

MS. GARZA: On a picnic table where all the walkout students are sitting, congregated, because it's no longer school district. It's a city park. And so I'm having my lunch, asking these students. . . . I'm one of the very few. . . . I don't think there was any teachers out there. It was all high school students from the school. And I'm eating my lunch and, as I'm eating my lunch, I'm listening to the students, and there was this big car, Cadillac, that drives by with the superintendent.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, no.

MS. GARZA: Driving about three miles an hour, really slow. Of course, he found out that I was one of the student teachers there with the students. I heard nothing about it. I went back to the rooms, to the classroom, after lunch. The next morning when I drove up to campus. . . . I had picked up my rider, another student teacher, a Mexican-American girl, who, on the way there, was just ranting and raving, chastising me for getting involved: "Don't say anything. Don't do anything. You're going to get into trouble. You're going to get us all into trouble. Why do you. . . ?"

MR. KALSTROM: But you weren't involved.

MS. GARZA: "Why are you doing this? Why are you even. . . . This whole thing Chicano is ridiculous. Nobody's going to do anything. It's not going to accomplish anything." And I would pick her up every morning, get up earlier to pick her up and give her a ride *free* to the school. And she was very ungrateful, never offered any money to help me or anything. So I get to the school, she gets out of the car, goes to her class. Before I get out of the car, my supervisor from the university runs up to me and he says, "The superintendent of the school district of Robbstown no longer wants you to teach in his school district. You are no longer welcome in this school. If you step on the school [grounds-Ed.] you will get into trouble." And I said, "I have to talk with him, because I did not encourage. . . . I did not tell the kids to walk out. I know what they're doing, but I didn't tell them to walk out. I want to meet with the superintendent." So he said, "Okay." So we got in his car. We went over to the superintendent's office, and he said, "Wait here." He walked into the superintendent's office, came back out about ten minutes later totally red in the face, and he said, "Not only does he not want to meet with you, but if you insist on stepping on any of the school grounds, he will kick out *all* of the Mexican-American student teachers."

MR. KALSTROM: Incredible.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, now, was your supervisor red in the face because he thought this was outrageous?

MS. GARZA: It was outrageous. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Was he sympathetic to you?

MS. GARZA: It was outrageous. He was. . . . It was outrageous. I think he felt powerless. He may have been powerless. Well, when you're teaching in the school district, you're a guest. He was powerless. But not only that, he was very embarrassed, and also he felt very powerless because during our student teaching we had touched upon the early beginnings of multiculturalism-you know, what we now know as multiculturalism.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right.

MS. GARZA: It was like very, very slightly touching on the issues of multiculturalism. And so here was his chance to stand up for it, but he didn't. And so I was furious. I have never been so furious in my life ever since then. Up to then and since then. I got back into my car. I said, "Well, I have to go back then. I mean, what am I doing here? Nothing." And I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do about my rider." And he says, "Don't worry, I'll come and get her." So I went home, and I was so furious. And my mother was at home. I was ranting and raving. I was crying and screaming. I was so angry. And my mother was freaked out because she had never seen me like that. And, of course, she was mad that I had been kicked out unfairly. Because if you don't finish your student teaching, you don't get your teaching credential, you don't. . . . You know, the whole undergraduate education is wasted. All for nothing. So the next day I went back to the university and I met with my supervisor and he promised to help me get to another school, finish my student teaching, so that I could get. . . . I was a straight-A student. Straight-A student. So there was no way I could flunk the class.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: So he finally did put me in another town. He put me in [Palferias, Paul Ferrias]. But in that school I was not allowed to control the class. I was only like a teacher's aide. And basically I was told by the art teacher there that, "You just do your job and that's it. Don't say anything. Don't try to start up anything." And by that time I was just so disgusted that I didn't try to do anything at Palferias anyway. I had no intention of doing any protesting, not during my student teaching. So that was quite a personal experience, and a political experience. Later, I found out, the next semester, from the organizers at the university-the MAYO organizers-from Carlos Guerra and from Victor Nelson Cisneros, that all of the boys in the Robbstown High School walkout who were eighteen years old or who reached their eighteenth birthday, were immediately drafted and sent to boot camp. Before the school year was over, they were in Vietnam. [pauses] And that was. . . . [sighs, struggling to control tears] I still get very upset about it because. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: It's an unbelievable story.

MS. GARZA: That, to me, was the clincher. I said, "That's it. I don't care what happens, I'm going to dedicate my artwork to the Chicano movement, because if our boys can go and lose their innocence, lose their limbs, or, worse, lose their life for our country, they have every damn right to enjoy their culture and their language and their history and fully participate in our society-in this

society that we have contributed to. We have every right to be proud of who we are." And that was it.

MR. KALSTROM: So you were obviously radicalized, in a sense, by this experience. Everything else had been building towards that . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . but this was just too dramatic and too patently unfair to accommodate, to accept as anything but what it was . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . which is blatant racism.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: I mean, here you were set up, in a sense. I mean. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I was set up and I walked into it.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. I mean, do you think. . . . I don't know what's the point of sort of analyzing. . . .

MS. GARZA: I wasn't set-up maliciously. I mean, there was nobody doing anything malicious to me in the Chicano movement.

MR. KALSTROM: No, no, no. I didn't mean that. I mean within the school itself.

MS. GARZA: Oh, by the administration, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: That, basically, you were not welcome, even in your role as . . .

MS. GARZA: A student teacher.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . as a student teacher.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And perhaps . . . do you think that they were aware of your . . . well, that you were a curator of a Chicano art show at a conference \_\_\_\_\_?

MS. GARZA: No, they had no idea.

MR. KALSTROM: They didn't know anything about that?

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: So it wasn't as if you were singled out. It was, it sounds to me, like it was, to a certain extent, bad luck.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it was bad luck.

MR. KALSTROM: Just where you were at a certain time.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, but I'm sure the principal had seen me sitting at that picnic table other days eating my lunch, because I'd be the only one out there.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, see, that's what I mean. Because, obviously, they wanted you guilty in connection. . . .

MS. GARZA: What they were trying to do was quelch [probably means squelch or quell-Ed.] the whole thing. Anything to quelch. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And intimidate, maybe, the other student teachers and so forth.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: What an incredible story.

MS. GARZA: And what was really devastating was that they didn't lose any time whatsoever drafting the boys who were eighteen or who were \_\_\_\_\_.

MR. KALSTROM: That is. . . .

MS. GARZA: It was almost immediate that they received their notices.

MR. KALSTROM: In other words, it was. . . .

MS. GARZA: See, they're no longer in high school.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . punitive action.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. See they're no longer in high school. They're not any longer in school and they're of age. You have to go.

MR. KALSTROM: Can you sort of trace that out a bit-or extend it out a bit-in terms of some subsequent developments there at that school? Did you keep any track? Did you know what happened after that?

MS. GARZA: No, I didn't keep up with Robbstown after that.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: Maybe you can sort of generalize from some other situations then?

MS. GARZA: Well, I mean, now there's much more . . . you know, today there's a lot more going on in the public schools dealing with education-education of our heritage. My book-my children's book [\_\_\_\_\_(title)-Ed.]-is very popular in the elementary schools in Texas. It's really ironic, you know, that the paintings about my childhood, my life as a Chicana in south Texas, are being used as curriculum material in the elementary schools and in some of the junior highs.

MR. KALSTROM: That's a poetic justice.

MS. GARZA: [laughs] Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Sometimes it works out that way. Well, obviously, this was a traumatic experience for you . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . and it marked, as well it would, a kind of divide where. . . . You had already decided that you wanted to devote . . .

MS. GARZA: My artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . your artwork.

MS. GARZA: Well, I already decided that I wanted to be an artist, but this was the clincher that made me finalize my decision about being a Chicano artist. And so from then on the ideals of the Chicano movement, the ideals of correcting the inequities, of learning more about our own history, about participating more in political action, changing the curriculum in our children's education, changing attitudes about language-our language and our cultural traditions-just overall, every aspect of our lives-trying to change and correct and improve, develop.

MR. KALSTROM: Were you ever tempted to be more explicit-or shall we say polemical-in terms of illustrating themes and ideas?

MS. GARZA: Well, let me tell you how it went from what I was doing to when I turned, when I made the decision to become a Chicana artist for the rest of my life. As I told you before, I was a good academic art student. I followed all the criteria, I took the classes, I was a good student, I did very well in my drawing classes, in my printmaking classes, I knew chiaroscuro, I knew the elements of art, I knew all the Renaissance principles of art. I had also been studying child art in my art education classes, and I knew the stages that children go through in the development of their artwork. And I had also seen how child art is very direct and very simple and clear. There's no wishy-washiness about children's artwork. It's very up front. I had a very difficult time with abstract art. I didn't understand it. I was not into Pop Art, all that stuff that was popular in the late sixties and early seventies-the Warhol stuff, the Jackson Pollock, the Henry Moore, all that Pop Art stuff. It didn't understand it, I didn't feel it, and, as a result of our Chicano movement and our wanting to study our own art history, I decided to look towards my own family to see the art, to see, "What is the next step? What direction should I go in?" And so I decided that I was going to paint my own set of loteria tablas, just like my mother had painted, had copied the old ones. I wanted to do loteria tablas, but I wanted to do a whole new version with new monitos, new figures that were relevant to contemporary Chicano life, Mexican American life. So I asked my mother if she still had the old loteria tablas that she had painted-I remembered her painting them-because I wanted to make my own loteria tabla, and she said, "Well, you can do your own version, a new, modern version of the loteria monitos, but you have to copy the old one first." And I thought . . . "Well, I'm an artist, I can't . . . it's not cool to copy somebody else's artwork." You know, that's part of our training in Western art.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right. Originality.

MS. GARZA: It's since the Renaissance, you know. You be original. Create your own. Do new stuff. Avant-garde. But she insisted. So she gave me her old cards that were given to her to use as a guide to copy, and we dug out some of her cards that were not finished. And then we went looking for all the old ones that had been framed and had been used for the games, and we found them at one of the former member's garage, totally ruined. Wet, broken, all the glass was broken. They were moldy, black, ruined by rain and dust and spider webs and everything. We took all of those loteria

tablas to my parents' house, and I sat on the front porch and I went through every single one of those and tried to salvage whatever I could get. So I was able to salvage about a half a dozen tablas—you know, cardboard tablas that were. . . . By my estimate, judging from the style of the clothing on some of the figures, they were done in the twenties and the thirties. And so these were the old cards that were given to her to copy. And none of the ones that she had completed were saved. They were all ruined. So I only have incomplete ones that she made, that she had saved, that were in the closet. But I had some of the old ones that were given to her that were still in very good condition and some of the old ones that I salvaged from the frames.

MR. KALSTROM: She didn't keep any of her own? I mean, a few, just a few.

MS. GARZA: No, there were just unfinished ones.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Yeah. She didn't keep any of her own finished ones. So she gave me the list of the names, because she had that, and she gave me what she had and I literally copied them. But there was about half a dozen little figures that were missing. I had the name and the number, but on none of the cards could I find the figure. So I went and complained to her. I said, "Look, you want me to copy this loteria, but there's monitos missing." And she looked at me like incredulously, "You're an artist. Do your own drawings." [laughter] And then I realized, like, "Well hell, yes! This is what art means." It's taking from the past, adjusting it, and creating new. Making adjustments, adaptations. So I'm creating my new monitos and I made them into etchings.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh!

MS. GARZA: And here are the plates.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh good, we can see them. [sounds of items being moved about on a surface] And you still have these. . . . Oh, I see. Well, monitos are all kinds of things.

MS. GARZA: [At a distance from the microphone] Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Shears, hats, sombrero.

MS. GARZA: [Coming back to microphone]. [Tijeras (tee-hair-uhs)].

MR. KALSTROM: Tijeras.

MS. GARZA: Mariposa, butterfly. [Pavo], peacock.

MR. KALSTROM: Peacock. And how many are there?

MS. GARZA: Seventy-five.

MR. KALSTROM: Seventy-five. And you had to invent twelve?

MS. GARZA: About half a dozen.

MR. KALSTROM: About half a dozen?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, about six or seven or so. And I was doing printmaking at that time, so these are zinc plates that are etched. My whole intention. . . .



MR. KALSTROM: And they're about, what? Is that about two by three?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, a little bit smaller.

MR. KALSTROM: A little smaller.

MS. GARZA: A little smaller, yeah. And so, my intention was to make sets of these loteria tablas that we could play on-actually, play on, just like my mother handmade her loteria tablas. But because each one is a separate little plate, I could mix them around and have unique combinations for each print.

MR. KALSTROM: Because she. . . . Were hers separate? Were they always separate little. . . .

MS. GARZA: No, no, hers. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: No, they were on the board.

MS. GARZA: There was on one cardboard twenty-five little figures-five across, five down. Pen and ink and watercolor. So she had to do the whole card, the whole playing board, each time, you know? And so she would also mix up the numbers. But number one through fifteen had to be in the first column, number sixteen through thirty had to be in the second column, and so on. And so you can mix them up that way, but as long as one through fifteen had to be in the first column, so you could have any one of those in the first column, and so on. And the reason she wanted me to copy the old ones is because the caller of the numbers knows them by memory. He knows that number one is the sun, number two is the moon, number three is . . . so on and on and on. He knows all of them by memory, and he knows not only the names but he also knows riddles and rhymes. So that when he calls them out, to make the game more interesting, instead of telling you what the little figure is or the number, he'll give you a riddle and you have to figure it out. And if you figure it out then you can put your bean or your marker on your tabla. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: On your man, yeah.

MS. GARZA: . . . and cross out that space and have a better chance at winning.

MR. KALSTROM: And so what do you do? The first one to fill a line, is that. . . .

MS. GARZA: It depends on what the caller will determine in advance of the game. He might say full card, he might say across, or vertical, or an X shape, or the four corners, or whatever he decides is what will be the winning combination.

MR. KALSTROM: Are these the actual ones that you did then?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah? Way back in about, what, '69 or '70?

MS. GARZA: 1970 or '71. I can't remember.

MR. KALSTROM: And you carry them around like talismans, practically.

MS. GARZA: Well, because I never did finish what I wanted to do. First I printed the complete set in order, in numerical order: one through twenty-five in the first card (primera tabla), twenty-six through fifty in the second card (segunda tabla), and so on. And then I started to mix them up to

make the individual playing cards, and my intention was to ask people what their favorite monitos were so that I could put them on a print to make for them. But it was a lot of work. Even my mother came and helped me print during the summer, in the printmaking department, some of these loteria tablas.

MR. KALSTROM: [looking at one of the prints:] Corazón.

MS. GARZA: Corazón. The heart. Barrill, the [Devil].

MR. KALSTROM: Look it, it has a valve or something at the top. That's an interesting heart.

MS. GARZA: And this is number seven. The original loteria tablas that she painted did not have the name written on them. It just had the figure . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And the number?

MS. GARZA: . . . and the number. And that's designed so that those who didn't know how to read, they could see the image, could still play. So children. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: That's very democratic.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, everybody could play. As long as you had your money to pay to use the card, yeah. [chuckles]

MR. KALSTROM: This is fascinating. So in some ways you trace your work-or the development of it-back to this \_\_\_\_\_.

