



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Patssi Valdez,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Patssi Valdez on May 26, 1999. The interview took place in Los Angeles, CA, and was conducted by Jeffery Rangel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Session 1, Tape 1, Side A (30-minute tape sides)]

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is an interview for the Archives of American Art with Patssi Valdez on May 26, 1999. We're at Patssi's - We're in Patssi's kitchen right now, at the kitchen table and the interviewer is Jeff Rangel. And I think that's what we need to know to get started.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And Patssi's kitchen isn't a restaurant. [laughs]

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is it a restaurant.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Is not.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay. We need to turn this down a little bit. We need this towel under here. Okay, there we go. Okay. Actually, like I told you, we tend to go biographical in nature. But as we're sitting at the kitchen here, at the table, we started talking a little bit about the show that started at the Mexican Museum and is now in Laguna. And I thought it might be a good idea to get some reflections about that show because as we were saying, it represents something of a turning point, or a marking point, in your career. And so rather than start at the beginning, I figure we'd start at the present and see what that means to you right now. So, I think the first thing I wanted to ask you about was the title of the exhibit. And if you had come up with that yourself or . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, not at all.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Not at all.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I had nothing to do with it all.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay. What did you think of it?

PATSSI VALDEZ: And I think that's part of it. Maybe - No, I didn't have anything to do with it and I wasn't even asked. I'm not real familiar with having shows like this, you know. I don't really know how all that works out. But "A Precarious Comfort" - I thought it was okay. You know, it was okay.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Who came up with the title?

PATSSI VALDEZ: It must have been the curator and I'm not exactly sure, but I think it was the curator, Tere Romo. Because basically it was her vision . . . the work that she picked. I mean, we went over it a bit but I - She had a certain vision.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What do you think of that vision? What do you think of her selection?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I thought it was okay. I think there are a lot of pieces that I would have preferred to have in the show that weren't in the show. And there were also - I had done a recent piece, it was a landscape, that didn't make it into the show in San Francisco. And when I . . . I told them I was going to put in a new painting and when I went to see if it was hanging, they go "Oh no. There was no space." But I think what was happening is because it was so different from the other work that I'm noticing that my public and people are having a difficult time with my new work.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Accepting the changes.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That you are going through.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yeah. Because it was a landscape. And I'm known for doing the interiors. So I have this feeling now - I'm only sensing that people just can't even look at it. They can't handle it. They want to see the curtains. Because they say I'm known for the curtains or I'm known for this vibrant color. Well, it's changing. And

I think that's why it wasn't up. I was a bit disappointed with that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So what's that mean at this stage to you? I mean, it seems to me like the show is a real achievement.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm.

JEFFERY RANGEL: To my knowledge it's the first major show of your paintings like that. It's kind of a retrospective in a way.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, they're calling it a survey.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Survey. Okay. It's about ten years or so represented in there.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Ten years. Because I've only been painting ten years, exactly. So it's from the beginning of my painting career, which began in 1988, up to the present.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What does that mean for you to have the . . . the sort of parameters of what Patssi Valdez, the painter, is set up already? You know, I mean, it seems a little bit early to put that label on

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know! I know! I don't know how people . . . I don't really . . . I shouldn't say I don't care but that's other people's limitations. Mine, I listen. I just go keep -- I've always been that way. I just go forward. I go, "Oh well. Sorry."

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's what you have to do.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. I listen and I go, "Oh well. I'm doing this anyway." I know I did a series of monoprints about two years ago that were all done in pastel colors . . . pale yellow, pale pink. Very, very, very soft. And my old dealer, my ex-dealer, he couldn't - He said, "I just can't sell this stuff!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really?

PATSSI VALDEZ: "People just can't believe it's you!" And I'm going, "Well, it is me!" He goes, "I can't sell any of it. They're looking for that other stuff."

JEFFERY RANGEL: So it's like your public isn't - People who are familiar with your work as well as curators and people who are writing about you and stuff aren't giving you the space to make that transformation. Is that accurate?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't know if they're not giving me the space - because I'm taking it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. Maybe not acknowledging it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Not yet. It's early. Because the transition, the change has just started. So it's sort of early. But I know in this last show when they didn't put up my landscape, I was like, "Oh! Where's my landscape?" Because I wanted the show to end with my landscape, which they did do in Laguna. Because I want people to have a little idea of where I think I'm going. I'm not positive if I'm going all landscapes. But, you know, it's a rough idea.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was the landscape of?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Just imaginary landscape. What I do is I drive . . . when I'm driving in my car because I want to do landscapes, I just really start honing in on the trees and hills and I keep a mental picture. And that's what I do when I'm driving my car. And then I come home . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Look out! Road hazard. [chuckles]

PATSSI VALDEZ: And then I make a rough . . . no, I make a rough sketch because you know when you're driving in the front of you there's all these mountains right here.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Sure, right up the 110.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. So I'm seeing them right in front of me. I mean, right out my - I love trees. I adore trees. That's why I'm near a place where there's a lot of trees. So, I make a mental picture and I'll make a rough sketch. Or sometimes I'll actually make a quick sketch. I'll go hang out at the park. Make a rough sketch though because if I actually sit in front of something and try to paint it, it's too limiting. I try to make it look too much . . . and it doesn't work.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I'm better at my imagination.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Hold on a second. A brief pause there. I guess the other thing, one of the other things I wanted to ask you, getting back to the show, was the intensely personal work on the walls. What's it like for you as an artist to put that stuff out there?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, you know, when I'm making the work, I don't even think about anybody out there or anything. I just paint what I feel because my work really comes from my work with my intuition and my emotions. And it's not even like really logical a lot of the times. So I don't really think about any . . . what it's . . . what I'm putting out there to the public or anything. I just have to paint what I'm feeling and what I'm thinking and what I care about at that particular time in my life. So I really never think about it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: But then there it is on the wall.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Then there it is. Yes, there it is on the wall. But see, I work with a lot of metaphors so a lot of the work, it's - Some of the early work is really intense. And . . . but it's not real straight forward because I work in metaphors. So it's sort of hidden inside these objects, sort of. And a lot of these objects have more than one meaning to me. So I've sort of - It's out there but at the same time, it's not real blatantly out there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: There's a subtext to it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Exactly. So I sort of . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: But the energy and the emotion and I would say the intent comes across really, you know, strong in that way.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. I feel very fortunate that I'm able to do that even if it is really like . . . you know, whether it's happy or sad or dark or light. I just feel glad that I can imbue my paintings with that kind of energy. I would prefer that than painting some bland piece of work. And also, if it tends to be dark, I tend to balance it with light so that there's like a balance. I don't know if I always succeed but . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are you talking with the palette or the themes or both?

PATSSI VALDEZ: With the colors, you know. With the themes. Like say I'll put that really intense red watermelon on a table and it could mimic - well, really it's a heart to me. It could be a heart. And then all the juice from the watermelon could be blood or it could be just juice.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I sort of play with that. And make it just a watermelon on a table. Or . . . [laughs]

JEFFERY RANGEL: Red in the context of the whole painting, it's pretty clear that there's at least a . . . you're alluding to blood.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. Alluding.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And so your viewers . . . it seems pretty well aware. It comes across pretty quickly.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. But at least it's not all real gory or anything.

JEFFERY RANGEL: No. It's not.

PATSSI VALDEZ: See, that's what I don't want to do. I want to make it - I don't want to live with a piece of art that's all gory. I just don't want that. I mean, there's enough difficult things in the world to have to sit and look at gore! So I try to make it attractive or beautiful or interesting. I try to sort of make something that I would want to look at, even though it's extremely intense. But I could actually live with it. Where I try to make it lovely in a weird kind of way. That's what I try to do.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think the show is really successful, I think, in pointing out or displaying that balance. I think the thing that first hits you obviously is the color. You know, if it's not on the wall that it's hanging on, it's jumping out of the paintings at you!

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Can you comment a little bit on your use of color?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yeah. Well, you know, sometimes I salivate when I look at certain colors.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are you serious?!

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. Right here. I see _____

JEFFERY RANGEL: Like you're biting into a lemon.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. Like I'm biting into a lemon. I don't know if it happens to other artists. But I heard someone else say they also - it happens to them. I'll salivate a little. Like [laughs]

JEFFERY RANGEL: Pavlov.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know. I'm not kidding. I'll be triggered by a color. Really.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What colors make you salivate?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't remember. I don't remember. But if the painting is really like stunningly beautiful or intense, I'll feel it in my mouth. It's amazing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It is amazing.

PATSSI VALDEZ: But I forgot the question now. Oh, the color. So my intension early on was I was trying to paint my emotions so the best way I could do it was with color. Like what I do -- Say I'm going to paint this room and I have a certain mood today. I will paint things how they feel, not how they look. Like the room's white right now. But if it feels warm to me, I'll paint it orange. If that corner feels cool . . . So I work a lot with warm and cool. That's sort of how I view it. And then I like juxtaposing colors against each . . . like compliments so that they could vibrate. That - In the early beginning of my painting career, that was a total intention. So that I could make it vibrate. And what I would do - and I never really told people, nobody asked - I actually would read a lot of scientific theory on color and I would have a book near me and go, "Okay. I'm going to paint this blue. Now what will work near blue?" I wouldn't guess. I'd actually look it, read it, study it and then do it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think that's important to know because there's a combination between tapping into the intuitive and that kind of emotional side but also a real technical aspect of

PATSSI VALDEZ: knowing what it will do.

JEFFERY RANGEL: producing that stuff. Yeah.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And a lot of times I tell young people that I don't just guess. I'll actually like sit down and I'll do homework. I'll do red and see how many color combinations I can do and . . . I would sit between paintings sometimes and actually sit down and do homework with a book . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: color charts

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. With color charts and little studies. So I wouldn't just go, "Oh yeah! I think I'll pick that." It wasn't all that simple. So I would really - I also read about - And I'm trying to remember where I read it. I can't remember now. But I also learned that pigment is vibrating -- you know, the atoms - they're vibrating. And some have higher vibrations than others. And that I was totally aware of. Another thing too is I wouldn't want to scrub it a lot so it would break down its vibration.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Scrub the paint?

PATSSI VALDEZ: You know, like sometimes you can paint like over and over, scrubbing and rubbing? So I try to paint with a lot of respect so that my color can maintain its purity.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Some of those things look like they're coming right out of the tube! You know what I mean?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. Some. But also I don't - Like somebody asked me recently in my little -- my show at Patricia Correa that I have up right now? The young guy said, "Is that flourescent paint?! What do you put in your paint?" I said, "No. It's regular acrylic paint." He said, "Is that flourescent?" I said, "No." So don't think I just put one layer of red. I put like layer and layer and layer and layer and layer in different little shades of like red. It could be _____ crimson with some cad - many varieties of red make up my red. Get it?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Patssi's red.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yes. Not just plain red. Because I know I'm known for that red. Or now there's no more red. The new stuff - no more red. For now. I'm not saying I'll never. I don't know, you know. Maybe I'll use red in a different way now. So now I'm mixing red with Naple's yellow or something. So that - because when you mix

white with red, you make . . . cool it down. And I was very aware of that. So I didn't want to put any white in my red because I didn't want to cool it down at all. But maple's yellow will now give me a red but not as intense and it won't cool it down. So I'm still I like trying to learn.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Cool. Very cool. And those are the colors corresponding to the emotions that you're . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh. Yeah. Now, things have gotten softer. You know, I've worked with two healers for the last ten years. So when people think I do magic in my paintings, there's magic in there? It's not about magic at all. It's about dealing with energy because my healers -- that's what I learned a lot about -- energy in the universe. So, another thing is that you know, you feel people's energy. I do. So also, I know that everything in the universe is -- Nothing's solid. And everything is in motion.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So that's why those paintings, I try to make everything feel like there's movement. And it's about that. That's what I'm thinking about when I'm doing it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's really interesting. I think the tendency is to equate that motion with dis-equilibrium and then people sort of read into that . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: That's exactly what . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Patssi's going through an unstable thing or something.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, it has nothing to do with that at all. Nothing at all. Actually, I've never been more stable in my life. But it's about capturing the energy in the universe and nothing is static. So I try to make my paintings where they're not static! That's the whole intention.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Ten years ago, when you started painting, it was the same sort of intention?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I met my healer in 1988 when I started painting. And I've been with him ever since. He's played a major role in my work. He'll go, "How's the work coming, Patssi?" And I'll go, "Oh my God! It's getting so bright." And he goes, "Oh, very good. Very good." You know, I go, "It's so bright and intense people need sun glasses." And he'll go, "Oh, okay. Oh, okay." So it has to do with being balanced - even though the work is very . . . could have some dark and intensity, but as far as me, it's about letting that stuff go. Putting it out there and letting it go is part of the process.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What about how people read that? Do you see in letting it go, is it sort of like - I don't want to say a morality tale but a kind of - Is it instructive in that way? Is there a message that people can intuit through that? Is it instructive about how to heal or what it means to be at a certain emotional place? I guess I should clarify the question a little bit. Because when I was at the show, a woman in the gift shop asked me what I thought of it. And I thought . . . I said, "I think it's pretty courageous work to put that stuff on the wall, to sort of like really bare it like that." And I said, "I think it probably resonates with a lot of other women's experience or a lot of other Latinas in particular." And so that's kind of what I'm getting at. In putting your paintings out there, is there that kind of . . . "Look, I've been through this. Here's something you can relate to."

