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Oral history interview with Gilbert Sanchez
Lujan, 1997 Nov. 7-17

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Gilbert Sanchez Luján in November, 1997. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California and La Mesa, New Mexico, and was conducted by Jeffrey Rangel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

GL: Gilbert Sanchez Luján

JR: Jeffrey Rangel

[Session 1]

JR: Okay, this is an interview with Gilbert "Magu" Lujan on November 13, 1997. The interviewer is Jeff Rangel, and I guess we can go ahead and get started. This is Tape 1, Side A.

So, like I was saying, we like to kind of begin with where you were born and what your family history is so that we can get a little bit of an idea how you got into a career as an artist and how you developed as an artist, really.

GL: Well, I suppose the most significant thing to say is some of the statistics and that is that, I was born in 1940 at the San Joaquin General Hospital near a little place called French Camp, which is a migrant farm workers' place that was actually, I think, either on my birth certificate or the records I used for a long time. And French Camp, being a migrant village, as it were at the time, because it was all rural except for these little hamlets of [Mejicanos, Méjicanos, Méxicanos, Mexicanos,] or Chicanos that created these little areas. And as you'll see, as we go on in this interview, it becomes significant much later as I get politicized and I get involved with the United Farm Workers Union much later on. But we stayed there probably some months before I returned with my family. I had just been born up there. And we were there because I had an uncle by the name of [Isaudo], that he was a contractor and had employment, so my father went up there to work and took my mother up there with him and, of course, I was born there. So. . . .

JR: Did you have brothers and sisters?

GL: Yeah, I have. My brother, Richard, was born in 1942, July 17th, and essentially him and I were the only siblings for a while, and then my parents both separated and were divorced, and they both remarried and had two males. My father and that side developed two brothers—two half-brothers—Phillip and Robert, and my mother remarried and had two males, again, and those two half brothers were Mark and Ronnie.

Anyway, that came much later, but at the time that we returned to East Los Angeles. . . . I remember East Los Angeles in the forties. This is right about the beginning of the war, because I remember things being said. And I must have been a baby at one, two, three, four—1942, '43, '44. I remember the intensity and something about. . . . There was such a vagueness to it, that it's nothing real clear and certain. But I remember the Second World War very distinctly, because. . . . And other things. I remember very clearly being smothered by a blanket, so I was a baby baby. I mean, I was little. And I've done meditation on trying to get back to those childhood recollections, because it's part of some other interests I have in reconstructing your childhood, and for other purposes that adults should do. But, in any case, I grew up in East L.A. for the most part in my young, you know, primary age-group level of, I guess, one to six years old. And I remember going to school and I remember the very first day I went to school, which was the first grade. I didn't go to kindergarten because in 1944 or '45, I think it was, we went to Mexico and we stayed there for a little while. Anyway, I didn't speak. . . .

JR: What part of Mexico?

GL: To Guadalajara, where my mother was from and we stayed with relatives there in La Colonia Libertad for one, and then the little ranchitas that we went to visit. Her grandfather was a Dutch man that was six-two and had blue eyes and real güerito. And my mother, if you look at her, she looks Hungarian-Jewish. I mean, she doesn't have the typical what people stereotype as Mexican so. . . .

JR: Yeah, Indio?

GL: Yeah. So she's very fair-skinned, very light, very pretty lady. And so we stayed there, and when I came back, going back to the first grade, the first couple of days that I went, I didn't speak English. I had no knowledge of the language because at home my mother spoke Spanish to us, and I had just come back from Mexico and had

spent time there, so my English was. . . . I don't remember speaking English, I mean. And I think as a child you don't remember language that clearly anyway. It's something that you're learning, and you understand vague concepts at best. Anyway, so what I did is, I had to go to the bathroom, and I had to wait all the time until my mother came to get me on that first day.

JR: Because you couldn't ask?

GL: Yeah, and I had to go. I had to take a leak.

JR: [laughs]

GL: And I suffered. . . . And the reason I mention it is because that's one of the things that's important about language, when you go to a place that doesn't speak the language that you do. And that's incredibly significant in my political life, as you'll see later on, that I was also part of a generation that was still basically Mexican and very immigrant-like, if not. . . . I wasn't an immigrant, but my parents were. And so we had all the experiences of people coming to this country. And any transplanting, whether it be Cambodians or Africans or Iranians, there's some psychological stress and drama, actually, that takes place in acculturating and becoming operable in this society.

JR: Right.

GL: So that was an early thing. And I remember by the fifth grade I was the best speller in the class. And that was overcompensation, was only because school presented a challenge to me somehow, and I was always very interested in things that were cerebral. But little did I know. I mean, I was just a kid. But I was interested. And I remember a Mrs. Davis, when I was in school, that used to tell us stories, which was history, and I really got into the stories. I used to enjoy them a lot.

JR: Were your parents really encouraging you in school and stuff like that?

GL: Mm, yes. But nothing. . . .

JR: Nothing out of the ordinary?

GL: Not . . . there wasn't an over-emphasis, for sure. There was just a, you know, "Behave, go to school, do what you're supposed to do." It was more of a going along with what school requires and so forth. There wasn't any values of ambition and really getting to be the first guy in your class. Because I met people thereafter—Japanese-Americans in particular—that were always being forced to—through the culture; the culture does it to you—to strive and to really excel. In our case, it was enough to just go there and put up with whatever you had to do there and come home and don't be in trouble.

JR: Right.

GL: And as long as you didn't cause waves everything was okay. And, as a child, I was a very good kid. I was always a very mellow, good-hearted simpleton, naive kid. I mean, you know, pendejo.

JR: [laughs]

GL: But, you know, I had a good heart and I don't think I've changed very much over the years. I think that the reason I even mention it is because, being an adult, those things are challenged tremendously. The pressure for me to be much more astute and sophisticated and having business acumen and political maneuvering and so forth that you're required as an adult, is a bummer for me, because I really enjoy a childlike state, which my art requires, and if you look at it seriously you'll see that my art is interested in that innocence of humans, that real essence of who we are. I think cities. . . . This is getting off the track but, hey, we'll throw it all in the pot.

JR: It's all right. Yeah.

GL: But I think the reference that I make in enjoining this kind of thought is that the way we're shaped from childhood and the way we see things was governed largely because of the experiences that I had. I mean, that sounds almost too simple to say, but what I got out of all that kind of growing up and all the experiences of having to deal with two cultures and having to really do good in school was self-motivated more than anything, I believe. My brother didn't want to go—didn't even think about going—to college. He wanted to go out and make money. He wanted to go out and be successful in the world, but college was not part of that program. And for me it was, at a very early age, and this is without civil rights, affirmative action. We're talking late forties, early fifties. What was going on in the larger picture there was that people were coming out of. . . . This country had a feeling that was going on, and it was a rebuilding feeling. And it was a reconstruction-of-your-life feeling.

JR: After World War II, you mean?

GL: After World War II. And we were, in this country, flexing our new victory with the atomic bomb and the conquering of the Axis, which was Germany and all that. And so the United States was in a very incredible period. And that feeling that it engendered in me, growing up, I've explored and I've thought about, but it was an expansive one. It was one where you try to do new things, you go out and you learn, you go to college. And I had *no* idea what for. I had no reason. I mean, I was a Mexican.

JR: So you were just kind of picking up on . . .

GL: Through osmosis.

JR: . . . the sense of cultural transformation was taking place.

GL: The whole country was very upbeat. There was a lot of hope. There was a lot of planning. There was a lot of futuristic talk about the future with nuclear . . .

JR: Right.

GL: . . . and easy, labor-saving devices. You know, all these. . . . The cars. The automobile industry had. The notions of power. They had the big engines that came out at those periods of time.

JR: And so you had a sense that that vision included you?

GL: No. I was a kid. Who was to think about all these things? This is upon reflection that I look back and I see what shaped me was these larger things that were taking place.

JR: I see.

GL: And the reason I give them credit or I talk about them is that oftentimes people don't really. . . . Well, forget what people do. They do all kinds of stuff. I think it's important to relate that these were dynamics that were influencing me, although I didn't sit there with my hand on my pulse reading all this. I didn't know, I was just a kid. But upon looking back and introspection, looking at what happened to me, I realize that being very bound to car culture was another aspect of my sense of aesthetic; my sense of ambition about having cars and so forth was a total fantasy. Movies, cars, hot rods—you know, cool. James Dean and Marlon Brando, in particular, heroes. Guys that were not nerds. These guys were cool. They had the black jackets and they were hoodlums and they were outlaws, but fifties culture was bland. I mean, Pat Boone and those guys were very nice people, [but—Ed.] were still not the kind of music that we were interested—I was not interested—in listening to. I keep going to third person, but, in particular, I was interested in rhythm and blues, black musicians, jazz. On the music level, which was another kind of impact that was very important, to be cool, and the kind of music that I was interested in mostly was this real funky cantina. . . . Not even cantina, kind of a honky-tonk. . . . No, that's too hillbilly. Blues, the bars. You know, black bars. Jazz, beatniks. That whole thing attracted me.

JR: Can you remember specific artists or specific venues?

GL: Oh, yeah. What period of time, though?

JR: I guess. . . .

GL: I was listening to rhythm and blues in the late forties, and I was listening to black groups that never made it big but were really instrumental in developing the rhythm and blues: B. B. King and I'm talking about Johnny Ace, Mary Wells. That real kind of black ethnic, very ethnic kind of music. And then for a period of time when I was a young man—I was in my ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen period of time—I mean, black musicians to me were the tops. I mean, that's all I wanted. I even spoke like black people did. Because I lived in South Central area.

JR: Right.

GL: So as a kid you take these things in. I always loved black culture. I mean, for me. . . . But at the same time there was a kind of. . . . Also, I didn't take any shit from blacks either, because. . . . Now it's politically very sensitive to be saying anything harmful about black people, but in those days it was, "Hey man, they were just another guy." And another culture. We weren't responsible for their slavehood. We weren't responsible for. . . . That was between them and white people.

JR: I see.

GL: You know, we weren't involved and so I remember when I went to John Muir Junior High I'd see fights between the gringos and the blacks, but it didn't have nothing to do with us. See?

JR: So you never sensed any kind of affinity with black folks?

GL: Oh yeah! Yeah. But none of the guilt.

JR: But none of the guilt.

GL: Because they used to Mau-mau us, too, but I said, "Hey, well, I'm not interested in. . . ."

JR: Get your history straight. [chuckles]

GL: What it is, is that I think, there was a part of . . . and it was a period of time where blacks, especially in the Black Panther era, would go around Mau-mauing people, and as they learned to rediscover themselves and manifest themselves as they did through the civil rights period of time, they also got a little bit righteous about it. And I would look at black culture and so forth, *love* it, but at the same time say, "Hey, I don't owe you nothin'." And don't be crying on my sleeve. I got my own problems." That kind of attitude. And it wasn't anti-black. It was pro-Chicano and black as an ally, but I'm not going to be. . . . And oftentimes I think what has happened in our culture—and certainly with a lot of experiences that I've seen—where we kowtow to black culture. Chicanos do. What do you think young kids listen to the most? You hear . . .

JR: The rap and the hip-hop and that kind of stuff, you mean?

GL: Well, that's current. It goes back to my period of time. Like me, I was just interested in black musicians that. . . . Shirley [Guenther] and the Queens that came out of here—out of L.A., south L.A.—most people never heard of them people. They never made the big time, but they were very big time in rhythm and blues.

JR: What about Chicano artists playing R & B? Or bands that are racially mixed and stuff like that?

GL: What about them?

JR: Like dance hall venues? Wasn't there a lot of. . . .

GL: Here's the thing I think at this point that might reflect something about who I am as well. I think that ethnicity is beautiful. I'm not a racist when it comes to being judgmental about blacks, Chinese, anybody—even white people. And all of us have a history. Every ethnic group. You know, white people don't see themselves as an ethnic group, but they are.

JR: Right.

GL: The way I see it, they're just another one, they're just another group. But what I'm saying is that the arts have always manifested a very positive inter-relationship with the people. When you go to a jazz concert, you'll see Chicanos, whites, blacks all nodding their heads to the music. There's harmony there. When you start talking about political things, we all go to our corners and put our dukes up.

JR: [chuckles] Right.

GL: Okay? That's the nature of humans. It agonized me too many years—and this is why I'm saying it—why we couldn't get along. Well, I know why we can't get along. We're human beings and we're full of contentions and egos, ambitions, and all kinds of things that create those negative situations among us. But ethnicity, to me, is a beautiful aspect of humankind. Because what it does is it talks about who we are as a people and how we've learned to solve issues and how we do things, what we like, our social values. That's the culture and I think that each one of us. . . . Like I dig listening to black culture and the Africans, what they used to do, and the Arabs and the Cambodians and the Guamanian shamans out in the middle of this ocean, and Hawaiians that were doing trippy things. I love anthropology. Because of it. Because it's about people and it's not judging them. Which is my best point, I think here, that I want to make, is that it's accepting those people in all their faults. Even white people have a lot to answer for. And by "white" I mean those people that come from European, basically, stock. But I don't think there's going to be very many places in the world that you find that people haven't intermarried. It just depends on how many centuries back you want to count this little percentage you're trying to assemble. But I think that there's only one race—the human race—and then we have all these ethnicities. And then we have all these nations, which is another way to divide us into groups.

JR: Right.

GL: Then we have astrology signs, and then we have, you know, biorhythms and stuff. You can separate humans and look at them in this profile any way you want to, and I think the arts, essentially, see all of us in a better light than politics. I know it's simplistic, but still I think that it's general truth that. . . . In music you have to harmonize. You've got to work together. When you've got three or four guys playing, they all can't be playing a different tune. In the visual arts it's a little different. We have different kinds of dynamic taking place there. But music really. . . . Going back to what I like to hear in music, it was very black-oriented. I liked Mexican music—and boleros and [a tres sasses], and [it came after the big ones]. And [El Trio Pancho]. Those were things I grew

up with. I even liked country-western. Spade [Cooley] and all those guys that go way, way back to the forties. Because Spade Cooley used to have a show. First it was on radio, I believe—or we saw it on TV anyway. I remember it was in the early fifties and Spade Cooley had this country-western thing on TV, channel 5, I believe it was, because of Gene Autry, I think. He may have owned it at that time. At any rate, all the family there watched wrestling, country-western. . . . So we got a good dose of this culture here which was more . . . was certainly not Mexican. Right?

JR: Right.

GL: And so something happened to us here—and this is another part of who I am—is that my flag is here. Yes, I come from Mexican culture, but Mexican culture, if we don't get carried away, is a hodgepodge of many other very indistinct and clear cultures that have a greater integrity than this real large mestizo Mexican title.

JR: Right.

GL: And, just to put it on tape, I mean, the [Seti] and the Maya and the [Talmares] are very different people. Speak differently. And the people from Oaxaca. I mean, they're different groups of people.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And yet, like everything, you can separate intellectually all these things with words, but you have to put them back together, because there's other ways—and this is the way I think, again—I may be able to separate things and look at them, but when I put 'em back together I can also separate them with similarities. So you can look at all these different Indian groups, however different they may be: They also all eat corn. They also all like color. They also have their own individual language and culture that dates back hundreds and hundreds of years, and have their own kind of social integrity and look and description. So, going back to growing up again, as I was trying to understand the world—and I was thinking about that before you came—is that I remember conceptually how I would work things out. I remember to this day how, when I was eight years old, when I was twelve years old, that I was learning the world. And there was concepts that I had to learn about what it meant to be Mexican. And a Mexican had a role to play in this society, and I fell into place like every other Mexican. And when gringos came around I had to keep quiet, back up, and be conservative while they took over and controlled and were in charge and had the greatest social stature or status, just by being white. They might have been idiots, but they were white. And this is the world I grew up in as a child. And so it affected me later and I became a political activist. It was based on growing up in a world that was very much apartheid here. And in 1970-something—I forget—I went on radio—KPFK—one time, and I'll never forget it because. . . . I think it was Molly Barnes' show or. . . . It was a lady who had a. . . . I'm sorry I don't remember right now . . .

JR: That's all right.

GL: . . . but there was a lady who had a show there, KPFK, and still goes. . . . She had it on for years. But she also had a gallery. And I made a comment that Southern California was not so different from South Africa, and different people had different responses to it. And I said, "Well, if you look around, you know, the Mexicans are these people that are disenfranchised in their own land. You know, we were here first and we've been displaced. And we're the labor pool. We are the slaves of this society today." We're not called that. Nobody's describing it that way. But to me it's very much. . . . We have apartheid here in Southern California, where Mexicans cannot go to certain clubs in Santa Monica and so forth. Not because they wouldn't let them in. You'd be out of place. You may not have the money to be there. There's a lot of ways of restricting you. And then Mexicans in the West Side that live in Santa Monica, I've seen the little dumpy places they live in, right next to mansions.

JR: Right.

GL: So this very much looks like South Africa.

JR: Still today.

GL: To this very day. But, anyway, I was willing to speak about those things, because as a kid, having those experiences, you can see real easy that way. This is the way to see it from my point of view, because this has been my experience.

JR: Right. Were there people or, I don't know, books or things that were really formative in developing your understanding of that? Or was it just really came out of. . . .

GL: No, that came later, because I think that up to the time when I first did my first Chicano art show, which I thought was a joke. . . . I mean, I didn't. . . . It had no political significance. It had none of the significance of a movement or an advancement of our people. I understood Chicano to be an internalized word that we used [entre nosotros], you know? Chicas spatas. There were certain idioms or vocabulary that we had in caló—or

Spanglish, as they call it today—that was an internal cultural knowledge but not known to the world. Chicano was one of those words. My father used to refer to pan Chicano as being Mexican bread.

JR: Oh, yeah?

GL: And we did not have a derogatory idea of Chicano. It just happened to be that we're pochos. We're from this side of the border, and that distinguished us from Mexicans.

JR: I see.

GL: Now, in the sixties, when I first did this first Chicano art show, me and this other guy from México, we got this big old loaf of bread, some cheese, and wine, and we stayed up all night putting an art show at the Camp [Hess-Kramer], because they were having an educational conference. This was in '64, I believe. And so. . . .

JR: Where was it at?

GL: At Camp [Hess-Kramer]. And it was an effort. . . . It was a Jewish camp that allowed Mexican-Americans to meet there to talk about educational disparities that we had in East L.A. And so these were Lefties—you know, Jewish Lefties—that were sympathetic and understood our dilemma much more than we did, because Jewish people have made a religion out of being persecuted and deprived and so forth. If you look back at even the Bible, you know, they're constantly being screwed over by somebody. So that is to point out that they understand cultural survival; they understand that kind of struggle.

JR: Yeah.

GL: We are just learning it. We are just beginning to discover. . . . We, in the sixties for certain. We were barely beginning to understand that there was a problem. So you remember in the fifties, as I was growing up, I accepted the fact that gringos had better situations. When I was going to high school, here was this kid with a hotrod and everything. He had a rich father. That was my rationalization. That was the end of my examination of that. What did I have to compare anything with? Nothing. Where did I get those comparisons? By reading and going to college. Then I began to understand that, "Hey! There's something very, very, very wrong here. We're in a country that everybody's equal until you start looking at their color and then it changes somehow." So in this vague pre-understanding of all this stuff, we knew, but we didn't examine.

JR: I see.

GL: We knew, but we didn't act on it. And I've heard people say, "Oh yeah, man, when I was in 1950, man, I used to tell the teachers to go and get fucked, man, because I was a Chicano and. . . ." Bullshit.

JR: [laughs]

GL: Those people that talk like that, if you ever find them, were lynched. Simple. They were ostracized or they'd get beat up.

JR: Yeah.

GL: So that kind of talk, if you did it at all, you did it among your own. You know, drinking at some quinceañera, you might be telling your uncles and your primos that you feel that way. Because Chicanos have always been independent. Not rebellious so much, but independent politically to want to counter what the Anglo invasion did to this land over here. Because we, in our cultural structure, accepted these newcomers. By and large, we did. Not everybody, but there was a feeling of plenty of room and, "Hey, yeah, all right. They're different people and they're strange. They have no soul but as long as they. . . . They are people, after all." And Mexican culture doesn't examine those things with profit motive. They examine those things with social values of, you know, "You've got to show good face, you've got to have all these Mexican values that are actually European, and a lot of fluff. It's all social decorum and all that stuff.

JR: Right.

GL: Well, the gringos then they're saying, "What can I rip off and how can I begin to make this be mine?" Ownership and those kind of things. We don't think of ownership, and those dynamics puts us at a disadvantage.

JR: I see.

GL: So, anyway, that's just a general way of saying that the racism in this coun[try]. . . .

[Break in taping]

JR: This is Tape 1, Side B, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on November 13, 1997. And I think you were telling me about. . . .

GL: The kids' wife.

JR: . . . your wife, yeah.

GL: Well, then I had three children: Otonio Amarillo Lujan, and he was born on the thirteenth of August, 1973. And then came Risa, who was Risa Liviana, L-i-v-i-a-n-a. Liviana—"Light Laughter"—and she was born on the twenty-third of March, 1977. And then Niche—and these are all Marty's children—and Niche was born the twenty-fifth of August, 1980. Now I had two other children besides them, and the oldest one is Michelle, and she was born on the seventeenth of May. . . . No, wait, she's a Cancer. Twentieth of May, sorry. Twentieth of May, 1966. And then Joasia was born 17 May, 1969.

JR: So you were a father pretty young. Twenty-six? I guess that's about average.

GL: Yeah, twenty-six. I guess. It wasn't too young. I mean, young to me would be in my teens. But I was already. . . . I wasn't so different than a teen, I guess, at twenty-six. I'm still young—a young man, very innocent by and large. I tried to seem worldly and sophisticated but I wasn't.

JR: It takes some time to develop that.

GL: [chuckles]

JR: Let me go back for a second and ask you about a couple things that were taking place in L.A. in the forties in terms of the Sleepy Lagoon trials and the zootsuit riots and things of that nature. Do you have any recollection of that? And if that was formative in your experience at all or not.

GL: I would say that, yes, there was some memories of it, because I remember people talking about that it was happening, and it was an alarm that spread out through the Mexican community. And that alarm was that, even though we were very much into the war effort at that time and supporting it and doing everything we were supposed to do, like blackouts—you were supposed to close all your windows, shut all the lights, all this kind of stuff. . . . And then to us, who were innocent of the other kinds of things that were going on like this racism that took place with the zootsuit riots, and those really horrible feelings that people have towards another group of people, we didn't know where it came from. It was out of nowhere. But as a child you don't know where these things come [from]. You've never had . . . you don't know the world yet, right?

JR: Right.

GL: So they were always kind of like, "Why is this going on?" There was a quality of, "Why? What's happening?" Of surprise. Like, "Why is this going on? We're supposed to be helping this war effort and. . . ."

JR: Right.

GL: It's like seeing yourself as being part of the picture but knowing you're not. It's a schizophrenic situation for us. But that's the dilemma that is created by racism towards a controlled ethnic group like Chicanos.

JR: Right.

GL: So I remember them talking about it and stuff and, yes, it had an impact on me, because most of my adult life I'd been in favor of trying to get people to see that the cholo experience was created by racism. It works against us more than it helps us, and we help to devalue that experience by denigrating it like the racists that see us *all* as cholos, whether we are or not. And the cholos are for the gringos an example of why we're no good.

JR: Right.

GL: And cholos are an example of our defiance over this rule, but not being able to politically really effectively deal with it so we get self-destructive. We get into the cholo gangster thing that we share with. . . . The appeal comes because I think this country likes outlaws, and they like outlaws for a very simple reason. That individuality is a really strong factor in our national psyche. And so that Jesse James and. . . . See, the reason why Jesse James was so attractive—people don't really, really know—is that he was robbing the railroads. The railroads were big crooks. That was big business. So all the little people said, "Yeah, get 'em."

JR: Right.

GL: Okay? He didn't have a political. . . .

JR: A kind of Robin Hood effect.

GL: In a sense. It had that quality. That's why he was. . . . They didn't like him because he was a crook.

JR: Right.

GL: There was another real reason, and that was that he represented a counter to the wealthy by the poor. And in this country, that's how people express that frustration about being poor while other people lived in luxury. So, going back to us, with your question about the zootsuit, was also manifested in that my mother at that time was going around with a guy who was a pachuco, who she hated pachucos but she wound up with one.

JR: How did that happen?

GL: Because it's very common for us to hate what we wind up getting. You see, you can't hate which. . . . If you hate something a lot, you'd better be careful because you're bringing it to your breast.

JR: Ah-h-h.

GL: It's an old axiom that, you know, don't hate too much, because you're going to become like that.

JR: I got'cha.

GL: Yeah. You got to be careful. And little did my Mom know that she was going to wind up with this pachuco from [Mariana]. And those guys were organized and when they had battles they used to. . . . The media will never have accurately described, except for [in—Ed.] Carrie McWilliams' *North from Mexico*, if you've read that book you can begin to see an inkling of how the Mexican community did resist. We did fight back. There was people with a very vague and also a very clear idea of what to do. But "vague," I keep saying, because I was a child and it was always vague to me, until I grew up and I began to analyze these things as an adult. But I say cholos belong to us. Those kids are our responsibilities. And we make a mistake giving them over to an institution that's going to make them into these incredible, inhuman creatures. They will come out, and you don't want them in your neighborhood after that. And what they do to these young men is very criminal. That's the real crime of what these kids are translated into, into adulthood.

JR: Um-hmm. You're talking about the prison system and the justice system or the quote-unquote. . . .