MS. GARZA: Specifically to this. And so what happened when I was doing these monitos, copying them, I felt wonderful! I felt like I had finally figured out. . . . I felt like I had come home. I felt like I had figured out what I was going to do with my artwork. Because up to that time, you were supposed to find your own way of doing artwork, and I'm like, "What am I going to do? Pop Art, avant-garde, abstract art, what?" It was all very confusing, and so immediately after I finished these I did a another etching where I actually drew directly on the plate of a scene with my grandfather in the garden.

MR. KALSTROM: Wow.

MS. GARZA: Me sitting next to him on a box, sitting watching the garden as it's being watered. And it was fantastic. I showed myself with my father something that was very special to me, an occasion that was very special to me, and it was in a style that was very simple and direct. I used some of my education about child art, my knowledge about child art in the use of the disregard of perspective in certain ways and proportion and so on, to compose an image that would fit my recollection of my grandfather and me in the garden. And I called it *El [Jardin]*.

MR. KALSTROM: And that was related . . . came out of this experience.

MS. GARZA: Yes, came out of this manito tablas-or loteria tablas.

MR. KALSTROM: So that was like an elaboration on one of these?

MS. GARZA: It was the first step beyond the monitos, the tablas, to try to do scenes, the whole scene with a story behind it.

MR. KALSTROM: That was an etching?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it was an etching, yeah. A little etching about this big-oh, maybe ten by ten. And I did an edition of it. And that was it. I said, "This is what I'm going to do. This is the kind of artwork that I'm going to do, the kind of imagery that I'm going to do." Because I had seen what had been going on with the Chicano movement, the artwork that was being done within the Chicano movement. There was, of course, a lot of artwork that was heavily influenced by the muralists, Los Tres Grandes, so there was Chicano artists doing murals of [Juelgas] and of Los [Rinches] beating up farm workers, and, you know, all kinds of scenes like that, dealing with protest, with injustices, in a mural format. Or there was artists who were doing posters that had images of the Mexican revolutionary figures-[Emiliano-Ed.] Zapata, [Pancho-Ed.] Villa . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right.

MS. GARZA: . . . [\_\_\_\_\_ -Ed.] [Adelita]. You know, all of those images based on photographs and based on the [Jose Guadalupe-Ed.] Posada prints.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: Or they were doing images that copied off of the ancient pre-Cuauhtemoc artwork. But there was very little that dealt with just the ordinary everyday life of Mexican-Americans. And I felt that. . . . I formulated the concept that my position as an artist, my contribution would be to depict our lives as we know it, what we have grown up with, what we were made to feel ashamed of, put [it] in a fine-art form, the very best that I can do to make it available to our people so they can see themselves in the artwork and feel proud.

MR. KALSTROM: And that they're legitimate or appropriate subjects for fine art.

MS. GARZA: Exactly. For fine art. Yeah. And that's what I've been doing since this monito, since 1970.

MR. KALSTROM: God, I love that story. Well, you know what I suggest. I suggest we pause now, because this is just a perfect place to end the first session.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: That is just terrific. Thank you.

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a second session interview with Carmen Lomas Garza. The date is May 27th, 1997. The location is the San Francisco home of regional director Paul Karlstrom-to be specific, the dining room; we're sitting at the dining room table-to give us a change of scene for the second session. The interviewer, of course, is Paul Karlstrom. So last time, Carmen, we were just reviewing the notes that I took a bit and we ended up at a point, I don't know exactly the year, but where you really had determined for yourself the direction that you wanted your art to take, and part of that, it seems to me as I remember our earlier session, part of the determination of that had to do with your experience as a Chicana, your self identification as such.

MS. GARZA: Um-hmm.

MR. KALSTROM: Also, I think, very much, very important, an attachment or an interest in your own domestic, family experience, that certainly imagery was drawn from that. And the other thing that you mentioned was that. . . . By this time you'd been in art school, presumably, studying art-we might want to just sort this out a little bit-but I don't know if you'd been up to Washington state yet.

MS. GARZA: No, no.

MR. KALSTROM: But, at any rate, you were aware enough of what was going on in contemporary art and, according to you towards the end of the last session, you said you finally decided that that did not interest you, that was not the direction you wanted to take. So why don't we just pick up there, wherever that is, and kind of trace what happened next with you.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, as I had told you, the turning point was when I started working on those loteria tablas and actually copying them and making them into-well, the plan was to make them into a limited edition of color etchings-and learned a lot from making them, and I felt like I had found a way of starting to create images of my memories of my childhood, because I felt like I needed to work on imagery that I was most familiar with and that other Chicanos were familiar with, and that if they saw this imagery, then they could relate to it and I would have an audience, which was a very big concern for me as a Chicana. I wanted to be a Chicana artist. What was going to be my place within the Chicano movement. I was also pretty freaked out, because it was getting towards the end of my undergraduate education and I was going to have to decide what I was going to do. I knew that I was going to have a teaching certification, if everything went well, and would be able to possibly teach in a public school. But that wasn't my long-term goal. My long term goal was to be a full-time professional artist, and teaching was a backup, was a way of falling back on, if necessary, for income. So trying to figure out what was going to be my place within the Chicano movement was topmost on my mind. And I felt that going back and doing images of what I knew, what I remembered of my childhood, would be the best way to start. So when I did the monitos, the style was real simple and direct. It was almost childlike, like naïve, folk art, somewhere in there. And since my mother made me copy them, I latched on to how good it felt to be able to use that technique and how unencumbered it felt. I didn't have to worry about all the elements of art that I had so very well studied in my undergraduate academic training and felt that I was free of that. I could choose whatever I wanted to do. And so the image of my grandfather and me in the garden was the first one, because I love my grandfather very much.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, that was your grandfather?

MS. GARZA: That was my grandfather.

MR. KALSTROM: In my notes my shorthand had father.

MS. GARZA: No, it's my grandfather, Antonio Lomas. He had a garden and he also raised chickens and rabbits-he was already retired; he was a railroad worker and he was retired-and this is how he raised food for his family. He would bring over some of his fruits and vegetables over to our house which we really enjoyed a lot. I remember especially the corn-fresh corn-and garlic. So the image of my grandfather and me sitting next to him was something I remembered very fondly about him. And then from there it took off. I started to do other etchings of other scenes that I remembered that I was very fond of. And I really wanted to, first off, to reaffirm or to validate what I had experienced as a Mexican American growing up in South Texas, and then have other Mexican Americans see that artwork and recognize themselves in the artwork and feel proud. And this issue about feeling pride in our culture was really crucial because so much damage had been done to us growing up in South Texas in the public schools, in the society in general, being made to feel ashamed of our own

culture, our own language, because of discrimination, because of the hardships of being a minority- even though in lots of areas of South Texas, we are the majority.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: But still. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: In numbers only.

MS. GARZA: In numbers, right. But still there was a lot of discrimination and it was very difficult.

MR. KALSTROM: You described that, I thought, very effectively in the earlier interview where your experience and your growing recognition of this in, well, different levels of school.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Yeah. So I did etchings because I had done black-and-white drawings and etchings was a natural thing to go into. I was afraid of color. And I didn't really start painting until much later.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. I was already, actually, in my last year of graduate school in the state of Washington, in Washington State University, when I started to try to do some painting and I started with gouache painting. I had taken some painting classes in undergraduate school, but I just didn't feel very comfortable with them, and it was with acrylics and I don't like acrylics.

MR. KALSTROM: Too plastic?

MS. GARZA: I don't know what it is about them. It's just not. . . . It doesn't. . . . I use them when necessary. There's one painting that I've done in acrylic, and that was *The Cakewalk*, and I did it in acrylic because there's so many figures. There's eighty figures in that painting-eighty monitos-and it was a lot of work to do that. And I'm hoping that I don't become allergic to the oil paints, the alkyd paints, and have to switch over to acrylics, because I really do like the ability to manipulate, the time that the oils and the alkyds give me to manipulate. So I didn't start doing color until 1976.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, really?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And to conquer my fear of color, what I did is I just went ahead and did color scales of every single color medium that I had. I did my own color scales instead of relying on the pre-made color scales that sometimes you can get, color charts of the different colors. So what I did is I mixed all of the colors together, different amounts of white, different amounts of black, different proportions of each color to get the secondary and the tertiary colors, and see how transparent and opaque they were and how they behaved and so on, and that's how I conquered my fear. And those color scales, even though they're not very finished looking, they're really valuable. They're more valuable than some of my paintings because I've worked on them, I've added to them over the years, so every single color medium that I have I've made color scales for. And I always wanted to do artwork in color because I remember in color. I remember the clothing in color, the lighting, the walls- you know, just everything in color.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, your work is very colorful.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: You used the word "fear." You know, fear of colors, like fear of flying or something. You had this fear of color.

MS. GARZA: Because it was so confus[ing].

MR. KALSTROM: Why?

MS. GARZA: There were so many colors. It was so confusing.

MR. KALSTROM: Too many colors? Do you think it was partly because. . . .

MS. GARZA: It was overwhelming.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you think that, fundamentally, that you're particularly attentive, maybe sensitive, to color? Do you think that. . . .

MS. GARZA: No, no, no. It's that I was afraid of making mistakes. I was afraid of. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: You mean there was a right way and a wrong way?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, because the image, the vision, the memory, is in particular colors. And since I didn't know how the colors behaved I was scared of wasting too much time trying to find a particular color. I mean, mixing a lot of paint, wasting a lot of paint, and, you know, paints are very expensive and so I didn't want to be wasting paint and time trying to look for a color.

MR. KALSTROM: But you realized, though, that you *had* to get to color eventually because you just said that color was a very important part of the memory.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And what I had tried to do was. . . . Since I was doing printmaking, I tried to go into doing color lithography, and that's the most difficult way of getting to learn how to use color. [laughs] So it was a very short attempt, and that's when I started to just finally get into studying color.

MR. KALSTROM: Now back . . . you were doing the etchings. How did you have access to equipment?

MS. GARZA: When I was an undergraduate student?

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. \_\_\_\_\_ print. . . .

MS. GARZA: Well, we had a one-room print shop at that time, and we had block printings, etching, and very little lithography. It was there, but it was very simple lithography-black-and-white lithography. And since I was a student worker in the art department, I had access to the room, and so finally the janitor. . . . During the summer I didn't have access, so I kept bugging the janitor to let me in during the summer and use the print shop while the other summer art classes were going on. The print shop was usually closed during the summer. So he finally got tired of me bugging him to let me in. He gave me the key to the printmaking department. And that's how I got to do a lot of printing. And then I also made friends with a printmaker-instructor over in Edinburgh at the Pan-American University down there, and he also let me use the print shop during the summer down there. And I would use it when I would go down to visit Javier, and Enrique-Javier Gorena and Enrique Flores, who were my mentors in South Texas, in Mission, Texas. And they had a gallery and this gallery was like an oasis in the middle of the valley.

MR. KALSTROM: Where were they? What town?

MS. GARZA: Mission, Texas. Near [McCallen].

MR. KALSTROM: I don't know Mission. It's not near San Antonio?

MS. GARZA: No, no, way down in the valley.

MR. KALSTROM: Way down, oh way down.

MS. GARZA: Right next to the Rio Grande. Right there in the valley, right in the middle.

MR. KALSTROM: And they had an art gallery?

MS. GARZA: They had an art gallery, and it belonged to Enrique Flores. The property belonged to Enrique Flores, and he had inherited a movie theater-a Mexican movie theater-and two store fronts right next to the movie theater, and he had converted one of them into a frame shop and the other one into a gallery. And in the back they had their studio. And in the very back they had this. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: They both artists?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah. I met them in. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Xavier who?

MS. GARZA: Xavier Gorena.

MR. KALSTROM: Gorena.

MS. GARZA: G-o-r-e-n-a, Gorena. And Enrique Flores.

MR. KALSTROM: Flores?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. I met them in like around 1970-71. 1970, actually. And, again, when I went back to Kingsville, . . . I met them in 1970 when I was at Colegio Jacinto Treviño. I met them real briefly; they came to visit. And then I met them again when I went back to A & I, back to school, and they kept inviting me to come and visit them at the gallery, so finally I did visit them, like around 1971, and became very close friends with them. They became my mentors. They were both older than me. They were already out of school, they were already practicing their art, they had this gallery and a frame shop, and from them I started to learn the business of art. They gave me a book on how to market your artwork-the one book that there was available a long time ago, *Marketing Art*. And I spent almost every summer with them. I'd go down for at least a month, if not two or three months and. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: And that was in the early seventies?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. All the way. . . . Actually, I visited them all the way until they died. They both died of AIDS. First Enrique died in 1991, and then Xavier died the following year.

MR. KALSTROM: So even when you were on the West Coast, you still would go visit them?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Almost every summer?

MS. GARZA: Almost every summer, yeah. When I was over here, I couldn't go spend a whole summer with them, but I would spend one to two weeks with them every summer. I'd go visit them. Any other time of the year, when I was in South Texas. . . . You know, my parents still live in Kingsville and it's about a two hour drive to the valley, and so I'd jump in my father's truck, borrow my father's truck, and drive down and visit with them. They were very important for me.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, they haven't been gone all that long.

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: 1991, did you say?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, 1991. They were my mentors.

MR. KALSTROM: Hmm, now this is an interesting story. We don't want to digress but the fact that you would. . . . It sounds to me as if they represented an artistic family for you.

MS. GARZA: That was one of my artistic families, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And I mean enough that, even though you were way out here, which is pretty way far away, that you would make a point of-at least every year-reconnecting.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Can you describe why that was? What this really meant to you and what the situation there was?

MS. GARZA: Well, I was always looking towards other Chicano artists, other Mexican American artists, for influence, for inspiration, for information, for technique, for camaraderie, for support, and most of the time it was from Chicano artists because that's who there was more of. There was very, very few Chicana artists. And it seemed to me that the Chicano artists were much more forceful and aggressive in what they were doing and much more bent on achieving their goals as artists. So I made friends with a lot of Chicano artists in Texas and then over here in California. Enrique and Xavier were very, very instrumental for my development. They were gay, and so I felt at ease with them because they were a couple . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: . . . and I had nothing to worry, you know, and everything to gain from them. And they gained a lot from me also, because I traveled a lot and I would bring back to them connections and information, and we shared a lot in techniques. Enrique and I both started doing paper cutouts at around the same time, and we influenced each other on that. The paper cutouts was another technique, another art form that I've been working on-basically, since I first met them in 1971-1970-71, the first time that I ever went to visit them. And I just started. . . . I was looking at a book that they had on folk art-Mexican folk art-and it had a section on paper cutouts, and I said, "Oh, I can do that." So I pulled out scissors and knives and brown wrapping paper and started cutting, and Xavier passed by me and he saw what I was doing and he says, "Oh, I can do that, too." And so we both started cutting paper, and from there we progressed to using finer papers and Exacto knives and drawing on the paper and developing designs and patterns. He went into more geometric patterns and stylized patterns, and I went more into scenery. And he started getting really big and that



influenced me, so I started working big also. And he was painting-spray-painting-on the paper cutouts, and I didn't like to do that but I always liked to see how he managed to do that and almost used the paper cutouts as stencils to get. . . . Not only was the paper cutout itself a work of art, but this painted artwork from the stencil became another work of art.