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, you know what? I don't think about it when I'm doing it but when I talk to other painters later . . . I've had students or even a dear friend who said - She showed me some work one day and then she showed me this other work. I said, "Oh my God! Why are you not doing this work over here?" She said, "Oh, that's too incredibly painful." And I said, "Well, that's the work you should be doing. That's the work that has the power." And she said, "Oh, I couldn't do it. I'd be bawling my eyes out when I did it!" I said, "Don't you think half those paintings I bawled my eyes out?!" I said, "Actually, that's why I think a lot of that work is so incredibly powerful because I don't hold back. And I don't think it's something I need to hold back or be ashamed of or anything. I just give you all I've got!" And you don't have to like it and if you like it, great. If you don't, well that's okay too. But I have to do it for me. And hopefully that will encourage people to just be who you are. I mean, be who you are and don't be ashamed of it and just . . . I don't hold back.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are there unspeakable truths that are rendered in those paintings?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Unspeakable truths. Some probably. Yeah, maybe there are some. I don't know if they're unspeakable. Because everybody has talked about - I guess mainly when the stars starting talking about coming from dysfunctional homes. What is the word? Oh, I don't know. Not only dysfunctional but there's another word. I don't know. But when they started talking about stuff, it was all okay. And I was painting it. So I don't know if it's so unspeakable.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's another way of speaking it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Exactly. Through my work. In the past. Now the intent is going somewhere else. But I needed to paint that stuff, you know.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I'm not going to let you get away from the show quite yet.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Okay.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I wanted to ask you about

PATSSI VALDEZ: That's all right.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think right in conjunction with your use of color is the iconography that comes up in the work

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yes.

JEFFERY RANGEL: and you mentioned the play that you used with the objects that you paint. But I'm wondering how you developed that vocabulary. Where that comes from. If it's . . . If there were any sources for that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, you know, before I was a painter, I was a photographer and all I did was portraits of people. And now my paintings have nobody in them. So I was a photographer photographing for many years. Then there was a point where I had this idealized dream that I was going to like . . . I don't know . . . either try to change the world's vision of Latinos. And I was very naive and that was the big goal. And then along the way, I started to get - We're just all human. No matter what color you are. And I encountered some very discouraging situations with people. And I just decided - They were so painful. Because I had this - I was going to make you show your beauty to the world that Latinos are this and that. And then, say you came back at me with something that totally hurt, shocked me. Like you thought I was going to get rich and famous off your image and what were you going to get? And I went like, "What?! What are you people talking about?!" I'm like I hadn't even thought of it! I was really like that naive. I really had this vision. And I'm going - what?! So soon after that - I even had one person who was going to sue me, write me letters and go, "You know, you're getting famous because of me." And I'm going, "what are they saying?!" So I decided enough and I just stopped. And then I started to go inside myself and go, "You're looking outside yourself to change the world and da-da-da . . . and all this stuff." I said, "Patssi, I think you need to go inside yourself and look for the answers. They're not out there! They're in here!" And then I decided to start going inside of me. And then I started to paint. It went roughly from my childhood. That was probably my first painting "The Kitchen." I think it's in the show. So I started to paint my own childhood. Memories of my . . . the kitchen, the home, the things that took place in these rooms. The feelings that were in these rooms. That's why chairs and . . . people are absent and just the energy, the energetic . . . the feeling of the person that left their energy on that chair. And the memories. And that's when I started the inward quest for change. I also learned from one of my healers. He said, "You cannot change the world if - You cannot change the world if your own house (meaning your body) is in disarray." How can you do that? How can I go over and go, "Look, you need to do that, that and that?" How? When my place is a mess. So I decided that I needed to clean up my mess. And that was when I met Howard and when I met Carlos. And I started to work with -- not even work, get healed by mainly Howard. And then I got to meet Carlos. And then I started on going inside, inside. And so I was painting everything that was mine that I remembered or things I was attracted to or things that had meaning for me. And that's where those paintings started.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How does that process of painting those things contribute to healing?

PATSSI VALDEZ: You know, I don't know if it contributes to healing because that's not my goal. I don't know - Oh, you mean . . . I don't know if it contributes to healing for others but I think it's like . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: No, for you.

PATSSI VALDEZ: you have an old memory and if you let it out, you don't have it in your body anymore. It's over there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What if it's a good one?

PATSSI VALDEZ: If it's a good one?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you want to let it out if it's a good one?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, maybe if it's a good memory -- What's funny, in the beginning the memories were not all that good. You know, they were hard memories. And that's a good point - now you're asking me about a good memory. Well, some of the new work has a good feeling of where I want to be. You know, like that painting "Saturday" that the Laguna people did the - they really liked. And you know, I painted a body of water. Well, you know I live near no water! So . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Echo Park is right over there.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I could like dream the dreams of where I want to be or how I see beauty and I love nature. So those are the other things - dreaming the dreams, ideal situations or I love nature so bodies of water, trees, the landscapes. You know, then I can make - I like to make things beautiful so I can make this beautiful thing that maybe I don't own and then I can like . . . have it and live with it, make it mine. And I think that's the great part about art making is that you don't have to have money. You don't have to have much of anything. You just have to - Well, you have to have your paints and your imagination. And you can create anything! And that's the good stuff, you know, that the great things - Like I had a home up on Park Drive that I lost, that I didn't get to buy. Things weren't right. I loved that home. So what I did is I painted the mantel and brought it with me. It's right there with the fire on it. So the magic of just with these two hands you create these things. So, I don't know if that's a form of healing because I don't - Really, I don't know. I never thought about it that way. But, manifesting the dream, making it tangible is a good thing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. Pretty liberating I would think. Can you - You've mentioned the healers that you've worked with. Can we talk about the particulars of that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think so. You know, I won't go real into depth but I worked with Howard Lee. I worked still -- I was very ill; I'll just say that. I used to get these migraines that I probably wasn't going to live much longer. I probably was going to die about . . . when I was about thirty or a little older.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PATSSI VALDEZ: . . . and I thought I can't live like this.

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 1, Side B, continuing with Patssi Valdez on May 26, 1999. And you were talking about having the intense migraines and what that was about.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So, I actually had even submitted myself to a hospital to get a CAT scan because my sister's had brain surgeries. She had six. So I thought, "Oh my God! What if something's wrong with me?" So one day I had an episode of this headache and I got a phone call. I used to have to unplug the phone because I couldn't function and I had plugged the phone and it rang. Ring! And I thought, "Oh . . ." Because when you get ride of a migraine, it's gone. The pain's gone. So I picked up the phone and it was this curator. And she said, "Oh, now. You don't have to be sick." I go, "Oh, I've been so sick." She says, "You don't have to be sick like this. This is not . . . You don't have to be this sick. Call this man." So it was Howard. And I had been looking for an acupuncturist earlier. But somehow I got lost and never found a person. And so, it's funny, then she called and go to him. I called him up the same day and he . . . I started crying because I was so like upset. And I went to Howard in 1988. And have been seeing him ever since. And within a year, he had totally taken my migraines away. I live today without migraines.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is that about herbs?

PATSSI VALDEZ: He's . . . Now, he doesn't - It was needle, the needle and herbs. But now he's so powerful he doesn't use needle or herbs. He's a hands on healer. He uses energy. He's been practicing since he was a very young man. And he has a certain gift. There are some people in China where they just move the energy. You lie down and they just move it. He does that. And you go into a deep meditative state. Even when you just sit in his office, you start to go under. I was so sensitive to him already I just start to go under. And you can have something wrong. By the time you leave, it's . . . I had a dry patch here. And when I left, it's already - by the next day it was already gone. So you have to experience it because even - He's a man of very few words. He said, "There are just certain things you can't even explain with words." So I've been with Howard all these years. And he says we're like cars; we need tune ups. And sometimes we get out of balance. We're an instrument. We need to be finely balanced like this. And then so, I'm very lucky that I met Howard. Howard has been my mentor for a long time. So he saw a recent work. I just did some flowers that, of course, didn't sell at Patricia's.

JEFFERY RANGEL: There were some at Laguna. I think there were some calla lilies and roses.

PATSSI VALDEZ: A few, a few. But these are even prettier and so nothing sold there. And I told him. And he said, "Oh yeah. Don't worry. It'll be a matter of time. People will be accepting everything you do." And then I thought oh, okay. And that was it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You mentioned somebody by the name of Carlos you've worked with too?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. Casteñeda I worked with too for about three years. He was my other teacher. And he - I worked with him in a movement, energetic in the movement. So movement for well being. I was seeing both of them at the same time.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it something like a tai chi type thing?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. He didn't call it that. He combined different movement and it was called Cha Ling Fu. He combined them and we'd meet once a week, sometimes two, sometimes three . . . depending. Because sometimes he would have to go places. You don't know where it went but he'd go. You didn't . . . You just . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Visionquest.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, you're like where did he go?! Oh well, teacher's not here today. Okay. So anyway, I worked with them, the group, for quite a few years in movement and that really - They helped me a lot. And I looked like fabulous when I was with them. And so I worked with him. He became like another incredible mentor.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where does he work out of?

PATSSI VALDEZ: He's now dropped dead. He died. He just died like last year.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I didn't know that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And he just - through the same area where my other healer is, it's on the next block. What a small world. So I go - You get a call and you go and you'd do these. And the same woman who introduced me to Howard introduced me to him. When we were in a plane, she goes, "How would you like to meet Carlos Casteñeda?" And I go what?! Of course. She said, "I think you're ready to go now." And I went, "Okay." Because I had already been in a healing with Howard so I was already clean. And I lived a certain lifestyle.

JEFFERY RANGEL: When you made that transition, did you . . . was it difficult in terms of re-establishing or changing relationships with the people in your world? Like the way that they knew Patssi was the way that they wanted to relate to her but the fact that you were going through these changes made it hard.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. I had already cut off all my old relationships. I had ended them already when I decided to - my unhealthy things. I had already - When I met Howard I was already going into another direction. No, people would look at me and go, "Did you get a face lift? Or what's wrong? Why do you look different?!" They would say, "Why do you look so different?" I'd go . . . You know, it was funny. Howard would say he gives psychic face lifts because you're like younger. You should see him, what he looks like. But anyway, so did I break off? No, I didn't break off but I had already done that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: When did that take place?

PATSSI VALDEZ: In '88.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In '88.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Every -- The total line was 1988. And if you look at a print I have in that show - it's called either Scattered

JEFFERY RANGEL: Scattered

PATSSI VALDEZ: Notice? That's me. I think it's '89. '88 or '89. And I did a portrait of myself and my face is opening and someone else is coming out. I mean, if you really go look at it. Because I knew that this old Patssi was breaking away and the new one was emerging. And that's the process that's been happening all through these paintings. So that's why I left her. She's dead. She died. That old Patssi's left over there and now I'm another person. But it's hard for people to look at me and talk to me with who I am today as compared to who I used to be. It takes people - It's very hard for people. Maybe they can't let go - even more than you.

JEFFERY RANGEL: They want to resurrect that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: They do! That's why that interview. They just want to hold on to that I don't . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, it was a really strong persona. A real iconographic even persona and the way that people are writing about Chicano art history and particularly the role of Chicanas within that, I think that narrative would probably make it hard for you to shed that skin so to speak.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Not . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Because it's out there. Kind of right now it's what's been written.

PATSSI VALDEZ: it got shed. But I know I don't -- I feel that was very important and I don't say it was less important or more important. It's just in the past. And I did certain work within that context of who I was that --

You know, because a lot of really interesting things, innovative things took place there. So I accept that and I respect it. But it's over there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Because you don't need to go back there.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I can't. That's way in the back. I can only go forward now. There's no way I can ever go back. I would never want to. But I do know that it was an important innovative time. But it's back there. And that's what's exciting about life . . . is that you can make drastic changes in life! I mean, I'm living proof of it. That's the fabulous part. You know, when I see young people who are maybe troubled or have been through a lot of difficulty, I want to say, "If I did it, you can do it. Anyone can. But you have to be focused and want to do it." And the one thing I have low tolerance for is the woe me thing. It's like don't waste your time with that. You can focus somewhere else and you can move out of that space. I should probably have more tolerance for it because, boy, was I good at that! But I just - from the knowledge I have now, it's wasted energy. But we don't know that when we're young.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's hard to have that perspective.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know. So I try not to be judgmental and critical. Because now I can see things on people. You know it when you've been it. You go, "Oh! I see that." Right? It's mirrors, old mirrors.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So at this juncture now, I guess the question would be where do you see the energies going next? Or I know you spoke a little bit about it and you mentioned not being really clear about where.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I mean I'm clear in my head but I don't know how to put it down yet.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Creatively.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yes.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What are you considering?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, of course, landscapes. But not - You know, more imaginary ones. More sky. Get out of the room. The window's opened up more and I want to go outside and play now. I don't want to be in there any more. I might come back in and dabble and then I'll go back outside. So I'm headed outside. [laughs]

JEFFERY RANGEL: Outsides, or just like exterior interiors?

PATSSI VALDEZ: My landscape ended up looking like my room because that's my style! I have a particular style I'm realizing and I like my style. So

JEFFERY RANGEL: How did you develop that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't have a clue.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did art school have anything to do with that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Not at all. I didn't even paint . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: . . . anything about painting.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I didn't paint in art school. I was a photographer. I took photography in art school. I was a collage artist and a photographer. I did my painting on my own. I actually taught myself how to paint because I didn't have a clue how to paint until I started teaching children. One of my weakest points was mixing color.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's what you said in Long Beach and it's hard to

PATSSI VALDEZ: I have to keep saying it. You know why I know now, why I couldn't mix it? I couldn't focus long enough. I had so much inside of me that I just couldn't focus. And I know that now. I would paint a painting and I'd put five emotions on one painting and I would make a big mess! I started doing that and then I'm doing that and then by the end, I was like, "What a mess!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: So does that mean you're less happy with the colors from the earlier works?

PATSSI VALDEZ: There was no color . . . Oh, you mean . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: You know, the stuff that's out there right now. Let's say in this show.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, there isn't much -- Oh, this show? No, no. I'm talking about earlier. I'm talking when I --

No, when I said '88, everything flowed.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You knew how to mix color at that point?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. Because I had . . . I'm saying before because all through art school, I couldn't paint worth a darn. Maybe I did a few paintings here and there in the seventies, in the Asco years. I'd do one and it was okay. I mainly worked in black and white or one color. It was safe. Because color mixing is really in -- it's really intense. I mean, you can mix and over mix until you make a big blob of mud. So you don't really control that and know what you're doing. I mean, I know you can paint intuitively too. But I needed to go real basic. And so when I got out of art school, I needed a job. I started teaching children painting. So I had to start reading books so I could do assignments. And I did it for two years. And then one day I went, "Oh, my God! I think I know what I'm . . ."

JEFFERY RANGEL: what I'm doing!