GL: Yes. And middle-class people, mostly white people, set up institutions and bureaucracies. They make a lot of money from this particular kind of problem. Am I saying something original? No. Am I saying something that's unique? No. It happens in India. It's happened in South Africa, Cambodia, China, Bangkok. The nature of human beings, having some people always in control and some people having to bite the bullet, is nothing new. It's centuries and centuries old.

JR: Right.

GL: Our part, our understanding of these things is new, and child-like in comparison to other groups, like the Jews. The Jews have become experts—look at Israel—they've become experts in understanding how to torture and how to be abused. I mean, isn't it ironic that here the people that were crying about being abused by the Nazis are doing the same thing to the Palestinians? I mean, that's humankind. I don't say the Jews are any worse than anybody else. I mean, that'd be absurd.

JR: Right.

GL: But all of our cultures. . . . I mean, look at the Chinese. They're doing some tough things, you know? Whereas I remember studying the Chinese, and they were building China and they were getting rid of the white long-nosed devils and they got rid of opium and all that, which was a British monopoly down there. And so they did a lot to get themselves back on the road. But you have to pay a price for that unification. And that unification was one of the goals of the Chicano movement which never happened. Because we are so bound to the capitalist system that it would have *never* been a reality for us. We entertained it, looking for models. We looked for political models in the sixties to try to figure out, "What can we do with our group within this country?" Well, the Black Panthers tried armed resistance, and so did Chicanos. Some did, you know. And have historically. If you go down in Texas, and all that stuff, you get more of those kinds of resistance than up here in California, or back in L.A. But out here in New Mexico, for example, the colonies that were left over from Spain—the kinds of social development that the Texan-Mexican had versus the New Mexican had—is very different. And the Californian—going back to L.A.—is another cultural guy . . . person—female or male. And what happened in California is much more. . . . The nature of California being a place where you could. . . . It was the fringes. You can come out here and do things. Hollywood. Fantasy. Kookie cultural, health nuts. Experimentation. Beatniks. New. The real laboratory for social dynamics took place on the West Coast. You go back to Texas, them suckers,

boy, they ain't budging. Boy, they're these cowboys and they're going to . . .

JR: It's a [different] _____, huh?

GL: Yeah. They're going to chew that stuff and spit it in a spittoon for another two-hundred years. They ain't going to give it up, you know?

JR: [laughs]

GL: And notions of machismo—which are not all negative, unfortunately, you know. They're not all negative.

JR: I understand that. So we did a little jump there.

GL: Yes, we did. [both chuckle]

JR: But that's okay.

GL: It happens a lot.

JR: That's fine, though. Actually. . . .

GL: I guess I'm trying to give an assessment of too much here, but we should go back to, what, developing maybe a . . .

JR: I guess I'm interested in some of, like, a little more about family experience. About how you were raised. Like maybe what kind of work your parents did and . . .

GL: Okay. More personal thing.

JR: Yeah, a little bit more personal. Particularly how you got interested in art and creativity and things of that nature.

GL: Well, my Mom got a job, among other things that she probably did that I never knew about, but I know of one in particular, that she used to color photographs. She would ink them. And so she was taught how to come back and color a photograph, because they didn't have color in those days. This is in the forties. And so I saw that she had an affinity for art, and she would make these little drawings and stuff, and I always had that around, and it seemed interesting to me. I remember also at that time period that colors, Christmas, candies, smells and so forth were, as I was learning the world, these things were all the hotbed of my creativity later, and they were in the sense that these feelings—relaying probably a more romantic side of me, this nostalgia that I have for the forties. . . . And to this day, although I'm not a Christian, but Christmas to me is a wonderful cultural experience. Because the religion, you know, you can work it out for yourself, but, for me, I don't care about the religion. I'm more interested in the manifestation of Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas," the smells of apple cider cooking, and the food, and the beautiful little colorful things, angel hair. There were things that. . . . Only a child and it's magical. So I, if you can get my meaning, had a magical childhood that we all have. All of us have an opportunity for that. But I'm recollecting that magic as a child, and I try to keep it in my work today. This is why I. . . . It's old familiar ground, some of these thoughts that are reoccurring [*sic*] in my head right now, because I think that that's really the crux of us. You really need to be able to see yourself with that longevity, all the way back to smothering in that blanket. And then you have a sense of yourself that's much more complete and full than just thinking of yourself as a doctorate candidate or a person of twenty-three years old or a man of thirty-five years old.

JR: Right. The history, yeah.

GL: So this history is something that I keep coughing up, and I need to get it down on your tape here.

JR: [laughs]

GL: But it was very important and I. . . . Depending on what you want to know. You asked me for some other examples. My mother did that. And I remember all these colors and smells, and the reason I think it's important is that those are really the backgrounds to what's motivated and has what I needed and being creative, I rely on those.

JR: Yeah. Was that something—like when you were going through high school or starting out in college—were those the kinds of memories that you would draw upon when you were developing as an artist?

GL: No, no. No. Because I was looking for academic references that would lead me to art. At that time, being a young man trying to. . . . Well, if you go back to high school, I was already drawing cars. I was drawing these

little characters that I found the other day. They're somewhere packed away. But I had Peter Posole, Maria Tortilla, Ernie Enchilada . . .

JR: [laughs]

GL: . . . and I had all these charac[ters]. . . . Timmy Taco. Now I was a young man. I had no idea. Believe me, I had no idea that I was going to spend my life being a cultural promoter of Chicanos. And all I was doing was reflecting what I was about, without any political or sociological direction or implications or nothing. And I think that's what true-blue about it is that this is what really should be happening with Chicanos. They should be manifesting who they are and not worrying about Rembrandt and all those other guys who . . .

JR: Yeah.

GL: . . . I admire dearly, you know, but we need to scratch our history, our experiences, and in that way I think Chicano art will blossom like crazy. But it created my path in Chicano art.

JR: I see.

GL: Recognizing that I needed to investigate. . . . Now I'm reading a book right now by Paul Reps, *Zen Bones, Zen Flesh*, that I read as a young man. I was in my early twenties. It was early. I don't remember when I first read it, but I was a young student. And going back to it—you just asked a minute ago, to not lose it too much—I was trying to become an artist, but I was looking externally now and I was in school and all their examples were European. Okay? So I started thinking of art in those terms. And then when I went to college. . . . I was already at Long Beach State College and I had already done my first Chicano art show, and I had also begun to curate shows, not knowing what I was doing. I didn't even know what a curator was. All I was doing was organizing these shows to do cultural expositions. That was my intent, to show off our culture. What was it? I really didn't know, but I knew it had to do with pan de huevos, serapes, hats, low riders, graffiti, and cholos.

JR: Kind of all the things that you saw around you.

GL: That was my. . . . I grew up in East L.A., you know. Wore khakis and wore Pendleton shirts and Sir Guy shirts in high school, and so that was my experience.

JR: I see.

GL: And in art school they told us, "Use your experience," so I did. And then they s[aid]. . . . Well, I've capsulized all this in one critique that I had once when the teacher kind of said, "Well, that's not really what we meant." They wanted found objects that were gringo objects, and when they told me that mine didn't count, I knew that I had found a treasure for myself. Maybe for him it didn't work, but, for me, this was my experience, and I found at that point. . . . Because I did a menudo bone sculpture. And that was. . . . Found objects? Well, you know, we had menudo bone, and that's what I had.

JR: [laughs]

GL: So we put that together in a concept at Long Beach, and I knew at that point that I had to follow and explore those kinds of cultural experiences that make us all different.

JR: So when you were at Long. . . . Let's see, you're at Long Beach from what, like '71?

GL: '66 to '69, something like that, yeah.

JR: Okay. Was there a contingent of Chicano artists there, or Chicanas, or folks kind of working to develop this? Or did you get the sense that you were kind of on your own at that time?

GL: I was on my own, but I knew other Chicano people that were doing the same thing I was doing. We were digesting Euro-trends, Euro-history, and you. [both chuckle] But the products that we were making at that time looked very much like what could be found in any gringo art magazine—although they were Mexicans and Chicanos. Almost nobody that I can remember . . . very few were really trying to do something Chicano. It wasn't even a thought. So here I come very early in the picture of here, a Chicano, pushing for getting together, talking about our dilemmas, identifying issues, trying to find solutions for these things, looking for models. Now, I didn't articulate it like this at that time. I didn't know what the hell was going on. I was trying to discover what was going on. And we were getting a lot of negative feedback like, "We're getting screwed over. We're getting screwed over. Look at the blacks. They're articulating things that we should understand, too." And that kind of thing. Now, going to art school, my job as an art student was to discover what art was. And that brought me to try to discover, "What is Chicano art?" In particular, what is Chicano art? They may not be interested, but I'm interested. These were realizations. These were stepping stones to becoming pretty much an advocate of Chicano art. And if you ever ask people that knew me back then, I was a pest. That's all I thought about. To this

day, that's all I really think about. "What is Chicano art? Where's it going? What role am I playing in this picture?"

JR: So when people ask you that, what have you come up with over the time? I mean, how do you. . . . Because I've been asked that question—in different settings I imagine—and I have a real hard time explaining to people the parameters of it—or the breadth of it.

GL: And it is broad. And it is broad. And I try not to be too glib about it, but because I was a Chicano studies teacher I had an opportunity to over and over again, every semester, form and formulate an idea of what Chicano art is. For myself. I do not speak for a group or an association, but I speak for myself and I say that Chicano art is a cultural product, period. It is, again, a reflection of who we are as a people. It is not a political thing. It is not a religious thing. Those are elements of our artwork, but I think the bottom line is that if it's done in the spirit of the Chicano experience, it's Chicano art. What if you're Anglo? Can you be a Chicano artist? I say, "Yes." Because if you grow up like some of the gringos that grew up with us that were so acculturated that they out-pachucoed everybody else, then they could make Chicano art, because Chicano art is not genetic. It is not genetic. And I'll prove it to you. You go to a lot of schools over here, and you'll see these dark guys, Chicanos, looking as Mexican as possible, and they can say, ["Shop good."] [chuckles] They have trouble saying, "Shop." Now which one did I say? Did I say, the thing you do with your hand [chop—Ed.] or a place where you work and make artwork [shop—Ed.]? Which did I say?

JR: I was hearing. . . .

GL: No, no. I just said, "[Shop]," right?

JR: Right.

GL: Well, I just changed it again. See I have trouble saying "shop" or "chop." "Chop, chop." Anyway, not to get too far off the thing, but Chicano art to me, in definition, is a cultural definition. People come by with their political agendas and want Chicano art to be a political statement. I say, it *can* be. And the other one I have problems with is that Chicano art can be anything a Chicano does. And I think that's nonsense, because a lot of Chicano artists that are just doing gringo products are not exercising Chicano-anything. They just happen to be genetically that. But this is a cultural identification, to be Chicano. This is like belonging to the Woodcraft Rangers [_____—Ed.]. In order to be a member, you have to practice and want to be a member, see?

JR: I got it.

GL: Yeah, it's an identification issue. That's why, say, this guy can deny it, this person can accept it, and this one can promote it. See, all Chicanos don't have the same interest in the culture. I'm obsessed by it. Some people could give a damn less. They can say, "Well, so what? We don't wear sombreros anymore, so what? What d'you care? I don't need a. . . ." Or "I'm not a low-rider, so I don't wanna relate to that." It's fair. It's fair. We learned that the Nazis who did a lot of arm-twisting with their ideology doesn't work. At least that's my frame of mind. I think that it's a persuasion that people need not a beating over the head.

JR: And these are observations that you've come to after a considerable amount of time and thought . . . incessant thought.

GL: Yes. Yeah, over and over.

JR: I guess I'm kind of interested in the process of how. . . .

GL: Of how I got this?

JR: . . .how those ideas developed, going back to, maybe, your experience at . . . was it L.A. City College?

GL: No, I went to East L.A.

JR: East L.A. J.C. [East Los Angeles Junior College—Ed.]

GL: I think that's when. . . .

JR: And then you started developing from there?

GL: Okay. That's when it really happened. Because, see, I didn't know I was going to be an art-anything until I went to East L.A. College, and there was a female that was a lab assistant there at the ceramic department, and her name was Margaret. And I'd really like to find her one day because I just owe her a little thanks for getting me started with clay. Because I went to East L.A. after I had come out of the Air Force, [in—Ed.] which I had spent four years, three of it in England, and I came back . . . and had joined specifically for the G.I. Bill.

JR: Okay. I was going to ask you about that.

GL: Yeah. So that was very important for me to go to school. I knew my people weren't going to be able to send me through school, and I knew I wanted to go to college, but I had no idea what it meant. None.

JR: You just had this sense that you should go.

GL: I knew that college was good.

JR: Right.

GL: But I didn't know what for. Now, remember there was nobody with . . . a college graduate that was a successful guy around that I saw.

JR: No role models like that.

GL: None. So it was a blank. I said I knew it was good, and I knew something about a better job, and that's it. It was that vague and that simple.

JR: But you were aware that if you had done some kind of service, or that you went into the Air Force. . . .

GL: Well, no, I knew the G.I. . . . Yes, I knew I would. . . .

JR: . . . that the G.I. Bill was there, waiting for you.

GL: Yep. Well, that's why I joined.

JR: Did you pick that up in high school? Did counselors tell you that? Or did you see other people in the community that had come back from World War II and. . . .

GL: Well, I had heard through the grapevine that that was the policy, that if you served that time you'd get a G.I. Bill and then you could go to school. And I think they talked about it as part of the recruiting, possibly. I don't remember. But I know that was a definitely real reason why I joined the service. One of them. The other one was I wanted to get out of the house. I was a young man, I was feeling constricted there as a teenager, and then this offered me an opportunity. Also, to go overseas and see the world. Another attractive. . . .

JR: So this was in '57 when you go into the Air Force?

GL: I went in in '58.

JR: '58.

GL: August the first. So what happened, as I got into the art department and began to take art classes, I began to see that I liked being there. Because I had tried education. I wanted to be a dentist. And I wanted these other things. I wanted to be a psychology major. And psychology, I found out very quickly that that was a fucked-up job.

JR: [laughs]

GL: Not only were the people nuts. . . . [moves away from the microphone and speaks to a child or pet] Hey, you! Get down from there! [Comes back to the mike] I mean, I saw all these people, and they were all a little cracked. [laughter] I said, "This is not for me."

Also at the same time, I had a very deep interest in theology, and I was exploring the Koran, the Talmud, and the Bible, and Zen Buddhism at that . . . in those sixties. And it was important, because it was also, if you can get a better picture, it was beginning to develop me as an intellectual person and I was beginning to explore religions, which started much earlier when I was around seventeen. I wanted to know if Christ and all this stuff was for real. Because I grew up with my father who hated Catholics and my mother who will never give it up but doesn't really practice. But like everybody else, don't give it up, but it's just the mental identification with Catholics. So I says, "Well, who's telling me the truth?" Because these people would say, "Well, don't believe them. And da-da-da." So that dialogue I resolved by studying theology, and I really got into studying history as a result. And so these were outside of my art interest but fed it, at the same time.

JR: Yeah, exactly.

GL: Very much so. So when I went to East L.A. College, I began to try to figure out, "What is an artist? And so what do I do with that?" And so we ate bread and drank wine and ate cheese. We thought that's what French

artists did. I know it sounds silly, but we were young kids. We didn't know. I didn't know. "What is an artist," you know And so those were the initial kind of corny things I did to try to identify as an artist. And as I went along I began to discover, by myself—because there was no movement at that time and there was very few people I could talk to about these things—and I began to put things together in my own conceptual way, of knowing that I had to figure out what kind of artist. . . . I had to find these definitions for what teachers were asking us for, because what they do in art school is they keep presenting you art problems. And the process of learning about art is solving all these problems until you get on your own. You learn to concoct your problems and then you solve them and that's how you operate as an artist.

JR: Like, for example, what kind of problems would they throw at you?

[Break in taping]

JR: This is Tape 1, Side B, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on November 13, 1997. And I think you were telling me about. . . .

GL: The kids' wife.

JR: . . . your wife, yeah.

GL: Well, then I had three children: Otonio Amarillo Lujan, and he was born on the thirteenth of August, 1973. And then came Risa, who was Risa Liviana, L-i-v-i-a-n-a. Liviana—"Light Laughter"—and she was born on the twenty-third of March, 1977. And then Niche—and these are all Marty's children—and Niche was born the twenty-fifth of August, 1980. Now I had two other children besides them, and the oldest one is Michelle, and she was born on the seventeenth of May. . . . No, wait, she's a Cancer. Twentieth of May, sorry. Twentieth of May, 1966. And then Joasia was born 17 May, 1969.

JR: So you were a father pretty young. Twenty-six? I guess that's about average.

GL: Yeah, twenty-six. I guess. It wasn't too young. I mean, young to me would be in my teens. But I was already. . . . I wasn't so different than a teen, I guess, at twenty-six. I'm still young—a young man, very innocent by and large. I tried to seem worldly and sophisticated but I wasn't.

JR: It takes some time to develop that.

GL: [chuckles]

JR: Let me go back for a second and ask you about a couple things that were taking place in L.A. in the forties in terms of the Sleepy Lagoon trials and the zootsuit riots and things of that nature. Do you have any recollection of that? And if that was formative in your experience at all or not.

GL: I would say that, yes, there was some memories of it, because I remember people talking about that it was happening, and it was an alarm that spread out through the Mexican community. And that alarm was that, even though we were very much into the war effort at that time and supporting it and doing everything we were supposed to do, like blackouts—you were supposed to close all your windows, shut all the lights, all this kind of stuff. . . . And then to us, who were innocent of the other kinds of things that were going on like this racism that took place with the zootsuit riots, and those really horrible feelings that people have towards another group of people, we didn't know where it came from. It was out of nowhere. But as a child you don't know where these things come [from]. You've never had . . . you don't know the world yet, right?

JR: Right.

GL: So they were always kind of like, "Why is this going on?" There was a quality of, "Why? What's happening?" Of surprise. Like, "Why is this going on? We're supposed to be helping this war effort and. . . ."

JR: Right.

GL: It's like seeing yourself as being part of the picture but knowing you're not. It's a schizophrenic situation for us. But that's the dilemma that is created by racism towards a controlled ethnic group like Chicanos.

JR: Right.

GL: So I remember them talking about it and stuff and, yes, it had an impact on me, because most of my adult life I'd been in favor of trying to get people to see that the cholo experience was created by racism. It works against us more than it helps us, and we help to devalue that experience by denigrating it like the racists that see us *all* as cholos, whether we are or not. And the cholos are for the gringos an example of why we're no good.

JR: Right.

GL: And cholos are an example of our defiance over this rule, but not being able to politically really effectively deal with it so we get self-destructive. We get into the cholo gangster thing that we share with. . . . The appeal comes because I think this country likes outlaws, and they like outlaws for a very simple reason. That individuality is a really strong factor in our national psyche. And so that Jesse James and. . . . See, the reason why Jesse James was so attractive—people don't really, really know—is that he was robbing the railroads. The railroads were big crooks. That was big business. So all the little people said, "Yeah, get 'em."

JR: Right.

GL: Okay? He didn't have a political. . . .

JR: A kind of Robin Hood effect.

GL: In a sense. It had that quality. That's why he was. . . . They didn't like him because he was a crook.

JR: Right.

GL: There was another real reason, and that was that he represented a counter to the wealthy by the poor. And in this country, that's how people express that frustration about being poor while other people lived in luxury. So, going back to us, with your question about the zootsuit, was also manifested in that my mother at that time was going around with a guy who was a pachuco, who she hated pachucos but she wound up with one.

JR: How did that happen?

GL: Because it's very common for us to hate what we wind up getting. You see, you can't hate which. . . . If you hate something a lot, you'd better be careful because you're bringing it to your breast.

JR: Ah-h-h.

GL: It's an old axiom that, you know, don't hate too much, because you're going to become like that.

JR: I got'cha.

GL: Yeah. You got to be careful. And little did my Mom know that she was going to wind up with this pachuco from [Mariana]. And those guys were organized and when they had battles they used to. . . . The media will never have accurately described, except for [in—Ed.] Carrie McWilliams' *North from Mexico*, if you've read that book you can begin to see an inkling of how the Mexican community did resist. We did fight back. There was people with a very vague and also a very clear idea of what to do. But "vague," I keep saying, because I was a child and it was always vague to me, until I grew up and I began to analyze these things as an adult. But I say cholos belong to us. Those kids are our responsibilities. And we make a mistake giving them over to an institution that's going to make them into these incredible, inhuman creatures. They will come out, and you don't want them in your neighborhood after that. And what they do to these young men is very criminal. That's the real crime of what these kids are translated into, into adulthood.

JR: Um-hmm. You're talking about the prison system and the justice system or the quote-unquote. . . .

GL: Yes. And middle-class people, mostly white people, set up institutions and bureaucracies. They make a lot of money from this particular kind of problem. Am I saying something original? No. Am I saying something that's unique? No. It happens in India. It's happened in South Africa, Cambodia, China, Bangkok. The nature of human beings, having some people always in control and some people having to bite the bullet, is nothing new. It's centuries and centuries old.

JR: Right.

GL: Our part, our understanding of these things is new, and child-like in comparison to other groups, like the Jews. The Jews have become experts—look at Israel—they've become experts in understanding how to torture and how to be abused. I mean, isn't it ironic that here the people that were crying about being abused by the Nazis are doing the same thing to the Palestinians? I mean, that's humankind. I don't say the Jews are any worse than anybody else. I mean, that'd be absurd.

JR: Right.

GL: But all of our cultures. . . . I mean, look at the Chinese. They're doing some tough things, you know? Whereas I remember studying the Chinese, and they were building China and they were getting rid of the white long-nosed devils and they got rid of opium and all that, which was a British monopoly down there. And so they

did a lot to get themselves back on the road. But you have to pay a price for that unification. And that unification was one of the goals of the Chicano movement which never happened. Because we are so bound to the capitalist system that it would have *never* been a reality for us. We entertained it, looking for models. We looked for political models in the sixties to try to figure out, "What can we do with our group within this country?" Well, the Black Panthers tried armed resistance, and so did Chicanos. Some did, you know. And have historically. If you go down in Texas, and all that stuff, you get more of those kinds of resistance than up here in California, or back in L.A. But out here in New Mexico, for example, the colonies that were left over from Spain—the kinds of social development that the Texan-Mexican had versus the New Mexican had—is very different. And the Californian—going back to L.A.—is another cultural guy . . . person—female or male. And what happened in California is much more. . . . The nature of California being a place where you could. . . . It was the fringes. You can come out here and do things. Hollywood. Fantasy. Kookie cultural, health nuts. Experimentation. Beatniks. New. The real laboratory for social dynamics took place on the West Coast. You go back to Texas, them suckers, boy, they ain't budging. Boy, they're these cowboys and they're going to . . .

JR: It's a [different] _____, huh?

GL: Yeah. They're going to chew that stuff and spit it in a spittoon for another two-hundred years. They ain't going to give it up, you know?

JR: [laughs]

GL: And notions of machismo—which are not all negative, unfortunately, you know. They're not all negative.

JR: I understand that. So we did a little jump there.

GL: Yes, we did. [both chuckle]

JR: But that's okay.

GL: It happens a lot.

JR: That's fine, though. Actually. . . .

GL: I guess I'm trying to give an assessment of too much here, but we should go back to, what, developing maybe a . . .

JR: I guess I'm interested in some of, like, a little more about family experience. About how you were raised. Like maybe what kind of work your parents did and . . .

GL: Okay. More personal thing.

JR: Yeah, a little bit more personal. Particularly how you got interested in art and creativity and things of that nature.

GL: Well, my Mom got a job, among other things that she probably did that I never knew about, but I know of one in particular, that she used to color photographs. She would ink them. And so she was taught how to come back and color a photograph, because they didn't have color in those days. This is in the forties. And so I saw that she had an affinity for art, and she would make these little drawings and stuff, and I always had that around, and it seemed interesting to me. I remember also at that time period that colors, Christmas, candies, smells and so forth were, as I was learning the world, these things were all the hotbed of my creativity later, and they were in the sense that these feelings—relaying probably a more romantic side of me, this nostalgia that I have for the forties. . . . And to this day, although I'm not a Christian, but Christmas to me is a wonderful cultural experience. Because the religion, you know, you can work it out for yourself, but, for me, I don't care about the religion. I'm more interested in the manifestation of Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas," the smells of apple cider cooking, and the food, and the beautiful little colorful things, angel hair. There were things that. . . . Only a child and it's magical. So I, if you can get my meaning, had a magical childhood that we all have. All of us have an opportunity for that. But I'm recollecting that magic as a child, and I try to keep it in my work today. This is why I. . . . It's old familiar ground, some of these thoughts that are reoccurring [*sic*] in my head right now, because I think that that's really the crux of us. You really need to be able to see yourself with that longevity, all the way back to smothering in that blanket. And then you have a sense of yourself that's much more complete and full than just thinking of yourself as a doctorate candidate or a person of twenty-three years old or a man of thirty-five years old.

JR: Right. The history, yeah.

GL: So this history is something that I keep coughing up, and I need to get it down on your tape here.

JR: [laughs]

GL: But it was very important and I . . . Depending on what you want to know. You asked me for some other examples. My mother did that. And I remember all these colors and smells, and the reason I think it's important is that those are really the backgrounds to what's motivated and has what I needed and being creative, I rely on those.

JR: Yeah. Was that something—like when you were going through high school or starting out in college—were those the kinds of memories that you would draw upon when you were developing as an artist?