MR. KALSTROM: Did you ever show your work in that gallery?

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah. I had my first solo show with them in 1972.

MR. KALSTROM: That's what I thought. In '72?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, and the show was called Monitos. So they were my first gallery to represent me. And they sold my artwork up until they died.

MR. KALSTROM: What was the name of the gallery? May as well know for the record.

MS. GARZA: Well, it was just called Estudios Rio Gallery. And they started out as a commercial gallery and then years later . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Is it Rio as in. . . .

MS. GARZA: Estudios Rio Gallery. Because the theater was called El Rio. And El Rio means the river, you know, right there.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, yeah. Estudios Rio.

MS. GARZA: Estudios Rio Gallery, yeah. And then later they. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Carmen's first show.

MS. GARZA: Right, yeah, and it's in my resume. And I always put it as my first show, my first solo show in 1972. They later developed a nonprofit. . . . The whole space was developed into a nonprofit, except for the frame shop, and it was called Xochitl, Incorporated-X-o-c-h-i-t-l-which means "flower." It's a Nahuatl word.

MR. KALSTROM: Nahuatl, yeah.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, which means "flower."

MR. KALSTROM: And that was the nonprofit?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, that was the nonprofit. Because it was difficult for them to. . . . They were doing so many things already as a benefit for the community that they decided to do it as a nonprofit, and so for many years they had the nonprofit.

MR. KALSTROM: And what did it do, the nonprofit?

MS. GARZA: They had exhibitions. They also had some programming to go out into the public schools and teach in the schools. They did slide presentations. They loaned the space for other fund-raising functions. They did film presentations in the theater, because the theater became part of the nonprofit sector. So they did a lot of art film presentations and historical films, old Mexican movie film festivals. Some live performances also in the theater. And it was basically the two of them with some board members. And board members came and went, but they were always there.

MR. KALSTROM: Were you ever on the board?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I was.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, I'm not surprised. [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: But when I was here and I did it long distance, and finally I had to get out of the board because they were going through so many things and they needed so much help and I felt it wasn't fair for me to occupy a board director's position-I mean, a board member's position-and not contribute. So I had to withdraw from the board, and they filled that place with somebody local.

MR. KALSTROM: Let me ask you something you touched on just in passing a few moments ago. You said how you sought support more in contact with Chicano artists than Chicanas, and this, of course, raises the whole question or issue of gender . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . differences. I mean, of course, in general, but more specifically among artists. But even more specifically here, in terms of the movement-Mexican American situation. You must have some thoughts on that. Why it is. Is there a cultural component to that?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, at A & I, my hometown university, the majority of the Chicanos who were interested in becoming serious artists were men. There was hardly any women, that I knew of, that were really serious and dedicated. Many of the Chicanas became art teachers who were in art education, and we lost contact. Santa Barraza is the only one that I know from my hometown university-who started there, but she didn't finish there; she left and went to U.T.-who is a Chicana artist and has made it her lifetime goal to be an artist. And I've stayed in contact with her. She's younger than I am. So there wasn't anybody older than me-women, Chicanas.

MR. KALSTROM: No role models at all?

MS. GARZA: No, no. And I didn't get that until I came here to San Francisco. And my mentor here is Amalia Mesa-Bains.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, okay. What's the name of your-well, I don't know if she's a friend-but you mentioned this woman there in Texas who actually was the only other one. . . .

MS. GARZA: Santa Barraza.

MR. KALSTROM: Santa Barraza?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: B-a-r-a-s-a?

MS. GARZA: Z-a.

MR. KALSTROM: Z? Oh yeah. Baraza, Baraza [Barraza-Ed.]. Got it. And so do you know what she's doing now? Where she is?

MS. GARZA: Actually, I think she's planning to move back to Kingsville. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: !No me digas! [Don't tell me! Say it isn't so!-Ed.]

MS. GARZA: Yeah, she's had a difficult time. She divorced. Now her daughter's grown, but she divorced when her daughter was, I think, eight or nine-I don't know how old-and raised her by herself. And she taught up at Pennsylvania, I think, or somewhere up there, and for many years was a teacher up there. And we always stayed in contact with each other.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, I was going to ask you if. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, we've been in a lot of group shows together, and you know, we've discussed a lot of things, we've exchanged information. We're constantly exchanging information. But she left pretty much. . . . Right before I left Texas, she left Texas. So it's not like we spent a lot of time together like I do with Amalia.

MR. KALSTROM: But presumably you may have, in some ways, reinforced one another in your resolve, this whole enterprise of actually being serious artists.

MS. GARZA: Yes. You know, Chicano and Chicana artists have always had our network. We've always had our network-for exchanging information, for supporting each other-and I've always felt, usually, a lot of support from Chicano artists. César Martínez, who was very supportive back when I was in Texas. He was always very encouraging, very supportive, and he actually photographed my artwork for me in slides-you know, when I needed to have some slides-because he's also a photographer.

MR. KALSTROM: Now he was in San Antonio?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, he's always been in San Antonio.

MR. KALSTROM: Still is, yeah.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: I don't want to get onto too many things but this interests me because I know a little bit about it, since I was in San Antonio and. . . .

MS. GARZA: With César, uh-huh.

MR. KALSTROM: I interviewed, I think I mentioned, I met César, I think, but . . .

MS. GARZA: Mel Casas.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . I interviewed Mel and Jacinto Quirarte is actually interviewing César now.

MS. GARZA: Oh, good!

MR. KALSTROM: For us, for the Archives.

MS. GARZA: Oh, really?

MR. KALSTROM: So you see all of this is. . . . So you're going to be coming up in that. And what I'm trying to do is get a sense of that community and the interaction-this is why I'm asking these particular questions-and I'm interested in this mentoring. I mean, you mention you come here and it's Amalia Mesa Bains. But in lieu of women role models it sounds as if you got really good support from men, from Chicano artists.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: So one couldn't very well say that this is that stereotypical assumption that there's a kind of sexism, machismo, operating among the artists here-that you as a woman were encouraged and welcomed. Is that a fair [way to say it]?

MS. GARZA: Oh yeah, I've always felt a lot of support from a lot of Chicano artists. The kind of support that I've gotten from Amalia has been much more intense, much more personal, and much more. . . . Because she's so analytical. She can clarify things very easily and explain things back to you-you know, analyze what it is that you're doing and explain things, put things in words . . . that I've never been able to, before that, been able to articulate. So in that way, she's been a much more powerful mentor than, say like [César] and even Xavier and Enrique in Texas. And for length of time, Amalia's been much more a mentor for a much longer time than César or Enrique and Xavier. And the intensity is much greater with Amalia. But the initial support that I got was from Chicanos, Chicano artists.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, I think that's interesting. I think that's important to have on the record.

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah, very important.

MR. KALSTROM: Because there is this view, as you know, that it's very much a machismo culture and that women are venerated but in very specific roles.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, well, you have to remember that artists are not like the general population always.

MR. KALSTROM: Good point.

MS. GARZA: They may have all of that, but they also have deviant [chuckles] ideas and divergent ideas and ways of life. Another person who was very much a mentor here in California was Gloria [Maya, Amaya].

MR. KALSTROM: I don't know her.

MS. GARZA: She lives in New Mexico now. But she was here, and she's a printmaker. And so for that she was also very instrumental in inspiring my printmaking work here, when I was already here in the Bay area. And I met her through the Galería de la Raza. All of these women artists I've met through the Galería de la Raza.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, without. . . . I have to turn this tape over because we're about running out.

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, we're. . . . Is this recording? I hope so. This is Carmen Garza, and it is Tape 1, Side B, with a little tape hiss, but I don't think that that's. . . . I think we're okay. Continuing our second session. And, Carmen, we were talking about. . . . I guess we're still talking about that time right around in the early seventies when some very important things happened for you-to you-like meeting your friends with the gallery in Mission, Texas. And then we were talking about people who were influential on you, to whom you could turn for support and reinforcement and perhaps even learn how to be an artist. And I was asking about whether this split along gender lines . . . and your response was-just to recap-that, no, you found that there weren't many women role models but that you got more than sufficient support in the beginning from the men, from Chicano artists. And

then this, of course, changed after you came to San Francisco. There's another dimension to this that I need to ask about, and that is the sort of the political side of it. Within the movement did you find that there was the same involving of women as equals. And I'm thinking more of the political dimension now rather than, strictly speaking, the artist part. Because you point out that artists are a bit different in the way they separate themselves even from community traditions . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . which I think is a real interesting question, because Chicano artists, the whole movement, then turns-has turned-to the traditions and the Mexican background . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . but that's perhaps even another question. But again, just to restate, in the more political aspect of the movement. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, my involvement with the Chicano movement was through the art. It was always through the art. I didn't want to get involved. I did a little bit become involved with the Democratic party and found that it was just taking me away from my artwork, so I decided that the best contribution that I could make to the Chicano movement was through my artwork. So there was always this concentration on the artwork and how I could participate in the movement through the artwork. And the best ways was through exhibitions and workshops. And in Texas I was friends with César Martínez and Almodo Peña, and we were always trying to exhibit our artwork as a group. I would get invited a lot to do group shows at university art galleries where the Chicanos had some access to the art galleries in the Student Union Building-that kind of a thing-and therefore would have a chance to have exhibits in those spaces. And that's the majority of the kinds of exhibitions that I had, because other than the Estudios Rio Gallery there was no galleries that were interested in Chicano art, and so I didn't even try to get into commercial galleries. And museums-museum exhibitions-was through. . . . If there was a Chicano somehow or other guest curating an exhibition at a museum, or if it was a curator that was extremely interested in Chicano art, then it would happen that I would be in a group show in a museum in Texas. But it still was very frustrating in Texas, and so when I had the chance to move to California, I did. And I started working as a volunteer at the Galería de la Raza, and I was invited to come and volunteer at the Galería de la Raza by Ralph Maradiaga and René Yañ ez, the co-directors of the Galería. And at that time they just had the corner space on 24th and Bryant. I also started having a relationship with René Yañ ez, and he was in the beginning very supportive of me trying to curate exhibitions and gave me the opportunity to curate a show of Chicano artists that I knew from outside of California.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh. What was his name again?

MS. GARZA: René Yañ ez.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay, yeah, I've heard it. Never mind. Okay.

MS. GARZA: It's with a Y. And Ralph Maradiaga.

MR. KALSTROM: How do you spell that last?

MS. GARZA: Maradiaga? M-a-r-a-d-i-a-g-a.

MR. KALSTROM: Got it. I'm sure that Rupert actually mentioned them, of course, in his interview.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, because they were the cofounders. Well, the Galería was founded by a bunch of Chicano artists, but Ralph and René were the ones that ended up being there all the time and doing a lot of the work. And so when I joined the Galería, they were in the process of expanding to the space next door and they were going to need help, and they went to open up a store next door and so I started helping them with that, and so did Maria Piñ edo.

MR. KALSTROM: Now what year was this?

MS. GARZA: That was in 1976.

MR. KALSTROM: '76?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, and that was the year that I moved here to San Francisco.

MR. KALSTROM: From Washington state?

MS. GARZA: Washington. I was in graduate school up in Washington State University in Pullman, Washington.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: Was there basically for a year, and I dropped out. Because I felt that working at the Galería was going to be a much better education than what I was getting up there. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: I think you're right. Let's pause just a moment.

[Interruption in taping]

MR. KALSTROM: Back from our momentary pause here. Well, we have you. . . . Remind me again, and this may be in our first session, but how did you end up in Pullman? I mean, how did you make the connection?

MS. GARZA: Well, okay, I was in. . . . Let's see, how do I get back into that? I did a lot of traveling around when I was in Texas. I was more or less recruited by Pedro Rodríguez, who had been the first Chicano art instructor at Texas A & I University when I was in and out of A & I. He had been hired to teach up there in Pullman, Washington, and he was recruiting Chicano students and trying to get us to apply for funding and scholarships to go up there, of Chicanos that he had known. And so somehow or other we connected, and so I applied, among other places I also applied to and got accepted to, but the funding that was available up there was greater than all the other institutions- basically, I would be able to live. You know, it was not only tuition scholarship but it was also a teaching position-a graduate student teaching position. And so I went up to Pullman. Of course, I hated it. I had never lived in the snow. I had seen snow once in my lifetime. And I was not prepared with the kind of clothing that is needed to live in that area. But that wasn't as bad as the isolation from the Chicano community. There was Chicano students up there, but it was so isolated it was really difficult for me. And that's when I became friends with Rudy Fernández and Luis Montano, the other two graduate Chicano students that were recruited up at Washington State University in Pullman. So I was there for a year, and my goal was to study color lithography, and when I got there I was really disappointed at how it wasn't as elaborate a setup as I thought it would be for lithography. And I just . . . I couldn't stand the isolation. And the other thing that really bugged me, that actually infuriated me, was that the graduate students thought that all the Chicano students had gotten in, not on their merit, but because we were Chicanos and it was affirmative action, when, in reality, we were the top applicants. We were the top applicants.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, nobody wants to believe that.

MS. GARZA: No, no. And so we were kind of ostracized sometimes and it was not a pleasant experience. I had a very difficult time. Rudy and Luis liked it because they had the facilities and good instructors that they wanted, and so they could put up with. . . . And they had their family with them. They were married.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. It makes a difference.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, and so when I came to visit in the summer of '76, to visit a friend here in San Francisco for the first time, and went to the Galería de la Raza, and they invited me to come and work with them, volunteer with them, I decided, "I'm going to drop out. I'm going to come over here." So I went back. It was during the Fourth of July week. I went back and finished the summer session, and I moved here in August of 1976, the year of the Bicentennial. And working at the Galería was the greatest experience for me. I met a lot of artists. I learned a lot about nonprofits, the gallery space, and made a lot of mistakes. Encountered some difficulties-lots of difficulties. Ended up having a disastrous ending to my relationship with René Yañ ez. But basically I worked at the Galería for five years, and it was a very valuable education. In all that time I was still doing my artwork, and I got some funding from the California Arts Council-artists-in-residence grants. So I'd do that, which was part-time, and then work at the Galería part-time, so I was able to save enough money to prepare and finally, after five years, go out on my own. Basically, I jumped off the cliff with a set of handmade wings-self-made wings. [chuckles]

MR. KALSTROM: You said that you had difficulties during that time, but I gather the whole. . . . Obviously, you learned from the difficulties.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: But did any of this have any kind of specific impact on, well, your view of yourself or your view of your work? In other words, did any of this. . . .

MS. GARZA: Oh, it strengthened me incredibly. All the good and the bad at the Galería is strengthening. I can't stress enough how valuable it was an education for me. When I was working there, all of us did everything. We had to learn how to paint walls, wash toilets, write proposals. I did everything except talk to the media. I didn't talk to any reporters. René always wanted to control that, which is something I ended up resenting because I would have liked to have learned how to do that, but he always wanted to have control over that. I learned a lot about recruiting board members and, you know, on and on and on.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, so it gave you then this really public exposure, public experience, an understanding of how you get things done within a. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And I also learned a lot from other mistakes that other artists made. Because I was on the inside, I was on this side of the door.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, what kinds of mistakes are there? This is what I'm trying to. . . .

MS. GARZA: Oh, things like artists coming in and demanding to have shows.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh yeah, yeah.