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, I think I know what I'm doing. I'm going to try to paint now. And that was the first painting. I haven't stopped since.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where were you teaching children?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Everywhere. I taught at Plaza de la Raza. I taught in Santa Monica. I taught a class in Malibu. I taught in Watts on the bus. I mean, finally someone gave me an old car. I graduated from art school. You know, you have no money and now you've got to try to earn - pay your rent or earn . . . You know, so I'd do all these little. They'd give me one class, two.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The hustle.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Just tiny pay checks. And it was really difficult. But I had -- I was determined that I was going to succeed that way. And even though I was very poor for quite a few years, very poor. I remember my friends, "Let's go to the movies." I'd go, "I can't go to the movies." "What do you mean you can't go?" "I can't afford to go to the movies." "Oh, come on." Because they had a straight job, right? I can't. I'm serious. They didn't believe it. Because I know I could have probably went and got a job, regular, but I refused. I was not going to do anything else other than be close to art. I just -- I'm stubborn as a mule too. I'm like, "No. I'm going to do that." And I didn't really want to be a teacher full time. I mean, I liked teaching the kids. I don't know if I should say I didn't want to be one. Well, I didn't have the credentials. That meant I'd have to go back to school some more. And I just wanted to do my art.

JEFFERY RANGEL: When you finish at Otis you don't have the credentials to do that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I just got a B.A., Bachelor of Fine Arts. I never went back and got my master's or anything. I thought about it on and off. But after I did my show, my career's just sort of been on a slow up, a slow climb up. Real slow but it's going up. And then I did the body of work and then I got this call from this man, a French man, Pasqual. And he said, "I heard about your work. Can I come over and see it? I'm planning a show in France." And it was my first like six or eight paintings I had completed. And I said, "Sure." He came over; he looked; he thought. He said, "Okay. I'll be back. I'm picking certain artists for this Chicano show." And I took it with a grain of salt because I'd been promised many things in the past. And I knew that when you believe it, you're sure to get hurt. So I went, "Oh yeah. Whatever." So he came back again. He said, "Well, you're the one I want to put . . . I want you to be in the show." He said, "How would you like to come to France and do an installation?" And I'm going, "Yeah, yeah. Sure, right. Yeah, yeah, I'd love . . . Sure." So I didn't believe it. He goes, "We'll send you the ticket. We'll send you da-da-da." And I go, "Okay." Well, sure enough, it did happen. It did happen. So from going, never traveling and I made this joke. Because I had my studio at Self Help Graphics, in East L.A. at that time because I had gotten a grant that really helped me, the C.A.C. grant that supports you for so many years. Oh, my God! That changed my life. That helped me get medical help and pay Howard.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How does that help you get medical help?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, no. Because I had an income! Get it? I didn't have to count my pennies. I had money.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Gotcha.

PATSSI VALDEZ: A fair amount. Not like a lot but I had this income check. So it helped me get medical help, pay my doctor and it helped stabilize me. It was like those kind of things . . . was a very crucial turning point for me, so much like struggle. And then I met Pasqual and then I was one day - There was a market in East L.A. called Tiangi's. And I made this joke because one day I'm shopping in Tiangi's in East L.A. and the next minute I'm having cappuccino in Paris, France! I'm like how did I get here?! I'm like, "Oh my God! He's going . . . the king and the queen used to prance in the courtyard." I'm like, "Oh really?" And I'm like in France drinking my coffee.

Oh, my God. Air travel is so amazing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was this a solo show?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, it was that "Les Demon des Anges" and me and Amalia got to go everywhere free, or all expenses paid because we were the installation artists.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Oh, you've got to go! Because you've got to set up the installation

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, what I saw is you do one -- Like here, you do one and then they have someone set it up in each city. That's normal. So I'm having my -- Oh, I go . . . I went from Tiangi's to Tangiers. That was the joke. That's how it felt. So when I was there, he said, "Oh, Patssi, do you know that you're going to be going to every city the show goes to?" And I go, "I am?!" So every three, four months, I got an airline ticket. I got all expenses paid. I got spending money and I got my hotel. And I went to every city. And I changed my life. It broadened my view of the world big time.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So what did you witness out there?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, just experiencing different cultures was one big wonderful thing was -- Okay, it was the cultures. Oh God, there was another thing I was going to say. Oh! And the treatment that we got as artists in Europe!

JEFFERY RANGEL: Tell me about that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: It was amazing. I mean, I got medals. Big fancy cars picked us up. There was dinners at . . . twelve course meals with long tables with linen. I mean, I was a queen. They thought we were the most fabulous artists. They loved our art. They thought I was like famous in L.A.! They didn't know. I come back and like people are like - You know, you come back to L.A. and you're nobody. And over there I'm getting a medal of whatever. You know, the ambassador in Sweden gave us this party where we even did the formal thing where you stand in line and you shake all the guests' hands and you say your name one million times! By the time you get into the party, it's over because you're going Oh my God! So, and it's funny because I was there and a man said, "May I escort you to the wine cellar?" Because we're all going to look at the wine at the wine cellar at the ambassador's house. And I'm going, "Sure." So he goes, "Oh my God! I thought you artists were poor." He goes, "You don't look poor at all to me!" Because I like to dress up. But you know this assumption of artists being all like scraggly and poor? So, anyway, that's . . . The other thing that I wanted to dispel is that myth that you don't have to be this suffering, messed up human being to be an artist. I just want young people to know that it's a bunch of baloney. You're not a drunk. You don't have to be any of these things.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Tortured soul.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. I mean, I don't think so at all. They asked me that recently. Do you think you need to suffer to be a great artist? Well, I'm hoping that's not true. But I don't know. Because I suffered. But I'm hoping that's not true. But also is that I don't drink. So when people offered you liquor and I said, "I don't drink" they're like, "Oh my God! An artist who doesn't drink and smoke! What do you do?" I go, "I drink water." And they're like, "Oh no!" That was so funny. But it's like

JEFFERY RANGEL: All over Europe, people were having that response?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. They're like, "You do not drink?" I mean, even here. And I'm like, "No." They go, "Oh my God!" You know, like why? And that's the fabulous thing is you don't have to be these things. You don't. And if I can say that more to young people, you don't have to do those things. It's not part of being a great artist or even a good one. So that's how I got to Europe.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did they understand your work and the rest of the artists who went in that show as Chicano art? Were they sort of aware of the whole context in which the stuff was being produced?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yes.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And they were hip to that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, there would be like certain intellectuals who'd go and give them a history of where all this work came from. That's why Pasqual really liked this work. Because in every country there's always a group of people that are like Chicanos. Okay? The Arabs. So they totally understood and they got it

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's really cool.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. It was really, really cool. I was really glad that it was so well received.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you see other artists out there? Were you exposed to other artists out there who'd had a similar kind of take on . . . productivity?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, there was really not much time for that. I mean, I maybe met a few. Maybe they were in other fields like in the theatre or other areas. But I never really met many fine artists. And then you're so - I would go work, see? I was working. But I made a lot of friends. But some attached to the music world or the theatre. But not so much fine art.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I wonder if that's . . . if there's some kind of similar or shared aesthetics with other folks in Europe who sort of have that . . . that occupy a similar position as Chicanos in the U.S.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. And you have to go back and stay way longer. Because you're there three weeks.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were you and Amalia the only ones who traveled with the show?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, at first because we're the installation artists. Then other artists would start coming on their own. And then they finally got John Valadez to come and do a piece. So we were together there in Spain. And then Daniel finally came. He did a piece. So little by little. Then Gronk was invited. So we'd go to the airport but he never showed up. [laughs]

JEFFERY RANGEL: He never showed up?

PATSSI VALDEZ: We're like, "Where is he?! He never came." We couldn't find him.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He was waiting for the first class ticket! [laughs]

PATSSI VALDEZ: Probably. We're like, he never came! Oh well. I'll never know why. So little by little, a few other artists, their way was paid. Which was cool. You know, as we'd move to another venue, they'd go, "Oh, well let's bring Daniel." Or let's bring John.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did it come to the States too? Was it in New York or in L.A.?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No.

JEFFERY RANGEL: No. It was just in Europe.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. It didn't come to the States. I don't think we could find a venue actually here.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Have you been to Europe since?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I went back after because I was going to be commissioned to do a mural, me and Willie. They were picking . . . I never did a mural. Well, I did one with some young people but there was going to be four murals in Paris. And they were teaming us up. So me and Willie were going to do one. Eloy was going to do one and I don't know who else. But the project fell through. Only one artist got to do it and that was Eloy. And so I went, "Well, I'm not going to let that bother me. I'm going any way." So I got a ticket and I went. And this time I went on my own. I mean, I went but there were friends there. And then I decided I needed to go to Italy. So I went to three . . . I went to Florence, Venice and Rome. So I was on a traveling roll. And then I come back and I go, "Okay. You haven't even really . . . You've been to Mexico once in your whole life when you were twenty-one years old, or twenty!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: That was my next question.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And I'm like I think that triggered me to want to go back to my roots. I said, "I think it's time you go over there." So I thought I want a residency. I got one. I got one soon after I got the NEA. I applied. They gave me a residency and I did two or three months in Oaxaca. That's when I painted the calla lilies! Those got painted there . . . for a Day of the Dead show. And so I got my wish.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A rich place to go and have a residency.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I had a fabulous time and I went and did that residency. And I just thought, "Oh, my God! I have to write a letter to the NEA and go, 'you know what?'" Was the NEA in conjunction with some . . . another organization in Mexico. I can't remember the name right now. But I wrote a letter to just say that these kinds of things are crucial to an artist's development because to be able to have a studio - which I did - paint, and work and live without any worry is like heaven. And I met three artists, women, that were younger women that became my dear, dear friends. And how I met them, I don't even know how. One worked at a gallery. And two others were painters. And one in particular, her name was Christina. She had left Mexico City and was in Oaxaca. And to earn money, she was teaching children. And so she could make money to survive and do her work. Well,

we became dear friends and what happened is that - Oh, and I met a young journalist who was only like nineteen who wrote an interview on me and then we became . . . she became a dear friend. And what happened though is that some days, they'd look funny. One day one of them came and I go, "Christina, why do you - You don't look well." She said, "I don't feel that good." I go, "Well, what's wrong?" She goes, "I haven't eaten." I go, "What do you mean 'you haven't eaten'?" She goes, "I haven't any money to eat." And I'm like, "Oh my God." So my grant allowed me to feed my friends and help them sustain. And I felt so happy. They thought I was like some . . . When I left I had all this food and stuff. I go, "Take it all!" They're like, "Really?!" I go, "Take it all. Take it." So I felt so good that I could share my grant money with these amazing artists. And the journalist too. It was unheard of for a young girl to be writing for the paper, single and living on her own. I mean, it was unheard of. She was so cool and they were so loving. She was another one who came one day and didn't look right. She goes, "I haven't had any food today." I'm like, "Let's go eat." So that was the fabulous thing. And I actually had an exhibit there with Christina and another woman who worked at the museum and I did an installation.

[END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 2, Side A, continuing with Patssi Valdez on the 26th of May.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I wrote a note, or a letter, to the NEA to tell them how important these kinds of exchange programs were.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was this at the time when the NEA was in the middle of all the controversy?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Hm-m.

JEFFERY RANGEL: . . . defunded and everything.

PATSSI VALDEZ: It was probably the end of those. I probably got the bit - There was probably maybe one more season or whatever it's called of giving those out. And then it was it. Round. But it's funny because I go - I focused really hard what I wanted and it just came. It was like, "Here it is, Patssi. Go." With one go. And I'm like, "oh, okay." So but I wrote the letter to say how it really helped, changed me, and helped me connect to my history. And it was a really, really good experience.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What kinds of things other than the people that you met and the kinds of relationships that you developed helped you feel like you could reconnect?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, what it was is that just - it was just the everyday. The simple things that matter. First of all, the first quest is finding food. Yeah, because you're in Mexico. You have to know how to get it, wash it, prepare it. They taught me because I had gotten very ill when I went there years ago. So there's a whole ritual to washing. I mean what's so funny . . . you spend weeks - I don't know about weeks, but days - Yeah, maybe weeks - figuring out all this stuff. Where do you get that? Where do you get the paint? Where do you get the paper? Where do you get that? That's the first part. So the everyday is what is so interesting. It wasn't anything that I went and saw, some fabulous thing, site. It was just being with those people on the everyday that really was the most important thing. Everyday life that was enlightening.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Why Oaxaca?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I didn't really want to go to the city. And I heard that Oaxaca was a really calm place to go. And I was into calm. And I go, "Okay, I would like to go there." But actually, they picked it for me. I didn't pick it; they picked it. They said, "You should go to Oaxaca." And there's a lot of artists there and a lot of print making going on. And it's a whole little area of art making going on in Oaxaca. It was interesting because Tamayo - not Tamayo. Oh, God, Tamayo.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think I know who you're going towards.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, anyway, I'll tell you a quick story about Rodolfo Morales. I didn't know who that is. I didn't have a clue. It's like I go to Oaxaca. I don't really know much of anything. I go there. And one day on a Sunday, it was nothing to do. And the other girl who had gotten some grant, we decided we were going to take a bus and go to where Rodolfo - where I know now that he lives. Now I can't remember the name now. So we go to this little town on a bus. It's Sunday. And we get off and there's nothing to do. And I'm on my quest looking for paper picado. Don't ask me why. And so we're walking and we're going, "Oh, the mercado's closed." There's nothing open. And I'm going, "Well, let me see if I can find somewhere where they have paper picado." So these people lead us, go that way and turn over there. So we go, "Okay." And it's all dead on Sunday. And we're walking. And there's this house with a gate. And I go, "Oh, my God. What is that?!" So we look and we're peaking through the gate. The man goes, "Oh, you want to come in?" And we go, "Yeah!" He goes, "Come on in." So we open the door, we go in. It's a courtyard. You know how they have the courtyard like this? So we go in and he

goes, "This is the kit, this is the dining room." And we go, "Oh." It's all like very old, antique. This is the kitchen. It's all beautiful and the ladies are cooking. And we're going, "Well, who lives here?" He goes, "Oh, my uncle." And we go, "Oh." He goes, "Yeah. He has his studio back here." So we go to the back and I go in the studio and I go, "Well, what's his name?" And they go and I don't know who that is. And I'm going, "Oh!" And I'm sitting on his chair and I'm spinning around.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Just playing around.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. I'm looking at all the paint and looking at all the acrylics and oils and I'm going -- because I needed paint. I'm going, "Oh, where do you get all this stuff?" I just going where do you get all . . . And then he's showing a painting and I'm going, "Oh, this is really cool." So then we hang out there for quite awhile. And he goes, "He's not here. He's in town today." And I go, "Oh, too bad I didn't get to meet him." So then a week or so goes by and I'm in line to go hear a concert at the main church in Oaxaca. And I'm standing in line ready to go because these musical things are free. So I'm standing there and then I see that nephew. And he goes, "Oh, Patssi. Now you can meet my uncle." And I'm like, "Oh!" And he goes, "This is Rodolfo Morales." And I go, "Oh, hello." And he goes - And I don't know who and really, I just go, "Oh, it's so cool to meet the artist. I'm in his house." And they go, "Oh yeah. And he has a museum or something over here." So I go and I check it out. And I go, "Oh my God." So then I end up finding out he's like this fabulous master. I didn't have a clue! And I wish I would have known because I would have - After I saw the museum, then I knew. You know, totally knew. And I totally connected to his work. I felt it was related to my work. The paintings. Somehow the palette. And I thought, "Oh my God. If I would have known I would have requested that I study with him while I was here." But so I end up finding out who Rodolfo is, loving the work and by some weird reason, I was led to his house and I didn't even -

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow, amazing.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Amazing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you have any exchanges with him after that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, we talked. And I told him I'd really like to come and maybe work with you. He goes, "Oh sure. No problem." But it never could happen. Timing. He was a very busy man. And I don't know - me, I was in my own world. It never really connected that way. But I went to a big opening at his place. Then I come back later and find out who he really is. And I'm like, "Oh, my God! Look at this happening."