GL: No, no. No. Because I was looking for academic references that would lead me to art. At that time, being a young man trying to. . . Well, if you go back to high school, I was already drawing cars. I was drawing these little characters that I found the other day. They're somewhere packed away. But I had Peter Posole, Maria Tortilla, Ernie Enchilada . . .

JR: [laughs]

GL: . . . and I had all these charac[ters]. . . Timmy Taco. Now I was a young man. I had no idea. Believe me, I had no idea that I was going to spend my life being a cultural promoter of Chicanos. And all I was doing was reflecting what I was about, without any political or sociological direction or implications or nothing. And I think that's what true-blue about it is that this is what really should be happening with Chicanos. They should be manifesting who they are and not worrying about Rembrandt and all those other guys who . . .

JR: Yeah.

GL: . . . I admire dearly, you know, but we need to scratch our history, our experiences, and in that way I think Chicano art will blossom like crazy. But it created my path in Chicano art.

JR: I see.

GL: Recognizing that I needed to investigate. . . Now I'm reading a book right now by Paul Reps, *Zen Bones, Zen Flesh*, that I read as a young man. I was in my early twenties. It was early. I don't remember when I first read it, but I was a young student. And going back to it—you just asked a minute ago, to not lose it too much—I was trying to become an artist, but I was looking externally now and I was in school and all their examples were European. Okay? So I started thinking of art in those terms. And then when I went to college. . . I was already at Long Beach State College and I had already done my first Chicano art show, and I had also begun to curate shows, not knowing what I was doing. I didn't even know what a curator was. All I was doing was organizing these shows to do cultural expositions. That was my intent, to show off our culture. What was it? I really didn't know, but I knew it had to do with pan de huevos, serapes, hats, low riders, graffiti, and cholos.

JR: Kind of all the things that you saw around you.

GL: That was my. . . I grew up in East L.A., you know. Wore khakis and wore Pendleton shirts and Sir Guy shirts in high school, and so that was my experience.

JR: I see.

GL: And in art school they told us, "Use your experience," so I did. And then they s[aid]. . . Well, I've capsulized all this in one critique that I had once when the teacher kind of said, "Well, that's not really what we meant." They wanted found objects that were gringo objects, and when they told me that mine didn't count, I knew that I had found a treasure for myself. Maybe for him it didn't work, but, for me, this was my experience, and I found at that point. . . Because I did a menudo bone sculpture. And that was. . . Found objects? Well, you know, we had menudo bone, and that's what I had.

JR: [laughs]

GL: So we put that together in a concept at Long Beach, and I knew at that point that I had to follow and explore those kinds of cultural experiences that make us all different.

JR: So when you were at Long. . . Let's see, you're at Long Beach from what, like '71?

GL: '66 to '69, something like that, yeah.

JR: Okay. Was there a contingent of Chicano artists there, or Chicanas, or folks kind of working to develop this? Or did you get the sense that you were kind of on your own at that time?

GL: I was on my own, but I knew other Chicano people that were doing the same thing I was doing. We were

digesting Euro-trends, Euro-history, and you. [both chuckle] But the products that we were making at that time looked very much like what could be found in any gringo art magazine—although they were Mexicans and Chicanos. Almost nobody that I can remember . . . very few were really trying to do something Chicano. It wasn't even a thought. So here I come very early in the picture of here, a Chicano, pushing for getting together, talking about our dilemmas, identifying issues, trying to find solutions for these things, looking for models. Now, I didn't articulate it like this at that time. I didn't know what the hell was going on. I was trying to discover what was going on. And we were getting a lot of negative feedback like, "We're getting screwed over. We're getting screwed over. Look at the blacks. They're articulating things that we should understand, too." And that kind of thing. Now, going to art school, my job as an art student was to discover what art was. And that brought me to try to discover, "What is Chicano art?" In particular, what is Chicano art? They may not be interested, but I'm interested. These were realizations. These were stepping stones to becoming pretty much an advocate of Chicano art. And if you ever ask people that knew me back then, I was a pest. That's all I thought about. To this day, that's all I really think about. "What is Chicano art? Where's it going? What role am I playing in this picture?"

JR: So when people ask you that, what have you come up with over the time? I mean, how do you. . . . Because I've been asked that question—in different settings I imagine—and I have a real hard time explaining to people the parameters of it—or the breadth of it.

GL: And it is broad. And it is broad. And I try not to be too glib about it, but because I was a Chicano studies teacher I had an opportunity to over and over again, every semester, form and formulate an idea of what Chicano art is. For myself. I do not speak for a group or an association, but I speak for myself and I say that Chicano art is a cultural product, period. It is, again, a reflection of who we are as a people. It is not a political thing. It is not a religious thing. Those are elements of our artwork, but I think the bottom line is that if it's done in the spirit of the Chicano experience, it's Chicano art. What if you're Anglo? Can you be a Chicano artist? I say, "Yes." Because if you grow up like some of the gringos that grew up with us that were so acculturated that they out-pachucoed everybody else, then they could make Chicano art, because Chicano art is not genetic. It is not genetic. And I'll prove it to you. You go to a lot of schools over here, and you'll see these dark guys, Chicanos, looking as Mexican as possible, and they can say, ["Shop good."] [chuckles] They have trouble saying, "Shop." Now which one did I say? Did I say, the thing you do with your hand [chop—Ed.] or a place where you work and make artwork [shop—Ed.]? Which did I say?

JR: I was hearing. . . .

GL: No, no. I just said, "[Shop]," right?

JR: Right.

GL: Well, I just changed it again. See I have trouble saying "shop" or "chop." "Chop, chop." Anyway, not to get too far off the thing, but Chicano art to me, in definition, is a cultural definition. People come by with their political agendas and want Chicano art to be a political statement. I say, it *can* be. And the other one I have problems with is that Chicano art can be anything a Chicano does. And I think that's nonsense, because a lot of Chicano artists that are just doing gringo products are not exercising Chicano-anything. They just happen to be genetically that. But this is a cultural identification, to be Chicano. This is like belonging to the Woodcraft Rangers [_____—Ed.]. In order to be a member, you have to practice and want to be a member, see?

JR: I got it.

GL: Yeah, it's an identification issue. That's why, say, this guy can deny it, this person can accept it, and this one can promote it. See, all Chicanos don't have the same interest in the culture. I'm obsessed by it. Some people could give a damn less. They can say, "Well, so what? We don't wear sombreros anymore, so what? What d'you care? I don't need a. . . ." Or "I'm not a low-rider, so I don't wanna relate to that." It's fair. It's fair. We learned that the Nazis who did a lot of arm-twisting with their ideology doesn't work. At least that's my frame of mind. I think that it's a persuasion that people need not a beating over the head.

JR: And these are observations that you've come to after a considerable amount of time and thought . . . incessant thought.

GL: Yes. Yeah, over and over.

JR: I guess I'm kind of interested in the process of how. . . .

GL: Of how I got this?

JR: . . .how those ideas developed, going back to, maybe, your experience at . . . was it L.A. City College?

GL: No, I went to East L.A.

JR: East L.A. J.C. [East Los Angeles Junior College—Ed.]

GL: I think that's when. . . .

JR: And then you started developing from there?

GL: Okay. That's when it really happened. Because, see, I didn't know I was going to be an art-anything until I went to East L.A. College, and there was a female that was a lab assistant there at the ceramic department, and her name was Margaret. And I'd really like to find her one day because I just owe her a little thanks for getting me started with clay. Because I went to East L.A. after I had come out of the Air Force, [in—Ed.] which I had spent four years, three of it in England, and I came back . . . and had joined specifically for the G.I. Bill.

JR: Okay. I was going to ask you about that.

GL: Yeah. So that was very important for me to go to school. I knew my people weren't going to be able to send me through school, and I knew I wanted to go to college, but I had no idea what it meant. None.

JR: You just had this sense that you should go.

GL: I knew that college was good.

JR: Right.

GL: But I didn't know what for. Now, remember there was nobody with . . . a college graduate that was a successful guy around that I saw.

JR: No role models like that.

GL: None. So it was a blank. I said I knew it was good, and I knew something about a better job, and that's it. It was that vague and that simple.

JR: But you were aware that if you had done some kind of service, or that you went into the Air Force. . . .

GL: Well, no, I knew the G.I. . . . Yes, I knew I would. . . .

JR: . . . that the G.I. Bill was there, waiting for you.

GL: Yep. Well, that's why I joined.

JR: Did you pick that up in high school? Did counselors tell you that? Or did you see other people in the community that had come back from World War II and. . . .

GL: Well, I had heard through the grapevine that that was the policy, that if you served that time you'd get a G.I. Bill and then you could go to school. And I think they talked about it as part of the recruiting, possibly. I don't remember. But I know that was a definitely real reason why I joined the service. One of them. The other one was I wanted to get out of the house. I was a young man, I was feeling constricted there as a teenager, and then this offered me an opportunity. Also, to go overseas and see the world. Another attractive. . . .

JR: So this was in '57 when you go into the Air Force?

GL: I went in in '58.

JR: '58.

GL: August the first. So what happened, as I got into the art department and began to take art classes, I began to see that I liked being there. Because I had tried education. I wanted to be a dentist. And I wanted these other things. I wanted to be a psychology major. And psychology, I found out very quickly that that was a fucked-up job.

JR: [laughs]

GL: Not only were the people nuts. . . . [moves away from the microphone and speaks to a child or pet] Hey, you! Get down from there! [Comes back to the mike] I mean, I saw all these people, and they were all a little cracked. [laughter] I said, "This is not for me."

Also at the same time, I had a very deep interest in theology, and I was exploring the Koran, the Talmud, and the

Bible, and Zen Buddhism at that . . . in those sixties. And it was important, because it was also, if you can get a better picture, it was beginning to develop me as an intellectual person and I was beginning to explore religions, which started much earlier when I was around seventeen. I wanted to know if Christ and all this stuff was for real. Because I grew up with my father who hated Catholics and my mother who will never give it up but doesn't really practice. But like everybody else, don't give it up, but it's just the mental identification with Catholics. So I says, "Well, who's telling me the truth?" Because these people would say, "Well, don't believe them. And da-da-da." So that dialogue I resolved by studying theology, and I really got into studying history as a result. And so these were outside of my art interest but fed it, at the same time.

JR: Yeah, exactly.

GL: Very much so. So when I went to East L.A. College, I began to try to figure out, "What is an artist? And so what do I do with that?" And so we ate bread and drank wine and ate cheese. We thought that's what French artists did. I know it sounds silly, but we were young kids. We didn't know. I didn't know. "What is an artist," you know And so those were the initial kind of corny things I did to try to identify as an artist. And as I went along I began to discover, by myself—because there was no movement at that time and there was very few people I could talk to about these things—and I began to put things together in my own conceptual way, of knowing that I had to figure out what kind of artist. . . . I had to find these definitions for what teachers were asking us for, because what they do in art school is they keep presenting you art problems. And the process of learning about art is solving all these problems until you get on your own. You learn to concoct your problems and then you solve them and that's how you operate as an artist.

JR: Like, for example, what kind of problems would they throw at you?

GL: Well, for example, you had to translate a poem. I did this drawings of the old. . . .

[Break in taping]

GL: Do you know where it is in terms of volume?

JR: Yeah, we're okay. This is Tape 2, Side A, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on November 13, 1997. And we left off last . . . you were talking a little bit about having put some shows together, how you were solving some problems artistically, how artistically you were going about excavating Chicano culture. And I was thinking maybe at this point it would be good to talk about some of the work that you were doing with *Con Safos*, and then, eventually, how that led you to coalesce the group Los Four.

GL: Okay. At the time, I was doing a . . . We had a live TV, KCET, reception at Long Beach State, and that exhibit that I did at the college, which I had curated, brought these two guys from *Con Safos*, you know. Rafas Lopez, who was to me the real eye of the storm there. He was really, to me, the leadership of this group. He had the best sense for it that I could relate to. And they came to see me, these guys from *Con Safos*. Arturo Flores and Rafas came to this exhibit, because they had been watching me organize things in various places, and they had heard about what I was doing, these endeavors to kind of coalesce some definition of Chicano art. In those days—it was just '69, I think it was, at that time—we still had a very blurry idea of what all this meant. The Chicano movement, as we now understand it, was just at the inception, certainly after the 1968 walkouts that the high schools did, with people like Harry Gamboa [Jr.—Ed.] and so forth and others, that sparked off a very wide. . . . It gave solidity to something called a movement. Just the walkouts began to really spark something on a more community-wide basis. So these guys come to this reception and they hit me up to join their group. And what they were doing was a quarterly called *Con Safos*, which was an attempt to articulate arts and literature in the barrio—but from a perspective of the proletariat, the blue collar worker, the common guy, the average person in East Los Angeles. It wasn't a real sophisticated notion. It was more of a trying to be inclusive and develop these ideas of what literature meant in the Chicano experience. So "Reflections of the Barrio" was the subtitle to the magazine. It was a description of what *Con Safos* was endeavoring to do.

So I joined their group thereafter and became the art editor. And it was partly because I was also at that point known to be an organizer of Chicano artists and I had an art as well, because I'd done a lot of shows. I'd gathered together mostly people with Spanish surnames, hoping to, in that process, come up with something that meant Chicano art. And even in those days, although I had my own personal idea of what I was after, which was basically looking at the culture and those symbols to make visual art representations and that's basically what I was doing. So when I joined *Con Safos* I found that these ideas that I had, selecting motifs from the barrio experience—like low-riders, graffiti, doilies, plants growing out of peoples' shoes, and pretty much funky art that people did with the means that they had. Again, these were not schooled efforts. These were efforts being done by looking at the community and seeing what we had produced that could be called art. Pan de huevo. These were the things that I was looking at. And so when I began to articulate them in the magazine, I found resistance in, namely, Arturo Flores, who felt that aesthetics had ended with Diego Rivera.

JR: Oh, really?

GL: Yeah. And so within the group I found some, not only uninformed, but very limited and conservative ideas of aesthetics. Now these guys were not artists; they were writers. And all that points out is that in every area there's people who can't see what's in the present. They're still living in some past criteria of what it means to have an art object. So those are some of the battles that I had internally with *Con Safos* was trying to make sure that these guys understood that graffiti and low-riders were truly sculptures and art forms that, like calligraphy, were not only notable but distinctly ours. We had developed these things as a group of people. And my job, I thought, was to look out there and try to find, in attempts to get this definition, was to find examples of what could be Chicano art. And so it also began to develop a basis for my own aesthetic and what I thought I was going to do, and that is to utilize our social rituals and all the things that we had, like eating menudo and any number of things that. . . . And now we have [*Día de los Muertos*] that was actually started by Beto de la Rocha here in Los Angeles. He was the first guy that I ever knew that actually practiced that ritual and actually brought attention to that particular holiday. And Gronk participated, too, in the early days.

JR: Was that the stuff with Self Help [Graphics—Ed.]?

GL: No, Self Help came later. That came later.

JR: Oh, was that later?

GL: No, Self Help came later. Because Self Help took over the *Día de los Muertos* kind of process from artists that had already done that, that were not part of Self Help.

JR: I see.

GL: And so they just kind of took it over, because they were an organization and they were able to garner resources and support for that activity.

JR: I see.

GL: And then they were being sponsored to do these kinds of things, not very well, but that was the humble beginnings of it all. And so I think Beto de la Rocha should be given credit for initiating this process—almost single-handedly. And what he did, he didn't get funding or he didn't ask permission from anybody, he just went and did it. And went to the cemetery. . . . I was there on the second one that he did. The first one he did, I don't know where I was but I missed it.

JR: This is Evergreen Cemetery?

GL: I think it was Calvario, I think. It's the one over there by, oh jeez, Lorena? I don't remember now. I'm beginning to. . . . I'm trying to think of the streets.

JR: That's all right.

GL: Anyway, but Beto did do it. Anyway, so this was what was going on at the time. We had a very tumultuous time, in the sense that these definitions. . . . Like, I was a student. I was not a. . . . Nobody really. . . . I was not a spokesperson for any. . . . I was just another student, and so I would talk about these ideas—these motifs, visual motifs, symbols that I thought were beginning to construct this entity called "Chicano art." I was looking for that. And I got in a lot of trouble with the conservative element of the group to convince them that, yes, these were elements. It wasn't the complete story, and it was certainly the beginning of what Chicano art is today. And so we went from that kind of crazy experience of putting this magazine together, and it was a lot of effort and everybody was volunteering. There was a lot of dissension in the group, because these were ideas that we were all fighting for. And like in most movements, you have different opinions, and people with a lot of emotion would argue different perspectives. We had Marxists in the group that had a very different thinking about art and its purpose. They felt, for the most part, that it should serve some kind of humanitarian goal, but through Marxist ideology.

JR: Right. Politicize people to some kind of ____ ____.

GL: And politicize them and so forth. What I found out though, in the long run, because the Marxists in particular had a very narrow idea of art. Now I came out of art school; these guys were not artists. They were more interested in a party line. And they would accuse you of being a Lumpen, or somebody that really didn't understand the real purpose in saving the world. So we had a lot of hard times with people that had a political agenda and trying to superimpose it on aesthetics that we hadn't even formed yet.

JR: Oh, wow.

GL: So it was a difficult time. And then I was no authority of anything at that time. I was still also doing this, like you say, excavation and discovery of what it really all meant, because I was in earnest of trying to find out. And

so we had a lot of long kinds of arguments and discussions about these things with people that never studied art. Like even cubism or something like that was considered "a white man's art," which is ridiculous.

JR: Right.

GL: Picasso was an Español, I mean, and ethnicity really didn't matter. What they missed the point of is that Picasso was presenting aesthetic ideas. But since they didn't know the aesthetic ideas or gave them any credit, they would always rely on political thinking, and if it didn't fit the political thinking it was suspect. So here we have one of the problems of artists, where we're doing aesthetic ideas and developing within our field a construct of what we're about, and then trying to match it with the political ideology of somebody who's trying to do social changing.

JR: Did they ever feed off of one another?

GL: Of course they did. Sure, sure. Because we all had a concern for being involved with the community. We all wanted to help the community. So the political model was Marxism there. Or at least they were the most vocal. And then there was the [indigena] people, the cultural nationalists, which I probably was closer to because I was after culture not politics.

JR: I see.

GL: Although I got involved politically because that was the wave that swept all of us. No matter who you were, it was this incredible, basically, impact of a community to have to do the introspection to find out who they were, because identity issues were basically a problem for us. Who were we? Mexican Americans? Hispanics? Latinos? We had all these names that we still have confusion over. But the colonization of *Raza* was really the problem and the cause of all this confusion. Because people would identify with different things. You know, some people wanted to be anglo, some people wanted to be Europeanized, Westernized. And then other people wanted to ignore all of that influence and so forth, which I can hardly think is likely. But, nonetheless, these were the polarities. These were the different ideologies that were battling with each other there, trying to find not only definition but support for their point of view.

JR: Right. So I've noticed in some of the issues that Frank [Romero—Ed.] and Carlos [Almaraz—Ed.] both worked on *Con Safos*. Had you guys thought about forming Los Four before they were working on that? Or how did. . . . You know, what's the relationship?

GL: What happened is that, well, Carlos called me one day. I didn't know who he was, and then that's how I got to know Frank. But they were both buddies from college and they had gone to art school together. But Carlos and Frank, at the point that I was doing the *Con Safos* magazine, had still not accepted some of the premises that I was making with trusting your own experience to make art in lieu of being a Western Europeanized New York-oriented artist here in East L.A. that was so remote to me that I didn't really care about New York. But they did, because they had been in New York and, yes, that's where the action was. Yes, that's where the money was. And yes, that was where the professional goals of Carlos and Frank were to be fitting into that. To me, that was a gringo thing—mainstreaming, you might call it—and it didn't pertain to us. It did not resolve any of our issues. It didn't even consider our issues. So I said to myself that I didn't have much interest in New York. I didn't care what they thought or what they were doing, because it had nothing to do with my life. Because I was living here, in the present, at that time, and that meant we had Chicano issues and we had identity issues and we had this political upheaval that was essentially a slave rebellion in total. We were the labor pool at that time and still remain to be a labor pool. And so, whereas blacks were talking about being slaves a long time ago, we continue to be the slaves. And we need to know how to articulate that point better, because blacks have certainly articulated a very just description of the racism that has affected them. And so we all very well know the story of the blacks and what happened to them, but less is known and understood about Chicanos. More about the Native American, less the Chicano. And the Chicano is a Native American. But because we have a Mexican base and matrix to our culture and have two languages. . . . It's essentially this: The Anglo, the English-speaking world colonated [*sic*] the United States. And wherever you find that, you find Native Americans speaking English. And wherever the Spanish domain was, you find the same Native Americans speaking Spanish. And you'll even find areas where the Native Americans are speaking French. So it's obvious that each European country had an impact on the indigenous population. They're all indigenous and they're all mestizos, but some are called Native Americans and some are called mestizos depending on the language structure that they fell under. And the French, with the Iroquois and the Mohawks and all that, they were impacted with French first. And the Blackfeet, a lot of those guys were speaking French, not English or Spanish.

JR: Right.

GL: So this colonization has an effect, in what I'm trying to get to, to affect us back in the seventies and the late sixties. And my efforts were to try to put some rational kind of a ideological construct that made sense to us and begin to let us see a picture of where we're at. Because what we were trying to do was to find our place. We

didn't know what we were as a group. We didn't understand ourselves as a Chicano Nation. We thought we were just these people that were Mexicans that were left over from different political conquests.

JR: Hearing you talk about really trying to figure out what are all the different elements contributing to that situation, I sometimes get surprised that people as different as yourself and Almaraz and Romero and de la Rocha can come together. It seems like you guys are all coming from different areas. How does that work? How does that coalesce?

GL: I think that was the beauty of Los Four, because what I had been doing up to that point was I was trying to find art groups that would speak to these issues, and here we had an ideal situation. We had four different, really, archetypes of the community. We had Carlos being who he was, Frank and Beto being who they were. All coming together and merging together and creating artwork that was pretty neat, and yet we were able to, using our egos. . . . Either we were countering them or building on them or superimposing them, so that we finally wound up with a fifth entity. And that was Los Four. See it all worked together, once we started working, because some of the elements that I brought to the group were, not only looking to indigenous experience or those roots, but to utilize the tools that graffiti guys were using, employing low-rider techniques and attitudes and translating them into art forms. Now Carlos and Frank, they had no notion of this. In 1971 when I met Carlos, that's when I began to harass him about these things. And he would tell me that he didn't want to hear that shit—basically—because his orientation was New York, Western culture, and he wanted to be Jackson Pollock. Okay? I didn't want to be Diego Rivera. I wanted to be a Chicano artist. Not Mexican. I knew the difference. And so I was trying to do a home-grown product. Something out of the experience out of East L.A., because that's what we were. We were not Mexicans; we were not New Yorkers. We were [Montebello] people. I mean that came from here.

I'm just picking on Montebello, but in essence East L.A. was really the core word. East L.A. is the real root of it all, in spite of these other little communities that are all around.

So I think that the four of us—I keep going back to what you were saying—that it was one of the features of Los Four that I think was extraordinary and worked. We were able to, as four people, merge together and create artwork that was reasonable and abstract, and all the four sensibilities went to work together. We merged. And being able to work collectively that way was not believed before that time. I mean, there had been other collectives. There's always been collectives with artists. We weren't the only one or the first ones, but for us it worked. And we were, of course, with our ideology of always. . . . At least certainly my point of view was to get people together and to work together as a collective. That's all I was after. And it worked with Los Four.

JR: How about how that was received at the Irvine show or in to LACMA, that whole process of getting that going.

GL: I had originally gone to see Hal Glicksman about having the Los Four show, and he told me that he. . . . I wanted "A Dozen Tortillas" as the title. He thought it was too many people. He says, "It's too many people. Why don't you cut it down." So I cut it down to four people, because of the four directions, the four winds, etc., which I always went back to indigenous concepts, indigenous ideology, indigenous kinds of our forefathers' structures where they live. And it was like looking back and trying to find indigenous models for what we were doing. Because I think that the validity is that, in our language, for example, to say something in a diminutive is. . . . "Muy chico" would be "[chicinito]" in the way we speak. They don't talk like that in Spain.

JR: Right.

GL: They speak with another kind of a grammar structure. So this Indian influence was part of what we discovered in the sixties—that we were Indian people. And, yes, some of us are French, some of us are German, and Irish, and blah-blah-blah, but the mestizo was what I thought was Chicano. And that mixture was part of the mixture of Los Four. We had four different guys. Carlos and Frank being one—you know, there was two of them—and me and Beto being the other two guys, representing the indigenous and the local things, and Frank and Carlos representing European and other pursuits, like wanting to be in European history and so forth. Whereas Beto and I were really. . . . You know, that was the dichotomy between the group. That was *one* of them. We had many of them.

JR: Right.

GL: And then each one of us, being who we were, manifested ourselves to be just four different kinds of guys in the barrio. We were all different. I come from a cholo, low-rider background in the sense that I wore khakis when I went to school. And I never thought of myself as a cholo. I knew I was a Chicano, but I didn't know that I was being looked upon by people as a hoodlum because I wasn't. I never was, you know. . . . The costume that we wore, with the khakis and the Sir Guys shirt was part of the fashion of the time, and that's the extent of it from what I was understanding. But people would look at you if you wore khakis and they'd think you were a hoodlum—automatically. A pachuco. And certainly it was demeaning to people to behave that way—according to the

Mexican-American middle class standard and the social standard.

JR: Right. So how does that represent itself—those different characters from the barrio, say—in the show? And how does the fifth element of Los Four emerge out of that?