MS. GARZA: You know, just because they're Latino or Chicano or Mexican American or of any

group, they felt that they had a *right* to have a solo show and they were *demanding* to have a solo show. And they'd come in with their portfolios that were in really bad shape and thrown together.

MR. KALSTROM: Not professional.

MS. GARZA: Not professional. Many unprofessional mistakes that they made. And so I learned from that. Of course, with every artist we had to be patient and talk with them and see what they had to present and explain to them how we did our exhibitions, and explain to them that it took a long time to do the fundraising and so on. Those kinds of things I had no idea. I didn't know anything about the museum structure or any nonprofit structure. And for a lot of Chicano artists that was the only venue for us. So I had to learn. I had to. It was very valuable to learn what it took to promote my artwork. And I was still doing my printmaking, and with printmaking you have to know how to market because you have an edition. You have multiples. What are you going to do with so many prints?

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: You know, you have to sell, trade, exhibit, donate, and so on, and all of that is called marketing art, promoting your artwork. So I had to learn the hard way to market my artwork, to promote my artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, okay, so you learned these lessons. How did you then put that into action?

MS. GARZA: Little by little. I learned a lot from working at the Galería. I learned a lot from Xavier and Enrique, because they did have a gallery, though it was limited. I had to go beyond what they were doing, and start being more aggressive in the printmaking and distributing my prints-selling my prints, exhibiting my prints, documenting as much as possible, having all my homework ready so that whenever I was asked to do an exhibition, whenever I was asked for photodocumentation on my artwork it would be ready.

MR. KALSTROM: You would have it.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And a lot of artists don't do that. They make that mistake of not doing their office work, their preparation . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right, that's right.

MS. GARZA: . . . to promote their work. And then sometimes their character is not that kind of a person that will do that, that will promote and talk about their work.

MR. KALSTROM: You then \_\_\_\_\_ they can make enough to hire somebody or something.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, and they don't have enough to hire somebody so they don't get anywhere, and then they're frustrated and they're angry and they're pissed off at the world. And that's why the artists would come in demanding shows without even knowing what it took to put on a show. So it was a tremendous lesson to me. And so then after five years of working there and saving my money and preparing and doing my homework and updating my resume and documenting my artwork and getting my cards made and all that kind of stuff, I decided now is the time to do it, and I saved enough money so that I could pay my bills for a year, and I gave myself a year.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh! Well done!

MS. GARZA: Yeah.



MR. KALSTROM: How did you save your money? Because you were volunteering in the beginning.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, but I got hired to work at the Galería. And I was little by little selling. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Were you called curator or what?

MS. GARZA: I gave myself the title of curator. I asked Ralph, "Ralph, who do I call myself here?" He said, "Well, you can be my assistant," which I was, but I was also curating. So I said, "Curator and assistant director-assistant to the director."

MR. KALSTROM: Cool.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Because that's what I did.

MR. KALSTROM: That's smart, too, because that looks good.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And I didn't have any training in either of them except hard knocks. The one thing which I did not do which Ralph wanted me to do really badly, was to help with the bookkeeping. And I thought, "Oh, no, no, no. I already have to do that for my own business, and I don't want to have to do the Galería's bookkeeping." And it was still going through a lot of changes, going from an organization that was basically controlled by Ralph and René, to an organization that had to have a board, had to write proposals-major proposals-and had to be accountable and all that. And I just didn't want to handle that.

MR. KALSTROM: That's complicated.

MS. GARZA: Very complicated, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: What led you to depart? You said that your relationship broke up. Presumably. . . . Were you living with him then all this time?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. For the first two years that I was working at the Galería that I was here in San Francisco, we lived together and it was a disastrous ending. It was awful. It was very traumatic. I was right in the middle of curating my first major show, and it was the show dedicated to Frida Kahlo for Day of the Dead.

MR. KALSTROM: Really?

MS. GARZA: So I could not leave the Galería, even though we weren't speaking to each other, we were mad at each other. I was mad at him more than he was . . . he didn't care. But I just couldn't leave. I felt that it was not right for me to leave. It was my baby and I was going to see it through. None of the other staff wanted me to leave either. So I stayed for another three years, and it was very difficult.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, okay.

MS. GARZA: It was very difficult to work with him.

MR. KALSTROM: So it wasn't that breakup of the relationship that caused you to leave the Galería.

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: You stayed on anyway.

MS. GARZA: I stayed on anyway.

MR. KALSTROM: As assistant director and curator?

MS. GARZA: To Ralph.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh.

MS. GARZA: I worked with Ralph a lot.

MR. KALSTROM: I see.

MS. GARZA: And by that time, René's position with the gallery had changed. Ralph was the pillar of the place. He was the one that did the bookkeeping. He was the one that opened up the doors. He was the physical space. René was the idea person and the person that dealt with the public and the press.

MR. KALSTROM: The front person?

MS. GARZA: The front, right. Yeah. But Ralph was the nitty-gritty. Ralph, was the. . . . He was the one that got the work done. So I learned a lot from Ralph and was very, very fond of him. And then I left after five years because I felt I was being mistreated by René, and there was no appreciation. I reached a ceiling, basically. I didn't want to be the director of the Galería. I didn't want anything to have to do with that, but it was very difficult to continue, and I really wanted to concentrate more on my artwork, and I was starting to sell more, and I felt like it was time to be on my own. So I left in '81.

MR. KALSTROM: Tell me about the Frida Kahlo show.

MS. GARZA: Oh, that was incredible.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. That's interesting. This was in . . .

MS. GARZA: That was the first . . .

MR. KALSTROM: . . . '78?

MS. GARZA: 1978, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: That's very interesting because, of course, Frida has become this huge icon.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, we were the first.

MR. KALSTROM: You were the first?

MS. GARZA: Besides the show that . . . the woman who wrote the book on Frida . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Hayden?

MS. GARZA: Hayden Herrera. She had done that show out of Chicago at the same time that we were planning our Frida Kahlo exhibition. And so I went to go see it. Actually, when it was traveling I saw it in Colorado-in Denver, Colorado. I stopped there to see it on my way back from a trip. But the year before-on Day of the Dead, when we were celebrating our Day or the Dead show-I asked

Ralph [Maradiaga-Ed.] if I could curate the next Day of the Dead show dedicated to Frida. And I asked René [Yañ ez-Ed.]. And they both said, "Fine. It's yours. Do it." And I had been inspired by Amalia Mesa-Bains' altar-Day of the Dead altar-dedicated to five women, and Frida Kahlo was one of them. And she had also done another display for Frida's . . . anniversary of either her birth or her death, I can't remember, at the Galería. And I saw that people were really interested. They would see the window display, the altar in the window, and they would ask about Frida, and so for Day of the Dead I decided to curate. . . . I started a folder that same day, during the reception for the Day of the Dead show. And started to make a list of artists that we could invite and then we went and interviewed Emmy Lou Packard and [Lucien, Lucienne] [Dimetropp, Dimetroff] . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right. Yeah.

MS. GARZA: . . . because they knew Frida. And [Pele, Pelie] [de Lapping, de Lopping], and we did interviews with them. Amalia was the main person to do the interviews, and so Amalia, Maria Piñedo, and I would go to interview these women. And we started inviting artists to come over and to learn about Frida and to learn about Day of the Dead. We did slide presentations for them about Frida's artwork. I ordered copies of the Hayden Herrera book [\_\_\_\_\_ -Ed.] and sold those to the artists that were interested. So we ended up having quite a few artists that responded to our invitation for this exhibition. And it was both in the Galería and the Studio 24 that we set it up. And we did a booklet, which I edited and mimeographed.

MR. KALSTROM: This is very interesting. So in some ways-well, I don't know if you exactly need to claim an exclusive on this, but it sounds to me that you, really then were quite involved in the early stages of this Frida rage. I mean, it's practically a . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, we were. I formed a committee: Amalia, Maria, Kate Connell, and René and Ralph-and Rupert [García-Ed.].

MR. KALSTROM: Rupert?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. We were all in this committee to develop this exhibition. Because I needed help. It was such a big project that I was going to need a lot of help.

MR. KALSTROM: You may as well tell us. . . . You described the circumstances of how you became interested in doing this exhibition. But beyond that what was the dynamic at work? This identification . . . identifying Frida. You know, bringing . . . focusing on Frida-no longer Diego. Do you remember what you thought and what you talked about with others about this?

MS. GARZA: Well, it was looking towards a woman. It was looking towards a woman artist-a Mexican woman artist-for inspiration. That was the main reason why a lot of Chicana artists-and Chicano artists-looked towards her. You know, Los Tres Grandes, we had already been aware of them . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right.

MS. GARZA: . . . since the beginning of the Chicano movement. And I had only seen a little bit of Frida's artwork in a book when I was in Texas at the university when I was doing my own research on Mexican artists, and there was this couple of pages on Frida and I remembered her. I was impressed with what I had seen in that book, and so when I came here and I saw Amalia doing her altars dedicated to women and Frida-one of them-I said, "We have to do this exhibition. There's a lot of interest in her, and it would be great to do this exhibition."

MR. KALSTROM: Did you. . . Now I'm not sure the timing's right on this, although I think it is. Judy Chicago, of course, had that very famous . . .

MS. GARZA: The Dinner . . .

MR. KALSTROM: . . . *The Dinner Party*, which was at the San Francisco Museum of . . . by then, Modern Art, I think.

MS. GARZA: Uh-huh.

MR. KALSTROM: I can't remember the exact year, but it seems to me that it was the late. . . . Yeah, that would be the late seventies. So your show, your activity, came before that. But I was just going to ask, were you-as Chicana artist-aware of the work [of-Ed.] Judy Chicago-not just Judy, but other feminists, non-Chicana artists?

MS. GARZA: You know, I didn't pay much attention.

MR. KALSTROM: So this is really independent . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Oh yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . from the broader feminist art movement, the feminist activists?

MS. GARZA: Right. Right. Yeah. I think that Hayden's exhibition for Frida then started the feminist movement interest in Frida. So we had our parallel interest.

MR. KALSTROM: But you don't feel, except maybe in the most general way, that there was a direct connection? Because by that time already. . . . For instance. . . .

MS. GARZA: With the feminist movement interest in Frida? No.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, no. Well, thinking of the broader feminist movement. Feminism itself and within the art community. There were people like Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro at Cal Arts, and, you know, these were the ones, and many others-for instance, the Women's Building in L.A., which actually, I think, predated the very important expression here. I guess what I'm trying to get at is did you, in fact-the Chicanas-really evolve almost separately?

MS. GARZA: Yes.

MR. KALSTROM: Responding to the times, perhaps, but not directly.

MS. GARZA: No, that's right. It was a parallel movement. And that's way I'm trying to emphasize to you the importance of my Chicana friends here in California. When I came here is when I felt I had a *lot* of mentors-Chicana artist mentors. So there was Amalia Mesa Bains, Patricia Rodríguez (who was a muralist, one of the members of Mujeres Muralistas from San Francisco), Esther Hernández, and Irena Pérez. And so those are the women here, in the Bay area that were. . . . We were very supportive of each other. And that's different from L.A.-the Chicana artists in L.A. Over there I think there's. . . . I don't what it is about L.A., but there's this competition among the Chicanas and the Chicano artists, that they're constantly either trying hard to get together and end up breaking up and forming alliances and then end up splitting up. I never quite could fit in to the L.A. scene in Chicano art. I always felt that the Chicano and Chicana art movement up here was *really* supportive. We needed to be supportive because there was so much that we had to deal with on

the outside that we needed that support from each other.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you have any sense of why this may be? It sounds like a very different situation with the Bay area group.

MS. GARZA: In the end, you know, this whole thing about the feminist movement and the feminist art movement, in the end, when it comes down to it, as a Chicana artist, I know what my father has gone through, I know what my husband and my brothers have gone through, and I know what my nephews are going to go through with discrimination and racism. You know, I have to support them. They are my family. And I've seen it now more and more where white women are turning their back against men of color. You know, so their support isn't there as much as they vowed to do. You know, even though they're a minority. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: It falls along gender lines, primarily?

MS. GARZA: The race issue ends up dividing-still ends up dividing. And I think we've always sensed that, we've always felt that. And that's why I've always felt much more need to get the support of Chicana artists than feminist artists.

MR. KALSTROM: This is very interesting, because this is a distinction, a sort of subtlety, a sort of grouping within the broader feminist movement, that I wasn't really too aware of although I can see the logic of it-or rather, I can see how it would develop. I guess it has to do with primary allegiances and priorities.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You know, a sense, again, of community-or the need to seek identity within a community-is quite different, because of shared experience and so forth, than to set it up as a man/woman, male. . . .

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: This is continuing session two with Carmen Lomas Garza, and this is Tape 2, Side A. We were into some pretty interesting terrain, I thought-at least very interesting to me-where you, basically, were distinguishing between the experience-talking about feminists, the feminist art movement-but then distinguishing between the Chicana experience and that of the, well, I don't know what you'd call it-Anglo, I suppose. I'm not sure what you call the other, or the broader feminist art movement. And I want to ask where, if anywhere, are the points of intersection, or are they really parallel, separate?

MS. GARZA: Well, there has been intersection, because the feminist art movement where there has been some influence in museum exhibitions have tried to include Chicana and Latina artists in group exhibitions and in other exhibitions. So there has been a lot of benefit for Chicanas from the feminist art movement. But I personally have not been an active member of the feminist art movement, or an aggressive participant in the feminist art movement. Because there's so much work to be done within our own movement of the Chicano movement. So much that needs to be done that that work, you know, I just can't spend the time doing that.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, and apparently you don't think. . . . Well, no, no, I can't say "apparently" anything. I should ask you; you need to say it. Without being simplistic-[I'm] trying to describe things into absolute terms-the struggle for feminist artists and then reinforced by feminist art historians-and I do know something about this-the struggle is to try to gain-not regain-gain position within the

way art history is viewed.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And, of course, you can do a certain amount about the past, but really what we're talking about is now, opportunities now for exhibition. And the basic view is, of course, as you well know, that opportunities simply were not there for women, and that it has to do with a whole structure of, basically, oppression-if you will; this is the term that's used-and curatorial selections, let's say, acquisitions-not policies; not quite up there in front-that make it more difficult for women to really establish themselves as artists and get the kind of art-world acknowledgment.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: So that's one thing. And certainly Chicanas-Mexican American women-must have experienced that in the same way.

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah, so it's a double whammy.

MR. KALSTROM: Sot it's a double thing. But then I guess what you're saying-you can tell me if this is so-that, yes, that's true but that for Mexican Americans the more powerful limits or basis for marginalization is the group, not the sex or gender of the individual participants.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Yeah, it's. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Have I said that accurately?