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's really cool.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. All by it . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's like another one of those things that happens by . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: You're not even looking. You don't even know when they tell you the name. You don't even recognize it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. There's some kind of other thing going on.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Reason. That's what I totally believe in.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. I'm with you on that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And I can't remember the famous artist that's there and it's sad that I can't remember his name. What's funny but he looked . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's not Cuevas, is it?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, no. I have the book with his name in it. Anyway, it's funny because I saw him. He was always hanging out at the museum which was my main contact. And it's funny because he looked like a regular Indian who worked like maybe out in the fields. He would wear sandals and white, those pants. But, of course, you knew he had on a silk or linen shirt. [laughs] And then I found out who it was. And you know, the long hair with the pony tail. And he was just so like down to earth and he's incredibly famous. And I'm like going, "Oh my God!" So I passed him all the time in the street. We'd cross paths and he would just sort of nod. Because I don't speak Spanish that great. But that's where I learned to speak, at least have conversation. But I was too embarrassed to try to really talk to him with my Spanish all broken. My friends who I met there could not understand how a woman who looked like me could not speak Spanish. You know, dark. I look the way I look. They're like, "How did that happen?!" I'm like, "Easy."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Grow up in L.A.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Grow up in L.A. Be born and raised here. Easy. So, I'll remember his name maybe as I go along.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Maybe we can put it in the margin somewhere.

PATSSI VALDEZ: We should.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's good. So, that was in what time?

PATSSI VALDEZ: It'll be in my resume. Well, '98 - No. '99.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That recently?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. Excuse me. '89. Around '89. Because I graduated from art school in '85. So about '89.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I'm trying to get a sense of

PATSSI VALDEZ: Or maybe '90. Because in '89, I was in Europe.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, we can fish it out.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yeah. It was in the '90s. It was in the '90s. It was in the early '90s.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow. I was in Oaxaca at the same time probably.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Really?!

JEFFERY RANGEL: Close to it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: It was in the early nineties. Because it wasn't - like five years ago.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I was there in '92, I think.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, maybe it was the same time. Oh my gosh. . . . walking - Having coffee in that little place. That's the thing I searched for - where's the coffee?! And there was one place, an Italian, who made coffee. The locals knew it. A good capucino, really real. And I'm going, "Oh, my God. Coffee. Yea!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: They have good coffee there. But I was just trying to get a sense of some of the things that were leading up to that juncture in your life in the late eighties. I guess we're kind of working our way backward it here.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, we are. Well, you mean from what point to what point?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, you described sort of being plagued by the migraines and then sort of - What was going on up to that time? Where you said I need to make an intervention here?

PATSSI VALDEZ: A change. Oh, all the years before that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, things like

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, it was art school from '80 to '85. I think. How many years do you go to school? Four?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. '80 to '85. I went to Otis.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You started in New York, no?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. Here. And then I think the second year I went to New York. And then I came back again.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was that like?

PATSSI VALDEZ: New York?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, first art school. I need to talk about art school. Because I was in Asco and Asco was from like '71 to about . . . until I went to art school in '80. All those years were with Asco. And then I said, "no."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really focused on that work with Asco.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Just that. And so I decided I wanted to go to art school. I wanted a degree and I just needed to go to school. I had wanted to do that all along but I could never afford it. And there's that gap you fall between where your parent isn't that poor because they own property and you're not that poor but you don't have enough money to pay for school. So you're caught in the middle. Until I reached a certain age, then I don't know what happened. But I was able to just go.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You're not claimed on your parents' taxes.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. That's it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. Well, Reagan really gutted financial aid during the eighties as well for going to school.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. I got everything, all loans. I just paid it all I don't know when.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So what were the set of decisions that made the decision to go to art school a reality? I mean, you said you always wanted to but

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. I always wanted to. Never could. And then I had met a friend of mine, Victor, who was my boyfriend and he was a UCLA student. And I met him and we hung out and I was always complaining, going, "Gee, poor me. I want to go to school. I don't have money. I don't have this. I don't have that." And he's like, "Patssi, I'm so sick of it. Just go get those papers. Bring them home and fill them out and get yourself in school." And I liked that. You know why? He grew up in Tijuana. And he said, "You know what you have here as a citizen? I don't want to" He had no tolerance for complaining. He said, "All I looked forward was coming to this country so I could get my education." And he goes, "And here you are a citizen and it's all there for you. Now just go over there and get it." And I'm like, "All right." So I went.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Give me another slice of that humble pie! [laughing]

PATSSI VALDEZ: But I needed that. So I went and got the papers, came back. I think he helped me fill them all out. I applied . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Why Otis?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Why not? No, let me just say this. I did not want to go to a big university.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You didn't want to do a university program?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I did not want to do no university. I just wanted -- Again, I had this always this vision. I just want to go to art school! And be around, everything around art. That's all I - my goal. I had this narrow view. Just that. And I didn't even think I'd survive very well in a big, in a university. It just wasn't for me. And anyway, I used go to night school at Otis when I was barely nineteen. And I used to take night school with the old people. And I used to day dream that I could go there full time one day. Because I'd see the young people walking with their art stuff. And all I could afford was one night class. And I'd keep looking. - And I loved the smell of the paint. I'd go, "Oh my God, one day could I just be a art student like those people?" And I tried - I took one class at Otis for a long time at night. And so it was a big dream. I laugh at my dreams now. The big dream I had when I was in my twenties was like oh, my God, I could just see myself walking up the Otis stairs. And I'd go - Because that gallery they had, the north gallery. It was pristine. It was real, with high ceilings. And I used to just have the dream that one day I'd walk up those stairs and I'd have an exhibit in the north gallery! [laughs] And I would. I would dream it. It was a beautiful gallery. Now it's all condemned. And I'd go oh So, anyway, I used to day dream and look at those students. And I knew it was a lot of money. And so the dream was always there. And then, I used to hang out at parties. Gronk used to take - Gronk was always the innovative one. I learned a lot from him. He'd take us to the Otis parties. I'm like a nineteen year old girl and I'm at an Otis party. And they're all talking like art talk. And I'm like, "What are they saying?" I didn't know. It was like the art stuff, like all the terminology and I'd be - I didn't want to let anyone know I didn't know. I'd be going, "What does that mean?" [giggles] You're like nineteen! You're from East L.A. You know you're like . . . It's funny because I'm glad I'm saying this because it was things that would go on in my head. And I had decided one day - I said, "If this is going to be your life's work and you're going to function in this circle, you better get your butt in school and you'd better learn what these terms mean. Because you're going to need to know this stuff if you want to go where you need to go!" And so I knew. Okay, of course, other people maybe could pick up books and read it and all that. But I needed to go to school. I just needed it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Some kind of structure.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I needed that. And I wanted to go to Otis. I used to day dream out the window with a portfolio. So this always was on my mind until finally after the Asco sort of started winding down and I was maturing, I thought, "Now it's time to go." So that's when I met Victor. And he was a college student and I thought he was so

cool. And I'd meet all his friends at school. He was in the theatre and in video. And I'd hang out at the school. And so then that's when I

JEFFERY RANGEL: At UCLA?

PATSSI VALDEZ: At UCLA. I made some films actually with his video camera. So I thought it's time. I felt like an outsider and I wanted to be in part of the college scene. So I quit my - I used to be a hairdresser for ten years. From eighteen 'til I went to school. I did it on weekends so I could earn money to support my art habit. The Asco years I was a hairdresser. And so I - and it was a family business and so I went to tell my mom I'm quitting. Because I always went to college part time. East L.A. College. But you can't really get immersed if you don't go full time. It couldn't never happen. So I told my mom, "I'm going to quit and I want to go to school full time."

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was her response to that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Horrified. [laughs] Horrified. She's like, "You're going to leave the business?" And I had all these cus - I was a really popular hair dresser. People freaked out when I quit.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Who's going to do our hair?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Who's going to do our hair? And I had men and women. I was really good at what I did. And I was a make up artist because I went to make up school too. And I took theatre make up. I did it all. So it was like, "Oh my God!" So my mom freaked. She really freaked out. And it was a very difficult thing to untangle myself in the family business. It was very painful. And my mom was terrified.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did she end up coming around?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, she did. Years later. But so I - Oooh, but I shouldn't say years later because even though at first it was really difficult, then I applied and then within a week I think I got accepted. Because it was close to the end when I applied. So right away, I was accepted. I went in and the way my mom - After my mom freaked, my mom supported me though. She paid for like feeding me. And then I actually lived in the dorm. And she paid for my dorm. And then she paid for my apartment when I went to school. So maybe my mom freaked and didn't understand what I was really doing. But she still --

JEFFERY RANGEL: She supported you.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Even though she didn't understand or "what are you doing?" And I had a brand new red sports car when I was a hair dresser. And I sold it to go to New York and study. And that's why I didn't have a car. Because when I came back from New York, there was no car. Because that car helped me live for eight months because it was the cool hip trendy car. I got all this money for it. So I gave that up to go to school.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was New York like when you got there?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Terrifying. But it was cool. It was like I get there and all those tall -- First it looked all gray. I'm like, "Oh, my God. It's all gray." Here we have sun and then those high rises block out all the sun. And I lived in a Polish neighborhood across from a mortuary with a big clock. It was a church/chapel/mortuary.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where was this?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Right on the lower east side, near the alphabets. On Seventh and A.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And A? I lived on that block.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I lived on Seventh and A.

JEFFERY RANGEL: We'll go into that later. We'll go into that later.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh my God. I lived on Seventh and A.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I did too. Right next door to Thompkin's Square Park.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Right there. It was right there. And then there was a restaurant right there that people

JEFFERY RANGEL: Odessa's.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Odessa's! Oh my God!

JEFFERY RANGEL: We'll get into that later.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Odessa's. They would always say, "Where do you come from? Your accent." And I'm like, "I'm from East L.A." And they go, "Where's that?!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: Not the East Village.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know. I have an East L.A. accent. And they go, "East L.A.?" I go, "Forget it." Odessa's. Oh, God. So, anyway, . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was your take on the East Village then?

PATSSI VALDEZ: This is another weird thing. I'm there. And it's when that whole thing took off. You know, certain - Remember when the Lower East Side got all famous?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I was there right before it got the big blow up of fame. Or was I in the middle of it? I don't remember. But I didn't know any of this. Again, I go there. So I'm walking down the street and I see a gallery. I forgot the name of the gallery. And I go in because I think, "Well, maybe they'll give me a show." Yeah. So I go in. And there's a girl. That's when I was a photographer. And the work was really like hip. I used to make this really hip photography.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you paint it and stuff?

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. So I go in and there's a blond girl. And I interject, "I'm Patssi." And she goes, "And I'm Patty." And we talk. And I go, "Well, you know, I do this kind of work." And she goes, "Oh, bring it in. We'll give you a show." And I'm like, "Oh, okay, cool." So we talk. I come back to L.A. I never pursue it. That was one part of me -- I'd do something and then I think I - I was in school and fear and all this stuff. I don't know. I go; come back to L.A. She's in the Time Magazine. Patty with the blond hair. Her gallery became one of the most famous galleries! I'm like, "Oh, my God!" I was always right near big time stuff and then it would -- Not always. But . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. You had your window there.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, the window would be there. And if you don't take the window, it's closed. So the window closed. But on New York, I think every artist should - at that time I thought. I don't know how I think about it now. But I think every artist should really at least go to New York once. I think it's important. Because the gallery scene. The only thing I didn't like is I go into this like bar, club/bar whatever it was, and . . . because I want to know where the artists were, right? So I go in there and everyone is an artist. And I'm like, "Oh, my God!" I wasn't - See, in L.A., I was at least somebody from Asco. In New York, I was like nothing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Had they heard about Asco?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Nothing. So I go there and I'm go, "Oh, I'm an artist. Oh, I'm an artist. I'm an artist." And I'm like I think I need to go back home. No, I knew that it was going to be a very difficult climb to get back to where at least I had positioned myself here a bit. That I'd have to start all over there. And I don't know - I didn't come back for that reason. I came back for a family emergency. My sister had a stroke and she was going to have brain surgery. So I had to come back. But I had planned to stay there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You were go slug it out in New York?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I was going to live there. I wanted to live there even though it was hard. Yeah, it was really hard. But then I - Okay, so I feel real lonely. My boyfriend like is off in his own world. We break up.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He went out to New York with you?