GL: Simply put, the four of us each had a very distinct style and direction. The fifth entity combined it all, and it worked.

JR: Right.

GL: So that was a fifth. . . .

JR: So what was each person's strength in coming to that?

GL: Carlos. . . . Well, starting with Carlos, he was very articulate in paint. Personally, I found that Frank was the strongest in clay and ceramics, and Beto was the strongest in drawing and printing—those kinds of graphic images—at that time. And me, I thought I was more of the person who was conceptually and intellectually trying to develop a whole system of thought. I wasn't interested in just doing images without a larger infrastructure of thought. And so I always felt that I was there to push for ideas. Not that these other guys didn't have ideas. I don't mean to say that. But I think my task, what was more important is, because my art skill was not very good. . . . I'm still very self-conscious about my art level, because I spent most of my time organizing, and I didn't give it the time that these other guys did, to developing their technical and personal dexterity and draftmanship. So I always felt inferior to all of them in terms of drawing. Because I was really a sculptor. That was another thing that led me to feel a little more insecure about my drawing, which was really terrible. It was real bad, too. But, conceptually, I felt that was my forte.

Going back to Carlos again, I thought that he. . . . After I harassed him for a long time and had hours of dialogue at Frank's house—everywhere we went. . . . Sometimes I would. . . . Like, when we lived in Fresno, I'd come and I'd stay with Carlos or my family—it depends on what I was doing—and we would stay up into the night just talking about art. And arguing all the time. And with Carlos our polarity was a number of things. We were both intellectually oriented. We were both Libras. That was the common ground. But he had a different sexual preference than I. He was European-oriented; I was indigenous. So there was always this. . . . He was on one side of the fence, and I was on the other side of the fence, and then arguing over this fence about all these issues, and certainly talking about all these things. And for me it was a period of time of tremendous growth, because, like I said before, he challenged me. . . . I couldn't just say my stuff. With Beto, I could tell him stuff. He would absorb it. He'd sit there very. . . . You could see him reflecting, letting it settle in, and he'd kind of like say, "Okay." He got it, then he'd go to work. He didn't argue. You never argued with Beto. Frank, he'd just say, "Well, you Mexicans, you're not going to get it together." He would just pooh-pooh it all. Okay? Because Frank—going from Carlos to Frank—was more of a guy that. . . . The way I saw him is that he was a little more hedonistic in that he made me see this guy that he had his little coffee in the morning, and they would do things like going out to Barrigan's in the morning for breakfast. I thought that was the most fantastic thing. So I saw Frank's life-style as being very middle class and almost gringo-like, in the sense that we never. . . . I never went to restaurants for breakfast. That was just not part of my cultural upbringing. And so these guys, especially Frank and so forth, taught me how to be more middle class, I think. And I thought that Frank's essence was a more organic, clay person type of thing. It was intuitive. I think Frank's strengths were. . . . Although he never finished college. I don't think he has a degree in art, but he also shared a relationship with clay with me, because I was a clay guy. So that was my affinity to Frank.

JR: I see.

GL: We both did clay. And there's just a thing about clay people that bind us. You know, the clay is a wonderful material, but she's a mistress and she'll intoxicate you. I was infatuated with clay—oddly enough—but you talk to clay people and that's the way they talk about clay. They're in love with the material. So Frank and I shared that. Beto was printing at Gemini. He had gone from East L.A., where I had met him in '62, and then he left before I did to go to Long Beach, and then I followed about a year later. And he was, of course, about a year or so older than me, but when I went to Long Beach I picked up a relationship with him again, because he had been at East L.A. And up to that point, we didn't hang out. You know, we just knew of each other but we weren't really tight buddies. When we got to Long Beach, yeah, it began to develop into a good relationship because we were both from East L.A. And by this time, I was beginning to articulate something about trusting your own experience, being indigenous, all those kinds of things. So I started to proselytize. And so I would go over there and just talk to Beto, and we would sit there and draw. And he was just wonderful—draftsman, compositions, just amazing what he would do with a pen. And he was working at Gemini [studio? gallery?—Ed.], too, after we had graduated from Long Beach and got involved with some pretty highfalutin artists—you know, [Robert—Ed.] Rauschenburg and all these people that printed at Gemini. And then Beto, being a worker there, had some wonderful experiences and met some major artists. Me, I was more insulated. I wanted. . . . My audience and

objective was Chicano. I knew the value of Rauschenburg, I knew what Gemini was about, and I did dab in going to the La Cienaga Monday night gallery nights that they would have where people would go and see all these galleries in La Brea. And the [Sigi, C. G.] Gallery and all those places that were now history in California. So I knew of the Anglo world. I went to school. I got an MFA from Irvine. It wasn't my focus. I wanted to develop something from East L.A., where I came from. Because I knew that that's. . . .

[Break in taping]

JR: This is Tape 2, Side B, continuing with interviewing Gilbert Lujan on November 13, 1997.

GL: So Carlos, I think, was instrumental in helping me intellectually develop my thoughts. But it was mostly like we were at counterpoints all the time. Like, he would present things and ideas and so forth. I would automatically, somehow, be on the other side of things just. . . . And I think I enjoyed it. That we used to argue for hours and hours—about all kinds of stuff.

JR: So where was he coming from?

GL: He was European-oriented. He was looking at becoming historically important to the gringo art world. And I could give a fuck. I didn't give a shit whether gringos liked or. . . . They could just lump it for all I cared. That was not my audience. They didn't care about us. Why should I care about what they thought? This is my thinking, right? I little defiant, a little bit antagonistic, I would say. But these thoughts were about trying to reconstruct something for ourselves. I wasn't interested in whether we would be accepted or not. I didn't care.

JR: Right.

GL: Acceptance was not my interest. It was his. And Frank's. Because they wanted to be in. They wanted to be in thick. And, of course, they were a lot wiser than me. I was being dumb. I had no interest in mainstream or anything. Of course, my points of view are much more impractical. They were correct. I mean, if you're going to do anything, you got to compete in the world. That's where the world's become. And I think time has proven that they are correct, that we need to get out there, not insulate ourselves, which I was doing.

JR: I see.

GL: I was doing the insulation more out of fear of pain. I didn't want to go out to be rejected. I didn't go after galleries. I didn't care whether. . . . If a gallery was interested, they'd call me. If not. . . . And so Carlos was often rebuking me for not having much business sense or having those ambitions. He said, "You know, Magu, you got to think you're worth more." Now I'm reading *Zen Flesh* over here where, you know, you give up the world and you help humanity and it doesn't matter where you do it. And like there's this little Zen story there about this crook. This is a thief. He comes to steal from this old monk, and he ain't got nothing to steal so the monk says, "Well, take my clothes." And then the thief leaves and the monk's sitting there naked looking at the moon, and he goes, "Jeez, I wish I could have given him the moon." Reflection on the bucket that he took. Or something about the bucket of water. It was a bucket with a reflection of the moon. So I'm in that la-la land, right? And these guys are telling me about how to become a Republican capitalist, which I couldn't. . . . It was just too remote for me. And to this day I have remained a poor person financially and, nothing to brag about, for sure, but I've been incapacitated in a lot of ways because of my unwillingness to get financially more astute about things.

JR: But spiritually rich.

GL: I am full. I am a very complete and happy person these days. You have to be who you are. That's all it is. But the dynamics that were going on when we were all young guys. . . . Frank, I never really spent a lot of time trying to convince, because Frank, he either accepts it or he doesn't. But he'll always tell you some smart-ass remark about your concept but [then, he'll] adopt it. He'll adopt it and he'll take it in, but he's not going to let you know about it out front. But, intellectually, the real challenge was Carlos. Beto, the same thing. Beto would listen, he'd accept it or reject it. You'd never know. You just wait for the results. And I was happy with that, because I was not interested in controlling *anybody*. I didn't want people to do Magu reflections. I wanted people to pivot on their culture and do something with it.

So here let's go to Los Four now. What was going on there is that, basically, I was the guy that was pile-driving the concepts. I had that vision that over large . . . that larger vision about Aztlán, and these guys would just kind of look at me like, "Yeah, sure, Aztlán." And they weren't buying it at the beginning. But as Carlos became politicized and. . . . One example, for example. Example for example. [both chuckle] He was always afraid of cholos, because he said that cholos used to beat him up when he was a kid, because evidently he was somewhat on the either nerdy side or more. . . . You know, whatever he was as a kid, he was not a tough guy. And somehow he had had experiences with cholos, and they had beat him up or threatened him. He felt very intimidated. So I told him that the best thing to do was to face that intimidation and go work where there's

cholos, so he found a job at All Nations [community center—Ed.], when Carlos Ramirez was the director there—he's now a lawyer—and Carlos began to understand that these kids that would come around, these tough cholos, were just little, young kids. Some were stupid. They used to play grab-ass, and you'd have to control them and throw them out when they were misbehaving. They accepted it. But out on the street, they were threatening to him, because he didn't know them. And then at that time, he was getting politicized, which was part of that year I spent harassing him about political commitment to his community, who he really was, and that the gringos really had fucked over us all these years, how could he continue this allegiance that he had towards their—what would you say?—kind of paying homage to these people who hated you, and they weren't going to. . . . And not everybody. We all understood that not all gringos were the same, that there's—like in all of us—there are some people that are petty and racist, and there are people that are not, that are very gentle and sweet people [that] don't have those ideas in their heads.

JR: Right.

GL: And so, given that universal quality that there's some people you would. . . . There's some Chicanos I wouldn't trust or get along with either. Gee, they're animals or demons or something.

JR: [laughs]

GL: So it's not. . . . I'm just pointing out that it was clearly. . . . That we knew there was gray areas and overlapping areas with people. It wasn't all just, "Well, they're this. . . ."

JR: Us and them.

GL: Us and them. And, certainly, our conversations that we had, Carlos and I, as conflict-oriented as they were, were really the basis of this forging of all the ideas. But by the time these guys came on board, I had already pretty well substantiated these concepts in my brain and was pushing pretty hard. And they had none. So they all kind of fell into it, and then Carlos passed me up, politically speaking, because all of a sudden he became a Marxist and he was carrying around little red books. He gave me one. He bought a bunch of them and was passing them out. And then when you see the Los Four show—Los Four movie—he's talking about that if painting isn't going to help change people that he won't paint. Well, those were the days of a lot of idealism, but, of course, he later changed that and became a Republican Catholic or something towards the end of his life. He was very much more interested in money. And was successful. Of all the group, I mean, he really made it on his own. He really did very well financially. He was a schmoozer, too. He used to love. . . . Like, he knew Jennifer Goldwyn from Goldwyn-Mayer and all that stuff.

JR: Oh yeah?

GL: Well, he was also cultivating relationships with people on the West Side, because, see, Carlos, unlike me, which he's a good contrast to me, because he wanted to be successful. I didn't care. I avoided it. He thought I avoided it because I was afraid of success. And I tried to get him to read my Zen stuff, but he just thought it was cool but he never really did what. . . . He never reciprocated. I said, "I'll read Marx if you'll read these guys."

JR: [laughs]

GL: But he cheated. He didn't do it as much as I would have liked him to.

JR: I see.

GL: [Chuang] Tzu, Chinese philosophers. You know, Taoism is not part of the mundane world. It's the guy that just sits there and watches the river go by.

JR: Right.

GL: And for people that are yuppies, they don't understand that at all.

JR: It's hard to practice when you're rooted in the every day. Sometimes, you know?

GL: Yes. But part of the process is to stop being rooted into that, and then it's not so bad.

JR: Right.

GL: And you'll find out how neat it is. Because getting off that rat race—and this is going back to our talks with Carlos and so forth—he was asking us to participate in this madness called "mainstream," which is a wasp world. And I was saying, "Hey, let's examine our past and let's do something different. That has no path with a heart." And that was our arguments, and we went around and around.

JR: I see. Well, it seemed like you must have been pretty effective in your conversations with him, because he went out and organized with the UFW [United Farm Workers—Ed.] . . .

GL: He did. Yes, he did. That was later.

JR: . . . and was working with the Concilio and stuff like that.

GL: Yes, yes, yes. It's true. Yes, I think all that was. . . .

JR: I'll have some more, thanks. [coffee being poured—Ed.]

GL: I'd rather have milk. A little bit, and then more milk.

JR: Okay.

GL: That's good. Thank you. A little bit, and then [mas leche]. That's good.

JR: Okay.

GL: Yes, I think so. And he acknowledged the impact I had on him, too, but I don't know who's ever going to tell you about that anymore. I mean, he's gone now. I can only speak of the things that were good that happened. And with Carlos, he taught me a lot of stuff. I mean, he was important to me. And so I think it was a back-and-forth, because he was so bright and because he was so talented. He really had a lot of concerns for my financial welfare that I was too dumb to really take advantage of or acknowledge or just deal with. I don't know. But that's the way I am. I don't know.

JR: So was there a sense, in your relationship with him or with Los Four in general that there was. . . . I guess I'm kind of interested how the collective, the group, came together, and as I understand it it's around this one show that came out of Irvine and went to LACMA.

GL: Well, at that point, I was the pushy one. I was the one that was putting things together. Beto and Frank did very little of this. To them, it just all happened. In the meantime I'm over there going to meetings and pushing and planning and trying to get this thing going, because just before that I had put together several shows at Cal State Long Beach, two years in a row, of which the last one I had live TV reception with KCET.

JR: Wow.

GL: And I didn't even have my B.A. then. Now, I did all kinds of stuff like that because I didn't know what I could do and could not do. I just did it. And later, when I went to Irvine and got my MFA, I began to do very definite things, like forming Los Four for me was a definite political move to represent Chicano culture. That's what that group meant to me. And these guys went along with it, because they were just, at that point, somewhat novices to the Chicano movement. Beto, he went along. He wasn't interested in any of these dynamics. He was also reading at that time a lot of Russian authors that were into a lot of mystical stuff, a lot of things that finally caused some difficulties for him later on, I think. But Frank and Carlos began to, at that point when I first met them, were doing these little side jobs as artists. And they had connections here and there that were giving them these little jobs and so forth. I was married with babies and stuff like this. Ontonio had been born by that time, by '73, and so I was a kind of middle-class man doing this movement stuff, and with professional credentials because I was an administrator, like I said, at that point. And it was a job.

But the group, going back to the group. At that time I think I was the steam-engine, at the beginning. As the group began, and we got success as a group, then the group became its own. And since I was not interested in controlling the group. . . . At least, not like a dictator, but I was interested in controlling the group in terms of the direction. But I wanted to do it in a democratic way, which meant, "Go along with me and everything will be okay." [laughter] Okay? "But if you don't. . . ."

JR: A benevolent dictator, right? [laughing]

GL: Well, not a dictator. I always wanted a group decision.

JR: So long as it was. . . .

GL: It's a contradiction because, well. . . .

JR: So long as they conformed to your decis[ion] . . . or vision?

GL: It has to do with, "I'm going to make sure we have a collective here, but I'm going to fight very hard for my point of view and I'd better get some of it. I'd better get some of my. . . ."

JR: Well, that's part of the collectivity, right?

GL: It's part of the collective and I thought it was fair, but at the time they just thought I was being pushy.

JR: Ah, this is really interesting.

GL: Yeah? Well, that's what happened, I think.

JR: Well, I mean, I think it's interesting because I've heard and read a lot about Los Four and, in terms of Chicano art history, Los Four occupies a real fundamental position. And in some ways it's like the genesis of it. But you never hear so much about the interactions among people like Los Four, and then when Judithe Hernandez gets introduced to the collective, so, I mean, I want to encourage more of. . . . You know, anything that you want to share I think would be really helpful.

GL: Well, I think it's all above board. I think all of that is above board, because I think that our group dynamics were not so different than the times. They were tumultuous, they were very difficult, there was a lot of struggling among each other to try to not only find answers for ourselves, but to use the other person as a sounding board. Each one of us, emotionally, dealt with it differently. Me, I was after a cause. I had a banner, I was waving a banner, leading the march. Now some of these guys were coming along, some of them I have to keep dragging bodies, but Judithe wanted to be part of the group, and we had a meeting—and this is part of the art history that I think was eventually distorted in people's minds—is that we had a meeting about Judithe. And Judithe understands it to this day different than what happened, although she wasn't there. Okay? Carlos was voting against Judithe, although Judithe was his friend that he met at Otis and that's how we got to know Judithe.

JR: I see.

GL: Okay? But he didn't like Judithe in the group because she wasn't politicized enough. She was too conservative. Although we all knew she was a good artist. There was no doubt about her capability. I wanted her because, politically, we needed females. We were getting attacked—like in *Con Safos*; I had already had this experience. And I was trying to gender-free our group, but it wasn't the times, it wasn't the times. And so we all had our different. . . . And I don't know what Frank thought or Beto think. I don't remember. But I do remember that Carlos got credit for bringing Judithe in because he knew her, not because of the votes.

JR: I see.

GL: See? And so there was still a problem with Judy being in/out, but we finally got called to do some exhibits, and she joined the group by virtue of just being a nominee. And we all respected her artwork enough, so she became part of the group. And she was tough. There was nobody pushing Judithe around. I don't think. . . . She may have felt like she was going with four guys and so forth. The way we saw it is that it's every man for himself, and when you're arguing don't be pulling your petticoats and telling us that you got a petticoat on. Get into the discussion. If it's gender-free, don't keep bringing up the fact that you're a woman. Just get. . . . We're not talking about that. We're talking about political ideologies or aesthetic direction or whatever. It didn't pertain, so. . . .

JR: So she held her own then, under those . . . in that dynamic.

GL: I think she had more power than she understood. Now, remember, political power, group power, is all based on impressions. And the influence of a group, it's very transitory. There was times when I had that group going exactly where I wanted to, and there was times when it got away from me and was doing other kind of stuff that I didn't think was important. That's the nature of the beast.

JR: How did the group coalesce around the LACMA exhibit? And then how did that show change the dynamic of the group, if at all?

GL: It did. What happened originally is that I went to Hal Glicksman, who was the director of the art gallery at U.C. Irvine where I was getting my MFA, and he had liked my reception because my wife, Marty, had made these beans and this atóle de fressa and all this stuff. Anyway, I was encouraged to hit him up to do a show. So I went in and I talked to him and I said, "Look," I said, "I know all these Chicano artists that we could do a pretty neat show." And he says, "Well, put it together and let's see what we've got." So I got. . . . I wanted "One Dozen Tortillas." That was my original concept. Again, I was using any food motif, anything that had a cultural thing, and attaching it to whatever we were doing so it gave it those boundaries of culture. And so we got the show at Irvine going. We talked about doing a graffiti piece. And we did these big nine-foot by thirty-two-foot panel in the gallery with spray cans. And in one afternoon we did this thing that Frank finally wiped out in the back of his. . . . He just threw it in the back of his barn back there, old garage, and it was all destroyed, all that stuff. But what it did—and this is how the group dynamics began to change—is that the things that I had been pushing for began to happen. The graffiti mural, the altars that I was doing, all these manifestations of cultural products.

JR: The car that you brought in.

GL: All that stuff was being introduced, and these guys were going along with it. Even though Frank, in private, would say, "Ah, you Mexicans, you can't get it together . . ."

JR: [laughs]

GL: . . . which was . . .

JR: So Frank.

GL: . . . another aspect of our group. See, every member of our group was a typical Chicano of one of the many archetypes that we have. We have the Mexican-American [bandito, vendito] gringo.

JR: It sounds like a Luis Valdez play.

GL: Exactly. Because we all look . . . we all see this in our cultural milieu. It's all there. And so Frank and Beto, Carlos and I all represented. . . . We all have our constituencies in the barrio. Me, I represent the low-rider, cholo stuff. Beto represents the Mexican upright, very proper. And he was always very polite and very. . . . There's always about Beto . . . he always has this very strong social form in the front. You know, it's very Mexican, and the way you behave, you don't talk. All these forms that are very Mexican. Frank Romero is Mexican-American. And then Carlos became another constituency all together. Not only being gay but bright, bookish, nerdish. Smart guy. Always reading a little book. Me and Marty took him out to the desert one time, because I love the desert, and I was always telling him to come out there. And I used to take rides by myself and travel anza Borrego, and I used [go—Ed.] to Death Valley. Beto and his wife, Olivia, and Marty and I, before we even got married, used to go out to the desert. We went one time out there and had a great time, so we were doing those kind of things. We took Carlos out there one time. I took him way out there, way past San Bernardino. He wouldn't get out of the car, because he didn't want any bugs on him and he didn't want to get his feet sandy or something. I don't know. But he stayed in the car reading. Hot as it was, he stayed in there reading in the back seat. And he wouldn't come out. And he always had these little books in case so he wouldn't get bored somewhere. And so Marty and I went hopping around. I said, "Well, let's go back. This guy's not going to get out of the car, so let's just forget about it and go back home." And we did.

But we all had our character. And I think what was important of all of that, in the transformation, is that once we had the Los Four show at Irvine, the people at LACMA were looking around, because the blacks had had a show previously. The year before—I think it was '72, maybe—they had had a big show about blacks with David Hammons, John Otterbridge. All those guys were shown. Ed Burrell, I think might have been in that group, too. So the county had to do something for the Mexicans, for the Chicanos. But they looked around and they didn't see nothing but the same old revolutionary tired old neo-thirties mural stuff that was going on, done poorly in many instances, crudely, not up to master standards. So they looked at that stuff, and they said, "Well, this is all kind of high-schoolish kind of work." And then all this blood and guts and history that was very depressing, ultimately, about our being conquered and all that stuff. Well, they didn't find that appealing for a show. The blacks were more red, white and blue-oriented. Blacks already had a relationship with whites, and even though they were maybe in different teams, they still had an affinity to each other because blacks are, basically, a white culture that's been darkened up a little bit. The matrix of black culture is white culture. I don't care what they say. I don't care how much they want to be Africans, you tell the Arabs that Africa belongs to the Negroid and they'll give you a different point of view.

JR: I see.

GL: And I think that in this country we're being silly to think that American blacks. . . . And [Harry—Ed.] Belafonte and Malcolm X discovered those people over there had nothing to do with American blacks in culture. These blacks over here are gringos. They're just as racist, they're just as hard, they're just as motivated by money—Superfly and all those kind of fantasies—that white people are. They're black whites. Now here comes Chicano culture that has a different base, okay? A different base. So Anglos, they kind of say, "That's exotic," because it's not something they've traditionally been. . . . Now, it's different. We're talking at a different place now, but this struggle of cultures all over the world, I wish sometimes that we would have had an anthropology department in 1400—*anywhere*, an anthropology department!—and it would have saved a lot of suffering by millions of people. But this integration of cultures and so forth is what was the job of Los Four, it was the job that I had with the group internally, with Los Four, going back to our internal structure, of having to deal with these different peoples and pushing for them to each, in his own way, present those Mexican-American ideas, the over-conservative, these neo-Mexican ideas (in terms of Robert de la Rocha). But when the cameras went on. . . . And going back to your original question of what happened? How did these things transform us? That is that, once we got some response from the Irvine show, and when LACMA came over and picked up our show based on. . . . They had wanted to. . . . They had looked at Carlos, individually, but one Mexican's not enough. They had a group show for the blacks, and they needed a group show for the Chicanos, right? So here we were,

a package all ready to go. So they invited us over to LACMA to go and check out what was possible. And we put that show up, I don't know, it took us a couple weeks altogether with a lot of work, and how it changed us is that, all of a sudden, people were looking at us and looking at us as something a little different. Now this is before the fame stuff really happened, but we were already beginning to get people respecting us, and all the accolades and all that fame brings you were beginning to emerge from the LACMA show—right away. And for the success of the Los Four show at LACMA, which also had some internal battles of us trying to get something a little more expanded, because when we first got there, they were going to give us a five-hundred dollar budget and two little rooms in the back. And in this lobby in front of us, was this Anglo artist—very well known artist, very big-time artist—and he had a five-thousand dollar budget for just him. So we got all incensed and we told Ed Moreno and Monroe Price, who was the dean at the UCLA law school. . . .

JR: Oh, wow.

GL: He was a friend of Carlos's. Remember he used to schmooze real good with all the Westside people—and did it good. I mean, he was a master at that. He was good. Taught me how to be relaxed with those people. And then the curator was very cold to us and very. . . . I think we had problems with her at the beginning. It was Jane Livingston. And so what affected the group is all of a sudden we were brought into the spotlight. And that singularly affected us, because all of a sudden we were important. All of a sudden we were put on a pedestal. Now remember, we're still poor, we still didn't have anything going on, we still weren't selling artwork, we were just all of a sudden brought out into the spotlight. And we're there with the light's glaring, and we're squinting and trying to see what the hell is going on, and talking about self-determination, and shouting all those slogans that were very common at the time, and so forth. And so it all moved pretty quick, and we were paraded around for some months thereafter, not only with invitations from the Oakland Museum of Art, but Ralph Storey's L.A., and you could probably check the records for all the TV things that we did, including the KCET benefit, where we did a live spray-can painting that they auctioned off and blah-blah-blah. I mean, it was quite a whirlwind. And we were given star status and we were anointed at that point, and it's had ramifications ever since. Carlos exploited it, Frank has exploited it, and Beto and I probably have done less to exploit it more than the others, because of who we are as people. Me a *pendejo* ["a fool," loosely translated—Ed.], and Beto going off into his religious seclusion.