MS. GARZA: Yes, and even more specific, because as Chicano artists, our art work has so much to do with politics . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: . . . that it's even *more* difficult to get accepted into museums. And then there's that whole question that is raised along with it about quality of the artwork-being told that, "Well, the quality is not there." So there's all these different issues and fronts to deal with. And I personally think that the museums are opening up their doors, primarily because of the political pressure that we've put on institutions that get taxpayer's money. We pay taxes also, and we should have equal access to these institutions that are public institutions. If an institution, if a museum receives public money-taxpayers' money-then we have every right to be included in those exhibitions. And I've encountered a lot of resistance to that, because there's a resentment among museum directors and staff of having to do exhibitions based on [putting on] political pressure. And if it takes political pressure, so be it. And I said that one time that I was on a panel for the California Arts Council reviewing proposals for institutional grants, and one of the panelists who was a museum director was sort of complaining about this kind of political pressure being put on museums, because the California Arts Council had been changing its policy and requiring compliance among its institutions that were getting funded of how they were serving the different populations in California. And I said, "You know, if it takes political pressure, so be it. End of story." And I have no qualms about making it known that the institution is not representing that community or the different communities where it's located, and it should be. And that's where I differ with the Guerilla Girls.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah? How so?

MS. GARZA: I am not going to wear a mask. I'm not going to hide behind a mask. [laughter] I'm telling

you up front.

MR. KALSTROM: Especially a gorilla.

MS. GARZA: Right. [laughs] I'm telling you up front. We deserve to have exhibitions in the spaces. We are now professional. We've been doing it for a long time. We are peers to those artists that you have been exhibiting, and there's a movement here that should be recognized. There's artwork that should be recognized, and there's an audience that needs to see that artwork and *wants* to see that artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: What do you think the record is? What's your take? What would be your judgment on the degree of progress in this area in terms of the response to the pressure-and an opening up in a greater inclusion?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Well, if you look at my resume, the more important exhibitions that I've been in have been curated by Chicanos that somehow or other ended up doing guest curating for an institution or were curators for a certain length of time, and then women-you know, white women-who were also curators in curatorial positions or were in education-department positions where they were given the opportunity to curate exhibitions. So I have benefited greatly-both from the feminist art movement putting pressure on the institutions and the Chicano movement putting pressure on the institutions.

MR. KALSTROM: Let's look again at the way the goodies are distributed in this changing world. It's going to be a long time before some kind of level of equity all the way around is achieved-which is the way things work. Do you feel that Mexican American men, who started out being more aggressive, anyway, as you said, have they been more the beneficiaries of. . . .

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay. So it is true that even. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. The gender there is. . . . And there's many more of them-many more male Chicano artists than there is female. So, yeah, they have. . . . They were in the collections before I was in the collections. They were being collected before I was being collected.

MR. KALSTROM: See, look who is really prominent and enjoying big fame just right here in the Bay area. And I'm not sure that I know for sure, but it would seem to me that Enrique Chagoya is like risen way up high.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Way up. He's at Stanford now.

MS. GARZA: And compared to me, he's a Johnny-come-lately.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, there you go.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, you know.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . I don't want to put you in the position of being uncomfortable about making comments on such things but, on the other hand, I think you'll say exactly what you want. How do you explain in terms of these specific cases. . . .

MS. GARZA: Well, it depends on the artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: You know about marketing.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. It depends on the artwork, and it depends on the connections and the kind of artwork. You know, his work is very political, but it's also . . . it can fit in to the mainstream art world.

MR. KALSTROM: That's true.

MS. GARZA: He makes it fit in.

MR. KALSTROM: It's got all that pop culture and so forth.

MS. GARZA: Right, exactly. And that's what it is. But I have seen Chicano artists who have had a very difficult time being accepted into the museums. Getting back to your question of how do I see what has . . . how do I summarize what has happened with the museums and opening up the doors, when I was in the first major Chicano/Latino art exhibition which was the Hispanic Art in the U.S.A. It was in 1987 and traveled around the United States and it was real controversial. There was a lot of controversy back and forth from all directions on that exhibition. The curators took advantage of the situation that was ripe at that time. The corporations were ready and ripe for funding that kind of an exhibition. And some of the major institutions were ready to do that kind of exhibition. So the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. co-sponsored that exhibition along with the Houston Museum of Contemporary Art.

MR. KALSTROM: Who did that? Beardsley.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, [John-Ed.] Beardsley and Jane Livingston. Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Were you pleased with that show?

MS. GARZA: Yes and no.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay.

MS. GARZA: I was in that show, you know, but I was pleased and I was not pleased. And I learned a *lot* from that exhibition, because not only did they want to have some of my paintings in that exhibition, but they also wanted me to do the Frida Kahlo ofrenda, which when we did it in the Frida Kahlo show at the Galería, the ofrenda-the altar-was a collaborative effort between lots of people. René Yañ ez, myself, Amalia Mesa Bains, and other artists had contributed to it. But they wanted something like that. I had done something like that, an ofrenda for another exhibition, and so when Jane and John came to my house they saw my slides and. . . . They came to see my artwork before they went to see Amalia's artwork, and they wanted me to do this ofrenda to Frida. And I thought it was awkward because it was going to be a traveling show, and that meant that I was going to be setting up this Day of the Dead ofrenda at the wrong time of the year. There was only one right time, and that was in October-November.

MR. KALSTROM: How interesting.

MS. GARZA: But they wanted it because it was going to be very educational, nobody had seen anything like that, and so this was a great opportunity for people in other areas of the United States to see part of what was happening within the Chicano art movement. So I complied. And because of the nature of this installation I had to go to every institution and be there to do the



installation, and I got to see how the staff felt about this exhibition and it was very revealing in that I could tell-I started to be able to tell-when the institution was doing it because they really wanted to do it and when they were doing it only because there was political pressure and if they didn't do it, it would hurt their pocket. So that was a *very* revealing experience for me. And right off the bat, when it opened in Houston, I saw a big cultural difference in the way the opening was handled. The artists had our airfare paid for. We were put up in a hotel across the street from the museum. There was this big to-do for the opening, and all kinds of people were there for this opening. It was a tremendous turnout from the Latino community in Houston. But the artists were not introduced. Which, when you think about it in a big group show, it's typical. The artists are not introduced in any museum. But for a lot of the Mexican American community that was coming to the museum to see this exhibition, that was a big no-no because, you know, we're used to being introduced. If you're invited to somebody's home, there's introductions all the way around. Children, adults, everybody.

MR. KALSTROM: They viewed this as a slight?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. But the way I found out about it was that I had a self-portrait in the exhibition. Besides a couple of paintings and the Frida Kahlo ofrenda, I had a self-portrait. And so after the big speakers and everything, afterwards all the artists were encouraged to go to their section where their artwork was, and so I went to my section. And Mexican American families that were coming to see the exhibition saw my self-portrait and immediately . . .

MR. KALSTROM: They knew.

MS. GARZA: . . . knew who I was and introduced themselves and were *delighted* to meet the artist and see the artwork and they were very, very proud and it was a momentous occasion. But they also wanted to meet the other artists and they didn't know who they were because they had not been introduced, so they did not know what they looked like and they would like very much to meet them. Would I introduce them to these other artists? "Oh, my God."

MR. KALSTROM: How many were there?

MS. GARZA: Oh, I don't know. At least about two-thirds of the artists were there. There was quite a few of us, because it was the first major opening of the exhibition. We were not wearing nametags or anything. Nothing.

MR. KALSTROM: At least they could have done that.

MS. GARZA: Nothing. And so I went around to different artists-you know, to the next gallery space, the next rooms. I would introduce them. Because I knew a lot of the Chicano artists. I didn't know the Cuban artists. I didn't know the Puerto Rican. I didn't know the other artists, but I knew almost all. . . . I knew all the Chicano artists except Robert Graham. I didn't know him. He doesn't really consider himself a Chicano artist.

MR. KALSTROM: [chuckles] No.

MS. GARZA: And so I tried to introduce them. After that I realized, this is going to have to change. So when the show went to the Corcoran Gallery-which was the second venue-and I was doing my installation for the Frida Kahlo ofrenda. . . . The day of the opening I was doing the last touches on my ofrenda and Jane Livingston came by with the representative from the Rockefeller Foundation, which was a major funder for this exhibition, [and-Ed.] was giving her a tour. She introduced me to her because I was there, and I thought, "Oh boy, here's my chance." And so we were talking about

the installation, and then I said, "Oh by the way, Jane, at the opening in Houston a lot of people wanted to meet the artists but they didn't know who we were." I said, "I had my self-portrait. . . ." And I told her the story. "And I thought, couldn't we have some kind of a name tag or a receiving line or an announcement of who we are so that people will know?" And the lady-I forget her name, the lady from the Rockefeller Foundation-said, "Oh, what a wonderful idea! Do it."

MR. KALSTROM: [laughs] Do it. Okay.

MS. GARZA: So there's Jane on the day of the opening crazily looking for a calligrapher to do our nametags, for a carpet to do a receiving line, trying to set it all up. [laughs] And she did. She set it up.

MR. KALSTROM: that is funny. That's a good thing.

MS. GARZA: We had our nametags and we were introduced. There was an actual receiving line, so we had representatives from the different funders or corporations and then all the artists and the media, and the people that were coming in for the preview got to meet all of us. And, you know, the artists were asked, "Do you want to wear this nametag or not?" And almost all of them said they would, and then would stand in the receiving line.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, sure! I mean, you want to be acknowledged as an individual, as a person. To be an anonymous artist and to be there would be kind of awkward.

MS. GARZA: And so from then on they made sure that we were introduced or we had nametags. Somehow or other the public would know who we were.

MR. KALSTROM: How many venues were there? I forget.

MS. GARZA: Oh, let's see, Houston, Washington, D.C., Miami, Florida, New Mexico, L.A., Brooklyn Museum. I think that was it.

MR. KALSTROM: That's pretty good.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: That was an important . . . one of the early big-time. . . . I mean, it was sort of a blockbuster for [this time].

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it was, and that's why it was so controversial. I was the only Chicana in the whole exhibition. There was only three women in the exhibition.

MR. KALSTROM: Really! Okay, well, see, there you go.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You see, since then these fronts are not moving along at the same pace.

MS. GARZA: Right, yeah, right.

MR. KALSTROM: Let me ask you, again within a movement there can be tensions and conflicts. You described a situation in L.A. where there seemed to be much more of that within . . . describing the Chicana art community down there as much more-what shall we say?-competitive with one another, and I've heard from interviewing other people that this is a bit endemic for the Chicano

movement-maybe not in the Bay Area, which I think is great, although Rupert [García-Ed.] has told me of some conflicts between groups in the area. But let's jump back briefly to San Antonio. I mean, not that you were actually in San Antonio, but when I first began to learn a little bit about your history and talked about some of the Texas-area people, I began to think of you as a prominent figure, even early on within the whole movement there. I'm wondering if. . . . I have the impression, from talking with people like Jacinto [Quirarte-Ed.] and Mel [Casas-Ed.], who are older a generation, that there was a definite generational . . .

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . difference, and sort of a . . . Well, I'm not going to say; I'll let you describe it, because it's interesting to hear what. . . . And they talked about it; they talked about you. And I'd be interested, since this is [all the same] Archives of American Art, to hear some of your recollections about that situation.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, well, I think that we were the young upstarts-you know, the ornery and vocal young upstarts, whereas Jacinto and Mel and-basically Jacinto and Mel-were of the older generation and were already teaching at universities or colleges, and so they tended. . . . I thought they were conservative. You know, I thought that they were conservative. Nonetheless, they were supportive.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: They were listening to us. They were trying to work with us and they were looking at our work and supporting our work. But sometimes, you know, like César [Martinez?-Ed.] and I felt that they were too slow for us, they were too cautious, and that we just wanted to just get it out there and get it done-immediately. And that was [*sic*] some of the reasons for some of the differences in the way of doing things.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, did it get polarized to any extent along generational lines?

MS. GARZA: No, I don't think it was. I don't think it ended up being negative. It's just a different way of working and wanting to do things. You know, I never spoke badly about Jacinto or Mel. To me they were sort of like mentors, even though they were not directly my mentors.

MR. KALSTROM: Parents.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, you know, you did look up to them and you did seek out their support and their help. And they did give it. They did support. But it was just a different way of doing things.

MR. KALSTROM: You'd probably be interested actually to hear my discussions on tape with Mel and Jacinto on this very issue, because they seemed a little bit troubled by some of these memories, although it's in the past, and I certainly don't want to make more out of this than it really is, but it then reminds me of discussions I had with Rupert, who-I'm not sure I told you this earlier, and I'm not sure that Rupert did this on tape or off-but he was describing himself and others as being hypercritical and actually, not hostile, but dismissive and antagonistic towards Jacinto, for instance, who, of course, was a scholar.

MS. GARZA: Uh-huh. Oh-h-h.

MR. KALSTROM: And maybe what this question is leading to is that there are the different demands or requirements of what you're doing-your discipline-and how you're approaching [art-Ed.],

because, at any rate-not to make this a long story-but I know from talking personally on tape with Jacinto that he suffered quite a bit from the position that he was in and that he felt very much sort of vilified by the younger Chicano-movement people, who were thinking out of the urgency of change and so forth, and that, I guess, he felt basically misunderstood, especially in light of the fact that he was one of the first of a high level to even identify or write about [it].

MS. GARZA: The *Mexican American Artists*.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. And just, you know, I'm interested in your comments-again, not wanting to make too much out of this, but trying to get some understanding of change.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And Rupert said to me-and I can quote him; I remember this perfectly well-he said, "Paul, we were really nasty to Jacinto." And then he said-we were sitting eating lunch over at Bay [Wolf] in the East Bay-and he said, "We were wrong."

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah, I never criticize Jacinto or Mel, because I knew that they would be jeopardized in their position-their teaching position-if they went out too far on a limb. So I was always very supportive of Jacinto. When he came out with his first article on Mexican American artists, he didn't write about the Chicano movement because we were barely starting out.

MR. KALSTROM: Just starting out.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And so there's no way he could have included us, because we were not known to him yet. I was still a student, and basically my whole time in Texas I was still a student. I was not. . . . To me, my professional life started when I was here in San Francisco, with the Galería de la Raza. So, yeah, I always felt that some Chicano artists were much too critical of Jacinto, and so that's why whenever he would ask me for slides of my work I always sent it to him right away. Whenever he needed anything from me, I always supported him. So, you know, he should have come out with a publication on Chicano art, but there was one particular person that blocked-you know, nastily blocked-him. And not a Chicano artist, but a Chicano art historian.

MR. KALSTROM: Not Shifra [Goldman-Ed.]?

MS. GARZA: No. From up north from Chicago.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, oh, oh!

MS. GARZA: What's his name?

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, I actually. . . . Jacinto talked about that.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: It was a. . . .

MS. GARZA: [Sorrell].

MR. KALSTROM: Who?

MS. GARZA: Victor Sorrell?

MR. KALSTROM: Yes!

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah. Which I was upset about because we *needed* to have Jacinto's publication. You know, the more there is the better, so there's this weird jealousy on this man's part. I don't know him. I don't know him at all. I think I met him only once. So that was extremely unfortunate, and I was really disappointed when Jacinto decided or was . . .

MR. KALSTROM: I just got a \_\_\_\_\_ .

MS. GARZA: . . . or he came to the conclusion that he was not going to be publishing-or be able to publish-his book on Chicano art.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, he's sort of returning a bit to that subject, you'll be happy to know.

MS. GARZA: Oh, I'd be happy if he did.

MR. KALSTROM: You know, he finally said, "Okay, enough." I mean, this isn't an interview about Jacinto, I know, but I'm just trying to get some sense of the broader . . . the different participants in the movement and this whole phenomenon, and people contributing or being involved from different directions and he's now, I think, to a degree, returning, becoming more involved, partly through this talk he's going to give in the session that I'm chairing at the Oral History Association meeting this fall.