PATSSI VALDEZ: He was in New York. Him and I together.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right on.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So we break up and I'm sort of going, "Oh, God. I'm all alone. Poor me. There I am." So I go, "Oh, I think I'll go in there." It was a cold day. And it was a coffee shop. I go, "Oh, I think I'll go in there. I need some coffee." And I was real low and sad and lonely. All alone in New York. I mean I knew Victor was there and I could call him. But it was not - you know, we were separated. So I go in the coffee house all like slow. And then I'm in there and all of a sudden I hear somebody go, "Patssi?!" What? [giggles] And there is a friend of mine in there who's living in New York.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Hallelujah.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And I went, "Victor! Oh, my God!" And we hugged. And I'm never alone from that day. And I have an instant group of friends.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How cool. A different Victor than . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: A different Victor. Two Victors. Victor Durazo who was a dancer and he was living in New York. And he goes, "Oh my God!" And then I made all these friends and I had an instant family and I was all like happy. But that was the first time in my life I got home sick. I never knew what that was. I had never been anywhere, had I? And I got that home sick stuff.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What were you home sick for?

PATSSI VALDEZ: It was a feeling. It's not even up here. It's a feeling like I don't really know. It overwhelms you and you get real sad. And I got it once and never have had it since. So that's cool that maybe you have to get it once and then you break through and then you're free.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it the sense that - I forgot what I was going to ask.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, you felt you're apart from everything familiar.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it a renewed appreciation for home?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, you know what's funny is that I didn't - I got this sad feeling but then at one point, I didn't want to go home any more. So it just sort of was like a letting go maybe. And then when I had to come home I cried for how many weeks. Because I was in L.A. and I go, "How boring!" I think it's all a process. I'm like, "What am I doing here? I want to go back" like tomorrow! And then it wore off. And now I'm learning that everywhere I travel, I always want to stay. So I was going to stay in France. There was already a house. They go, "See that house? You could live right there." I'm like, "Oh, God, don't say that because I'm going to move right in." So I learned that it's only part of travel, part of a process.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The charm of it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Exactly. And you learn as a traveler. You go, "Okay, this is what I felt before and I'll get over it."

JEFFERY RANGEL: What do you think would have happened to Patssi had you stayed in New York?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Gee, I have not a clue. And it wasn't even possible.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You were really working on photography at that point?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Hm-hm. Mixed media photography. Oh, I know what I felt when I was there. I'd go to art school with my canvas because you know you'd have like painting and drawing and all that. And then I knew one thing. I said, "Oh my God, when I get back to L.A., I'm going to do some of the biggest paintings you've ever seen." Because my projects in New York, you had to be able to put it in your pocket to go to school. I mean I did sculpture that was like - Oh, and all my art stuff I did had to stay because I couldn't bring it home.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You're kidding me! Where is it now?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I did sculptures. I would give them to people. I'd go, "Just keep it all. I've got to go." I gave away things. One thing that I did in New York is - because that's part of my Asco stuff. They said, "Well, what is the main thing that you remember about New York? What image? Cockroaches. How sad. But it was. My apartment where I lived was infested. And I remember being in a really cool place and there's cockroaches. And I go, "Oh, cockroaches." So I did a cockroach poster. How sad. A lithograph. It had cockroaches all over it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I've seen that I think. I've seen one with cockroaches. Someone did something with cockroaches all over it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Ah. Maybe.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Maybe it didn't make it's way back here.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't know. I don't think so.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I'm thinking of something else then.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I did a litho and I went to the part where all the galleries were. All those famous galleries where I wanted to be inside. Like what they did at the L.A. County where the guys sprayed their name. Well, I

did that in New York but I did it with my cockroach posters with my name on it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You mean like pasted it up?

PATSSI VALDEZ: All over the whole gallery area.

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[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay. Here we are on June 2 -- I can't believe it's June already -- 1999. This is an interview with Patssi Valdez in her home in Los Angeles for the Archives of American Art. And the interviewer is Jeff Rangel. Like we were saying just a moment ago, we're working out way backwards. So when we left off last time, we were talking about some of your experiences in New York and kind of the impetus to go back there. And I think you were talking about coming back to Los Angeles after that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm.

JEFFERY RANGEL: One of the things that I wanted to ask you about in terms of when you came back were - if some of the work that you did at various centers, cultural centers or art centers, around the city, your involvement with L.A.C.E., your involvement with Self Help Graphics, stuff maybe with Plaza or, you know, any other kind of collectives - to try and get a sense of what the larger Chicano art scene is like when you're coming back to Los Angeles.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Mmm. You, almost like you felt when you go off to art school, you felt totally disconnected from that Chicano art scene, because you're off in your own independent way. So, I'll go back to school in New York. School there was very difficult for me. I mean, I wanted to go to New York and I want to experience all that and see what it was all about, but I felt really, really isolated. And I felt like I didn't fit in at all. Even more than, more uncomfortable than here at Otis. Because even here I felt totally like an outsider. So I remember making my - I had sculpture class. And I remember being in there and trying to figure out, do the sculpture. I was trying to figure out what I was going to do. And I remember the teacher went wild, like she was bragging or going on and on about this woman's work. And it was clay. She was working with clay and it was totally abstract. And I remember looking at it and going, "What is that?" [laughs] I didn't say it but I thought it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It was another student in the class?

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. Another student. And the teacher loved the work. And I was trying to figure it out, going, "That's what they love?!" I couldn't understand it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And that's what made you feel marginalized?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, it wasn't that. It was like I'm more . . . My work isn't abstract at all obviously. And I have a hard time connecting with it. So, mine are literal or it's - So I was trying to figure out what to do. And I was working in plastic, with plexi. And I loved the plexi because you could buy and have these amazing transparency color. You could buy these tubes and you could buy sheets.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Cool.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And I was trying to balance and make this piece. But I don't ever remember -- The teachers would walk by but never even noticed anything you did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Never even commented on it?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Directed?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, nothing. Just like . . . oh, I don't know. I just felt like a freak, doing my work. Feeling like I didn't belong. Feeling insecure about it all in a way. My God! Because I think what happened is that I was used to getting complimented. So when I wasn't being noticed at all, it was a different feeling, you see. So I was going, "Oh my God! There's something wrong with me."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Kind of a shake down.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, it was. Maybe it was good for me. And then I had another class that I won't forget which was hard but good because I was drawing. I only drew faces. Constantly. How funny I don't do that at all. Face, faces, eyes. Faces. ____ just that. And the teacher came over to me and was looking at it. And I was real

confident that I was a really good drawer because that was one of my strong points. And the teacher came over and looked at it and went, "Boy, you're really full of yourself!" And I thought, "What?" She said, "You know, there's a big world out there. And all you see is this." You know, this little face. And I was like . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it self portraiture?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. It was just faces. Just faces. But I didn't look -- I wasn't looking at the whole body. I wasn't looking at the world. I was in this little - I mean, I know that now. But when she said that and walked away, I thought, "I am?" And I was trying to understand what she was saying to me. But as I matured I realized that I had a very limited view of the world. It was true. But only that I was shocked because I thought she was going to come and say, "Oh, what a great drawing!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. What an insightful way to read somebody's work too. You know?

PATSSI VALDEZ: But I thought she was right on after because see, when I get any negative . . . any kind of negative comments or anything negative happens, I really try to learn from it. Not to take it - I mean, maybe at first you're shocked but I have to really look at it because people don't say things for nothing. And I thought maybe there's something here I need to learn. But it took me years.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's hard to . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. At that moment, don't think that I went, "Oh yes, I totally get it." No.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Bruised ego and all.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. It took me a while to go, "Ohhhh. I understand now what she meant. It was a limited view. It was only about me in this little world like this."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow. So, did that get you to open up a bit?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I was trying to break out. I didn't know how. I was trying. But it didn't happen then. It's barely happening now. But I didn't really know how to break out of it. You know, and then, the semester, it's so short. You can't accomplish that in one semester. And so then I had a painting teacher there and he took us - He was like sort of famous. And he took us to his studio and he showed us his work. And it was all, every canvas was paint stripes. Pink ones, blue ones. White in between. I'm going [laughing], "What is that?!" I didn't get it. I'm like, "What is that?" I didn't feel it. I couldn't understand it at all. So I felt like a . . . I felt like really like I didn't . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were you alone in that reaction?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, I was alone in school. Oh, you mean with my . . . Well, because I really didn't have any friends in school. I don't remember -- I didn't have any friends. So I was like -- I didn't get it. So it was a very -- Well, thank God that I didn't abandon what I do because maybe I could have said, "Oh, I'm going to try to be like everyone else." But I thought, "Oh, they just don't understand me the way I don't understand them."

JEFFERY RANGEL: It seems to me a somewhat - It just reminds me of what I've heard about Carlos Almaraz, the time that he spent in New York trying to shape his work to sort of what was hotter and contemporary at the time. And it just didn't work.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, I didn't even try.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So it seems like a very similar experience like that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I didn't even try. I don't get it. What is it? I can't feel it. I don't understand it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you feel more connected to some of the work that was coming out of Los Angeles or from your peers here?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I didn't really . . . I was really . . . No. Because I didn't really . . . I didn't hang out with anyone at that time. I was totally devoted to school. I cut off all ties with everyone. I was a student and I was going to just focus. See, they didn't go to school. Not they didn't but I was in school and I'm carrying eighteen units. I have to focus.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You didn't have time for that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I'm immersed in my work. And I was living with my boyfriend Victor and so he was a student. And we were just immersed in our work. And there was no time. Plus, you know, that whole Asco thing. You

stayed up late. You hung out. I couldn't do it. I just said, "I have to focus on this." And I was determined. I think, if I'm not mistaken, my first semester I got straight A's. Maybe I got one B but I think it was all straight A's because I was ready for school now. I really was ready and I just focused on it. And I was going to do well. So my whole focus was that. So I didn't really connect with anyone.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did people give you a hard time for opting out like that or choosing a different sort of route?

PATSSI VALDEZ: They made fun of me for awhile.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah?

PATSSI VALDEZ: They made fun. Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where do you think that came from?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Because I think it's because you're going into - what is the word? You're going to the main stream. Or you're accepting - like when we were in Asco, you were free. You did your own thing. You didn't have - You didn't work within rules. I mean, well maybe our own rules. But all of a sudden, I was going into this academic art school. And a lot of times, they say it can really harm you in a way. You know, that it could take away who you really are. It might ruin you.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you feel that pressure?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. I was ready. I had already been making art ten years. Now if I was eighteen when I was going in, maybe. I doubt it. But I was so much older that nothing could take away what I had already established. So . . . But it wasn't cool to go into art school, you know. But it didn't matter. I was going anyway. I wouldn't be happy. So you know, but I don't think -- I think maybe now that I look back, probably people were -- There were a few people that I would ask about, "What do you think if I go to school?" And there was maybe a few supporters. But it wasn't the cool thing to do.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What would have been the cool thing to do?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Just continue making my art. You don't need school. Or maybe you don't need to go into art school and just continue the path you're going. And if you want to learn about these things, you can go get a book and read it. You don't really need a degree. What do you need it for? And I always believed that when I was in . . . when I went to East L.A. College. I took every art class and all these classes and I didn't care about grades. So, I thought, "I don't really care about the grade. I'm here to learn. I'm here to make art." So I think that was a really naive way of thinking. I mean, I don't regret it now but I felt, "Who needs grades? Who needs that?" I wanted to be in school but I didn't care about the grades. I didn't even care if they - I didn't even care about that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is it about applying yourself in different ways, you know, and the grades maybe being a reflection of that? Whereas when you were at East L.A. College?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think the important thing was learning and doing the art

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: but not really

JEFFERY RANGEL: In both cases.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yes. But the mark at that point, or a piece of paper that I used to say didn't really matter to me. Because I thought, "What do I need it for?"

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I used to think like that really young. But then later I thought, "No, you know what? I need this piece of paper. I think it's really important." You know, it's hard enough already being who I am. So sometimes I need proof.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Those credentials.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I need proof. I need, "Well, look!" So no one can say anything. I have back up. That's sort of what I thought.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Have you had to show those credentials?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No.

JEFFERY RANGEL: No?

PATSSI VALDEZ: And still, I really don't have the credential -- I never got Master's. I only got my Bachelor's. And I thought, "Oh, you should have got your Master's." But then I thought - I would think it but I went to school so late. And then I thought, "Well, maybe you should go and get your Master's." So for a long time, I've said, "Yeah, I should. No, I shouldn't. Yeah, I should." And at this point, I probably won't do it. I'm just already on my way I don't know where.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You've got enough projects to keep you busy here.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, already on my way. But you know, I have moments where I - I had moments. Sometimes I still do where I'd to go to teach. And then I won't have to hassle or anything. I'll go, "Here's my MFA."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. But you've taught before! You've taught a lot, haven't you?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I've taught only children and then I taught only at the Santa Monica School of Art and Architecture; it's a semester. So, not adults. You know, I haven't tried teaching in a university of anything like that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are you still interested in doing that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think about it on and off. You know? But I'm so maybe going into another direction at the moment.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, it's a different kind of commitment.

PATSSI VALDEZ: It's a big commitment. It really, really is. So, you know, I don't think I'd like to do it like weekly. But I think the best way I can give back to young people is I go and maybe do workshops or lectures or things like that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So those types of engagements are about reciprocity, about giving back.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And sharing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you ever find that you learn stuff when you're teaching children?

PATSSI VALDEZ: When I taught them? Oh, totally, yeah. That's the other thing is that you learn. Plus, I always want to tell young people all the things that no one told me about the art world.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Such as?

PATSSI VALDEZ: And there are business kind of things. Simple kind . . . simple but really, really important. You know, we get all involved in the art making but that's only a part of surviving as an artist. Only a part. There's a whole other part of it that no one really . . . not no one . . . but that I really didn't know about. About dealers, how to deal with a dealer, how to deal with contracts, how to market or how to . . . yeah, I guess that's the word . . . market your work. Like lately, what I do so every . . . so all levels of all people can own my work is I do a payment plan. People can't just come out and dish thousands of dollars. And they want it really bad. So I go, "We'll work out a payment plan." And other artists at Self Help -- I told a girl, I go, . . . I was sharing some of it and they go, "Oh my God! We never thought of that." Because see, it's about making a sale or not making a sale. So if a person can't come and spend thousands, they can put something down and make payments. That helps me, the artist.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. It's the American way. [laughs]

PATSSI VALDEZ: It helps the artist. It helps the person who wants it. And everybody's happy.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I've learned how to survive that way.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's smart.