And so that's what happened. I mean, there's more details, but we'd have to. . . . We had struggles, too, trying to deal with Judithe because, being a woman, she came in thinking that we were already sexist dogs, and so, without giving the group a real look. . . . Because she was a member. In my eyes, she was just another member, and she had to fight for her ideas like we did. We weren't going to, on the one hand, free all those gender habits that we all had at that point in time. We had them. There's a way that we all. . . . She had 'em. She probably had them more than we did. To us, gender was not an issue as much as it was to her, is my point. So therefore she magnified a lot of the stuff in her own head, which I didn't feel. I didn't feel that she was less than us. I didn't think that the fact that she didn't have a dick made her different in the group.

JR: I see.

GL: But *she* did. And to this day. . . . We had an interview not long ago and she was still. . . .

[Break in taping]

JR: Okay, this is Tape 3, Side A, interviewing Gilbert Lujan on November 13, 1997. All right. And, once again, I forgot where we left off.

GL: You were talking about the conflicts within the group.

JR: Right, right.

GL: And we were talking about how. . . . The group was [lopping] around. We got incorporated. We were getting a lot of attention. And all this affected the group in various ways. Beto became reclusive for twenty years. Carlos decided that he had had enough—eventually, I mean, after some time of struggling with all these things. He began to think about having a career in art, and at a given point his parents sold the house and gave him money to get started, and then he concentrated on being a painter and went and made his contacts and began to develop a business in painting. I had taken off to Fresno to go and save the guys up there. . . .

JR: [chuckles]

GL: . . . and pretty much kept on that evangelistic mode of trying to proselytize Chicano art. Frank Romero pretty much got involved with Nancy Romero. At that point, they became a couple and then they had a child and he went and did that kind of scene. At the same time, he was here in L.A., and he also began to develop a studio and doing the art thing. Me, I went to Fresno to try and organize the artists up there and so, whereas everybody was already not doing this *movimiento* thing, as of 1976 I went up to Fresno to be a Chicano studies teacher [at

Fresno City College—Ed.].

These guys felt that I had abandoned them, because, again, I was really the pile driver behind a lot of this stuff, behind the scenes, and when I wasn't there, the whole thing had a whole different character. And so Carlos was always competing for being in charge. Me, I didn't mind because I don't really want to be in charge. Never really wanted to, but I would fight for keeping him honest. So that was how our little dynamics would take place. I was watching and controlling his Marxist leanings, and he became a Trotskyite or something, I don't know. He really got radically involved in Marxism, became a card-carrier, went to Cuba, went to China because of them. And he got the opportunity to go to these places because he became a member of the Communist Party. Me, he kept. . . . I was still a lumpkin. I mean, I was sympathetic but I was not important, because, like [with—Ed.] all these groups, you're either in or you're not. And if you're not, you're some name, whatever they are.

And so I went on to stay in Fresno, California, and raise Antonio and had another child in 1977, a year later, named Risa, the little girl. I had two previous girls before, in the sixties—'66 and '69. And those are the two older. . . . But they had different mothers and they weren't part of my family structure at that point.

JR: I'm kind of interested about how you introduced your vision for sort of proselytizing a Chicano arts movement into a Chicano studies program. How did the two jell?

GL: What I think it. . . . Looking back at it, what it did is it helped me, even again, like Carlos had helped me intellectually to be a little more clear and a little bit better . . . more responsive to the real issues instead of just being very shallow and politically saying, "Freedom," and these . . .

JR: "La Raza."

GL: . . . yeah, "Viva la Raza." But Chicano studies *really* gave me the depth. Because what it had me do, as a Chicano studies teacher, which I started in '73, I think, at Rio Hondo—I started teaching there. What it really did is it helped me. . . . Every semester I had to explain to people socially, politically, and anthropologically, and through various academic means, what was going on with Raza. Who were we? What were we doing? Then there was a section that I introduced into the curriculum that wasn't there before, which was basically social-political curriculum. I expanded and included health, I included the arts, I included anthropology, and I also introduced the idea of indigenous contributions. These were not aspects that were part of this class. And they even took away a history class from me because I was doing all this stuff, and even the Chicano studies teachers there—"pinche vendido cabrones" [stupid fuckin' sellouts, loosely translated—Ed.]—didn't back me up because they thought that they were jeopardizing their position by agreeing with me that we should tell our own history.

JR: Wow.

GL: But not as an attitude like what the rancher said that, "We don't need to own Mexicans. We just rent them." That mentality of all my colleagues there, except for a few guys like Vanachio Gavona. . . . He was a fighter, man, and he knew. . . . He was very conservative, he was very Catholic, and ultimately, politically, he was too conservative for me—ultimately—but still he was probably my best ally and I got along with him very good, but he was tenacious and did the work of ten men. And he was in everything. And people resented the fact that he did so much, so they used to hate him. That was the kind of situation that was in Fresno: Rural, don't want to change, very backwards kind of thinking. Here comes a city slicker from L.A., moving a hundred miles an hour, freaked everybody out.

JR: But in a way, it was coming back home for you.

GL: Hmm?

JR: In a way it was like coming back home.

GL: Yeah. And they had told me. Other people that were very interested in social change, told me, "Well, slow down. These guys can't handle all this stuff." And, sure enough, they undermined everything I did. Because colonized people, slaves, they don't really want to upset the master. So when you start talking about, you know, like the house nigger talking to the field nigger, you got different perspectives here.

JR: Right.

GL: And I was out there from the field saying, "Well, hey, I ain't going along with what your master says no more. I ain't interested in what your master says." And this was epitomized by some of the dialogue we had with Los Four members. Some said, "Hey, no, the gringo way is the only way." And I'm saying, "Hey, forget the gringo. Let's develop our own thought, our own thinking." And so Chicano studies gave me the depth, gave me the information, gave me the repetitive kinds of sequence that allowed me to, over and over and over again, articulate, rearticulate, and rearticulate these social things that were going on—the social transitions that we

were undergoing, all of us.

JR: Sounds like there was a lot of work that you had to do, a lot of study that you had to do on your own.

GL: Yes, I did.

JR: But were there people—colleagues or other people—kind of generating Chicano studies at the time who you felt like were your allies who you were collaborating with?

GL: Yes. Oh, yeah, yeah. In general, we were all collaborating. In practice, most of them were afraid for their jobs. What I did was total disregard for self-interest. What I did there was I took chances out of. . . . So I was a Joan of Arc, in a sense, because my cause blinded me to my own safe-keeping. And some kids told one of my students one time that this new teacher—me—was saying a lot of shit they didn't want to hear and that I'd better watch out. So I got [to] my house one time—it was four o'clock in the morning—and we heard these little pebbles and rocks hitting our bedroom window, right? Some guy in a jeep had come onto our lawn and was spinning his tires in the dirt, kicking up all this dirt on our window, as a way of telling me that I'd better watch out. It was KKK tactics, right? They did this a couple of times.

JR: And these are Chicanos that are doing that?

GL: No, these were gringos. Because I looked outside and I saw the jeep. I didn't get a number and I couldn't run out there at that point and start my car and catch up with him. But I saw the guy. He was a gavachito. And they did it twice to me. Right? Trying to intimidate me to tell me to stop telling Chicanos there about the kinds of things that we were discussing in class. And these were very legitimate subjects. I was not Angela Davis. But that's what they saw. They saw a political radical, because I was telling these people that they have a culture and that they could manifest it and they have to make it grow and they have to examine it. And they had to introspect and change their character enough to get the kind of successes that they wanted to and not just sit back there and watch the corn grow. My training. . . ?

JR: Right.

GL: I was in a contradiction. I was telling them, "Get up and move," when I really believe that, "Hey, let it all flow and everything will be all right." But when I looked at the political reality of things, we had been Zen monks too long. We had been kicking by the river, and to get these guys to do anything took. . . . If I wanted a simple art show, I had to put in 260 percent effort on it to make up for the lethargy, the complacency, the inactivity, the poor habits, the slave mentality of not taking the responsibility for developing your own institutions, your own activities. They all wanted to be told what to do. They all wanted to be like all their slave training had been is to be given guidance and being told what to do. And if they didn't like it, they would just buck. They would just not play. That was the only response they knew. So what I was attempting to do was get them to see that, even if they disagreed, that if they stuck together and they held in and made joint decisions, and if they had a bad decision that they could change it. It was big lessons to learn from people that have never done this before, that had looked at cosmetology as maybe the highest profession they could attain. That or the fields. And also having the experience of being told by one parent that I was ruining their kid because he wanted to become a lawyer.

JR: What?!

GL: Yeah. And other fathers that didn't want their daughters to go there because they'd get pregnant in college and that they should stay home. And it's that "stand and deliver." [referring to the film *Stand and Deliver* based on math teacher Jaime Escalante's teaching career—Ed.]. I mean, the examples are there. Nothing different.

JR: Did you end up training any young artists while you were there, as well?

GL: Who knows? I made an effort to teach people about art. But the kind of resistance that you find in these small communities is based on ignorance. I told this one guy, Mario Obledo, who was going—what was his name? Obledo?—who was going out for. . . he was trying to be a governor in this state back in those days in the early seventies. He was running for governor. And I told him that the kids there had a low information base, and he looked at me like I had insulted him. And he thought I was being condescending. I was being factual. I had to deal with students that came in there that knew very little of the twentieth century. Believe it or not.

JR: Um-hmm.

GL: And I had to deal with kids that were very backwards with regards to information about the arts, information about things that I had taken for granted in the city. And so it was a tremendous lesson for me. How it affected Los Four, to kind of jump back to that, is that Los Four continued to operate here in the city but under the control of Carlos and Frank, for the most part. And then we would all quit. Everybody would quit at one given point or another. We've all had these wonderful, beautiful letters of resignation with drawings and all that stuff.

JR: [laughs]

GL: But the dynamics in the group was very hot and heavy, because the emotions and the things that were at stake at that time were very difficult for all of us. Some of us were more righteous than others, and I may have been righteous. I'm not really sure any more; I can't tell you how righteous I may have been, but I probably was. I probably was a pain in the ass because I believe so much in something larger than ourselves.

But trying to convince everybody, I had different kinds of results. Some people understood what I was saying very easily and not offended and did not take what I said in a hostile way. Other people recognized what I said as being totally anti-American and undermining and cholo romanticizing. So I found out that people, when they hear you, really reflect what they understand and know. They can only reflect in their little mirror what they can understand of what you're saying. And so, as a Chicano studies teacher, I endeavored. . . . And, like I said earlier, my real effort in all of these efforts was to do something better for my community at large. To do something in the arts that was a building factor, not a victimization pattern. I didn't think that would help us at all. And I also had the idea that if we were to build Chicano art in the area of visions for what we should attain to—whatever that is—and I also found that what we wanted to attain was very diverse in opinion. Some had political objectives, other people had cultural ones (like myself), other people had very practical things to solve—like a better job, security maybe, medical benefits. So it varied with everybody. And this is what Chicano studies helped me understand, is that it's not as narrow and small of an idea that we wanted social change *only* in political terms or *only* in education, or *only* in one area. We were all over the place in terms of considering what we should do about this and that. So it was very diverse and very big.

JR: Yeah. Can I jump out for a second . . .

GL: Sure. Oh, yeah.

JR: . . . and ask you how yourself and how Los Four as a group interacted or participated with other art groups that were forming at the time? In other centros that were sort of coming to life at the time?

GL: I was connected with all the centros, because I was the most metiche of the group. I was the connection to the California Chicano political movement. Beto didn't get involved in those things. Frank, forget it. And Carlos was beginning to do it, but the guys up north didn't like Carlos because Carlos had all these little opinions. And they had them in their group, too, but Carlos being an outsider they held it against him more, I think, and unfairly. They didn't really get to know him because of it. But there was a lot of hostility in the way people were presenting ideas and sides and all that stuff so. . . . I'm losing track of where I was going with this but. . . .

JR: Say, like. . . .

GL: Oh, oh, oh! Okay, the California political groups and centros and all that, I was the one that was connected to all that. They were people that were my buddies and so forth. Okay? I also interacted with groups like ASCO, but each one of us reacted differently, okay? I was happy to interact with ASCO. I wanted to be [ally] sister organizations with ASCO. I wanted to see us get together, because I thought it would be politically advantageous for us to be unified in some way, even if we had different aesthetic contents, we had different aesthetic directions, but still we could be buddies, right? Now in the group, like Carlos and Gronk—being gay—had issues. They had what I think are. . . . Maybe it's just a lot of catty little things that were going on between them, which was a personal thing. Whereas Patssi [Valdez—Ed.] had her own problems and was probably just self-absorbed within her own issues and probably saw it all as "men," whatever that is. She had a hard life, too, in her situation. And then Willie [Herrón—Ed.]. I remember one time I met him, he didn't even know what my name was. And this is years after we had known each other as groups. And then I know there was animosity because there was a lot of criticism of Los Four, because any time you get shot up on that pedestal, you become a target for the snipers. And you become a target for any number of envious reasons. People have envy. Me, I don't have that in my heart. I wanted everybody to be together; I wanted one big happy family. Of course, I never got my wish. I mean, everybody has different personalities. I try to make amends with other artists without mentioning all these names and making it gossip. I wanted different groups that didn't get along with us or so forth, to get along and so I kept making efforts at getting people together with varying successes. Sometimes it would work; sometimes it wouldn't. Sometimes people told me, "Listen, don't try to get these guys together. It's not going to work. You're wasting your time." And it was true. They weren't going to be friends. But I was always driven towards getting people together, trying to make, if not a unified voice that we all agreed, at least one voice. And that was what I was after. A voice that was singularly the common ground between all of us. We have this need; we have this kind of character to us.

JR: Which was what?

GL: Well, we were Chicanos. We were bilingual for the most part, not everybody. And we shared a culture. Whether you were cholo, gay, nerd, middle class. Whatever we are, of all the archetypes that we have in our community, we needed to at least be together. Because I saw us successfully. . . . Jews fight, Blacks fight, Anglos

fight among themselves. I mean, they'll kill each other. But then, at a given point, they work together. We've had a harder time at it because we expect more from ourselves. We make it much more difficult. The kind of unification that we want is almost impossible. We want us to all be one and not appreciate our differences . . .

JR: Yeah.

GL: . . . and so we just work on the differences and never get together.

JR: I see.

GL: In the long-run, that's been the experience.

JR: That's frustrating.

GL: It's frustrating as hell. I also learned very early in this movement that there's no thanks for this. You're going to get kicked in the face, they're going to throw mud in your face, people are not going to . . . they're going to misinterpret what you say. And you have no control over any of this stuff.

JR: What about the centros? How did you interact with, say, Mechicano or Self Help [Graphics—Ed.]?

GL: Always good. Always good, because I was for all that stuff. The contradiction was that they all abused us. All of those centros abused artists.

JR: How's that?

GL: Because they would not pay us. They would keep a lot of the money for administrative things, and the artists wound up getting very little out of it. I did projects for *dirt cheap*, while the centros got administrative moneys and got funding for all this stuff. And who knows where the money went. But I was administratively astute enough to know that there was things going on, but I never challenged them because I'm not going to challenge a centro. See, my thinking is, "Hey, I'm with you guys and we're one, and we're a family and so forth." And they say, "Sure, man," and exploiting me and my efforts and using our artwork and so forth. Like in one place, I lent my art, and before they say, "Oh, yeah, we love you. You're Mr. Magu," and all that stuff. And then they wouldn't return my artwork, because they didn't think that I was worth returning artwork. I mean, at least, they didn't return my artwork. I had to go and get it. And this is an example. And then pay and so forth. You know, they would be real accommodating before the show, but once the show took place, you were lucky to get your artwork back. They didn't care anymore. They dropped it. And so, in that way, there were abuses taking place. But where you find a lot of victim thinking, you're going to find a lot of reactionary kind of exploitation taking place. So the thinking in many instances is that, "I'm oppressed, I'm going to fuck over this person because they're not politically correct, so, therefore, they should be punished by this behavior. They should be reprimanded and be towed into line according to the way I think it should happen." Now, that was the story-line. Now, you can put it in any words you want, but these were attitudes that were very strong and that caused a lot of problems.

JR: How about exchanges with groups and centros up north?

GL: Well, I was the one. See, I was the link. Not only for Los Four but for the whole Southern California thing at that time. Now, remember, at that time there wasn't a lot of people doing what we called *movimiento* work.

JR: You mean up north? Or just in general?

GL: Just in general. Up north, you had the Royal Chicano Air Force, Casa Hispana, which is out of San Francisco. And so I knew all these guys. We had the Royal Chicano Navy in Fresno where there's no water.

JR: [laughs]

GL: We had the Tortuga Patrol out of Hollister-Gilroy [and, in] San Juan Battista, that area. Then we had the Casa Hispana and Galeria de la Raza in the Mission district. We had Sacramento, The Royal Chicano Air Force. And so there was all these groups around that I identified with and I loved and I was a fan of. And I saw some of the things that they did that were not cool, but I overlooked them because they were my heroes. And I would always. . . . And if people really know who I am, I subjugate myself to those groups, right or wrong. Again, that's my team spirit. That's my team thinking. I want to be part of them no matter what mistakes they've made or what they've done in terms of abuse. It didn't matter, you know. Being part of all that was more important to me than the differences.

JR: Did you feel like there was a difference in vision up north as there was down south?

GL: Yes. And also more self-absorbed. Up north they know very little about what happened down here. I think.

Because I've had people come back with interviews that have interviewed—or interested in interviewing me—and I send them to these people so they can talk about what I've done or what they. . . . They didn't even know what I've done over there. And they *knew* me. Some guys say, "Well, you're really respected up there," but I'm not sure for what. I don't know. It's just something you'd probably have to find out from people up there, but. . . . And then there's different opinions. But the thinking and the differences in the north and the south were not so different from turf wars and gang mentality that we have as social creatures. Not just Chicanos. You're from Echo Park or El Sereno. Automatically, you're already thinking that you're this club and that club.

JR: Right.

GL: And so north and south automatically. . . . Which I never liked the division. I always thought north and south was California, not north and south California. But everybody had different opinions and. . . .

JR: I guess I'm just curious about the kinds of interactions that took place, if they did take place, between groups and centros up north with groups and centros in L.A. and Santa Barbara and San Diego and stuff like that.

GL: We did through the California Arts Council. The California Arts Council. . . .

JR: The Concilio?

GL: Yeah. No, the Concilio de Arte Popular was a group that we formed to make a north and a south. And I was listening to this guy, Victor Zamudio Taylor, the other day and he attributed Carlos to forming this groups, and Carlos was *never* involved in that, except at the very end, and he had a very kind of . . . like, he was just there at this meeting, but that was all. These guys did not care for Carlos, for whatever reasons they had. And I defended Carlos because he was a Los Four member, but at the same time there was times where I wasn't sure what I could defend, because he had political. . . . He went from not having any political ideas to very strong ones, and so he turned some people off. Although the same characters, like Carlos, existed in their groups, and they allowed that guy to be that way but they didn't allow Carlos, which I always felt was unfair. Now, all this means is that, in terms of how we deal with other groups and what was going on, is that Frank and Beto were not involved. Carlos tried to be involved and so forth and actually became the editor with William Bejerano, and Carlos became the editor of *Chisme Arte* magazine, which was developed, and they did get involved that way. And then politics being what it was, because this magazine was started up north, funded by the California Arts Council. . . .

JR: I see.

GL: It started up north, but the guy that was supposed to do it just took the money and never did anything. And so then they gave it to Carlos and Bejerano to do something with it. And they did a great job. If you've ever seen them, they did a better job than anybody else. Better than *Con Safos*.

JR: Do you think that served as a pretty effective forum for communication between the groups?

GL: Oh, yes! I thought so. Oh, yeah! They produced good art. You know, John Valadez was represented in there and so forth. And I think they did a good job, but it got taken away from them because of a lot of political, stupid things that happened with these groups again, where people say, "Well, Carlos is too Left," and Bejerano. . . . They were doing this and they weren't doing that, and it was real picky, although *they* never did anything.

JR: Right.

GL: I think it was unfair some of the criticism they were given.

JR: Can you give me an idea of how the California Arts Council came to support an organization like the Concilio? Or what the genealogy was in some way?

GL: Yes. Because what happened is that as the Concilio de. . . ." Bueno. The California Arts Council—which is the way to say it in half Spanish and half English, there—is that they were looking to fund groups such as this. They were funding Black groups like crazy. We were always behind, and the Native Americans were even behind us in funding. We were like half percent, one quarter percent funding, and Blacks were cleaning up. They were really doing much better than us in funding. They were getting most of the funding. And so we saw that people were being funded, so we went in our own little shy way. . . . We were never as aggressive as other groups. We never mau-maued people like they did. Some people tried to do those tactics, but it didn't work for us. Gringos were not afraid of us. We could go up there and beat our chests and so forth and they'd get a little alarmed. But when Blacks did it, they did something about it. They really responded. That was the political scenario in those days. There was White liberals that were trying to be benevolent and be inclusive and help out and so forth, and that's how some of the funding happened. There was also a guy by the name of [_____—Ed.] Serna up there, who's now the mayor of Sacramento, who had political links and was very helpful to the Royal Chicano Air Force. The

Royal Chicano Air Force was very heavily linked with Cesar Chavez and was always doing posters and those kind of things. So this linkage was very solid and real, even for the differences that they had among themselves, which always exist somehow. So the inception of this funding came from having us get people [to—Ed.] become members of the California Arts Council, like Juan Carillo. And Juan Carillo's one. . . .

[Break in taping]

JR: All right. This is Tape 3, Side B, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on November 13.

GL: So in terms of names, José Montoya, Estéban Villa, Ricardo [Favella], Juaniche Orozco, Rudy Cuellar, Louie the Foot, Mad Max. All these guys from the Royal Chicano Air Force, including Tere [Romo], Irma Barbosa, and I'm sorry I don't remember all the people, because there were so many that were involved with that clique of the Royal Chicano Air Force, and they did *tremendous* things. I always wanted to be part of it. They were always. . . . Although I got along good with them and they were always nice to me, whatever their opinion was of me—I don't know—except that they treated me pretty good. I was a fan of theirs. I mean, I really. . . . I never tried to present any threat to them. Or anything like that, but they didn't really appreciate Los Four, in my opinion, because they wanted to be the center of the universe for Chicano art. And this was told to me by one of the members. Because me, I'm not into that kind of competition. I didn't see it that way. I just figured that Los Four was one of the family members of this other extension of Los Four called The Royal Chicano Air Force—or The Royal Chicano Navy, the Tortuga Patrol. I saw it as united, family-wise and so forth.

Which way to go with it? [in terms of what topic to discuss next—Ed.] There was a lot of turmoil. I think that Los Four became a target by Chicano groups because we had this horrible envy thing. Other people. . . . And some people were kissing our butts. So that was the response. Some people would give us an accolade; some people would just say, "Ah, those guys. They're vendidos [sellouts—Ed.]" Why? Because they were successful. That was it. So sometimes I think the opinions were not founded on anything rational. It was just petty concerns and so forth.

JR: So how does Los Four dissolve?

GL: We dissolved over and over again, because the kinds of pressures that were brought to bear were to have us operate as a corporation and do some decision-making and some thinking about what we were building that had to do with the collective, see?

JR: Um-hmm.

GL: And so we had individuals in the group that wanted—for their own purposes—the group to go where they wanted it to go and it didn't serve the group. It served them. So those were some of the dissolving factors. The other dissolving factor was that I took off to Fresno. Being one of those glue factors and being the kind of person I was. . . . I don't how to. . . . I don't want to. . . . I don't want to sound self-serving here, but it had to do with the fact that I had this vision and I was very stubborn about it, very tenacious. It didn't have nothing to do with my benefit. I wanted to benefit the group. And one of things where I screwed up so many times in my lifetime is that, at the expense of my family, I've given my time to something else and I wound up pissing in the ocean, really not having the kind of effect that I could have had I done what Luis Valdez did—you know, just concentrate here, just stick to this. [tapping canvas—Ed.] I was out there trying to save these guys in Fresno, and then I was pissed off at the guys from Los Four because they weren't acting as this collective, and expecting too much. I was expecting too much.

JR: So did that influence your decision to go up to Fresno and take that job teaching Chicano studies? I mean, that things were. . . .

GL: What really did it for me was not so much the Los Four group. [It—Ed.] was the fact that I had a kid and I had an opportunity to get a full-time job with benefits. So, on a personal basis, I was much more concerned about my family and taking care of them. And then I was tired of hassling with Carlos, because Carlos was really into control more than some of us. Frank, the kind of control he would do is he'd listen and so forth. He'd do what he liked, and if he didn't like it he wouldn't participate. So his was kind of like a benign resistance. It wasn't really serious. And Beto was just not a real. . . . He would have his own ideas. Beto always had his own ideas. He was independent, and he would barely. . . . But he would go along with a lot. I mean, he wasn't going to fuss with details like Carlos and I would. Carlos and I both are Libras, and so we had more of tendency to be more argumentative—both of us—more pushy, more egotistical, I think.

But everybody probably expressed their egotistical ways differently. By withdrawing like Beto did or like Frank who just would pooh-pooh everything. It's just that, I don't know, nobody was better than the other. Nobody made more mistakes than the other. We all quit and it was just that we were trying to respond to these pressures that, once Los Four took hold, became great pressures because we were being asked to do a lot of things. And for free. Me, always willing to do it. Carlos was much more practical—and Frank. They said, "Well,

let's see if we can get some money from it." That's where I would drop out of the conversation and keep quiet, because these guys were much better at collecting monies than I did. And I had no interest in collecting money. I'd soon relinquish that to anybody. And that's my character. Although they . . . because Frank and Carlos, I knew loved me and wanted me to do better, they always used to put me down because I was so dumb about money. I was dumb about money because I had no ambition for it. And in that way it's dumb. It's not a practical thing in this world. You need to have self-interest. I know that but. . . . So my contradictions or my truth is that I am ambitious but I'm ambitious for something larger. My personal life is probably . . . could be a lot better if it wasn't that I don't have that self-concern that I should, and my family has suffered for it. That I regret. That I regret. I should have been more interested in the welfare of my family. But that's another story.