MS. GARZA: Oh!

MR. KALSTROM: He's going to revisit sort of his earlier Chicano interviews and stuff like that.

MS. GARZA: Oh, good, great.

MR. KALSTROM: I think let's turn this over now, because it's doing its blinking.

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Continuing our interview with Carmen, this is Tape 2, Side B, and this, again, is the second session of interviewing. We'd gotten into some-I think-pretty interesting terrain here discussing some of the dynamic and even tensions and pressures, generational, gender, all these things within-which is true of any enterprise, any movement. Certainly the Chicano art movement is not exempt from that. And, well, I think maybe we sort of dispatched that subject unless there's anything more that you want to add to it.

MS. GARZA: No, that's fine.

MR. KALSTROM: What I would suggest we do, then, is shift a little bit from the general-or your experience of the general-to the more specific, which is your development as an artist-I guess looking at it more in a traditional way, from formal considerations: style, choosing of subjects. We know full well now the main engine that seemed to be driving your art, which you described in the very beginning: that you wanted to put your art to the service of the community.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You said something earlier on that was very interesting, and that is you came to the point where you knew what contemporary art was, you knew what mainstream art was, you

knew what we'll call gallery art-museum art, gallery art-and that, for you, wasn't where it was at. And I'd like you, if you would, to describe further, maybe in a little more probing way, just what that was like, establishing yourself and taking a direction in your career that was not counter to the mainstream where most of the opportunities, by the way, at least used to be.

MS. GARZA: Right.

MR. KALSTROM: And what your thinking was beyond what you've already stated and how you then saw yourself vis-à-vis, well, many of your colleagues, your peers, some of whom seem to be able to be in both worlds.

MS. GARZA: Right, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Like maybe Enrique. We mentioned Enrique Chagoya and. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, Carlos Almaraz.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, exactly.

MS. GARZA: Luis Jiménez. Yeah. Well, it was so daunting to try to do anything with the mainstream art world and I just felt like I would not fit, and then I also had this need to fill my obligation to my community and also within the Chicano art movement and the Chicano movement, that I felt I needed to develop my own audience. You know, there was this group of people that were not getting artwork in their lives, and could be served with my artwork. So I started developing my audience, which was the Mexican American audience. My artwork was directed-and has been and still is, primarily directed-towards Mexican Americans or Chicanos. And they also started to become my padrinos and madrinan [patrons-Ed.], my collectors of art. Because that's where I was exhibiting, that's where I was having . . . that's who was seeing my artwork. So I have *always* felt support from Chicanos and Chicanas, especially Chicanas.

MR. KALSTROM: Especially Chicanas?

MS. GARZA: Especially Chicanas. And it's always been amazing to me that they have collected black-and-white etchings, which already is. . . . You know, it's a very specialized art form, and for people to want so much to have the imagery that they will settle for a black-and-white work of art-you know, an etching-still amazes me today. But that's how I started. I started with black-and-white etchings. And I think that you mentioned earlier that I was one of the major figures in the Chicano art movement in Texas, and it was because of the printmaking, the print medium. I was able to disseminate the imagery in a much wider way than I would have with paintings. So I was able to have multiple exhibitions at the same time. I was able to donate and to sell and to exhibit the work, even though it was black-and-white. And so Chicanas started to collect my artwork, and the majority of the time it was on the layaway plan because that's what they could afford. So not only was I developing my own audience, I was also cultivating my own collectors. And having to learn the business of art. Because I didn't have the benefit of a gallery, except for the Estudios Rio Gallery down in Mission, Texas. And Mission, Texas, is a little town. It's not Austin, it's not Houston, it's not Dallas.

MR. KALSTROM: It's \_\_\_\_\_.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And so they were the only ones for the longest time that represented my work, that sold my work. And then, of course, I sold a lot directly to collectors and met a lot of people, and have gotten to the point now where some of my collectors that were collecting prints can now

afford paintings and have graduated up to the paintings. And I started to sell artwork to non-Chicanos when I started to exhibit in museums with exhibitions like the Hispanic Art in the U.S.A. in 1987.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, isn't it because that, frankly, provides a validation?

MS. GARZA: A validation and a broader range of exposure-though for me the first major, important solo exhibition was the show that I had at the Mexican Museum that same year in 1987-in the fall of 1987.

MR. KALSTROM: Was that a solo show you had?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, at the Mexican Museum it was a solo show. Yeah. And they did the catalog. That was a learning experience also, but it was very rewarding. It was very important. I had had a solo show at the Mexican Museum when they were at the other location in 1977, when they were located on 16th Street. But at that time the audience was not as broad as when it was here at Fort Mason.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, I see.

MS. GARZA: And that show was mostly prints. Actually, it was all prints. And it wasn't as publicized, like the show in 1987. That was really my first major solo show of paintings and prints.

MR. KALSTROM: [Wow, Well], it was a while to wait but I guess others have waited longer, so it's not too bad. That was pretty. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah, that was like the . . . more or less. . . . Like from 1985-86 is when the museums started to do more exhibitions of Chicano artists. And then the Hispanic Art in the U.S.A. show, that was the first major exhibition where the doors were opened up for Chicano and Latino artists in the United States. So everything came together: the political pressure, the funding, the maturity of the artists, the numbers of artists, of Chicano and Latino artists. It was all coming together. And the big interest in the eighties for art. Remember that?

MR. KALSTROM: Yes, yes. Oh, sure, yeah. Voracious. [You know, you're *OR*: I mean], looking around and. . . .

MS. GARZA: Well, I was not in on the marketing aspect of that movement in the eighties. It wasn't until later in the eighties that I started to start to sell more than just the prints.

MR. KALSTROM: What about the-I have to mention this at some point because I don't think we've talked about it-the big Hirshhorn show which . . .

MS. GARZA: Two years ago.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. Was it just two years? I guess it was just two years ago. So what? '95?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Because I remember it was. . . . We saw it in Washington, maybe in the spring?

MS. GARZA: It was there from the fall through February. From November through February, I think it was. About middle of November through the middle of February.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, we were back-I guess-for a conference or something like that. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I do remember though, it was after we met you and had dinner in Hawaii.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: How did that come about? That's a pretty big deal.

MS. GARZA: It was an interesting story.

MR. KALSTROM: That's a pretty big deal.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, yeah. Well, let's see, Thelma Golden, the curator at the Whitney [Museum-Ed.] at Philip Morris in Washington, D.C., had seen some of my slides through a slide presentation that a filmmaker-a Chicano filmmaker-had made for the Whitney. And his name escapes me right now. I'm sorry I can't remember his name [\_\_\_\_\_-Ed.]. And so then a year later she calls me up and asks me if I'm interested in doing a solo show. And by that time, Amalia Mesa-Bains had already either had her show or was in the process of arranging for her show with Thelma Golden at the Whitney at Philip Morris. And I couldn't do it when Thelma wanted. She wanted to do it immediately. It was that kind of a situation and I couldn't do it. I was not prepared. I had just come out of my solo show that traveled, and I was burnt out and the collectors who had loaned the work were burnt out on lending for such a long length of time. That was a major show for me, the show that the Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin, Texas, put together and it turned into a traveling show.

MR. KALSTROM: What year was that?

MS. GARZA: That started in '91. So to me, that was *the* major show for me, because. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: That was in Austin?

MS. GARZA: Austin, Texas, yeah. It was fantastic.

MR. KALSTROM: What's the name of the museum?

MS. GARZA: The Laguna Gloria Art Museum, which now is the Austin Museum of Art.

MR. KALSTROM: Okay.

MS. GARZA: So I told Thelma that I couldn't do it but I could possibly do it the following year. So then the following year I had already planned to do this show in New Mexico at the Millicent Rogers Museum. And it was not going to be a traveling show; it was just going to be for there. And I thought, "Well, here's this show. We're making all this effort to put together some of these same paintings and some new paintings. Maybe Thelma will be interested in picking it up." And she was. But the Millicent Rogers Museum was not interested in making it into a traveling show. So all the coordination of the traveling was upon me to do. So then I went to New York to be at an opening at the Museo de Barrio of a group show, and that's when I met. . . . Let's see, I met Thelma. And I was at the opening at the museum when I met [Anna, Ann] Louise Márquez and Andrew Connors. Anna Louise from the Hirshhorn. And she overheard me telling . . . I don't know who it was . . . that I was going to be having this show at the Millicent Rogers and that I was trying to get it to go to the Whitney. And so soon after that, the curator from the Hirshhorn called me up and asked me if I was interested in having the show proceed on to the Hirshhorn. And, of course, I said yes, if I could get the permission from the lenders. That was a big if.



MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: Because already it was going to the Whitney at Philip Morris. So that was going to be a lot of work. And he, the curator, assigned Anna Louise Marquez, who was in the education department, I think. . . . I can't remember. The research department. To curate the exhibition at the Hirshhorn. So I felt a little bit upset that it was not going to be handled within the curatorial department . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: . . . which is something that happens a *lot* with Chicano artists. Is that we get thrown to the education department for the curatorial aspect of the exhibition. Instead of being handled within the curatorial department, it gets thrown to these other departments. As it turned out, Anna Louise was excellent. This was her first major curatorial job, and she did a great job, in spite of several setbacks.

MR. KALSTROM: Is she Mexican American?

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: No?

MS. GARZA: No. Ann Louise Marquis. [pronouncing it "Mar-KEES"-Ed.].

MR. KALSTROM: Marquis?

MS. GARZA: Marques. Marques. [pronouncing it "Mar-KWEHZ"-Ed.] Yeah. The government shutdown happened right at my show-right as my show was being installed.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, yeah, yeah, the furlough.

MS. GARZA: Her mother died. So it was quite traumatic for her, but she still pulled it off and it was *great*.

MR. KALSTROM: Explain this to me. This is the same show then? I'm confused.

MS. GARZA: That started at the Millicent Rogers in New Mexico, went up to the Whitney at Philip Morris, and then went to the Hirshhorn. And all of the coordination for the traveling aspect of it was through me, with each curator.

MR. KALSTROM: Was it worth it?

MS. GARZA: It was worth it, but it was a *lot of work*. I mean, I didn't get paid for any of this. This is like. . . . I lost a lot of time from my studio. I didn't do any artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: But, my God, what visibility.

MS. GARZA: Very good visibility, yeah. And then when the show was at the Hirshhorn, it got reviewed by the major newspaper, the art critic for them. He was awful. A really long review and, you know, he accused me of being a fake because I was passing myself off as being a naïve artist or folk artist or whatever, which I never have.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: I've never hid my education. You know, forget it. So he attacked me from that angle and attacked me for being nostalgic. But the worst part and the part that revealed who he really is, was that he felt that I was doing artwork that was too pretty and too clean and I was not depicting all the bad things about my culture-the wife-beatings, the poverty, the horrid living conditions, and all of these things. There's no cockroaches on the walls on my paintings and there's no wife-beatings. It was awful. It was so racist it was awful.

MR. KALSTROM: [What is that]?

MS. GARZA: And I was so glad. I mean, at first I was pissed off and hurt by the review. But then I realized, "This is great because it's giving the people at the Smithsonian a chance to see what we've had to deal with all this time." Because, you know, the Smithsonian had that whole issue of willful neglect.

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm.

MS. GARZA: And it gave them a chance to experience firsthand what we've had to deal with.

MR. KALSTROM: That's a way to look at it.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. But, you know, they were furious at the Hirshhorn. They were furious. . . . They were devastated.

MR. KALSTROM: Who was the critic? Was it in [the *Washington Post*, *The Washington Post*]? Was it the *Washington Post*?

MS. GARZA: It was the major newspaper.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, *Washington Post*.

MS. GARZA: The *Washington Post*, right. Then, afterwards-I don't know how much, several weeks later or a couple of weeks later-there was another review in the same newspaper. Which is totally unheard of.

MR. KALSTROM: A positive one?

MS. GARZA: A positive review almost counterpointing point-by-point the first review.

MR. KALSTROM: Who did the second one?

MS. GARZA: It was by another cultural-art critic. So this is the woman who does reviews for happenings, shows, events, whatever-whereas the first one was done by the art critic.

MR. KALSTROM: Is that Paul Richards?

MS. GARZA: Yes.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah. That's what I thought.

MS. GARZA: I can't remember the lady's name who wrote the second review [\_\_\_\_\_-Ed.].

MR. KALSTROM: Boy, that is interesting.

MS. GARZA: But they got lots of letters to the editor and they did publish a letter to the editor, a very well written letter to the editor from this young Chicano working in Washington, D.C. I can't remember which office he works in. You know, government employee. Wrote this fabulous letter to the editor and they published it. And I'm sure they got many more letters to the editor. And the art critic actually sent me some of those letters to the editor. It was so bizarre.

MR. KALSTROM: Sounds to me as if, in some ways, it couldn't have been choreographed better.

MS. GARZA: Exactly.

MR. KALSTROM: It's almost like a set-piece, you know?

MS. GARZA: Exactly.

MR. KALSTROM: What do you want . . . What do you-Carmen-want to happen?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. It was fabulous. It was great. And something sort of like that had happened in El Paso . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, really?

MS. GARZA: . . . when my solo show traveled to El Paso, The El Paso Museum of Art. That was another [escandolo] that happened, and I left that. . . . Boy, for weeks afterwards they were dealing with that whole escandolo and it was great! It was great that it happened, because it awakened people; it stirred up people. You know, my artwork is not overtly political.

MR. KALSTROM: Hm-mm.

MS. GARZA: Yet it causes this stir for various reasons, lots of different reasons.

MR. KALSTROM: Passing yourself off as a naïve, right? Trying to get attention because of that.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And I get attacked on that aspect, and I do not hide it. I clearly state from the beginning that I chose to do this artwork in this style for a very specific reason and purpose. I am not a naïve artist, because I've been trained. I'm not an outsider artist, because I've been trained and I'm not on the fringes. I'm not a homeless person. I'm not a mentally ill patient or anything like that. I am not a primitive artist, because there's no primitive societies left in the United States. And I'm not a folk artist, because, even though I've been influenced by my mother's watercolor paintings of the loteria tablas, I'm not following in that tradition. So I don't hide behind any of those labels. Those labels get forced on me. They want to put those labels on me because they're lazy. It's easier to put a label-a preconceived or pre-established label-on me than trying to really look and see what I'm doing and what I'm saying with my artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: True.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. It's harder to write about something from a new angle, from a different perspective.

MR. KALSTROM: I would think, though, that it would make it easier in a sense to understand-as we've discussed through this interview-a professional artist making choices . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . making determinations about imagery, choosing imagery for a reason. And it's very consistent and very coherent, and I think would make it actually-I think you're doing a favor-it makes it actually easier to understand the art and where it's coming from, than to invoke these other catch-all terms or categories.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. I know. He didn't call me to interview me. Just from seeing the artwork and reading the brochure, is what he based his review on.