PATSSI VALDEZ: You know, I've learned that. I've worked that kind of payment plan out for people.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where did you pick that up?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think it's something I would have wanted someone to do for me. Like I see art and I go, "Oh! I wish I could have that." But I can't pay it all at once. So maybe I was sort of thinking about how I wish I could do it. If an artist would allow me to do that. So I don't remember exactly but I think that was one. My own need. My own wish. And that helps support me. Because people go, "How do you survive?" Well, like I have money coming in every month because of that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you're an accountant too.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I'm not. My assistant is. So she does that. She sends the bills out. We wrote a contract. We covered all the bases. And so she does the billing now.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I got it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: See? And that helps support, helps me to pay my assistant.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I see. What about - you mentioned negotiating or entering into relationships with dealers. What kinds of things did you need to learn in that arena?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, first of all, don't go in there feeling lesser than or afraid because sometimes people think, "Oh God, that dealer. They would really want me?" So you're almost at their mercy because you want a gallery so bad. So you need to go in there feeling really good about yourself, strong. And that's number one. And then you have to know what you want, what you want out of the deal. You have to also understand they're taking fifty percent of your money, so you have certain rights. I mean, you're supporting them. I always make fun. I go, "Oh, I bought him that suit." [laughs] I probably did. So you have to go in there not feeling at their mercy but you have to feel strong and think they're there for me and it's a joint venture. Get it in writing. Get everything in writing. And if you don't feel good about something, you have to talk about it. And go in there. And you know, if you get rejected, then that wasn't the one for you. And you just - There'll be somebody there for you that you can work with.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were those hard learned lessons?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Some of them were. Some of there weren't. Because I had a dealer who would not put anything in writing. And I had another one who put everything in writing but spent my money anyway. So, . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Like it mattered.

PATSSI VALDEZ: But it did matter in the end.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In the long run.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Because having things in writing matters because my lawyer, she told me we . . . we were already at the court door and they came through with my money. And another thing is just because you have a dealer doesn't mean you can sit back and like, go, "Okay. I have a dealer. They're taking care of it. Everything's fine and dandy." No, because you have to check up on your dealer too. You have to know what they're doing. You have to know - You have to keep up on them. You can't take it for granted that someone's going to take care of your career. So no matter

JEFFERY RANGEL: Absolutely.

PATSSI VALDEZ: You have to watch what they're doing too. And I don't mean suspicion but just go, "Okay. Everything's writing. What they sold." And you have to keep track of it all. You really, really do. And I mean, even now I still have trouble doing that. But now I have a helper. But you have to keep track.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's interesting to hear you talk about it in comparison to maybe some, some earlier points in your career where it was about just producing, you know, and things kind of go out there and circulate how they will to a point where you have to understand the business and the market side. I guess the industry side.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I'm wondering if they did to out there and just circulate as they will. I don't - Maybe they did. But you have to understand for a long time I couldn't sell a thing. I didn't sell anything. I was totally -- sold nothing. 'Til about '88 when I started painting. I actually sold maybe a handful of things. One hand maybe. Yeah, I couldn't sell anything.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it photographs?

PATSSI VALDEZ: My photography. I think a friend of mine actually bought them so I could continue to eat. But I think I sold one, two photos in my time.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Even being represented in a gallery at that point?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, I wasn't represented with my photography. But the work would go on exhibit. It would be for sale. And nobody would buy it. And then, before that, I really didn't sell anything. That's why I worked part time to keep up my habit. My art habit. I had to work to support it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were those the times that you were working on the set design and things of that nature?

PATSSI VALDEZ: That only started happening in the -- Everything started happening in the '80s. In the late eighties is when I

JEFFERY RANGEL: So what's happening in that period in between?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Starvation. Not starvation, but close to it. I mean, well, after art school, it was one of the most difficult times. I had no car. I used to take the bus. I worked like - I'd teach one class at Barnsdall and get a few dollars. Teach one more class at Plasa. Get a few dollars. Then I taught here and taught there and I'd just make a few dollars. I think I could barely pay the rent. And with a few, little bit left, if lucky to buy food and So those are things that I - Now that I make money, that I don't want to ever forget. You can forget real easy once you start earning money. But I remember counting my change at the store. I go, "God, I had to count all this change." That's why I'm real aware when I'm in the market, when I see people with their - you know, with the food things? What are they called?

JEFFERY RANGEL: The vouchers.

PATSSI VALDEZ: The vouchers. I look at that and I sort of - It gives me a memory. I mean, or when not only the voucher. I didn't have the voucher but when they're counting their change in their little purse and they're going You know, one day, one day a girl needed a dime and the cashier wouldn't let her go. A young girl. And I just threw the dime down. A dime! [phone rings] So I've become totally aware of that kind of thing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you want to get that? It's not going to go on tape.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So anyway, I struggled for - After I quit the beauty shop and went to art school right in '80. So from '80 to about '88 was big time poverty. Because see, I used to have the hair thing that compensated during the Asco years. Then I worked at the library at school just to, you know, have spare money. But when I got out of art school - Oh, I remember when I lost my library job when I graduated. I go, "Oh, what am I going to do now?" And I actually - I was so freaked out that I went to Al Nodal who used to run the North Gallery. I didn't even know him. I just said - That gallery, you know. Nobody knows all the stories I had in my head about that gallery, the Otis Gallery. Remember, I wanted to walk up those stairs?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Oh yeah, that's right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And then I worked in there finally. And the lady was so mean. She said, "Get up on that ladder and paint the ceiling." And I had a fear of high ladders. But I didn't tell her because I would do anything to work in there. I mean anything. So I got my bucket with my paint and I walked up the stairs. And when I -- It was a like of a triple, those high, high ladders. And when I got at the top, I was going to pass out. I broke out in a sweat and I was going to faint.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's serious.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And then I thought - Because she said, "If you want this job . . ." because I did tell her I'm afraid to go up that ladder that high. She said, "If you want this job, you have to get up there." And I thought, "Oh well." That was mean. But she did me a great favor - broke my fear of height. I needed - See? I needed to meet that mean lady to make me sweat and broke the fear. Now, because I need to get on high ladders to do my work. I have no fear whatsoever after I broke it. And that's what they say about confronting a fear. I totally believe in it. You think you're going to die but you make it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: _____. Would that characterize that period for you? Like confronting a lot of fears and sort of breaking through that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't know if I had a lot . . . I don't think I had a lot of fears. I think I just was -- When I want something One thing about me when I want something, if you keep - You can't stop me. People go, "You can't do it. Oh, being an artist, you know how hard it is. How competitive." And I'm like, "What isn't competitive?" "What isn't hard?" I would ignore it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where'd you get that spirit from?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I'm wondering. Maybe my mom. I don't think she ever said it but she pulled things together. I

mean, she went to school and she's done amazing things from - They were taking our furniture away when my father left. They were taking our stove, our frig, everything away. And the family joined together to pay for us to keep it. And my mom went to night school. She opened up her own business. She bought her own house. You know? On her own, raising us.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow. That's pretty impressive.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So, I look back and I go it was mom. Even though she didn't verbalize it. I watched her. That's where I get my business sense. I get my artistic . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Seeing here at the salon.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, in the salon doing the - like writing the checks. Then at one point they thought we were like -- We lived in Montebello but people thought we had all kinds of money. Because I had a new sports car. My mom ran the business. You know, it was like - But we didn't really have like, not a lot of money but we were perceived that way. So we went from being like poor to being perceived like we had all kinds of stuff. It's so funny. But that spirit, I totally have to say it came from my mom. And I've had it all my life. And the minute someone said, "Oh, that's -- you can't do that." I'm like, "Oh really? Watch me." [laughs] Don't ever say you can't because I'll like prove you wrong. So I had that - that's what that driving thing was in the Asco years. That spirit, that -- That's how we all were. People said, "You can't." We're like, "Alright. We will."

JEFFERY RANGEL: What were people telling you you couldn't do?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, the artists. Being an artist -

JEFFERY RANGEL: _____ You're not an artist.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, it's too . . . No, it's too scary. How are you going to make money? How are you going to survive? It's so competitive!

JEFFERY RANGEL: So people within your community, within your family even are feeding you these messages.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I don't know if it came from my family. I mean, nothing was said about art to me in my family. But I think just out in the world when you talk about your dreams or your goals. And probably too with my mom, she didn't understand how could I survive. You know, because everybody hears all the stories about the art life. Well, I lived that life for awhile but I knew - I don't know even if I knew but I was determined to succeed as an artist, even when I - Oh, but I have to admit when I was counting those coins at the market [chuckles] I was getting really tired of being poor. I was really sick of

it. I was like - So when I did get money, the money went to supplies or it went to art, my art stuff. And usually, it didn't go for like a new dress or clothes. It went to art. So now I buy new clothes and a dress.

[END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PATSSI VALDEZ: Now this is important. If I go off the track, just pull me back on.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's what it's all about, though.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh, okay.

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 1, Side A with Patssi Valdez on June 2nd. And those tangents are good because I think they're some of the more insightful moments in an interview. So, continue.

PATSSI VALDEZ: The poverty syndrome? .

JEFFERY RANGEL: No, I'm not so interested in the horror stories of poverty. But it's kind of like what you gained or learned through that process.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know what I want to say. When artists focus on money -- I learned this after awhile. If you focus on money when you're creating your art, forget it. Forget it. The worst thing you could possibly do. You have to totally focus all your energy in the art. And you have to throw the money to the wind. And if you don't have any money, then go get a part time job. But don't think, "Oh, I'm going to make this and it's going to be worth da, da, da, da kind of money." Forget it! You'll be totally disappointed and that's just not the way you should make art. The focus needs to be on the art. And money comes as a gift after. It's never the focus any more at all. I don't think. I just make my art and that's

JEFFERY RANGEL: Your purpose is to make art.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. To focus on the art. Even if you're really needing that money, I don't focus on it any more at all. Even sometimes I still have moments because I don't -- You know, I survive only on my art or my theatre or whatever work. But there'll be low points still where it gets a little low and then you go, "Oh my God!" And then you go, "Can't focus. Something will come." And I just keep working. It's hard. But it does come. Always. Somehow.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It sounds like faith.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. And I know a lot of people don't like living that way. I know it's a hard way. Some people can't tolerate living that way. But, I don't think -- I am just so happy for my freedom I have in my life style. I am so happy.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Patssi, listening to you talk, some of the insights that you're sharing resonate with some of the other interviews I've done with your peers, you know. Talking about committing yourself to the art, the way that jobs or work or income will come and just staying that focused. Do you think that's something particular to the group of you who are coming up at this period of time? Or do you think that's for all artists in general?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think eventually someone - Also I feel that there's an audience for everybody. There's enough for everyone in this universe. And I think that eventually if you're doing your best, you're bound to get noticed. But you have to be extremely patient. It doesn't happen overnight. Maybe for some -- I don't know. But I'm just saying if you're just consistent, consistently doing your work, eventually something's bound to give. And it's when you've totally forgot about it that it happens. And you're not even thinking about it any more. So I think it's for maybe anybody who's totally giving a hundred percent in their work. How can you deny that? How can anyone deny it? I don't think it can be denied. It shows.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So who's your audience?

PATSSI VALDEZ: You mean my audience? Well, I've been sort of -- I didn't know who my audience was there for awhile but now that I've got the show, you know. Well, I have a younger audience who didn't - who's totally into the Asco, okay? People in their twenties, or maybe early thirties are into the Asco - a lot of supporters of Asco. That's my history back there. And then now with my painting, I'm noticing that - What's made me really happy were these last few shows I've had. Is when I've looked in the audience, they were moms, dads, kids, they're everyday persons. And I don't really think . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: What are they identifying with?

PATSSI VALDEZ: First I think me. I think I'm a reflection of themselves. Latinos in the audience. I feel when they look at me, I am them. And I . . . just by the mere fact that I'm accomplishing something positive, I look in their eyes and I think they're proud for -- not me, Patssi. It's because I'm a mirror of them. And I totally know that. That's why I detach from it. I go, "This isn't about only me. This isn't maybe even about me." This is like a giant mirror going, "Do, do, do, do" back. It is. I totally feel it. When I hear all the speeches that they gave at the Mexican Museum at my one woman show, when they were giving them, even the people who were giving them, it was about themselves too. So I represent, I feel, a whole group of people. And so I know it's really cool. Because I go, "Oh my God!" because even young people, they look at me. I'm like brown. They look at me, the young, little young Latinos and they look at me - Not only Latinos but I guess I focus there for now, and I think I offer as the mirror that they can do it too. And that's totally, of course, where I came from and all that. There's hope there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How do you see that? Do you see it in their eyes? What's that look like?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh, I can feel it. You feel how people look at you. You feel when people are talking . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: People verbalize that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. And they give . . . Okay, and this Sunday, I went to Laguna Beach with my friend to see my show at the Laguna Art Museum. Three people cried in there. I didn't go around . . . One Latina, she was all choked up and her eyes were all watery. And I go, "You have to stop, You're going to make me cry. I don't even know . . ." She goes, "I can't even tell you how proud I am that you're in here." And her eyes were all watery. And then another woman too was - It's funny because one woman was Latina and her husband was Anglo. And she was the one who was wanting to cry. And he was just - I felt he felt really - It was like, "Thank you so much. Thank you." He was really like loving. I mean, he was really like . . . I felt like he really meant it. And so, yeah, three people on Sunday, not crying like . . . But just the red eyes with the knot in their throat. And I thought, "Oh, how interesting. Because it's a reflection of themselves." And it's like, "Ohhh, this is me in here." It is. I totally know it. Because I'm part of them. I represent them. And so I think, "Oh my God. I never even thought. I

never even knew that this was going to have this affect on people." Not on everyone but on some people. Even my friend who came in from Washington. I'm really proud of her. She's the anthropologist. Even she was like - Her sister was one of them who wanted to cry. She goes, "Patssi, it's a really wonderful show. It really, really is." And I thought, "Oh, that's really cool. Thank you." So it's been amazing at the positive response. Even though some of that work's extremely painful work. It was like, wow! These people are like so like moved. And I think this is really cool.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are the young people who are interested in the Asco stuff, are they moved in the same way? Do you get that kind of response from them?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't . . . I'm just saying because a few young people writing their thesis and all that have interviewed me and they're totally into the Asco stuff. I've met other people in their twenties and that age range that I don't know if my work - You know, I don't know because I've met these over here that interviewed me for the Asco's stuff. And then I've met my other audience that goes to the painting stuff. So I can't really answer that. I don't really know. It's like I have this audience and I have this one over here.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So there's something about the Asco production that's more intellectualized do you think? Or it's become part of art history, to the sense that people are looking to know more about it? What do you think that's about?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think it's real intellectualized. I think it's also hip and cool because we dress, how the things we did. It was like a hip thing to do. So I think that's why it touches a certain age group.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A certain audience.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How do you feel about that? I mean the way that that history has been written, the interests by that particular audience?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, for me, it's like, "Well, you get it now." [laughs] I'm happy they get it now. I mean, I said it sarcastic but I have to admit at first, "Oh, you get it now. Twenty years later." But it's okay.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, a lot of young people weren't around