JR: Yeah, those are tough decisions to make when you're in the heat of a movement and you have a passionate vision about things that you can accomplish. I would imagine that. . . . I've heard it before, I think, in different ways.

GL: Yeah. It's dumb. I think about it now, and if I had a chance to do it over, I think I would change some things. I would not be so adamant about trying to save people that don't give a shit about you, or even that you could pour your guts out and they don't really care because they're not interested in what you're attempting to do. And that's fair. I mean, everybody's got different agendas on this earth. It's part of being a young, naive person like I was that I didn't see those things. I didn't even care about them. I didn't really care about things. Nobody had to. . . . I personally do not like to get awards and stuff like that. And so, guess what? I don't get 'em. I don't get 'em. Because they don't mean nothing to me. A piece of paper saying that I've been a good boy. I *know* what I've done. And I know what efforts I've made, and they've been altruistic for the most part. But that's for me. That's a personal thing. I feel good that I've done so much things like that, but counting them up and trying to save them like blue chip stamps is not a reality. Where am I going with all my altruistic efforts? Who is going to honor them? Who's even going to pay attention to 'em? Very few people, if any. They're not redeemable.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And I knew that coming into this thing. I knew very early in this thing that this was a thankless job to try to do something larger than an individual. Cesar Chavez makes nice speeches about giving up your life for humankind and all that, and that's all noble, but you get a lot of criticism from your family for it. I have. I mean, I keep saying I'm a pendejo because I think that in society I'm expected to, as an educated man, make a lot of money and that kind of stuff. And it doesn't have much interest. I really try to get this hard-on for money, and it doesn't happen.

JR: [laughs]

GL: I can't. I used to want Carlos to understand that, but he never really did. Because, see, I think our ego makes us look at the world the way we see it, and we want everybody else to kind of share that, and since Carlos made so much money, and he knew I was financially in trouble all the time, so he would try to get me going so that that wouldn't be the case. And in that way I knew he loved me and he cared for me like the brother I always wanted. I wanted always a brother that you could be in contention with but you knew he was still your buddy.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

GL: And I mean I hated him at times. I mean, we really were at ends, and there would be times I told him, "Hey, don't call me any more. Get out of my life. Forget you." But, ultimately, we were bonded together in so many ways. I mean, the guy just had a different path, that's all.

I was telling Elsa [Flores—Ed.] the other day that I do miss Carlos, because he really tried to do good for me, and he was also very mean in other ways to me, and that's what close relationships do. That's how you interpret close relationships. You know, you look at peoples' motives, and sometimes they. . . . He really wanted more [and] better things for me, and I was unable to accomplish them and be successful with money. But a lot of people tell me, "Magu, you should be making a lot more money than you do." I say, "Yeah, but I need a foreman and I need a manager for those things." One day it will come. And if it doesn't, hey.

JR: Yeah, like a dealer? In the art world, who plays that role?

GL: There's a number of roles. . . .

JR: A rep or something like that?

GL: You can have an agent.

JR: An agent.

GL: You can have an agent, and you can have a gallery agent. And you can have a manager. They're different roles. And so, in each one, you have a different kind of purview of what they do for you. A manager would probably manage your career.

JR: Right, right.

GL: An agent would just sell your work on a commission basis. And a gallery person would also do the same thing, in a gallery . . .

JR: Right.

GL: . . . where the agent's free to move around. That's how I understand these terms. Another thing I might mention real quickly, since we're on it, is that I have also, even though I'm not ambitious with money and don't have those needs. . . . I mean, I'm trying to get those kinds of things embedded in my head. I do read about art marketing and business. And I *have* read those things. And although I can't put it all into practice, I do know very well what I need to do—and how and all that. In a nutshell, I would say that that's another job. You're either an artist or a manager. I cannot be both. I've tried. I've been an administrator. I've been department chairman for La Raza studies in Fresno City College. And my work suffered at that time. I did lousy artwork. Or not much. Lousy, mostly. So you need to know that I feel that these are different functions, and whereas you can have an owner of a business, right, he makes a lot of money, but he produces nothing in himself, with his hands. And we say, "Wow, successful." Then we get an artist who produces everything that they do but, because of the world's situation, doesn't make a lot of money, and then he's got a different kind of value in society. And what I'm saying is that. . . . And I tell—this is an old story for me—I tell politicians, I say, "You don't paint murals and I don't run meetings." We each have a different job, and in the world we live in politicians control things. We don't. It's a fact of life. We do not spend our energy in manipulating events and people—they do. Consequently they have a different political situation and a different control factor and they have more money at their disposal to rip off which they do. And I say "rip off" because, in this country in particular, we have such a disproportionate way of distributing wealth in this country. And it's not based on merit. It's based on being devious and. . . . This is my opinion, of course, and this is probably why I'm not going to ever be very successful in business. I don't know how to exploit, and that's what you need to know to be a good business person.

JR: So was that the kind of exposure to that world or sort of involvement in that kind of administrative or bureaucratic stuff, is that what made you decide to concentrate . . . refocus your energies on art? Producing art?

GL: Probably more. . . .

JR: Was there a moment that. . . .

GL: Yes, I think what really did it is that all of sudden, in the eighties, when I came back after I'd quit from. . . . I quit Fresno. People thought I was fired and so forth. I tried to get out of there for two or three years. And I did all kinds of crazy things to get fired and I didn't get fired.

JR: [laughs]

GL: I mean, I don't want to put it on tape, but I really was not being very responsible at a given point there, being a little bit crazy and *not caring*, and being antagonistic to the system that had so many contradictions. I mean, we had faculty there [that—Ed.] would go to their jobs toasted on alcohol, right? [phone rings] And they would allow that, and were always getting on my case for making political efforts that was improving the community. So I just said, "Well, okay, if the world's going to be that crazy then I don't care what they say, I'm going to do these things." Which were not responsible things but. . . . [A woman interrupts the conversation, calling GL to the phone [It was his son—Ed.].]

JR: Yeah, we'll put it on pause.

[Session 2]

JR: Okay, this an interview with Gilbert Lujan for the Archives of American Art on November 17, and the interviewer is Jeff Rangel. Okay.

GL: One of the things that's important for me to say about the Los Four deal is that we all had a different character. Carlos and I, I think, were probably the most vociferous of the group. We were the ones that would deal with the political pressures that were brought to bear on the group. And what I would say is that even though, like when I first met Carlos, he didn't want to hear about politics, and when I used to have to defend him to other people that didn't know who he was, and me being a Libra, I really can't leave alone an injustice, if you get my meaning. That was what drew me into the whole Chicano thing in the first place, was this innate, this normal nature of mine to want harmony, balance, and justice. It's a Libra thing. And, in fairness, Almaraz never

was a politician in the electoral [*sic*] sense. He was always an artist who delved into politics. And I think that's fair. So he operated as an artist, but he dealt very seriously with political issues that eventually became Left wing and so forth. But, regardless, if you understand that Carlos knew how to. . . . He was very interested in history and he very well knew that . . . enough had a sense of history to know that there was positions and so forth that were very safe, and in the long run, they were going to hold up. He knew about these things. And he had other things that he would do, like keeping diaries and stuff. Because I think he really had—and we talked about it—he had a real strong interest in leaving something. We talked about [Unamuno], in particular, who had, I don't know, about thirty children or something because he wanted to last forever, and Carlos entertained this idea about living forever. And in these journals, he was hoping that he would put down all these stories. . . . And he reinvented things for that appearance, that look, that historical picture.

JR: Wow.

GL: He knew how to. . . . My guess is. . . . And it's a guess, because as he used to tell me about what he was doing with the journals and stuff, and then we would talk about other people like Oscar Wilde and stuff that used to write these things down. And to me, coming from a Zen background and not interested—you know, just not documenting anything. I mean, what did it matter? It was too vain for my taste. It was too full of self-importance. In my way of thinking it was, "Who cares what I did on Saturday morning and what I thought? Who would care?" That was my frame of mind. So we would discuss it, sometimes argue about it. And Carlos was a wonderful dinner guest, because he could make us laugh. I mean, he used to get us all going. And he would exaggerate for the effect, for the hyperbole. He would tell you a story—and I heard a lot of the stories over and over again because I knew him for some time period—and he would change them, just to make the effect.

JR: Yeah.

GL: Well, that's the skill of a storyteller, and I think it's fair. I also say it's fair that, in his political searching, in his political attempts to find models and stuff to save everything, were really artistic. And even though I got him involved with other things, like the north and south meeting that we had at Avocado Lake in Fresno, and also other things that developed like *Chisme Arte* and so forth, those were all things that I was closer to than he was. He lived in, to me, a world that was much more acculturated, and he didn't have. . . . Of course, the difference between me and Carlos is I was so steeped into Chicano movement and I was so. . . . I was Mr. Chicano Movimiento, period. That's all I thought about. I sacrificed, I think, a lot of my family life because of it. And, of course, always knowing that when you get involved in these things—and I knew it from the very beginning—it is a thankless job, and nobody's ever going to give you anything back from it. It's got to be something that you believe in, that you can do totally through your volition. And so I accepted not only Carlos's role in all these things, wherever he could help and get involved in, whereas he finally got involved with Cesar Chavez, finally got him to go up there and spend time there. And he got involved with the newspaper and then he would draw us into doing things with the newspaper, for example.

JR: Right.

GL: And I spent a lot of nights, sleepless nights, trying to get the magazine out—or the newspapers, *El Malcriado*, and it was a real hard job. In those days we were all poor. We were students; we didn't have much money. What's important, I think, to note is that when I met Carlos and Frank—and this is about 1971—I was very impressed with the way they lived. I had never had met anybody who would actually go to breakfast in the morning at a restaurant. I mean, I come from poor people. . . .

JR: Every day?

GL: Not every day, but I had never done that very much at all. It was just not part of our cultural upbringing—for me anyway—to go and eat break[fast]. . . . That was such a luxury to me.

JR: Right.

GL: And even if it was a burrito breakfast or whatever we ate—it wasn't usually a lot of money—but it was just their life-style. They had a much more. . . . It was a life-style that was higher than mine. Mine was into a bowl of rice and some sardines, so it was cool. So I was impressed.

JR: By this time they had been to New York and they had been back so maybe that was part of the. . . .

GL: Yeah, yeah. But they knew how to live, is my point, and I was impressed with it, because I didn't do the kinds of things that they just took for granted or did as a. . . . I mean, to go to breakfast and then sometimes even go to dinner. Now I was a student. I never could afford that stuff. And we would. . . . I don't know how I did it. I would scrape up money and do it, but I thought of them guys as being much more, how do you say?, they knew how to live better than me.

JR: So do you feel like you picked up on that kind of stuff? That that was part of the exchange that took place in Los Four?

GL: Well, not too much. It was limited because I was married with kids and stuff, so that was after I got married. And this is in seventy. . . . By '72 I think I was already mar[ried]. Well, I was with Marty when I met Carlos and those guys, I think. Anyway, but it was important enough to mention because we came with different cultural values, and the group—Los Four—it's important to note, even Beto . . . much more conservative with his monies in terms of going out to eat. So I thought these guys acted like rich people, the way they behaved. That's what I'm trying to get at.

JR: I see.

GL: And they weren't rich, but they had the cultural habits of going and having croissants and drinking coffee at nine, ten. Jeez, at nine, ten, you already got half a morning's work in there. Because I come from working people and I used to get up early, so, man, seven o'clock I'm ready to go. And these guys would sleep until nine!? I don't know why I think it's so important, but there was such a difference in them, in their life-style and mine. Mine was worker-oriented, get out and go for it. And they had a much more leisure world. Carlos would curl up and read a book in the morning. And I'm thinking like a worker, "Well, I gotta get some work done. I gotta get something done this morning. I got to accomplish something." But I had enough of college life to know that I wasn't stone. . . . I'm not a worker altogether in my mind. But I came from that framework. And when I went to college and stuff, I learned that reading a book is an important input and has a value. But to be able to just curl up after breakfast and go read a book until noon was impressive to me so. . . .

Frank and Carlos were buddies. Beto and I were buddies. So when we got together, that was the mix, that was the two halves. And then Beto was not only heterosexual but probably asexual for the most part, I guess. And Frank and me were traviesos [outgoing—Ed.]—you know, the women. And then there was Carlos who had some pretty tragic situations at that time and we were concerned about him because of his life-style, things that he was doing. But we were really like brothers, all of us. With all these differences and so forth. I think the differences were part of the attraction for me. That's why I mentioned it. Like they were different. These guys were different guys. And they were also more. . . . Like Frank, you know, people thought he was gay but he's not. And he was a little more effeminate in a lot of the things that he did. And I don't know what you would call it, but it wasn't gay. It was just that he did certain things like he'd mix his . . . like when he stirred his coffee, he'd do like this [gestures], and, man, "Hm, hm, hm," I'm looking at that with his little finger up in air, and I'd say, "Hmmm."

JR: [laughs]

GL: But he was a heterosexual man.

JR: Uh-huh. So were those kind of sexual-identity politics playing themselves out in the group? Did it. . . .

GL: Well, we all knew where we at. But we would. . . . I don't know if anybody. . . . And Carlos, at that time, wasn't public about what he was, but we knew and he didn't hide it from us . . .

JR: I see.

GL: . . . what he was and what he was into. I don't know if it mattered to us. I mean, we accepted it. Because in the art world there's all kinds. We're all weird. We're all weird. And he used to tell me, he goes, "Magu," he says, "don't you ever think you're normal." I said, "Really? You don't think I'm normal?" And he goes, "No, you're not. You're weird."

JR: [laughs]

GL: I said, "Well, okay, I'm an artist. So that, you know. . . . But again, in terms of judgments, they were not issues among us. And this is why I said about Judithe, that she could have found a place much more easily if she wouldn't have had her own biases about males and what they allow and don't allow and those things.

JR: You know, there's two things I wanted to ask you about. When I spoke to Frank about Los Four coming together and doing their thing, he also mentions how he and Carlos were buddies and you and Beto were buddies, and how you brought people in from different kind of parts of the community and it was just this really powerful coming together.

GL: Yeah!

JR: I wanted to ask you about that. And then I wanted to ask you also about John Valadez and maybe what he brought to the group or how that worked out.

GL: Well, John and I had been buddies in Long Beach.

JR: Oh, yeah.

GL: And I was a director of a . . . I wound up being a director of a cultural centro down there, and John was a student at Cal State Long Beach and I had already finished my MFA, because John's younger than me by at least ten years or so.

JR: Right.

GL: And I always liked John because he's a real kick-back, and he was one of my smoking partners and we all just had a lot to share with. And then, he also didn't have a problem with my proselytizing about pachucos and stuff. He understood it. And he came from, I think, Garrity [low income housing area? area of Los Angeles?—Ed.]. He also came from the projects and he grew up in that stuff. And, oddly enough, as shy as . . . Well, John is shy and he's not. But he's very kick-back. He's very reserved. If he doesn't know you or anything, he isn't going to say very much. But he's very verbal and he's very bright.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And so I was dying to get John in the group. Remember, my thoughts were always political. I wanted to have a very broad group. "The Dozen Tortillas" was part of my nature. I wanted to have all these weird guys together.

JR: [chuckles]

GL: I didn't see the problem of, you know, whether it was gay or Marxist or Left wing or whatever—or a gang. Because we had guys that were like gangsters, pretty much, that I was bringing into the group. And it was an odd mix. And it was too much for the other participants. For me, I could have handled it, but for the most part John Valadez came on being very skillful in what he was doing and I always wanted to—and the group wanted to—expand beyond Los Four. Even at the beginning, we talked about it. We wanted to be inclusive. We were fighting exclusive treatment on the part of institutions around us. So we went the other way. We wanted to bring people in. So with all of Judithe's internal ideas of machos and all that, there wasn't as much there as she may have thought. We were concerned with survival.

The other thing that I think—speaking about Judithe, in this instance, because I'm jumping around I know—but the thing is that when you have . . . Say you're fighting racism and you think that you're being persecuted, then pretty soon you're looking at the whole world like that. And Woody Allen has—I think it's Annie Hall—has this part in there where he's talking to his friend and he's paranoid about. . . . [talking to a cat:] Would you cut it out, kitty? He's telling his friend, complaining that everybody was anti-Semitic. And he's saying, "Well, this guy he says, "D'Jew eat lunch? D'Jew eat. . . ?" He didn't say, "Did you eat lunch?" he said, "D'Jew eat lunch?" And so he went off on this thing. So you get paranoid, is my point, without getting too far off the track. And I think that's what happens and, at that time, all of us were sensitive and a little bit touchy about all these issues. And if anybody that was in the group was honest about our relationships, we all were carrying various banners. And it was kind of my fault, too, for getting Carlos involved the way I did, because I harassed him. I mean, it took me six months to a year to turn that guy around from a guy that was not interested in any of that stuff, wanting to be a mainstream artist but not knowing how, and seeing that he was. . . . In New York, he was constantly not. . . . He wasn't "in" and he complained about not. . . . And he would go and see Rauschenberg and all this stuff and they didn't know who he was. But, being a schmoozer, he got into his studio and he. . . . I don't know how he did it. He just walked in one time. But he would complain that he was never "in." And it wasn't because he was not from New York. It was because we were Raza. So he used to do artwork that was very gringo-oriented and it still wasn't enough. So here comes Magu saying, "Hey, wake up. You're a Chicano. You might as well realize who you are. So face up to it and attend to this. Don't try to be somebody else. Trust your own experience. Use the experience of where you come from." Okay. And as we explored that, he came from Montebello and he didn't like cholos and he was afraid of them. And he didn't like the low-riders and all that stuff. To him that was another group, another culture. See, we were all pushing for ideas. Especially me. I used to harass everybody, if they'd let me, pushing these ideas. And then, all of us being younger and really probably more susceptible to being emotional. . . . And not so well-informed. You know, we were young. I didn't know what I was doing half the time. And that's what happens when you're young. By the time I was. . . . I didn't even have my B.A, and I mentioned in the interview before that I got a chance to meet Ed Moreno, and it was through his efforts that we got our live opening at Long Beach State. So after that, man, I had all kinds of status at that school. Because I brought a live TV opening. Nobody had done that. Ever.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And . . . how did it happen? I have no idea.

JR: Do they have that on tape?

GL: I don't know. I doubt it. It was a live opening. It was live.

JR: Yeah.

GL: Back to the group. I think what's important, too, about Judithe and John Valadez is that. . . . I also looked around because, remember, like I said, before I met Carlos and Frank, I had spent some time garnering people and resources to do these shows in libraries and schools and hallways. Very humble. And I was learning how to curate, but I didn't even know that's what I was doing. So there was a lot of things that were, and continued to be naive on my part, and that's really the story of my life. I just bumble along and I've been very lucky to do a lot of different things.

JR: Let me ask you this.

GL: Yeah, go ahead. I'm going off again.

JR: No, this is good and actually reminds me of something I wanted to ask you before about how this coming together, how this exchange of differences in the group and within the whole movement, in general, helped you generate your iconography, your style. You know, the specifics.

GL: Well, this came before Los Four by some, jeez, maybe six years.

JR: Okay.

GL: Because what was happening—and I can skip over that pretty quickly and still give you enough information to say that, when I first did that Chicano art show, which I thought was a joke—me and this other guy in 1964—that was one thing. By 1965 I started thinking about all these things in a way that. . . . And at that time I didn't feel and have enough art information to feel like an artist. I knew I was an art student. So in my unfolding of my education in art process and all that, I also had these political issues to resolve. You know, I'm a Chicano. The walk-outs hadn't happened yet. This is all pre-walk-outs.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And it's important to note that because, as an artist, I was already working on trying to establish something that later blew up called the Movimiento. I was alone. I was trying to talk to people about these things, had very few ears that would pay attention to it, and I didn't know enough. So it was this examination and exploration that began to lead me into. . . . Well, since then I've learned how to articulate it this way—that is, that art is a noun and Chicano art makes Chicano an adjective.

JR: Right.

GL: It describes what kind of art—Chinese art, Anglo art, African art. . . .

JR: Modern art.

GL: Yeah. That's an adjective. I said, "Okay, I've got an adjective describing what kind of art it is, so what is Chicano? Chicano is not a political entity. Chicano is not a religion. Chicano's not an ethnic group—unless you want to say we're mestizos, which I would accept. So what is Chicano? Well, what do I need? I need visuals. Well, Chicano really is a cultural term therefore, let's say that the term is cultural. Now let's look at the culture for the visual motifs that I need to describe what Chicano art is." That was the first round.

JR: Right.

GL: The second round in my thinking had to do with refining these ideas from beyond the tortilla and the tacos and the low-riders and the pan de huevo. So now what? Now we have a vocabulary. And what I think and what people have told me—this is not coming from me, I say—but they said that people who have known what I've done for the last thirty years said that I was probably the most helpful in establishing a vocabulary for Chicano art. I was doing altars long before [Amalia—Ed.] Mesa Bains. Mesa Bains and these people, they're recent. They're recent people that have come on these things, and how they got a MacArthur grant I'll never know, but, anyway, never mind. Scratch that. [waving towards tape recorder—Ed.]

JR: [laughs]

GL: Anyway. But the thing is that there is a reason why these things have never been too public. And I have purposely kept in the shadows. I do not want to be getting a MacArthur Foundation fund. I don't need it, I don't want it, but I'll take it now if I get it—just in case.

JR: [laughs]

GL: But that was my mentality. I didn't care about anything. I was not doing these things for funding. I was not doing these things for anything else that. . . . Chicano art was the only religion I knew at that point. And so I treated Chicano art as my religion.

JR: How did that vocabulary that you generate circulate?

GL: By virtue of me doing a lot of lectures. I used to lecture all over the place and I'd tell whoever was listening. I did it on TV, I did it in a lecture series, and then I did it in my work. And anybody that would listen in meetings would say, "Ah, Magu's at it again—you know, talking about cholos and low-riders and stuff, and tortillas." I call this the Tortilla Clan. Again, looking for symbols and looking for things that made sense. I looked at the wheel by the. . . . The Native Americans have the shield, the wheel. We got all these things that are emblematic of the culture, okay? And so. . . .

JR: Like the Aztec calendar is circular, right.

GL: All of those kind of things. Yeah, all those kind of things are visual references, and depict the culture. When you see that Meso-American calendar. . . . Because it really isn't an Aztec calendar. They were just one group that affected it. But it started with the Olmecas.

JR: I see.

GK: And the Mayas, the Aztecas, the Toltecas, they all influenced this thing. So the ones we see are Azteca but, given all that, the real language that I needed to parallel was that I found that line, color, texture was our grammatic structure. That was our nouns, pronouns, conjunctions, adverbs. This is our vocabulary right here, okay? [pointing to a sketch he's drawing—Ed.] And nobody told me this, except that this is the vocabulary that we got in school for art, then I translated that into meaning, "Well, this is language. This is language." You know, the five laws of mass, shape, texture, color, line. They were equivalent to the eight parts of speech for us.

JR: Okay.

GL: Okay. Then I also was very cognizant and very clearly understanding that what I wanted to do was I wanted to develop not an ideology but a system. I wanted a system. I wanted you to be able to recognize that Chicano art was based on using this vocabulary and had these motifs. You know, pan de huevo, low-riders, you know, Spanish-speaking, altars, tortilla calendars from the market and so forth, which were part of it. Which, essentially—and I'll put it in a ball—domestic arts. Doilies, anything that was done in the house. And one of the features of Chicano homes that nobody ever trained us to do but became a cultural facet, was that you come to a Chicano home and they all got their little altars and their little cositas [little things—Ed.] here and there in all kinds of variations. So what I was after is that I wanted to do something more complete that would satisfy academic scholarship. Because I knew that, with education being such a focus in our Movimiento, I said I had to do something so that when educators get these ideas they can transfer them through their students and have something of an idea. Having an analogy. I mean, a metaphor that they could say, "This is Chicano art." And understand it that way. Because people would ask me, "Well, what makes Chicano art so different than anything else?" I said, "The culture." And any given question that I was given. . . . They said, "Well, how does politics figure into it?" I said, "Politics would be one of the departments. But it isn't the essence of." And people would say, "No, that's not true. You got it wrong. If it wasn't for politics, none of these things would exist." I said, "Well, I can understand what you're saying, but it isn't the crux of what we're doing. The overriding definition for Chicano can all fit under culture, but it all can't fit under politics."

JR: Right.

GL: Because of us do horses, some of us do flowers, etc. Some of us do pan de huevo, and if you're going to say that pan nuevo isn't Chicano art, then I think your definition is much too narrow and doesn't serve the definition." It's only one element of the total picture. That's what I would argue.

JR: Sure.

GL: Some people would say, "Ah, you're full of shit. You're not a Marxist," and stuff like that. And I'd say, "Well. . . ."

JR: Were there some pretty serious debates . . .

GL: Oh, yeah.

JR: . . . about what constituted Chicano art?

GL: For thirty-five years.

JR: [laughs] Oh, I mean. . . . They're still ongoing, huh!