MR. KALSTROM: You know, it raises an interesting question, though, because you yourself would agree that there are actually kinds of traditions that you are tapping into to come up with your imagery-and stylistically-and that one could understand, in lieu of information about you, and simply confronting the works themselves. . . . What you do as an observer is try to create the connections yourself. So one could understand how that might happen. But that also, I think, shows the weakness in the whole notion that you can look at a work of art and understand what it is really about, where it has come from. That in other words, this whole notion-post-modernist notion, if you will-of the text being everything, intention being irrelevant, and that it's all in our reading as individuals the specific or individual text as they [call it]. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: I just think this is a very interesting example of how flawed that way of thinking is in terms of relating to cultural instruments or artifacts.

MS. GARZA: Or, well, art.

MR. KALSTROM: Art.

MS. GARZA: Visual arts. Yeah. You can't. . . . You know, I am part of my culture and the artwork is a reflection of that culture. You know, in Western society-well, I guess since the Impressionists-there's more of dividing the artist from the artwork. This splitting up. And I think when that opening happened at the Houston Museum where we were not introduced, they wanted to see the artwork but they didn't want to deal with the people behind the artwork, because the people behind the artwork are Mexican American. They are "other."

MR. KALSTROM: That's right.

MS. GARZA: And it's not romantic. You know, you're dealing with realities. The reality of the history and the conditions and the injustices and all of that that goes along with the individuals that are behind the artwork, that do the artwork. Do you see what I'm getting at?

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm. Well, there's stereotypes. I mean, I think this could be a great big discussion, which we can't do. But I think you're doing some very interesting things, almost with. . . . It's challenging, because they're different. Not different messages. The message seems all the same. "This is about Carmen. This is who Carmen is. This is what she comes from." But it isn't as if you've taken on the responsibility of embracing and encompassing the totality of Mexican American experience at all. Or all of the traditions.

MS. GARZA: Right. It's only from my viewpoint.

MR. KALSTROM: Right. Exactly. And so it's very personal . . .

MS. GARZA: Very, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . and yet evocative, nonetheless, of what has to be a shared experience. And so I think. . . .

MS. GARZA: To varying degrees.

MR. KALSTROM: To varying degrees.

MS. GARZA: Because every time I've done an exhibition, I've gotten reactions from Mexican Americans, from Chicanos, that is a wide range-from those who say. . . . Say, for example, a child saying, "Oh yeah, we did that last week," to an adult saying, "Well, I remember when my grandmother used to tell me stories of doing that." Talking about the same painting that the child said, "We did that last week." So you can't stereotype the Mexican American community, because it's so wide-range. The experiences are so wide. There's lots of similarities; there's lots of things that are the same. But it's very different from urban to rural, semi-rural, to those who have been here for many, many, many generations to those who are just arriving. So second and third-generations. It's quite a big, wide range. And what I like of the effect that my artwork is doing is that it's bringing it to the forefront for discussion *among the same family members*. So it opens it up for discussion. And once it's opened up for discussion there is that process of passing on the history to the younger generation. And by passing on the history you have a building of the person, you have the building of the character, you have the building of the base, which you need to have in order to survive. Without culture you're nothing. So I very calculatingly have been doing this kind of . . . this artwork for a specific purpose. You know, when I was an undergraduate student, I used to do all the whole trip of the elements of art-you know, the chiaroscuro, the proportion, all of that stuff-and I was very good at it. I was a very skilled draftsman. I could draw very well. And that's how I got my scholarships. But it was boring. And then everything else that was going on with the avant-garde, [avant] and Pop Art, and all that, I knew that I would not be able to get an audience and retain that audience doing artwork that the audience could not understand-or would need to have a degree to be able to understand, would need to have art training to understand. The conceptual artwork and all that kind of stuff. And it was just not going to work. And I felt that I could not afford to lose my audience.

MR. KALSTROM: Let me ask you one more question. We're coming towards the end of the tape. But what is it that. . . . You're very definite about this, that you've chosen an audience, and that, to a large extent, has then determined the direction that your art has taken.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: How do you explain the broader appeal that it seems to have to many of us who are not part of that community?

MS. GARZA: But it's human nature to relate to some of those things, and that's the beauty that I'm seeing is that other people can relate to some of those experiences. Especially if they grew up in the Southwest.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, that's right.

MS. GARZA: Even more so now than ever before. I think the [baby-boom, Baby-Boom] generation has been much more involved with its neighbors in the Southwest-the white baby-boom generation-than ever before. Because we went to school together. We were forced to go to school together because of desegregation in the schools, and we've been going to college together. And they're eating our tacos and . . .

MR. KALSTROM: [laughs]

MS. GARZA: I can remember when there was no such thing as Taco Bell and all this, the Southwest cuisine, you know. The only people who ate "our" food was ourselves and those that were very much involved with our culture because they had to. It wasn't like that before. So . . .

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Continuing this second session with Carmen Lomas Garza, this is now Tape 3, Side A, and I think it's still May 27th. I don't think that that's changed.

MS. GARZA: [chuckles]

MR. KALSTROM: The last tape caught us by surprise and cut off when I was sort of asking a question that may have been a bit rhetorical. We were talking about the reception of your work, the response, and I basically was observing that, based on what you had said, that changes over the last decade or so-well, you said baby boomers . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . but changes within the last few decades, as a matter of fact, have created a situation-this is positive, I think-created a situation in which individuals, not strictly speaking within the Mexican American community or background, nonetheless as neighbors have . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: That that experience-the Mexican American experience, or reality-has become, then, to a degree part of their experience-or I should say our experience. My wife grew up in El Paso.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: You know, I've been there a lot and I'm fond of it and I grew up in Southern California, so there's no getting around it, that no matter what your attitudes may have been. . . . And I remember being in high school, Burbank High School. I didn't realize it at the time. It's only realized afterwards that that was a restricted community. I don't think it . . . it can't be written into law at that point, but there was a great discouraging of other groups. I would say Mexican American, blacks. . . .

MS. GARZA: Coming into that school?

MR. KALSTROM: Well, the school had some but not too much. But within the city itself, neighborhoods, you know what I mean?

MS. GARZA: Oh, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And how this was enforced I'll never really know, but despite this reality of my growing up-and this was what; well, I'm fifty-six now so we're talking about the fifties. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Despite that reality, I nonetheless have always felt this familiarity with things Spanish. To me the language, a little bit, at one time. And certainly Mexican, always had a fondness for this, because I view it-and you may have thoughts on this-as a Southwesterner, as a Californian,

as a shared heritage tradition-certainly much more so than the New England Puritans.

MS. GARZA: Right. [chuckles]

MR. KALSTROM: So I think this is another interesting aspect. Do you find that?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, there's. . . . Well, one of the nice fringe benefits of my artwork is seeing that other people can see my artwork and learn more about my personal experiences as a Mexican American and a little bit more about the Chicano culture, the Mexican American culture. So it's been a wonderful fringe benefit. And that's precisely because there has been this familiarity with our culture, and adapting some aspect of our culture into the mainstream culture. It's been a difficult struggle-you know, on my part, on our part-to get that kind of recognition and acceptance and respect. But it's benefiting everybody all the way around. Where it's really interesting is when it goes up, like you said, up to the Northeast where they have no idea that something like New Mexico exists, and the history of New Mexico.

MR. KALSTROM: They think it's a foreign country.

MS. GARZA: Right, exactly. They don't realize that there's this whole population in the Southwest that has been here for a very long time, and continues to grow, from immigration and expansion. And a whole culture. So it's been really interesting to have my artwork go to other places where they see it and it's like they think it's. . . . And some people even say that I was born and raised in Mexico. And I say, "No, no, no. I was born and raised in Texas."

MR. KALSTROM: They say you were born and raised in. . . .

MS. GARZA: In Mexico. Yeah. They assume that I was born and raised in Mexico.

MR. KALSTROM: Why? What does that mean?

MS. GARZA: Because of my artwork. Thinking that that only exists in Mexico; it doesn't exist in the United States.

MR. KALSTROM: Ah, I see.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So it's. . . . And I tell them, "Well, you know, my grandmother and my great-grandmother. . . . My grandmother was born and raised in Texas and she never spoke English. She only knew Spanish." And what does that mean? That means that there was this whole history, there's a whole society in Texas, that has it's history that's different from Boston and from Maine."

MR. KALSTROM: That's right, it's for sure. How do you account for this? Or do you? Or have you even thought about it? We've been talking earlier about your. . . .

MS. GARZA: I can tell you how we can account for this. The history of the Southwest, the history of Mexico, is not emphasized very much in American history. You know, when you think about it, there's this incredible history in Mexico, and you only know very little about it-very, very little about it. History and art and architecture and culture, and we know very little about it-in general-in the United States. So much was given to our culture from the ancient cultures that we've taken it totally for granted and we know very little about it. That's why they are surprised in Maine that the Southwest exists the way it does-you know, has existed in the history and the culture and the people.

MR. KALSTROM: It seems to me and seems to others as well-in fact it's kind of an underlying theme in that book you have over there which I edited, *On The Edge of America*-the perception or the awareness that the United States-its history, its peoples, everything about it-is viewed very much through an eastern lens, which finally means then looking back to Europe. Of course, there's nothing new. But more and more there is a willingness to look at America, at the U.S., as much, much more complex than that . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . and we, of course, know this from the great interest in multiculturalism and diversity. But even geographically, as you're suggesting, there are whole sections that are, well, viewed as somehow-if they're viewed at all-they're viewed as deficient.

MS. GARZA: Uh-huh.

MR. KALSTROM: Deficient culturally because they don't match. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MS. GARZA: It's skimmed over. It's skimmed over. And not only is it viewed. . . . It may be viewed deficiently, but there's a definite political reason for not studying the history, not educating about, not. . . . You know, it's a power struggle, *plain and simple*. If you talk about a peoples and their contributions and their accomplishments, and you recognize their strength, you're letting them have power that you feel that you can't let them have. You've taken the. . . . I mean, the power was taken away from us when Texas was annexed into the United States, and we lost our ranchos-our ranches and our land.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right.

MS. GARZA: And so culture has to be suppressed. And along with culture goes art, language, music, dance, foods, and all of that. You know, because culture makes a person. Culture gives strength to a person. You can't let a conquered people, a colonized people, have any kind of strength. So that's why we were made to feel ashamed of our culture. That's why we don't learn very much about our history. That's why we're prohibited from speaking the Spanish language, or any of the indigenous languages, and from practicing the way of life that is very different from the Western way of life.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you see. . . . Obviously, this conversation-or interview-could move very much, entirely, in a political way and it has to do with, finally, notions of what it is to be American.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And, you know, it's not bad to touch on that, because we're so diverse and we have so many different ideas. And I would say that your artwork and the environment now in which it is being seen, and having these kinds of opportunities at prestigious institutions and so forth is evidence of this interest and these changes that are going on. So the question is, I guess, or at least the topic for discussion and finally from your point of view, what is it to be American? What is being American?

MS. GARZA: Well, I can only tell it to you from the Mexican American point of view. And all of this interest now, current interest in Mexican American and Chicano art, is not only for political reasons, for political pressure, but the sheer numbers-that the United States can no longer ignore its Mexican American, Latino population. Can no longer ignore or relegate to second class the Mexicans from Mexico-Mexico and Mexicans. That it has to deal with it, and culture and art is the



most pleasant way of learning and dealing with another country. And who is in the forefront? Who is in the middle? Chicanos. Mexican Americans. We have been the ones who have been trying to bring about a greater awareness about our culture-our Mexican American culture and our Mexican culture. So finally the U.S. is seeing the importance that Chicanos have played. And I'm not just talking about the art. I'm talking about the whole movement. Because it is my peers, the baby-boom generation, who is now getting into positions in the corporate sector, in the government sector, in education, and so on, that has started to make changes. Some of my friends who were students when I was a student are now in political positions-government positions or corporate positions-where they are starting to be able to make some change, to bring about some changes. So we've grown up and are now in these positions. And who. . . . We came from working class and the poor class. And that's another thing that Mexico is starting to realize-*finally*-after having been criticized for so long for not speaking Spanish properly, for being gringos, for having lost our culture, for all kinds of criticisms, that we are the ones that are in the forefront. We are the ones that are vouching for Mexico. We are the ones that are explaining who we are and who they are, because of our similarity-the Mexican American and the Mexican. And so finally the Mexicanos are starting to see that, you know, "Hey, we should deal with these guys because they're the ones that are on the forefront." We're the ones that are vouching for the immigrants that are recently arrived here and that keep going back and sending money back to Mexico. And so finally they're starting to realize that we are in the middle. The Mexican Americans and Chicanos are in the middle. We are in a strategic position to make things happen, to make the flow go both ways. And I've always understood this-from the Chicano movement, from the very beginning. We were doing multiculturalism before it was popular to call it multiculturalism.

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm, right.

MS. GARZA: We were doing all of this liaison work from the beginning.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, I think this is \_\_\_\_\_ . . . .

MS. GARZA: And I have absolutely no qualms whatsoever about using my artwork for that purpose.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, it's your choice. Why should you? I mean, there's no rule about. . . .

MS. GARZA: No, but there's purists who will come back at you and say, "Well, your art is too political. It's too nostalgic." All these too, too, toos.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, that's beginning to collapse. That leads me to another question, moving it back to the art. Through our discussion a very interesting kind of discourse or dialogue between political, social . . .

MS. GARZA: Exactly.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . and personal ends, but also working out within the framework of what you do, which is to make art. You made the choice to be an artist. One of the things that occurs to me is that-and I'd be interested in your thoughts on this-that we're now at a time which suits you and your work and the choices you've made as an artist almost to a tee. I mean, there may be critiques from some old-fashioned critics and observers, but they're not really going to hold up in this time. Anybody who is aware of what's going on in the art world realizes that the whole notion of mainstream has been pretty much up-ended.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And that the frame has been enlarged enormously and what we find interesting- I'm speaking as an art historian, an Americanist; not necessarily a critic, but a cultural observer, I suppose- what we find interesting is no longer that which plays by certain rules or breaks rules within a certain narrow scope, but that which is exploring and, probably, that which most closely reflects a personal vision, a kind of passion, and personal experience. And so I'm trying to figure out why your work is so interesting and attractive, which I think it is, and I realize it has to be that your timing, Carmen, I think is very good. Don't you?

MS. GARZA: Well, the climate is very good because I've made it. We have made it. We have made it happen that way.

MR. KALSTROM: But what I'm saying, I think it's broader. It's international.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, it's broader because . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: . . . the population. . . . It's really like all those things I said: baby-boom generation, population, the nations, where they're at.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, we've become bored with formalism. You see, it's not just. . . .

MS. GARZA: [chuckles]

MR. KALSTROM: I'm playing a little of devil's advocate here, because it would be nice and romantic and I think justified to think that important changes are brought about not just by accident, by time, you know history taking some kind of progression that was inevitable. No, it's not true because there are these other forces at work, like the Movement. But there's also something else that has happened for people who operate in the art world and who are perhaps very sympathetic to outside enterprises, endeavors, and trying to achieve inclusion- because we're sixties people. Partly, that's one reason.

MS. GARZA: Yes, right.

MR. KALSTROM: But it's more than that. It's becoming impatient and rather bored, as you did earlier, with what we were taught.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: I'm not just talking about the art world now. What we were taught was significant and important didn't match up to those features. It wasn't good; it wasn't worthy. And what you do, your work, would only be, I think, given entree to the real art world in terms of Henri Rosseau. You know, thinking of quote, "naïve" or primitive, but within a modernist notion. And so that becomes then part of a modernist attachment to the "other," being the primitive.