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, I know. But even some peers or older people. It's okay. Maybe people who didn't accept now accept it. That's the people I mean. Okay. Not so much the young people but people who at the time just didn't have a clue when we were doing it. But I think it's all good. It's all good. If that work enlightens or encourages people to do something, I'm happy for that. And if I can motivate people by what I did, then that's really a great thing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What do you see as the most enlightening aspects of that work, of that period?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Gee. Because I'm so far from it now, I don't think about it any more. But now that you're asking me, what was -- Even the word "enlightening". Oh, I guess it's that we were so individual and that we were willing to try new things, break rules, give another face to what a Chicano or Chicana was. That we didn't stay within a certain . . . I always say a box. I don't know why I say it's a box. But in a certain little narrow viewpoint of what we were. That we broke out. And that we were . . . we didn't listen to anything. I mean, we just did whatever we wanted to do. And I think that that's the good thing about the Asco years. Hopefully for young people to say, "We can go beyond what anyone ever thought we could do." You know how there's that view of a Chicano? It's like a little limited view. That you can break free. There are no limits. It's all in your mind.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And so you found the support from other members and the kind of extended, the way that Asco kind of extended, you found it a similar attitude or a sense of support from that group of people?

PATSSI VALDEZ: At the time? Well, I found -- I don't know when it extended because I really wasn't involved in the extension part. I was only in there - Because I was at school when it extended.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I see.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I felt -- Well, of course, it's why I hung out with Gronk and Willie and Harry, because we all had a similar attitude about things. And then I left; then I went to school. But there were a few people around the perimeters of that that were doing other things but had similar -- I don't even know because to be honest I never really talked to them about their views much.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Who? The people on the edges?

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. I never . . . They just sort of were - I didn't really go, "What do you think? What is your attitude?" To be honest, I didn't do that. They were just sort of there. And they just sort of came around and we all just sort of were friends. Did your thing. We didn't have a big intellectual dialogue about how they were thinking. I just didn't. And, at that time, you have to understand I didn't talk much. I was very, very quiet. I don't know. I didn't do interviews. I was very quiet. And then another thing that I understand now. I was growing up with the work so I didn't have a lot to talk about. I mean, I was actually trying to find out who I was in those years. I didn't have the clear cut vision of what I was doing. I was exploring in those years.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is there an aspect of your character, personality at that time that was shy or introverted that could have made you less vocal in those settings or something like that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. I was really shy. I was really quiet. I was probably insecure. And I didn't really -- I don't think I -- Yeah, I think it was shy, quiet, introverted. And that's why I made art.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you feel like you could have a space to vocalize yourself, or express yourself? Or you just did it in different ways?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I wrote at that -- I used to write at that time little bits. I always wonder why I don't continue writing things. But I would write down stuff. I really wouldn't talk too much about it. I would think it and maybe write it and create it with images. But, yeah, there were opportunities to be interviewed but I didn't care to talk about it much. And that's probably why people always go, "Well, how come we don't know . . . Patssi didn't talk. There's nothing on Patssi in the early years." It's because I just didn't speak much. It wasn't to blame anyone. Because they always want to blame the guys. "They made you." Nobody made me do anything I didn't want to do. Because some of those early years, some of those difficult photographs really pissed off some women. Where I have chains or I'm wrapped up. A lot of feminist Chicanas were really angry at me for that. And they said the guys made me do it. And I'm like, "No. No guy made me do anything." I said, "I was acting out what I was living at the time. And my art was about me just like it is now. So it wasn't about anyone making me." They said, "Well, they should have stopped you. They should have redirected it." And I'm like, I don't know why we have to blame somebody for it. I was totally aware of what - I mean, maybe I wasn't aware that it wouldn't look cool or that it wasn't proper or it wasn't the feminist thing to do. The only thing that mattered was that I - And I didn't even really know, to be honest, at the time that I was acting out what I was living 'til after the fact. When I look back at it, I go, "Oh, of course, I did that." That's totally what I was living. But at the moment, you don't know that. And so see, that was the hard part about having dialogue. If you came to interview me.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Because you don't know that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't really know that. And if you say that I don't know that, you're like - You're not smart or you're lesser than or maybe I thought all those things so I didn't talk about it. I just did it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's interesting though because I think in some ways it raises that question of the way that a piece of work circulates, the different readings - Say that a feminist critic or somebody who's looking at the work through that lens versus somebody looking at it through a more racialized lens or a class lens or some kind of other construct like that and the way that people can interpret those things so differently.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh yeah. Real different. And then I look at them and go, "Oh, it totally makes sense."

JEFFERY RANGEL: I get it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: That's exactly how my life was, all bound up.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Metaphorically? I mean, I suppose you're speaking metaphorically.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are there aspects of that that you want to share or not?

PATSSI VALDEZ: It's funny. We should put the bound up piece of the flower that I'm doing today . . . [laughs]

JEFFERY RANGEL: A package deal, right?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh my God! That's why -- There was a review of my work when I started painting and the critic said, "How in the world did she come from making the Asco stuff to painting these pictures?" The woman didn't have a clue what happened to me. How did I . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, there's a big chunk of time in there.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. How did I make the leap. The woman was like -- And I go, "Well, you should just call me up and we could talk about it."

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's a good story though.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. She just didn't have a clue how did I do that. What made me do that? How did that happen? Sort of funny. Thank God you can - I mean, can you imagine if you kept doing the same thing all your life?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Some people do.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh my God!

JEFFERY RANGEL: They take it right to the bank. It's pretty boring.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I grow. Hopefully we grow. Hopefully we change if we're lucky.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you have artistic experiences before hooking up with the folks with Asco? Were you exploring that side of yourself before that time?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. Well, let's see. I turned eighteen when I was just out of high school, when I met up . . . when Asco was started. So the only experience was in school, always making art of course in high school. When I went to high school, I had three classes a day in art. And then I was like the pet of the teacher so I could - And then after that, well, then there was junior college. But okay, so, yeah, all through high school I had like - I found my report cards recently and I was looking at them. And I had all these A's all the way from when I was a little girl in like art. A, A, A. That's funny. I think it's all there in my report cards. What I was going to be. But then there was actually some grades in physical things. Gymnas - I think I could have been a gymnast or something. Did you ever see the picture of me? I'll show you later.

JEFFERY RANGEL: As a gymnast?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. I think I could have been, physically I could have been something physical like with my body. I thought too bad no one, my parent didn't notice that. But it doesn't matter. I wasn't supposed to go that way anyway. But yeah, so my first art exhibit, my first time I was recognized - I think I said this on record. I don't remember. But in elementary school, remember? That's story of the painting. And then it went to junior high and I had Miss Haas and she pulled me out of class and said I was going to be her A student if I stopped goofing around with the boys. And so then I became the A student. And I thought, "Oh, I can be." And she goes, "Don't you know that you could be my A student if you would just focus more?" And I'm like, "Oh, okay." So I became the A student in junior high and then I went to high school. And then I was Mr. Ramirez's - First he gave me an F the first semester because I tried so hard to - He said everyone go home and draw something just from their mind. Well, I looked in the dictionary and I saw this tiny little drawing and I drew it big. So I copied something, but I mean, eye-balled it. And he had recognized the piece I did so I got a big F.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was it?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't remember.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He recognized the dictionary picture?! Good Lord!

PATSSI VALDEZ: So after I got the F, I was determined -- There I go. Start to get an A from this man. And so I surely did. I got one. I didn't give up. I went back to prove that I could do some, this art. And then I became like the A student. And then he really became like a father figure. And he totally protected me through high school and said, "You have to . . ." Because he was a real artist. The teacher. He used to exhibit on La Cienega. Everybody remembers him. Some people either loved him or others - Gronk hated him. Gronk liked the woman teacher down the hall who was more eccentric.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I heard about her.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And I went more with I guess the father figure, because I didn't have a father at home. And so I had art all the time in high school. So then when I got out, I took art at East L.A. College. When I thought grades didn't matter. And then was involved with Asco.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So this whole time you're really developing technical

PATSSI VALDEZ: Always. Technical drawing. Oh yeah. Like the human body was one of my strongest. It's so funny because there's no human body in anything I do now. But drawing, I knew every bone, every . . . I could draw the whole skeletal system. I knew it all by heart. And the muscles and I really had good training. Maybe it'll show up one day. I don't know.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think it already has. Maybe not in the figurative sense.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I mean maybe a figure will come somewhere. Because I even sculpted too. I have some sculpture that my mom has of a figure. So I always was doing this.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The things that you're relating to me right now are I think really interesting. I'm wondering how they hook up to a kind of a larger story of what's taking place at high school at this time? Kind of like the culture that's surrounding you. There's been talk about all the different artists who came out of Garfield at that time. What is it about the air that you're all breathing at that time that's making people want to express themselves in all these different ways?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I mean, I never really look at it that way or thought about it because I know that I inherited this from my family, the talent.

JEFFERY RANGEL: But are you bouncing those talents off of your peers?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, then I think it's the climate that I grew up in. The political things that were happening. And that was totally something that triggered my creativity. Because I couldn't just sit around and watch all this stuff happen and not say anything about it. So, in the seventies, I mean, you just had to express -- I had to express myself with what was happening in the community. And I think my peers too. You know, we were really harassed by cops. Humiliated. Pulled over constantly. And then I encountered racism a lot. And I me not having, like being poor. I don't even know if the word's "poor" but, you know, in this capitalist society, you didn't have all these things that other people had. But you were rich in other ways. So I think it was - But we're going back to high school because now I'm talking about after high school. Gee, you know, I don't really know how we all - so many talented people came out of that school. You know, Los Lobos even. It's like amazing to me.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, it's really phenomenal. It's almost like a school of art.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Wasn't it?

JEFFERY RANGEL: People who are graduating are

PATSSI VALDEZ: But all I know is that I was fortunate, or we were fortunate that we could actually have art in our school. You know, at that time, art and see -- since I wasn't into music, but you did -- Oh yeah, you did grow up with music and art through your school years. And I think that

JEFFERY RANGEL: This was part of the curriculum.

PATSSI VALDEZ: That was totally part of it. I learned how to read music, write it. And so, I think that had a lot to do with it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's real interesting because there's so much -- I think when people think of the education system at that time, and there was a lot of reaction against the kinds of education, the way that people, particularly there, were being educated. And yet, the irony of it is that

PATSSI VALDEZ: Right. It creates all these people. Well, I think that yeah, there were the -- the other classes that were not so good like your English class. Just other classes. .

JEFFERY RANGEL: History classes or . . .

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. History, English. Those basic ones. But as far as art and music, we were all . . . we were excelling in it. And I'm so glad that I had art when I went to school. I'm like, Oh my God! Thank God I went to school when that was part of the curriculum. Because I really don't know how children are surviving today without it. I don't have a clue how they're managing that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Let me flip the tape here.

[END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A] (30-minute tape sides)

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay. This is Tape 2, Side A continuing with Patssi Valdez on the 2nd of June. And we were talking about high school and you just reminded me to ask you about -- I'm curious about . . . how do I pose the question? Are there other female artists at that stage in the game that you're feeling connected with and that you're kind of interacting with? I think I ask because so much of a sense of your development at that time is really with these three guys in Asco, you know. And I'm wondering

PATSSI VALDEZ: Where are the women?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. And well, just in the sense of looking at your work now, it seems to be more woman

centered than not.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hmm.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So is there a community, or a network, or women artists that you're hooked up with at that time that we don't know about?

PATSSI VALDEZ: You mean now?

JEFFERY RANGEL: No, then.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh, then? Let me think.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Or now. Or did it develop or what?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Then. No, actually there was no one. The only one, she was my best friend, Sylvia Delgado, she aspired to be a writer. She was my best friend. So she would write. I would play guitar. I thought, "Oh, I should have been a rock star." I used to play . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: We all have those dreams! [laughs]

PATSSI VALDEZ: I used to play . . . I could have been, now that I think about it. Because I thought, "God, . . ."

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's never too late.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, right. All they do is play three chords. That's all I knew. I could have played my three chords. I used to . . . We'd sing our songs and I'd play the guitar. And I thought, "Oh, I should have kept it up. I should have investigated it more." Now you can do a whole song with a few chords. So my best friend used to write . . . and recite her work. And she was actually in high school and I used to paint in my room with a black light on. How silly. And do all these paintings with black light. I'm like, "Oh God!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] I'd love to see some of those!