GL: They're still going. Because these mental [menudos], we get people and they say, "Well. . . ." This is the one that kills me. We sit down and we start having our mental menudo session and people say, "Well, what is Chicano art?" And we always throw bread at those people, because we've. . . . And it's not an unfair question. It really isn't. Because there is a lot of confusion in people's minds about these things. And it was my endeavoring to clarify this by establishing a definition that was all-encompassing. I needed to take care of academic concerns and issues. And this idea that, "Well, just because you're a Chicano, you're doing Chicano art," is not an argument. It's not a stance. It's just a stupid opinion], in my opinion. [laughs] It doesn't hold water. It just doesn't work. Because there's no evidence of that. I know a lot of Chicanos that don't do Chicano art and don't want to.

JR: I see.

GL: So definitions had to hold up on their own; they have to stand on their own. These ideas that I was trying to put together, this vocabulary, these motifs that I was trying to single out to begin to say, "Okay, if you're going to do Chicano art, you've got to use these little Mexican pots, you've got to use a reference to the culture. It's all I ask. You've got to make it evident." Because when we went into abstract art, they said, "Well, how does abstract art work?" I said, "Now you're trying to get *another* concept called 'abstract art,' a cousin of Chicano art, and you're trying to make that Chicano art. It's a different notion."

JR: Can they be integrated?

GL: Yes they can. Sure they can. The philharmonics can play Beatle tunes. Get my point? There's nothing sacred about them crossing paths. But when we're talking about abstract being a concept, it stands on its own. Chicano art is a concept that stands on its own. Do they interchange and do they overlap? Of course they do. And they can. But it's up to the artist to make those references. And I'll give you a verbal definition . . . I mean, a verbal kind of a description of how that could go. So [if—Ed.] you do something abstractly in whatever nonobjective configurations you do, you use red, green, and white. That's the reference. Okay, if you don't want to do it that way, you can say, "We're going to work off of the image of a burro, and we're going to use red, green, and white, and then we're going to use yellow, green, and purple." And we change one item for the other. It's an old trick that we use in teaching, where we change maybe. . . . The content stays the same; you change the colors. Or you keep the colors the same and change the content.

JR: I see.

GL: And. . . .

[Break in taping]

JR: . . . interviews. This is the first time I've heard . . .

GL: Well, I'm a teacher, so . . .

JR: . . . you speak so explicitly so about that.

GL: Well, Jeff, I've only thought about this twenty-four hours a day for the last thirty years [laughter], so if I don't at least come up with something worthwhile, I don't know, I've wasted my time. But I have thought about this most earnestly and I. . . .

[Interruption in taping (the tape is blank for several seconds)]

JR: Okay, this is Tape 1, Side B, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on the seventeenth of November, 1997. Que huela bien.

GL: [laughs] The thing to also remember, at that time what I was trying to do was not only establish a vocabulary for us to be able to speak Chicano art and talk about it, I also had the dilemma of having to fend off all these very powerful political emphases that we had going on at the time. In other words, you either had to be a Capitalist or a Marxist or a Leninist or a Black Panther or whatever . . . Brown Beret and all that stuff. And I felt that was not our purview. We were not. . . . I had already been in the military, and I'll be damned if I was going to be getting out of the service and put on a fatigue jacket. No way. I mean, I had no interest in—and knew—that there was no way that the Chicano movement was going to be a military exercise. If you. . . .

JR: So what did you think about that when you saw. . . .

GL: Well, I thought people would just get killed

JR: . . . people leaning towards militancy?

GL: I thought they were being stupid and brave and showing some courage, but mostly dumbness. There was no way that we could match the fire power of the gringo. Forget it! I mean, I was guarding bunkers that could blow up East L.A. One bunker had enough armament there, East L.A., you'd never see it again. Now, with our little twenty-twos and the . . . We didn't have automatic. . . . I guess guys that were interested in these things had weapons and stuff, but it was a folly that was not worth entertaining. I didn't spend much time in my brain thinking about those things. I figured if people wanted to march up and down and pretend they were soldiers, hey, I did that as a kid. I wanted to be a soldier; I wanted to be Audie Murphy.

But at the point that we had a job to do, at the point of, well, before Los Four, the sixties really spelled out a request on the part of us to come up with solutions for rectifying some of the long-range problems that we had with society, as Chicanos. Not as anybody. . . . And not to be deluded with this Rainbow Coalition thing about, "We're all in it together," and then everybody's politically fighting each other. That was also a thing that I did not participate in very wholeheartedly, because it was a sham. Again, I feel that politics is not only human affairs, in general terms, but it's also the art of illusions. And the reason I see it that way is because that's our business. In going back to Chicano art development and what my thinking was in the sixties, essentially, because that's when I was developing altars that were doing what I thought were cultural expositions. . . . In other words, all the things that. . . . The first one I did was in 1966. I was at Santa Ana College, and my brother was a E.O.P. director there, and so he talked to an art teacher and she goes, "Sure, let's do a Chicano art show." People were receptive at that point—you know, '66—and so they let me have this show, and I had never put shows together very much. I mean, I was still a student. I really was scared to death because I didn't know what I was going to do. So I went and borrowed from the [Spica] de Oro on First Street in East L.A. this bakery cabinet, and we filled it with [pan] [bread—Ed.] and all this stuff that we had, and we figured out that if you leave it in there for a month nothing happens. I mean, we're not going to eat it anyway, so we just. . . . It didn't turn green or nothing. It just dried in there.

JR: Right.

GL: But we had it mostly for just visual representation of our culture. So at that formative period for me, I was only trying to describe the culture. That was the first level of my efforts to try to begin to articulate what Chicano art was about. So, okay, then once I established the fact that we had altars and low-riders, I did a series on fences. Because you go into neighborhoods and stuff, the first thing that, if you're visually looking, carefully looking, you're going to see all these different kinds of fences from the guy that paints with various colors of paint, but he only has a little bit of this and a little bit of that, so he puts it all over the place and it becomes, you know, à la Watts Tower. Pretty neat. It's a folk-art effort that looks different from professional artists, but that's the charm of it.

JR: Right.

GL: So, okay, then I realize that gardens. . . . This is, again, gardens and all these kinds of things—the plants coming out of shoe boxes and Maxwell House coffee cans, where poverty, rasquache, makes with what they have. Indian people, African people—if you ever see western culture on them, they're wearing it in ways that they accommodate to their style of visual articulation of their bodies and stuff. So, okay, so then I knew that I wanted to go in a folk-art direction. And, again, the rhetoric at that time was, "For the people, for the people, for the people," so I said, "Okay, well, then I'm going to make my artwork rasquache, folksy, blah-blah-blah." And that's what I did.

JR: I see.

GL: And also the idea of processes. I began talking about taking it from that first level of articulating what it was—Chicano art comes from these sources—and then pointing to bread and the plants coming out of a boot and stuff like that. These were all examples of what one could use to make Chicano art. Now, another level of refinement, I thought—and conceptually—was to begin to talk about the art of making tortillas. Rituals. Plaza. Walking one way, going back the other way. Began to explore socially. . . . And I dissected our culture socially to find cruising was really a carryover from walking on the plaza. Now we're in these little metal boxes cruising around, isolated from each other. It changes the human dynamics. Now we got drive-bys, which is another thing, but in those days I was looking for aesthetic reasons to construct—or aesthetic rationale—to construct some kind of model that people say, "Oh, this is Chicano art."

JR: Can you remember any shows where you think that that came together particularly well?

GL: Well, sure. The Los Four show.

JR: The Los Four show?

GL: Right away I would point to that one because I did altars there. Beto, Carlos, and Frank pretty much did the standard artwork stuff. I was after building. . . . The other thing that I wanted to do—and this is a good time to say it, is—the reason why I didn't do artwork that showed us being victims of anything and getting beat up and all that stuff was that I said, "Okay, once we get tired of talking about the fact that we're getting our heads cracked over by batons of the police, what's next? And, better yet, what are we going to be teaching our children? Let's say that we won, this is Aztlán, and now what do you do?" You know, you've got to get rid of the drive-bys. Now you can't blame it on the white man. You've got to get rid of poverty trips and the pimping that goes on in terms of funding an all that kind of stuff—all that kind of capitalist stuff that people go crazy over. What do you have?" If you get my point, it's about trying to build an aesthetic that would create something that people would be proud of, their kids would want to be attracted to—just like Nintendo and rap music and so forth. I mean, our kids are going, culturally, all over the place. And that's really the sign of the times. I don't know if I really worry about it too much on one level. I was concerned when I was younger, because I thought the rudder should go toward Chicano only, right? Well, that has changed. That Chicano rudder has now made us mall babies. You know, we got Chicano mall babies all over the place. You go to any Chicano . . . I mean, you ever go to Montebello Mall over here, and there's Raza over there like [ormigas].

So what we need to understand is that this is another facet of this aesthetic building that I was trying to create, is that I knew it was going to change. That's why I only wanted to talk about the bases, the vocabulary, not decide, "This is Chicano art for all time, and the rest of you got to follow my lead." No. I wanted to bring into the salad the tomatoes, the olives, the onions, the bell peppers, the various kinds of lettuce that make the salad. First we have to identify that. So then once that was identified of what your ingredients can be to your salad, "Now go and make your salad and go and do your own Chicano . . . whatever you want to do . . . throw choriso in it or whatever."

JR: [laughs]

GL: And so, never did I ever in my thinking want to control this. I wanted to be like Plato. I wanted to be the midwife. And I thought those things, because I knew about Plato and midwifery. That was a self-description of his. You know, being a midwife to ideas and stuff.

JR: Right.

GL: But, of course, he meant it more than I did. I mean, I didn't want to be a midwife, I [pick on the idea]. [laughter] Plato was serious. He was a midwife. [laughs]

JR: Yeah.

GL: I kid. I don't know what he was. But I think I would just leave it at that and say that I was in real earnest to try to intellectually come up with a plan and a system, not just that we're getting beat up over our heads with some political system. That's transitory. That was just a . . . I knew there was going to be change.

JR: So what provocative ways did you see it open up after you kind of initially laid out some of the vocabulary for that?

GL: Well, then we had the walkouts. And then all those ideas that I had, that were really only being addressed to very few people that were interested in art. The world got all excited about educational issues with the walkouts. And that brought forth a real heavy emphasis in education. And then politics was a natural . . . a development of that because we understood that we needed to organize, like Cesar Chavez who's one of the better examples of organizing efforts, to do social change. And we were all bitten by. . . . Well, most of us were bitten by that bug. Some of us thought that the movimiento was a [movida] for themselves, that it was there to provide them with. . . . And a lot of people got good fat jobs out of it and fucked them up. Because they were not really, certainly, in earnest to solve these things. They just wanted to get a good paycheck. But then, they didn't do the job. Crystal City is a good example, and it's the metaphor about how Chicanos had to keep trying over and over again to overcome some of the discrepancies that were happening in Crystal City. And making a long story short, the Chicanos wanted more political representation. There was only a very small part of that population was Anglo, yet all the Anglos sat on the city council. So when the Chicanos did finally get some Chicanos in there, through a lot of efforts and getting Raza to take over this organization, the gringos tore up all these old records of all the things they had been doing all these years—unbeknownst to the Raza there, which they weren't allowed to participate by cultural force and social force. So it turns out that they sent these people in and took over these offices and so forth, but these people were just good talkers but they didn't administrate. They didn't know how to. It fell apart. It was a shambles. It failed. The Anglos came back into power, but this time a few of the Chicanos were reelected. There was a few that were more sensible about presenting themselves seriously as a . . . whatever your position was: city clerk, sanitation department, all that stuff. Because when the Chicanos took over, a lot of these services started to fail. Not only were the Anglos undermining those things, but with people that didn't know how to run a city.

JR: I see. Do you think that generated some disillusionment on the part of activists and artists and people who were committed to the movement in that way?

GL: Yes. And then they got glasses, they corrected their eyesight, and they began to send people in there that were serious to be in . . . I mean, serious administration interest, and so they were successful.

JR: I see.

GL: And then it worked. Remember, we've been excluded from participation in those kinds of governing positions that are. . . . Running a city, you'd better know what you're doing. You can't just run a city because you have opinions. And we had a lot of naive people at the time, because none of us had real experience or came from families that really understood politics. We were a rabble. We were just up at the castle gates, you know, saying, "Let us in, let us in." Then they let us in, and then we didn't know how to behave because we'd never been there before. So it just took time for that to unfold. Like I said earlier, now we have a lot of young people that are not only astute. . . . I'm so happy. You don't know. Makes my heart just swell up when I see young people that are going to begin to seriously work on the things that were started in those days. And I say that the most that happened in that time is that we were struggling, trying to lift the veils of ignorance. And ignorance comes in fogs, and these fogs are things that, as you begin to see more clearly, and that visual acuity begins to see how these systems work, and understand them intellectually, then we can do something about them. And we've gotten there. And I'm happy to have lived long enough to see that. The world's a crazy place, but I see a lot of reason for hope, and truly good things. And I say, every generation, like, I tell young people that, "Well, you guys have to make your mark now. What's it going to be? What are you going to leave on this earth? Are you going to keep talking about I'm pissed off and fuck the establishment?" I say, "When you get tired of doing that and you want to get to work, I want to talk to you. But until then, you're just beating your breast and saying, 'Boo-hoo-hoo, the world's a mean place, or it's a cruel place or whatever.' And, yes, it is. But after two or three times, you've got to get tired of saying that, and you've got to say, 'Well, then, what is there to do? What can I do?' Or examine it further. I don't care. You've got to examine it."

JR: Right. I wanted to kind of jump back to, I guess, the life-story narrative here. And I may be jumping too far ahead. . . .

GL: Well, my life. . . . I really. . . . I'm dodging it like crazy.

JR: [laughs]

GL: I don't know if you noticed, but I was trying to get around from that stuff because you're going to have a hard time really getting personal things. It's harder. . . . I don't mean to be that way, but I am . . . some of those things . . . like I told you before, I don't know why they would be important to people, so. . . .

JR: I see.

GL: Like right now, I just did this big speech about art and all that stuff. That's what I spend most of my energy in, and that's what I believe in. But my life is boring. I mean, I read books and go to the movies once in a while and I love drawing and doing my work. But it's not exciting.

JR: I guess there's. . . .

GL: It used to be. But that's a long time ago. [laughter] I better shut up. See, I ____ ____ ____.

JR: No. I think it may be helpful to see how some of your experience has helped you develop these perspectives.

GL: Well, tell me, like, what do you mean? Ask me something more specific.

JR: Okay. Well, I'm interested in some of the shows that you did and . . .

GL: Okay.

JR: . . . I'm also interested. . . . It seems like going through some of the biographical material that, like, in 1981 you come from Fresno back to L.A. and it seems like it. . . .

GL: 1980, I would say.

JR: Oh, 1980?

GL: Yeah.

JR: Okay. Well, it seems like it kind of launches a new kind of. . . .

GL: Yes, it does. It changed everything, because I had been burned out from being up in Fresno doing all this proselytizing and just. . . . You just had an example of my little speeches about Chicano this and that. I mean, I have all these little tapes in my head about these various issues that we have, and I've repeated these, I don't know, hundreds of thousands of times now. I make an effort to be succinct now and a little more brief. And maybe too brief for your purposes, but sometimes I get a little more detailed. I never know. It depends on the situation. But I've done this a lot. And part of my job. . . . Let's see, I'll try to work it into what happened when I came back from Fresno. Because in Fresno, I did a lot of organizing efforts for the Brocha del Valle, and it was difficult there because, no matter how slow I went—I thought I was going slow—it was too fast. Change for people was difficult, even if you're doing it for them, or they're doing it for themselves and you're helping. But when I came back, I was totally wiped out—in a lot of ways. I had given four years of my life to this little farming community and did all kinds of stuff that is. . . . My ex-wife recorded one time forty-five-and-a-half hours of community service in one week besides my job.

JR: Wow. It's like two jobs.

GL: Like two jobs. But, you know, me, I was just going at it, because I did not have a self. I was a community, and I was part of something big and it was *wonderful*. I mean, I'm not complaining. But, yeah, I was not. . . . And she made me aware. Because you can get lost in your little trips and whatever it is in life, and somebody needs to say, "Hey, look, you're standing in the water here." "Oh, oh," and then you don't realize, because you get so involved in the issues. And that's what happened to me. But after I came back from—and this is probably the better direction to go—is that after I had spent all this time trying to help do stuff in Fresno, I came back here totally tired and wiped out in so many ways, like physically and emotionally. I just felt like a dud. I mean, I just had no. . . . I was listless and all that stuff. And I felt horrible. I remember. It was just. . . . I was bummed out and stuff. Because people like me that get involved in causes and stuff, we get caught up in the dream, wanting it to happen—and did a lot of stuff. I mean, more than I ever knew I could do. I didn't even know what I couldn't do or do. I just did stuff, and it was neat and we had a good time and stuff. A lot of hard work, but you don't mind it. It's just stuff you do and it's neat to do. You get excited. That's why I say it's like a religion. Because that's the kind of fervor you put into it.

JR: Right.

GL: And religion can make people do all *kinds* of things, man. For free.

JR: [laughs]

GL: So it's interesting how people can be motivated to things. Nobody ever asked me to be involved in all this stuff. Nobody asked me to be speaking on behalf of cholos, or low-riders, or proselytizing the beauty of what those things mean. Most of the time you get shit. I mean, middle class people say, "No, they don't match my values, therefore, in my opinion, they're not worth. . . ."

JR: Okay.

GL: Yeah, those things are like [forks].

JR: How would cholos or low-riders respond to your presentation of [yourself, themselves]?

GL: Well, they don't go to museums or universities, but the ones that do of course connect. They come over and they say, "Hey man, I never thought I'd find you here, talking that shit here at this school." And they'd say, "Well, what's up, man?" I'd say, "What kind of car you got?" And then we'd into car talk. And that's another language, and, as you know, language codes. . . . The visual language has visual codes, too, and languages that we talk to each other. Car guys, if I'm using that group to talk about it in the same vein, we have a vocabulary, and then right away you start to say, "Well, what [*sic*] did you modify your car?" That's the first line of questioning, is, "How did you modify your vehicle to personalize it, to Chicanoize it, to socially adapt it so that it fits your identity, and so forth?" Now this is all art talk, because this is the area and this is the purview of artists to explore those things and translate them into artwork so that people will reflect on them, learn, or just enjoy the fact that car culture is a neat thing. It's like any other hobby.

JR: Right.

GL: You know, you get a guy into golf and then you show him your golf clubs and they're these real expensive. . . . he takes an interest. Raising chickens. You know, I've been among farmers. They start talking about chickens, man, and it's very interesting to listen, if you're like me, because I'm curious about ten thousand subjects. So I listen to things that I don't know about. I listen carefully, because I want to know and expand my head about that subject. And that's the way I've been about art. I see people thinking that Chicano art is very narrow. I'm afraid they're looking in a mirror, because Chicano art is as expansive and as broad as our culture and the people that are contained in it. And I've met some very bright and wonderful, talented artists

that don't have those narrow ideas and have expanded the view point of what Chicano art is. And if people saw the Hispanic art show, they could see that we're all over the place, stylistically, school of thought. The direction of the art has different ways of being described. But we're all over the place. And a lot of very bright artists. I think Latinos and Mexicans, in particular, and Chicanos, I think it's one of our virtues and one of our strengths—that is, visual arts are. I think that that's an area that is probably one of our highlights. And, I say, stronger than guitar playing. [Calls out:] Sorry, guys. Sorry, Santana [the rock group—Ed.].

JR: [laughs] Yeah. You mentioned the Hispanic show—the Thirty Hispanic Artists, the one that was done by Jane Livingston, you're old friend.

GL: I guess. Yeah. That's a good time to bring up Jane Livingston again, because after the Hispanic art show that happened, I mean, she was a sweetheart. I mean, my opinion changed of her.

JR: She'd come a long way, huh?

GL: Well, people change. She had to accept the fact that there's more than white people on earth. And I don't mean that in a bad way. It sounds like a joke now. But, I mean that people change. I hope I've changed, too, and I've refined some of these initial ideas about what Chicano art is and where it's going to go. Because I still have more work to accomplish in my own personal work, where it should be the best place to articulate what I'm talking about.

JR: How did you feel like Chicano art was received in the U.S. versus the show that toured around Europe?

GL: Well, I would say that it was different, because you're talking about two different cultures and different people. I'll say this. In Europe, generally speaking, I think they found it exotic and curious, and surprising that it came from the United States. Or beginning to accept the fact that there's ethnicity here that is not gringo. That's one kind of thing that I can say I sensed in Europe from information I got. And in the United States, especially on the West coast, they was a curiosity and an interest in the same way of these people *far* away in this other part of town called "Chi-CAN-oos." Or, like the Europeans would say is, "Chee-ca-NOOS."

JR: [laughs]

GL: [in a sing-song voice:] "Hey, Chee-ca-noos, de Ca-lee-for-nee?" [California—Ed.] It was cute. I enjoyed, anyway, the different ways they say Chicano. And, when I took my car up, when we were at the Corcoran [Gallery—Ed.], right there at the entrance, because they couldn't put the car in to where the show was, because it would have been up the stairs, and it was just absurd. I mean, they probably might of could of done all that stuff, but it would have taken a lot more effort than. . . . And it was an effort. And I think they videotaped it. And so we played with the hydraulics. And these people really got a kick out of it, because it was just like seeing something different and weird. The car was bouncing up and down, and they actually got a kick out of it, because if you really look at my work, another aspect of it—I'm jumping around again—but it's about humor.

JR: I was going to ask you about that.

GL: My humor is a device. It's very clearly a device to hide the fact that I'm talking about human dynamics, and all these little things that I do trying to get laughs are to soften people's ideas about who we are—Chicanos—and it works.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And that '50 Chevy, I could tell you a lot of stories about how people were responding to it—and also validating the opinion I had that Chicano art can be interesting if us, as the artists, try to do something interesting that people can relate to and understand without compromising the Chicanoness, okay?

JR: Right.

GL: So here I got a '50 Chevy. People come up to it, say, "I used to have a '50 Chevy. Wow, look at this one."

JR: "Look what you've done with this."

GL: Yeah, "Look what you've. . . ." And I'm just bursting with ethnicity, saying, "Chicano, Chicano, Chicano, with [chili] flames," and funny. People. . . . Now, I don't know why chili flames is funny. It is. I even still think it's funny, but I don't know why. I thought I did once, but people get a kick out of it. And I don't why any more. I don't know why they do. But a lot of my work, people smile at. And that just delights me no end.

JR: Yeah.

GL: I love that. Because that's what I want. I want to kind of tickle people.

JR: Well, in some ways it's kind of . . . not mysterious, but for somebody who is as passionate and steeped in proselytizing Chicano art and really invested in articulating different components and encouraging people to explore that further, there's a real seriousness to that task.

GL: Deadly serious.

JR: And then when you see the art, with the dogs, and the cars, and the hearts, there's a real sort of joy and sense of humor in there that, I think, might strike people as. . . .

[Break in taping]

[At the beginning, the recording quality on this tape side is not as clear as the preceding sides; hence certainty about the accuracy of the transcript is correspondingly diminished—Ed.]

JR: Okay, this is Tape 2, Side A, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on November 17, 1997. And we're talking about the deadly, devastating qualities of humor and some of the underlying messages or things that you can work with.

GL: Yeah, and it's real easy to point in European, for example, like the guys that were doing satire—like Daumier—to this day, are incredible works of art, and also the satire is very poignant and it's equal to poetry and other human endeavors. In the visual arts, I think satire—which includes often dialogue or some words, some graphic stuff—but even without it, humor, if you look at European history. . . . Well, satire is maybe more biting. I mean, I see humor—not humor ha-ha, but humor in the sense that there's a period—and maybe in French—like even Watteau who did these very light . . . and he was called a mannerist, right? I think so, if I remember correctly.

JR: I don't know.

GL: But it's a very distinct kind, and he looked like what later became modern art. And he was a precursor to modern art in a lot of ways, and he simplified these things. And that's, I guess, my point. But he also made them light. It was light. There's a lightness to it. And I guess my real point is that, that versus being incredibly serious and heavy about your ideas. And I think there should be room in people's minds towards light-hearted artwork that is giving you joy and beauty or other aspects, too, but that it doesn't have to be so sober.

JR: It brings more of an audience in.

GL: Well, there's room for everything. Maybe that's what I mean, ____ ____ ____.

JR: Yeah. Do you feel like the sense of humor and the playfulness that you're putting out there is . . . that it's open, that it speaks to more of an audience than Chicanos?

GL: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It cuts across all kinds of boundaries. The other thing I try to do—and I try to do it in a way that is almost unnoticed—and that is that I make it gender-free. I mean, not gender-free, I'm sorry. No, I use male-female very clearly, but what I meant is not sexist stuff, right? And I don't do anything that is too hard for any family to see. And I don't know why. . . . I mean, I'm not an innocent guy. I mean, there's a lot of. . . . I could be a *travieso* [outgoing—Ed.] in a lot of ways, but I haven't yet done any of those kinds of things—that I've exhibited anyway. Privately, I have all kinds of little stuff that I've done that would be called erotic—and even more political. But for the most part, the face I give to the public is really continuing to build that vocabulary in their mind of what Chicano art can be.

And I use that as my kind of basis for making the artwork, is that it needs to, in my little multiple-criteria that I have, it has to have social value, it can't be . . . like it can't be sexist or racist. It can't be too negative about anything. But it's about pro. Pro energy, pro. . . . Trying to get people to enjoy things, too, in spite of the difficulties that Raza has to live in. The ignorance that we have in our community needs to be lessened, because it's not going to be done by other people. You know, I look around and I see Chinese associations, I see groups that go out and do good things. But we need some groups that are self-serving to the community. Like the *Padrinos* [godfathers—Ed.]. There's a group, *Padrinos*, and then they are internally oriented. A lot of Mexican-American kind of groups I think need to be supported. We need to look at those institutions in our community.