MS. GARZA: Uh-huh.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, I mean, I'm not trying to give a lecture, but what I'm doing is just stating what I see to be this changed situation. When I say your timing is good. . . .

MS. GARZA: In many aspects.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: What's also really interesting-talking about timing-is what is happening with modern electronics, with computerization and the global shrinking that's happening as a result of that. And the changes in life-style that that, coupled with everything else that's happening to modern life, is doing to culture not only in the Southwest but in Mexico. And so you will see urban Mexicans be very much like urban Mexican Americans in San Antonio. And both seeing my artwork from the same position or a very similar position, in that some of those things in my artwork no longer are done by those that are very urban and very modern. And then you see those from Oaxaca, who are Zapotec Indian, seeing my artwork and still living that experience and directly relating to it, compared to somebody from the Caribbean, from Puerto Rico or from. . . . I can't remember which country it was that. . . . My work was being shown in New York to a group of kids from the Caribbean, and them directly relating to some of the paintings saying, "We did that, exactly that, in my family. We do that in my family."

MR. KALSTROM: Still do?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So tremendous changes going on. The timing is really interesting, the overlapping with what's happening with the computer age. I am really curious. I'm really curious to see how some traditional things are retained and how some traditional things are lost within this computer age.

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm. What about . . .

MS. GARZA: And how some traditional things are revived, which is something else that I've been seeing. Consciously revived.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you mean literally revived, where certain maybe practices are. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Yeah, for example, the tamalada, something as simple as a tamalada. Families telling me, "Well, I remember my mother doing that, but I didn't do that, but now we're starting to get everybody together to learn how to make tamales." So everybody gets together in the kitchen or in the dining room to help make tamales. You know, it's just a conscious, deliberate reintroduction or revitalization of a traditional practice.

MR. KALSTROM: Are you recording this sort of new phase in the progress of a society or a group of people? Or do you think that in some ways your work-especially the more it's seen-can actually contribute to these changes?

MS. GARZA: Oh, I know it has.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah? You have heard of . . . people [are telling you]?

MS. GARZA: People are telling me that they're making a conscious effort-and I'm talking about Mexican Americans, Chicanos; and Latinos-making a conscious effort to do things with the family that they remember doing with their parents. Because they have gotten so caught up with modern life, with the pressures of modern life, that they had forgotten to continue to do those kinds of things, and so they're making a conscious effort to do those kinds of things. Like making the tissue paper cutouts for birthday parties, and having the piñatas, and all kinds of things that they see in my artwork that reminds them of something that is almost lost or has been lost and they're trying to bring back.

MR. KALSTROM: So the revival of certain traditions becomes part of your artistic enterprise.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: How interesting. It's something that you couldn't necessarily have known or expected when you started out.

MS. GARZA: No. My original intent was to show the artwork that Mexican Americans could relate to and feel proud of their own culture. And so once they get that pride then there's this need to continue and to revitalize, to keep alive that aspect of the culture.

MR. KALSTROM: Well it seems to me a worthy goal.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: I mean, it must be very gratifying to you.

MS. GARZA: It has been, yeah. I look back at some of the interviews that I had done a long time ago, and I've been very consistent. I was really surprised. I was reading and I said, "Oh yeah, I've always said that. I've always said that and I've always felt that." And so it's been, basically, since 1969.

MS. GARZA: Do you see yourself-and I'm not sure you can really answer this-but do you see yourself as unusual within the Chicano or Chicana art movement in your really focused dedication to a shared experience, to recording it-as you described-and creating images that will within an art context, which will give a pride about these things. You know, this kind of focus. Because, again . . .

MS. GARZA: Most of the Chicano artwork has been very political, very overtly political.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, yeah, and it occurs to me also-I don't know if you agree with this-but also, no matter what it may seem on the surface in the political dimension and everything else, that with many of these artists the eye is on the galleries, too. You know, there's always. . . .

MS. GARZA: Ah. Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: And a conscious awareness of some of the strategies and some of the devices you put in your art even though it may be. . . . I think of Enrique [Chagoya-Ed.], I think of, you know . . .

MS. GARZA: Carlos Almaraz.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . connections between the pre-Columbian kind of tradition and then the Disney, and then the. . . .

MS. GARZA: Well, they're artists and they do have to survive in the United States.

MR. KALSTROM: Right.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: But you separate-you're not naïve, of course, and you're also a pragmatic woman-but you to a degree, I gather, would separate yourself from that-that your priority has been somewhat different than some of these other artists.

MS. GARZA: Yes and no. I always felt that this is just my unique answer to how I'm going to contribute as a Chicana artist. I've always seen it as each artist is doing what they think is the answer to what they should do as far as "what is Chicano art." Because it's really hard. It's always been difficult to define, "What is Chicano and what is Chicano art?"

MR. KALSTROM: Could you try?

MS. GARZA: Oh, don't ask me. [laughter] My answer is in my artwork. That is the answer. Because it was always the question, and originally it was wrecking me. It's like, "What am I going to do? How am I going to do this? What is my place?" And finally I decided it has to be through the artwork. That's the only way I know how. That's the best way I know how. And it's what I do the best so the answer has to be through the artwork. And so I just. . . . You know, maybe it's innocent, maybe it's naïve to think, well, "Every other artist is doing the same thing. What they do is their answer." Because tell me what artist is going to have a politician dictate to him what to do and what not to do with his artwork.

MR. KALSTROM: Not many, I think.

MS. GARZA: And they tried to do that. The Chicano politicians tried to do that.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, yeah?

MS. GARZA: Oh yeah, yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Say, "It is your responsibility to. . . ."

MS. GARZA: And they have tried to tell me what to do and what not to do. And I just say, "Well. . . ." I just smile and go on about doing . . . continue to do what I do.

MR. KALSTROM: That's interesting.

MS. GARZA: Right. "You can say whatever you want to say, but this is the way I'm going to do it. I can't do it any other way." You know, this is what my answer is.

MR. KALSTROM: But you also-I sense from this conversation-also feel comfortable with the choices you've made-that you've been able to pursue a career as an artist, and whatever that implies, but at the same time, most importantly, use your art to serve other issues and concerns that matter a great deal to you.

MS. GARZA: Right.

MR. KALSTROM: So you've integrated these two concerns, which I think with some artists is not always that easy to do. But you've been successful and you feel good about it.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Yeah. And a lot of people benefit from it. You know, witness the sales of the children's book. Over a 120,000 copies . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Oh-oh-oh-oh. [Really an untranscribable groan of admiration-Trans.]

MS. GARZA: . . . since it first came out in 1990. So. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Well, so you're reaching your audience.

MS. GARZA: I am reaching my audience.

MR. KALSTROM: You described an audience and you feel that you are reaching it.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And it's been a lot of work and a lot of sacrifice. I had to put up with a lot of negative stuff. But what's kept me strong is the constant support that I have always felt from Chicanos and Chicanas. And now it's even wider support from those who are not Chicanos and Chicanas who are giving me the opportunities to exhibit my work and purchasing my artwork. So it's expanded, and it's great. You know, sometimes people ask me, "When did you first start feeling . . . gaining success. . . ."

[BREAK]

MR. KALSTROM: Tape 3, Side B, allowing Carmen the opportunity to finish her anecdote. Do you want to. . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah. When I get asked when did I first start feeling success or when was I first successful, to me, the first time that I realized that there was some success here was when I sold my first etching to another student-undergraduate student-at A&I-I think it was my first year, the first time I did a print-for five dollars. And I didn't know what value to put on it. All I wanted was to get enough money to get some more paper. So it depends. What do you mean by success? Do you mean success in sales? Success in recognition? Recognition by which audience? And so on. So there's all these different kinds of successes. And there's been major points that are indication of success that I can tell you about, but, like I said, I've always felt a lot of support and recognition from Chicanos. And that first time that I did a show of Chicano art, where I got recognition, was at the Mexican American Youth Organization Conference in Mission, Texas.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, I remember. We talked about that.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: Oh, that was in Mission?

MS. GARZA: Yeah, that was in Mission, Texas. Not at the gallery-not at Estudios Rio Gallery . . .

MR. KALSTROM: No, no, no, but. . . .

MS GARZA: . . . but at a monastery.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, I remember you described that. Okay, I'm glad you said that. Okay, so that's the same place. That's interesting. So that place has got to be one of the important spots for you because it's a very key thing.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And to this day I have friends who still remember that exhibition and remember me from that exhibition and remember the artwork and some of the artwork from that exhibition. So that's success! You know?

MR. KALSTROM: That is success. Well, you've come a long way.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. And I feel like the show that I had at the Hirshhorn was the peak of success in the United States. I haven't done anything outside of the United States.

MR. KALSTROM: Um-hmm. Well, that's right. Remember, you need to go to Europe, we decided.

MS. GARZA: Well, I need to go to Mexico first. And that's going to be really interesting. They are proposing to try to have a solo show of my work in Mexico.

MR. KALSTROM: Where? At the [Modern Museum, modern museum] there?

MS. GARZA: Through the Belles Artes system.

MR. KALSTROM: Belles Artes?

MS. GARZA: Yeah. Which could be at the Museum of Modern Art.

MR. KALSTROM: Do you work with [\_\_\_\_\_ -Ed.] Augustine?

MS. GARZA: No, this is through the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, which means the Agency for Exterior Relations, basically dealing with the Mexican community in the United States. So they want to bring back to Mexico Chicano art and Chicano experiences through the arts . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Wow!

MS. GARZA: . . . to bring about a greater awareness of what has been going on and what is going on with Chicanos or Mexican Americans.

MR. KALSTROM: So what you were saying a little earlier wasn't just theoretical.

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. KALSTROM: This is a very specific case.

MS. GARZA: This is happening. This is starting to happen. They are starting to finally catch on and realize. I mean, of course, the corporate sector in the United States is helping to push this along, because the corporations are doing business in Mexico because of the Free Trade Agreement and all that. So there's financial reasons besides the political reasons for this relationship, this development. I'm not naïve about it. And that's why I say I have no qualms about using my artwork towards this goal of bringing about a greater understanding of who we are.

MR. KALSTROM: Including in Mexico itself.

MS. GARZA: Right. Right. Because there has always been this . . . all kinds of criticisms from Mexicans of Mexican Americans, of Chicanos. Everything from being considered traitors to being called gringos and gringas and, you know. . . .

MR. KALSTROM: Tex-Mex.

MS. GARZA: Unalfabetos, which means uneducated. Being the lower classes, being the poorer people from Mexico, being the Indians from Mexico. Because those are the people that come to work in the United States. You know, so you have filmmakers and other people, other Chicanos, Mexican Americans, successful in the United States that go to Mexico and we are the brown-skinned people that go back.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right.

MS. GARZA: When we meet with the people in Mexico who are in the upper class, who are in the positions of power in the art scene, they're white.

MR. KALSTROM: I noticed that.

MS. GARZA: Yeah. So we go there and we're the ones that are brown-skinned and they're looking at us like, "You are the sons and daughters, the grandsons and the granddaughters, of the [indigenas] that went to the United States to work because they were so poor they needed a way to make a life. And here you are coming back as our peers. As our equals."

MR. KALSTROM: And they have troubles with that?

MS. GARZA: Yes.

MR. KALSTROM: Nonetheless, they're talking about offering you an exhibition at Belles Artes.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, because they realized that we are the liaison, we are the go-betweens, we are the ones that are promoting the Mexican culture through our Mexican American culture. It's a really interesting times, very, very interesting times.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, it is interesting to watch. Now, when would this show come about?

MS. GARZA: That's the question. [laughs] That's a big cultural difference there. Now I am used to doing things way in advance, the way things are done here.

MR. KALSTROM: Right, right. "Oh, we'll do it, si si."

MS. GARZA: The Mexicanos do things at the last minute. They get it done, and it's amazing what they get done. They do all-nighters to get it done but they get it done.

MR. KALSTROM: But it's sure hard to plan if you have other things to do.

MS. GARZA: Extremely hard, you know. Especially over here we're used to insurance loan [firms] and all of this planning and documentation and all this stuff. So it's driving me nuts.

MR. KALSTROM: Well, I wish you luck with that. I mean, that is going to be. . . . That's very important, and it's great that you're able to take this kind of step and expand to still another audience. And also [it] is interesting because. . . . And I'm sure you've thought about this-that through this process, this kind of journey you've embarked on, and taking, that you're going to end up serving your country-the United States-in a . . .

MS. GARZA: Precisely.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . very specific, very important way . . .

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: . . . as you have been critiquing, you know, also operating-and I won't say a subversive way, I don't mean that-but challenging or undermining stereotype, shall we say?

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: It's pretty sweet. [laughter]



MS. GARZA: It's. . . . Do you know who La Malinche is?

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah.

MS. GARZA: Who she is? The Indian slave girl that was given to Cortés and became his interpreter? Well, she was like a liaison between the Spaniards and the Mexicans. And because she was a slave girl and because she was given to Cortés, she had no choice in the matter. She made the best that she could out of her situation, and Cortés did promise to give her her freedom and property once he conquered Tenochtitlán-Mexico City. So, hey! Here's a better picture for her than what she had been through already as a slave. And she came from royalty. She came from the upper classes of her society down to being a slave, because of her situation where her father died and her mother wanting to remarry and a daughter was cumbersome, in the way of her and her son achieving the same kind of position as they were used to. So I as a Chicana-and a lot of Chicanas-see ourselves in certain ways as Malinches, in that we are the liaisons between two groups of people. On the downside is that we're seen as traitors because that's how La Malinche was seen. She was a traitor. She was a scapegoat that became the traitor. Even though she was a slave. It was the coastal Indians of Mexico that joined forces with the Spaniards to conquer and to destroy Tenochtitlán because they didn't want to be paying tribute to Tenochtitlán, to Montezuma and to the Aztecs. But she is seen as a symbol of being a traitor, and so if a Mexicano calls you a [Malinchista], it's a cuss word. It's like you're being called a traitor. And so we're in that position in that we are trying to bring the two groups together. Because they have to. There's no way about it. You can't go back. You have to move forward. And so my way of doing it is through the artwork. We can't continue to have discrimination and racism. You can't continue to have a whole group of people not be contributing positively to the community. It hasn't worked, and it's not going to work. It's going to be our downfall if we don't have this community positively contribute to the society. And it's already known, statistically, that the ones who are going to be playing into the Social Security are the minorities who. . . . Social Security is going to be being paid to the baby-boom generation.

MR. KALSTROM: Yeah, we need it. [chuckles]

MS. GARZA: We're going to need it. Yeah, exactly. And who are the majority of the baby-boom generation? They're the white people. So we cannot afford to have this whole segment of our American society not be constructively contributing to this society.

MR. KALSTROM: There's no question about that. Well, what's interesting is that the scope of your enterprise has really expanded as time goes on.

MS. GARZA: Yeah.

MR. KALSTROM: It's fascinating. Well, I think we should break here. This is a good moment to conclude. And I'm very pleased.

MS. GARZA: Yeah, I think we got a lot covered. [laughs]

MR. KALSTROM: Right. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...September 24, 2007