And this is where the politics comes in at the same time the art and all these thoughts kind of work together. In the future I think I'm going to do more to articulate what those kind of things should be. Not unlike what Eddie Olmos did when he went out and took a broom, and some people thought it was a joke, but he made a very straightforward answer. "You go and clean up the mess." It's physical and it's direct. That analogy, for me, is something that we as artists need to also do in our work, and that's to. . . . Beto did a wonderful little drawing many years ago of these two cops holding a guy, and he's handcuffed and there's a cop car. And it's all in these gray colors, very depressing, and it was a powerful piece. And one thing that that makes me think of, too, is that

I believe that artists need to explore all kinds of things.

And most of all, my defense goes to. . . Artists should never be told what to do. I mean, artists need to explore those things as they wish, and they shouldn't be censored. People should censor themselves, but not others.

JR: [chuckles]

GL: That's the way I think.

JR: Yeah.

GL: And if you don't like it. . . .

JR: That would be healthy.

GL: . . . don't look at it, don't buy it, you know?

JR: That would be healthy.

GL: Yeah, I think it's better because to go out there trying to tell people what they can and not do, I don't know if that's good.

JR: Well, I guess that notion of exploring things leads me to ask you about the different media that you use. You know, I mean you've developed quite a repertory, from the altars to the cars to the sculpture . . .

GL: To clay.

JR: . . . to the painting to the pastel to wood, to cut-out, to. . . .

GL: Well, I'm not sure why, except that I know that, even when I was a student, for some reason I had the notion that I needed to know how to work with different materials. So I've worked with rubber, fiberglass, bronze, clay, plaster. I've carved some alabaster. Mocos [boogers—Ed.], I've done things with chili. I mean, anything that. . . Chorizo [sausage—Ed.] stains.

JR: [laughs]

GL: Because ultimately it winds up being just material, see? And if you could look at anything around you as a material, not as a pen or not as vitamin E-enriched lotion, a bottle that we have here. [picking up objects from around the room—Ed.] If it's stains and if it gives you a color or if it shapes something or if it it's only material. So if you think in those terms, if you can simplify your thinking and just look at around you, and that's how an artist often approaches his work. And the various materials that I've used, I felt would—again you get an idea of the way I think—is that I wanted to really do a real broad range of tools and equipment and materials and to see which ones I liked. And to just explore them, because doing stuff in these different materials has helped me learn how to manipulate materials better.

JR: Have you found that you're most comfortable in a particular medium?

GL: Well, clay I think is my first choice. I like clay the most. And I kick myself in the butt for not maintaining a studio all these years. It's been part of my . . . a mistake. I should have had a ceramics studio all along. But I'm hoping to rectify that very soon and develop one. But I think clay.

JR: What is it about clay that. . . .

GL: It's so malleable. It'll do anything you want but it remains a material that you have to follow. It's real weird. It's simultaneously something that. . . . I think what I like the most about it is the malleability of the material. The tactileness of working clay, I have an affinity for. I also work in wood a lot, but I work at it more. And I've learned to do it better now than ever, but I took to clay right away and it really was the material that I started with when I went back. . . . After the air force, when I went to East L.A. College, I wound up in this little ceramic department there watching this lady named Margaret [_____—Ed.]. She invited me into the room there, because you know I was always just kind of. . . . And then she'd look at me and I'd pretend I wasn't looking. I was a young man at that time. And so she got a kick out of me, she said one day. I was trying not to be rude, but I was real curious about her. She was working on projects all the time. And I'd go there between waiting for a class, and, anyway, her introduction—and she let me build this clay thing. I still have it in my backyard here. My mother kept it all these years, back in California, in La Puente. So that's what got me started, and I don't know if it was because it was the first serious attempt at being an artist with clay, because I had carved wood before and I have drawings of a '56 Ford truck that's all dropped and everything, with scallops and all this, and I did that when I was about fifteen. So I still have drawings of all these. And all these characters I did—Peter Posole, Maria Tortilla, Timmy

Taco, Ernie Enchilada—I've got a bunch of them.

JR: Yeah, you mentioned those the other day.

GL: Yeah. I'm going to bring them back out.

JR: Yeah?

GL: Yeah. I'm going to do something with them and I'm going to upgrade them.

I'll tell you another thing that I did—which is to be reflective of what, I guess, to share who I am—is that when I do these projects, I try to do them as a system and so forth. Let me see, I was going to. . . .

JR: A system? What do you mean?

GL: Well, when I do artwork, it isn't just doodling faces and dogs. These images are representatives of something larger. It fits in my total scheme of things. It's kind of like having a program that the navy used to build bombers with. You know, they have these systems of exactly what everything . . . is worked out. . . . Administratively, they have this plan, and everything is done and checked and double-checked, dah-dah-dah, and they build these aircraft, you know?

JR: Right.

GL: So these are administrative things that I learned when I was doing administration work—that you plan and you develop these systems. And we used to check this and accounting. Everything's worked out. And that's how they build some of these. . . . The Stealth bomber was done on a computer with this PERC system. Well, being an administrator and so forth, structures my thinking, so when I'm doing art, I think intellectually I use these little computer screens there that are these little templates and then I apply them to art, right? And so they help me make artwork that's much more significant.

JR: I see, about the way that your images are relating with one another in a given piece? Or. . . .

GL: Because in my lifetime I'm going to be saying all these, things and I want it to be comprehensive and cohesive over all. I'm cognizant of knowing that I'm not just making [perritos]. You know, that would be a little boring, but. . . . I'll give you an example. One time I had this pyramid shape, and I knew that it had to be the Mexican shape, not the Egyptian shape, for the pyramid. Because I needed to find an icon, an image, that reflected what I wanted to represent, which is indigenous Mexico. Okay? So I inverted what I was. . . . Because I cut paper, and that's another story I want to tell you about—that paper cut-outs that I've done . . .

JR: Okay.

GL: . . . but inverting these two pyramids it appeared as if there was this dog that was howling. And so I started making these little dogs, and it became these pyramid dogs, which was just an invention on my part, was to be the metaphor for indigenous Mexican-Indian heritage.

JR: I see.

GL: Now this is what I'm thinking about, right? I'm doing these. . . . So out of it comes all these dogs. All of a sudden I'm doing dogs. And I did these dogs, and I begin to do dogs with all kinds of shapes, and using round shapes to make these dogs. It was all kinds of variations I'd do. And that's what got me onto dogs. And then I was also climbing a tree. . . . Anyway, so this icon here connects me with indigenous Mexico.

JR: I see.

GL: Okay, that is my intention. This is an invention. It's an icon that is supposed to be a metaphor for my wanting to be connected with Indian Mexico, because Chicanos understood in the sixties—at least, I'm one of many—who understood that we were Indian people and that the European invasion that came over here in the fourteen hundreds. . . . And it was an invasion. It wasn't anything else.

JR: An invitation.

GL: Yeah. And. . . .

JR: About connecting to that, reconnecting to that.

GL: Yeah, and the whole Aztlán myth—I guess I was trying to find the words to say that—on the Aztlán myth, one of the reasons why Chicanos attached themselves to that is because it's the only metaphor that we came up

with at the time. We're not all Aztecs and so forth but, oddly enough, the Lujans in my family could have an affiliation with them way, way back there, because my father comes from West Texas and so we're supposed to come from that Indian stock that's in that area. But that's another thing that I'm studying right now with a cousin who's doing a genealogy thing.

JR: Is that what's taking you back to New Mexico?

GL: Yeah, that, and because I like the culture over there a lot, too. And I have an adobe home here and, as you can see, all the white walls here and everything, all these are adobe walls in here, and the back porch over there. . . . Yeah, there's a back porch there, and the kitchen was an add-on and the front porch was an add-on, so now we have three bathrooms here and four bedrooms, which are now partly studio spaces and stuff like that and I got all my artwork all over the place here, but. . . . We'll have to photograph this place and send you some pictures or something.

JR: That'd be good.

GL: I don't know, is this archival just oral histories?

JR: Well, eventually, there's interest in collecting papers and making those available to researchers.

GL: But I guess my point was that most of it is literary; it's not visual stories.

JR: Oh, yeah.

GL: There's no visual, like pictures and stuff.

JR: That's a good idea, though.

GL: Well, otherwise. . . . You should have a few anyway.

JR: I guess the idea is that your stuff is circulating well enough that people would know. [phone rings] We'll take a break here for a sec.

[Interruption in taping]

JR: All right, we're back. You were telling me about your name.

GL: Yeah. The name Lujan evidently, according to my cousin, came from North Africa. We're assuming Moorish, or that's the guess because [Luan] was the name before. It didn't have the "ha" sound, the [ho-ta], and so it was just Luan instead of [Lu-han].

JR: I see.

GL: And now in the Spanish spelling it's an emphasis with the "a." But anyway, all that is to point . . . what is significant with regards to all this is that my family has roots among the Apache and among the West Bend, Texas, indigenous groups that are called Huancheros. There were [Manos] and maybe even the Talmaras. I don't know. We're exploring that at the moment right now because we've got leads that take the Lujans back up into the hills and back through the pages of history into these mines that were going on in there. And many men died because of ailments that you get from mining.

JR: Right.

GL: And I think that's also beginning to jell into something that may wind up being some artwork.

JR: Yeah? How's that?

GL: Well, yeah, because one of the things that I thought of, if I can say that, an extension of not only refining Chicano art things was to begin to look at my own experience and apply some of that like many, many artists do—writers and poets, they reflect the world they live in. And so I'm trying to do several things. One of them is connect to my own particular genealogy, my particular line of bloodlines. But also on an expanded kind of notion of trying to produce a world, a Magulandia that represents another world. You know, the Wizard of Oz, the Emerald City? That's what I'm doing. It's an overall plan that I hope some day is animated. I'd love to have it animated. But I have buildings, I have trees, I have dogs, people, [carritas], kids on skateboards. I have a world that I've developed all over these years, basically trying to develop a whole bunch of pieces to this big epic that one day if we could ever animate it would be great. And in the future, with technology jumping the way it does. . . . I mean, I'm not going to animate it. That's another job, right?

JR: Right.

GL: I mean, that's another area. And a good friend, Gary Schwartz, that I always wanted to do something with—he's a friend out there in California, in Los Angeles. . . . But that's a dream.

JR: That would be cool, to collaborate on that.

GL: See, yeah, and part of the reason that I think I'm going to take another kind of attitude about business, as I was saying, is because some of these projects require funding, and if we could get them off the ground, they also could be profitable. And so I need to begin to do two things: make it a business and make a living from it, if possible. And then the other one is to expand what I started many, many, many years ago in articulating Chicano art. Because that's all I really care about doing.

JR: Seems like you would generate a lot wider audience, too.

GL: Well, yeah. Now I have cars and I'm doing pan de huevo flying saucer scenarios where they're landing on Earth and they're really it's Mexican bread in the form of a UFW/ I mean, a UFO.

JR: A UFO? A UFW eagle UFO? Yeah, that sounds like. . . .

GL: But I want it to be more fun, too. I need to get more. . . . And I've looked at the Simpsons [the television show—Ed.]. I've really analyzed the Simpsons in a way that. . . . I was trying to think of, "What would I do if these characters—these dogs and stuff—came alive? What would their voices be?" And, of course, I'd want to include. . . . Like I have friends like [Rosanna] [de Soto]. I'd like to have her be one of. . . . like Peaches. I have a character named la Peaches.

JR: I've seen that, yeah.

GL: And so forth. And, of course, I'd ask Eddie and Cheech, all these people, I'd ask them do the voices.

JR: Come and do the voices, huh?

GL: That'd be great.

JR: That would be good, yeah.

GL: It's a dream.

JR: Well, I think it's a dream worth pursuing for sure.

GL: So in a way, we've come. . . . I mean, at this point I'm trying to bring kind of a circle thing here to some kind of culmination with regards to what I've been doing for the last thirty-five years or whatever. I want to put it together, and I think that an animation and using all the images that I've done. . . . I also mentioned earlier about paper-cutting. Because what I did is, I saw some Otomi paper effigies, and I began to cut paper by just folding it over, and I began to teach myself how to cut paper. And what I wanted to do is use that reference, that influence by the Otomi, who use these paper effigies in ceremonies and whatever. I don't know how they do it, but they burn them. In the bathroom there's a couple that I'll show you. But I wanted to also get Chicano art to have things like what I've seen in Japanese culture. I mean, the buckets they do, the gardens, everything. I mean, they're so beautiful, so well thought out and so. . . . Sometimes designed a lot. Or the Zen way, designed very spontaneously and so forth.

JR: Right.

GL: But within all that vocabulary—again, you've seen it as vocabulary—I want to put all these things together.

JR: Well, it certainly seems like enough to be a life's work, to base one's life work on—you know, to interrogate all that, to really put it out there.

GL: Well, but I also want to do another thing that was characteristic of my younger days, and that's getting people together to get involved together. Because I like bringing people together, and so what I'd like to do is. . . . If it was an animation project, then we'd have the whole voice thing to deal with. Music, script.

JR: Right.

GL: And then the animation. That's Gary's department, but he told me that I need to have a script first and then we'd go from that. Now what's important to say, I guess, at this point is that *this* is where I see not necessarily a closure but a culmination of *all* the things that I started back in '64. From that time to this point, I'd like to see

this be my final, like say "Ta da!" and then go on and do some other stuff. Because I don't want to be doing dogs forever. But they're neat. People like them and they're funny. As you see, I just did it, almost without even thinking. It just pops out. [GL has been working on something throughout the interview—Ed.]

JR: I saw that. I guess we should mention on tape that you've got a sketch pad in front of you.

GL: Yeah. I'm just drawing stuff. [shows what he's done to JR]

JR: Huh!

GL: When Los Four was. . . . And it's on the Los Four movie, that when we would get together, we'd all be drawing and talking. We'd be talking and say, "Well, hey! Well, yeah? Well, forget you. I'm not going to do that." Or Frank would say, "Nah, forget it. I'm not going to go." And Beto says, "Well, I'm quitting."

JR: [laughs]

GL: And we'd all be drawing and we'd say, "Ah, shut up," you know, da-da-da. And then we'd keep drawing, and then we would pass the drawings, and we'd do that sometimes. But, like I said, it was a golden time, in the sense that we were very much like four brothers there, just kind of interacting and very straight-forward, and. . . .

JR: Uh-huh. Well, kind of connecting the idea of animation with Los Four, Frank was telling me about some comic books that you guys worked on. Do you remember anything about that?

GL: Yeah.

JR: Like what they were about? Or if that was helpful in generating iconography or anything like that?

GL: Well, one thing I can say about. . . . Well, maybe not specifi[cally]. I don't know what that is about there too much, but. . . . One of the things that happened is that, like when I first met these guys, I was proselytizing all these cultural things, right? So those ideas became the mode in which we put the graffiti pieces together. So we all knew that crosses and hearts and palm trees—these are all common images that we all understand in Southern California. So we start putting them up and, again, I was talking about the spray can being a liquid pencil. And what I was doing, because I went to art school, was translating the tools of a graffiti guy into something that was more palatable to the middle class. So I was saying, "Well, listen, just see the spray can as a liquid pencil." "Oh, yeah." "Oh, yeah, that's a cute idea." So it neutralizes the idea that it's vandalism.

JR: Right.

GL: And then we said, "Let's make a mural. Let's translate this negative factor in the community and let's make it positive." "How?" "Well, let's make a mural out of it." "Well, what does that mean?" So here's my point. As we began to work, one guy would come up and put a heart, another guy would come up and cross it out, another guy would embellish that. And then somebody would put a devil over here, and then some people would put wings on it and then. . . . So we sabotaged each other's work as it built up in layers and layers of paint, people just arbitrarily going and spraying where they wanted to and embellishing each other's, or trying to cross it out or something. Which made it look a little bit more like in imagery, like a Jackson Pollock or [Mark—Ed.] Tobey, where it gets kind of crowded and busy. I don't know if you've seen some of those, but. . . .

JR: Yeah, I have.

GL: So, anyway, I think that my point is that our images that we did individually changed collectively. We all had to apply each other's skills together and this was the venue: the graffiti can. The spray can, I'm sorry. The spray can became the device that allowed us to unify our different styles into this cohesive piece, and it turned out pretty neat, actually. Everybody was pleased with it at the end because. . . . And we stopped at a given point. We said, "Okay, that's it." We could have gone too far.

JR: Right.

GL: And wisely enough, I think I owe it to Frank and maybe even Hal Glicksman, who said, "Hey, okay. You guys better stop now." And then there was times when we would paint things out, because we just got too crazy. But it was pretty much a one-shot deal. I don't think we did much remedying, come to think of it.

JR: Was this for the LACMA show?

GL: This was for the Irvine show.

JR: The UCI show?

GL: Yeah, the first one that I curated and formed the group. And so I acted. . . . Well, at that time, see, I was organizing all kinds of stuff. I had just met Frank and Carlos not too. . . . Oh, this is '73? No, I had known them a couple of years already. No, that's right.

JR: Let me flip the tape here.

GL: Oh yeah.

[Break in taping]

JR: This is Tape 2, Side B, continuing with Gilbert Lujan on November 17, 1997. And I think we're kind of at that point. . . . I know you don't like me to ask you such open-ended questions . . .

GL: Hmm, well. . . . [GL continues to sketch throughout most of the remainder of the interview—Ed.]

JR: . . . but I guess I just want to give you a chance to offer up any kind of reflections that you might have about either your work specifically, or influences on your work, or where you see it going, maybe some ideas about where Chicano art's headed, what you see your role in the future of that is. Maybe, if you have seen anything going on out there right now that you think is particularly interesting or provocative. Or even if you want to assess what you think some of the successes or maybe shortcomings of the Movement [are—Ed.], and how people have kind of picked up the ball—the next generation may or may not have picked up the ball—from the work that you initiated and stuff. I think any of those might be a good way to head at this moment.

GL: Okay. I think some of the earlier ones. . . . What did you say there about some of the first ones?

JR: Some of the influences?

GL: Okay, yeah, that one strikes a bell. I would like to say that a very important influence for me was Carlos Casteñeda's work, because I dealt with it as partly phenomenology, but partly to deal with perspectives and perception of things. In other words, I was interested as a visual artist. I was interested in the manner in which he describes perception throughout the book. And the various things that he's undergone—you know, these Tolteca traditions and so forth—were also interesting to me for maybe something akin to being a disciple of a Zen monk, you know, here, and it's brought home. As I mentioned before, I'm an advocate of Buddhism and Zen and Taoism. I like those also not so formal and rigid kinds of organizations, but the ones that appeal more to artists, and that's the ones that are the Asian thought. But Carlos Casteñeda, in particular, has in a very profound way brought me home to the Americas, and I sought the wisdom and knowledge of the Tolteca tradition that he lays out in his books, in trying to find that deeper knowledge, that deeper understanding of the universe that I knew was coming out of the indigenous America. But we don't get it anywhere else. You don't get it through anthropology because they don't believe in some of the notions that are taking place in his books, so they don't accept, they don't know about them, and so why bother exploring that for this kind of thing? And this kind of thing—the Tolteca tradition that he's reflecting there—has been very important for me.

JR: Informative?

GL: It also. . . . I mentioned the Aztlán myth that Chicanos adopted in the sixties earlier, and so this is an extension and maybe a refinement of some of those fantasies we had about connecting with our indigenous past. So in that way, I think, Carlos's work is important because all these things make me think, [and I apply them, too]. He also said the Chicano movement was a waste of time.

JR: Casteñeda did?

GL: Yes. And he said that. . . . It was really an opinion, I think, of Don Juan, and he said. . . . And I think that I understand their point.

JR: How's that?

GL: I mean, after all these years of doing all this work in spite of that opinion. . . . I've wasted a lot of time on some of those things.

JR: Hmm.

GL: I know it to be true. I did it. I don't regret it, I guess, but I know that wasn't for naught. I mean, there was nothing that happened with many, many hours of meetings and meetings and efforts that went [on—Ed.] that I don't see anything that came of it.

JR: I see.

GL: And my evidence to support that idea is going back and feeling out things that happened, to see what developed from those seeds that were planted there. Not much happens. So, one must be satisfied with doing whatever they can, regardless of whether it grows a little tree or not. You've got to just. . . . You have to just act. You have to believe in something and then act on it, and some grow fruit, some don't. Because it's just . . . I don't know. Getting philosophical but. . . .

JR: Well, to extend the metaphor then, what trees do you think that were planted through that early work have taken?

GL: Well, the Los Four—[which—Ed.] is one that we've been talking about—was one of those things that turned out to be a real blossom, because, like I said, I had been doing other shows and I had done other . . . actually getting together of groups and with a conscious effort of making a guild, a group, a club, something. We didn't even know how to call ourselves. We didn't want to be a guild. Some people didn't want the idea of a guild because it was too European, which they had them here. In the Americas, the art-making was developed in guild systems. It's just a word, you know. We get kind of sensitive about European products, indigenous products, but without distracting from the point too much, let's see, what else?

JR: The centros, the Chicano studies, the development of the iconography or the language? How about the mural movement? You haven't commented too much about that.

GL: Well, I wasn't a muralist but I did get involved and did some, but I think that the Chicano movement got a lot of play on the murals. I think that people got an idea that murals was a Mexican thing and begin to resist. You know, racism sticks its head up again. And people can't stand having another culture come in and influence things, and so. . . . A lot of the murals were also of the nature of being kind of provincial, I guess, in the way that they presented ideas and so forth. So all these things have made murals difficult. The idea of vandalism and graffiti and so forth. There's a lot of things working against the mural system—or mural movement, as you say.

But I've always been interested in proselytizing sculpture because there's many, many more venues for sculpture—and bas reliefs off of buildings and stuff—and it doesn't have the negative connotation of the murals. Now, all murals don't have to be looking like Mexican muralists, okay?

JR: Right.

GL: And there's plenty of examples here in L.A. to show the variety that's possible. But the materials. . . . The physical problem with paint and the particular caustic elements of cement and brick affect the paint and so forth, so those are problems that you have, so that's what I think about the mural movement. Being involved with the arts for so many years, I know about murals in a lot of different ways, and one of them is selling it as art in public places. The other one is the material issues, safety issues, gang-turf things about graffiti and so forth. All these social elements work into all these things. So that's what I think about murals. But I was always interested in proselytizing sculpture, because I'm more into sculpture, for one. And I had more interest in that. And then I found, too, that, if people could get into it, it would be much more successful than murals. I think that a sculpture program would be better, in the long run. But the way things are set up and so forth and the amount of credibility that art has in this country, all those efforts are always kept real small. Not a lot of effort and money's put into these sculptural kind of things.

JR: Yeah. I was going to ask you about where you see Chicano art headed. Maybe some fertile grounds for development or any new voices that you may have seen out there that you think are doing a good job or are particularly effective these days?

GL: Well, there'd be a lot of people to mention because I've seen a lot of good things here, of late, in this time period, by young people that I really like a lot. And with greater skill, with better command of the materials, etc., than when I was their age. So I see those kinds of things that are encouraging. I also see that young people also get upset at things that are not right, and so that's encouraging, because we need to keep a moral fiber that has a consensus so that we don't have a society that's torn apart with the kind of conflict and so forth that we see coming from those gangster movies that people are constantly shooting themselves up and then all

this kind of dehumanizing kind of behavior that goes on between people. They get real harsh with each other, and those are not things that help build a society. And you know that my interest in art is building a vision and so forth. So I don't take too much interest in those things that are, if not negative, at least, pointing out a real harsh reality. And I'm not against other people doing it. I think it is a clear statement and I never have any qualms, because I grew up in South Central when I was a young man. I went to John Muir Junior High, and, hey, when you're in junior high school, man, the world is harsh and clear, man. You get beat up if you don't behave right, and there's all these things that manifest themselves in urban society. But I guess my point is that young people today, with the computers, with the technology, I see a lot of hope, like I said earlier, that I really do see that they still have. . . . Young people, you know, like Zack, Beto de la Rocha's son. He's with that Rage Against the Machine and so forth. And at first I used to think, "Well, jeez . . ."—at my age, of course, I'm down the

road. . . .

JR: [laughs]

GL: I say, "What a waste of energy to be mad and so forth." But I was there. I was there, too, and so I remember.

JR: I see.

GL: And so, again, not being too critical about that and understanding that and appreciating the fact that that anger is about responding to the world and, yes, there's things to be angry about but you've got to balance it with the beautiful things like these wonderful clouds and this scenario out here.

JR: It's true.

GL: You know, this rural setting and. . . .

JR: It's true. Well, I think that might be a good place to wrap up.

GL: Yeah, we're about it. . . . [chuckling]

JR: What do you think?

GL: Yeah. No, I think I'm getting tired, too.

JR: This process will do it.

GL: Yeah, it does but. . . . And I don't know what else to say, actually, at this point. Maybe some other time.

JR: Yeah.

GL: I'll remember some more things.

JR: I always think that it's a good idea, maybe like five years, ten years down the road, to do another installment on these.

GL: Yeah, I think you're right. Or even two years, because I'm fifty-seven, so you don't three to five years. [laughter]

JR: You still got a lot of fire left in you.

GL: Well, not too long, so. . . . You never know.

JR: Yeah. Well, thanks a lot.

GL: Okay, Jeff. Thank you.

[End of interview]