PATSSI VALDEZ: I have a picture of me in that room. My mother let me paint one wall black. It was like, "Wow! Your mother let you paint a wall black?! And you have your own room, even." So see, I guess I did have some luck, more than other friends I guess. So anyway, it was really Sylvia and I that hung out and did little creative things. And did things maybe that were out of the norm for the neighborhood because we were like the Chicana hippie girls. We wore the beads. We wore the thigh boots. We wore these cool clothes. And people would make fun of us and go, "What do you think you are? Some kind of like, you know, . . ." And make fun of us because we were dressing like out of the norm for the neighborhood. But she was one of my creative - We were both doing creative things, only I was the fine painter and she was the poet. And so we were like sisters. And I'm still waiting for her book to come out. And there's still time. She might write a book one day. I haven't seen her in years. But, you know, she became a model. Yeah, Sylvia Delgado was my sort of creative partner.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was there ever a time that you felt yourself a part a women's art community or kind of network or circle or . . . maybe because there's different women who are a part of that scene here in Los Angeles. I'm just wondering what the kind of recognition of one another is at this point.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. I really actually have to say no, I didn't feel a part of. But on my travels through Europe, I became really closely connected to Amalia Mesa Bains who became like one of my teachers. And a mentor for me. So for the first time, I met up with a woman who we totally connected and she taught me -- because she's very brilliant. And so she taught me a lot. And then I taught her stuff. My knowledge is different from hers. So we were able to share our knowledge. And so I would say Amalia is one of them. And also my friend, Cristina Fernandez, who's younger and it's so funny, we're close friends and controversy brought us together. There was an article written in the L.A. Times about our work - oh no, it was in a catalogue about our work. We were in a show together. And I totally disagreed with what the writer wrote. And then I found out she disagreed. And I think John disagreed. And so I was at a restaurant and they said, "Oh, here's Cristina. The one who thinks like you. I mean, the same thing's bothering her." And then we ended up becoming close friends. And we're still friends to this day. And it's funny because we're totally opposites. She's a conceptual intellectual kind of artist. And mine comes from my emotions. And she doesn't even like painting and I'm a painter. And I go, "Cristina, be careful. I paint pictures." She calls herself a photo-based artist. So it's funny because she doesn't even like painting. I go, "Cristina, why are we friends?" Sometimes I wonder. I mean, we go places and everything I like, she hates. And everything she likes, I don't understand. We're opposite. But I do know why. You know, we know there's other things that connect us. And so Cristina is another person that I - She's always current on what's going on and because I'm more . . . don't really go out there much, she'll fill me in. And go this is going on. She just graduated from Cal Arts too. So she brings me information. And then she'll ask me things. And then I sort of

give her my help. And who else? I think Cristina, Amalia. Carmen Lomas Garza became helpful to me in understanding business. And Judy Baca, a little bit. On and off, I've come to know her and respect her more recently. But not really - I mean, . . . Who else? Oh, Margaret Garcia on and off. You know, not real close but you know, I have dialogue with her sometimes. She can be . . . have moments where she's generous and will say, "Oh, this is going on." She's the one who pulled me into getting involved with Frank Romero's for the Christmas sale or things like that. And also Anne Chamberlain. I really like Ann's work a lot and I buy it. I love it. And so Ann's become like a friend. But I don't really hang out with anyone much. And so when I see them, you know, those are the women that I'm close to. I hope I haven't left anyone out. Oh, of course, as far as fine art but I have other, my performance artist friend Maria. And now I've made friends with an older woman. Her name's Mari. She paints too and I sort of help her, mentor her as an artist, and she mentors me as a mom. So, it sort of works out.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was the nature of that exchange with you and Amalia?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, we met each other . . . We knew of each other but we never were close. And we were doing the Les Demon de Anges, our recent show. The Demon of Angel show. And I remember our first installation, I hear some . . . like was there a mouse in here. I could hear paper [makes soft paper noise]. Because see, when you do an installation you're alone in the gallery or on the site. So I'm going, "There's someone else in here." And I go over there and peak and there's Amalia unpacking all her little things. And so her and I because we're alone in this space and we're both there to do our altars. Hers, because hers are very traditional, with traditional materials, and mine - I was chosen because mine are like plastic and bought in mass quantity, mass produced religious objects. So I like have play with mine. And hers are more imbued with like real stuff, like her grandma's or things like real. And mine are like from K-Mart or something. So we started to have dialogue together. And started to become friends. We talked about the art, the altars we were doing. We talked about all kinds of different - She always - She had so much information that I would . . . I was photographing women at one time. I would put skirts on their heads. I had this lamee skirt and I thought, "Oh, it'll make a cool headdress." So I put it on and I stuffed it. It was fabulous. And Amalia told me, "Patssi, do you know what that is?" I go, "What is it, Amalia?" She goes, "Do you know . . ." and she told me this whole story about these women in Mexico who found a trunk of clothes and they were children's clothes and they really wanted to wear the clothes. So they ended up getting the skirts they wanted to wear and they put them on their heads. She goes, "Do you know that that's what you're doing?" And I'm like, "No." So I'd do something and she'd tell me where it came from.

JEFFERY RANGEL: She'd give the context for it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Exactly. And I'd go, "Oh my God." So she was so bright. So she would . . . I learned so much from her. And then, you know, she's a psychologist.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I didn't know she was. She actually has her degree in psychology? I didn't know that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: She's really analytical and figures out all kinds of stuff. And I go, "Really?" And then I'm also telling her, "Amalia, you have to learn how to rest. You have to learn how to take better care of yourself. Go to my healer." You know, I taught her a whole other part that she was lacking. She had neglected a part of her being. So we balanced each other out. I brought her the spiritual - or I mean, I helped awaken it. And she brought me the intellectual. So we were like this balance.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A nice combination.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. It really was. So I almost like became her mother on the travels. I took care of her. She had gotten very ill, so critically ill that we thought we were going to lose her. And I already had intuitively known something. She goes, "Thank God you had that medicine that day because I don't know if I would have made it out of that room in Europe."

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was the story behind that?

PATSSI VALDEZ: She had something wrong with her lung and she wouldn't tell anybody for a long time. She couldn't breathe and we're carrying luggage and she was really ill. And so they had diagnosed her that she -- they were lining up to do some transplant.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A lung transplant?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Some kind. Something serious. So I introduced her to my healer. And within . . . she'd fly in. After about a year, they took more tests and it was gone. She had healed through Howard. So that . . . Now, we're like every time we travel, we go talking about Howard and we go, "We'd better stop. They'll think we're nuts." Howard did this and Howard that. She'd call Howard from wherever. We had Howard medicine. You know, we're like, "Oh God, this Howard thing." So anyway, we shared a lot. And she has become like an older sister to

me. And we've become dear, dear friends. And then that's how I met Alicia, a new dear friend of mine. So I think I've made new friends. And I think I did. I left old ones behind and made new ones.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I see.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Very . . . probably on this hand.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How is to interface with those old friends now?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I never see them. I intentionally left. It was intentional. It wasn't like it just happened. It was like I need to go this direction now. And it was very painful. I knew I needed to turn and go that way because that way was killing me.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And you literally don't see them?

PATSSI VALDEZ: At all. Nothing. I wish them well. I hope everyone's okay. But I have nothing in common with them any more. We just live different lives now.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you get that sense in Long Beach when the Asco reunion happened?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Those friends, those are different. I meant . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: I'm talking about in the whole scope.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, no. Those guys are like my brothers. They're my brothers forever. They're related to me. Those friends were my art friends, productive, creative friends. My other friends were my personal friends that weren't going in the direction that I was going in. And so I had to leave that. It was not doing me any good. I had to go away now. No, those men will all - Gronk is a relative. My mother, when she'd see me instead of asking how I was, she'd ask me about Gronk. And I would tell him, "My mother cares more about you than me!" Gronk this, Gronk that. So, Gronk and Harry - I just saw Harry. Harry's like a brother. They're like my brothers. Willie, well he used to be my boyfriend so I don't know how you'd call him my brother.

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] It'd be incest.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah, it would. Willie is also still a dear friend. So they're my family, you know. And I felt so good. I forgot. I said, "When we were there talking, I wanted to thank them." I just wanted - I was so proud that I had connected with such great men. You know, they were -- I just forgot to say it. I wanted to say it and go, "Oh, my God. I should have said it." I felt real fortunate that I had come together with them.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I'm sure it goes both ways.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. But I mean, I just wanted to say it because I looked at them and I was proud of all of them, even to this day. Well, Gronk, I didn't talk much about Gronk. But Gronk, more than anyone, was - I used to call him my Mr. DeMille because when I was in front of that camera so much being photographed, Gronk was my director. Head up. Chin up. Stomach in. Shoulders back. [laughs] You know, for the Asco photos? And I wanted that because I couldn't see myself and I was posing and I was a . . . So I go, "Gronk, you need to help me." And he would give me signs of what to do so I could look right in front of the camera. So he became my mentor and my director in many ways.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He has a real sense of theatricality.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yes. So I was like his star and he was like molding the star. How silly!

JEFFERY RANGEL: [Laughs] Oh God, I hope he doesn't hear this!

PATSSI VALDEZ: He knows it already. We both know it. Before the camera, you know. I needed another eye out there. So I was totally into glamor anyway, you know. So . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where does that come from, the interest in glamor?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh, I think I really . . . I don't know if I said it on tape but when I was younger, - Well, I have a glamorous mother. So my mother was always - never . . . The first thing was like you showered and the make-up came. Then the hair and the clothes. My mother was always well groomed. I mean, I thought it was normal that everybody, women, just did this. That every day you put on make-up. Not everybody has a mom like that. I mean. And so I grew up with watching this every single day. And then that became my pattern. So, it felt really good when I just, after many years of doing it, I thought, "Oh, I just want people to see me how I just look without nothing, you know." It feels great to just be without. I used to be so addicted to how I looked. I would

have my high heeled shoes by the side of my bed. I wouldn't walk anywhere without a shoe with a heel on it. It was scary. That's why now - And when I first went to art school, I must have went all dolled up and the teacher said, "Miss Valdez?" And I go, - She goes, "Do you expect to make art looking like that?" And I'm like, "Well, what's wrong?" I mean, I had high shoes. I was like all dolled up. And my best friend that went to the school, he said, "Do you know how much the women used to make fun of you because they thought you were a big air head because of the way you looked?" And I go, "Really, Jim?" He goes, "Yeah," he said, "they used to gossip about you because " of the way I looked. But after, they didn't really judge me by my But after awhile, forget it. I was like . . . like I am now. Who cares?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Just let it hang out, huh?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I let it hang out. Maybe too much. I had to pull the reins back so that I can go, "Okay, Patssi. You went too far that way." You have to sort go to the middle a little bit, which I'm trying to do now. So, I - When I was in high school, I had these dreams, other dreams too, that I wanted to - I was I guess highly influenced by Hollywood. And I - Now I look back and how these Latina actresses like Sadie Lopez. And I look at Sadie who worked on the set and I think, "God, how lucky" because some part of me feels like I was like Sadie. And that I could have been an actress. But at the time I was young, you know.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Just wasn't happening.

PATSSI VALDEZ: happening. But I totally would have been an actress probably if I could -- I think I would have liked to make a few movies. So at that time, there were no roles. So I played the role in front of the camera. But I would have totally been into show business. When I see Jennifer Lopez, and I go, "Oh, I could have been that." Now, I think I could have but you know, I was just born at the wrong time or something. And so I wanted probably deep inside to be like a movie star maybe. And then the next thing was "Wow, maybe I could be an airline stewardess" but I was too short. So I couldn't do that. And then I wanted to be a model. "But I can't do that. You're too short." So these things I couldn't be because I was too short. So art was somehow always there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you're playing it out.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I had the dreams, moments of dreams going, "Oh, maybe I could do that." So then I was role playing. And then I didn't have money for gowns or anything so I'd make them out of stuff that I found.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Hence paper fashions.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Acted out. And so that's what I did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It reminds me of a slide I just saw at Self Help of "Take One".

PATSSI VALDEZ: H-mm. See, I was just acting it out. I wanted to be a star, I guess. But now, of course, stardom isn't -- I don't care anything about it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And it seems to be knocking on your door.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know. And the funny thing is I could care less about now. You know. And so, don't ask for something. You just might get it, right?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So I have other things I want now.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, it's something that maybe in a way is a necessary evil or, you know, something like you're saying, you can cultivate and kind of use it for your . . . for your ends.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Rather than being consumed by it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. And so if it's a positive thing and if I . . . if the mirror is a good mirror for my culture, it's a good thing. It motivates or

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you really create with that in mind?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No. I never did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: No.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I mean, not I never did. No, I don't create with that in mind at all. I don't think about anybody or anything outside myself when I'm creating. It's just the thing that happened after the fact that I didn't even know the affect it was going to have. You know, because when you're creating, you're in a meditative state. You're not even . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: I would really like to be able to break that down. Like what happens in that state?

PATSSI VALDEZ: You lose it. You lose it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How do you get to that state? How do you maintain it?

PATSSI VALDEZ: That's the hard part. That's what I couldn't do when I was younger. That's why I couldn't paint because painting - while I don't know about other things but it's focused and it's all consuming. That's why it has to be so quiet. I mean, I do my art with music or silence. But, if there's someone around, I cannot work because I have to go inside.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So much for that documentary of filming as you're painting. [laughs]

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh, that. You know you know it's for the camera. I've done it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So it's just performance any way.

PATSSI VALDEZ: It is. It is. But the good thing about that is they came and they documented me for KCET when I started. Then they left and I could work alone. And then they'd come back. You know, anything for the camera's . . . I mean, I was able to paint, get it down. That's actually the painting around the bend. But you need periods of sustained silence and total focus. And that is what - I think now that I'm more balanced, I'm able to sustain the focus.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's like tapping into the right brain or whatever side of the brain is supposed to be the creative one and letting that kind of take over.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The physics of it.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I mean, you don't even know you're doing that. You just get carried . . . you just go away. And then you look at the clock and go, "Oh my God, I've been doing this for four hours!" You know, where did the time go?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. I want to switch gears for a second, if I can.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Okay.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You were going to say something?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I'm getting tired.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's ten to three.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Maybe I'll get up.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Hang on. Let me put a pause here for a second and you can stretch. Okay, one of the things that I wanted to ask you about was I guess we started today. I asked you about the work that you had done at these different centers. But I guess I was more interested, most interested in the time that you spent at Self Help, what that space meant to you, what you were able to accomplish there. How you see that space and institution serving artists today or what kind of role it plays?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, much today is changing so much. I can only comment on what I knew of it. Because now with the new director, I don't know what direction it's going into. I better not crunch on crackers now.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's all right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, I have to say more than the space, it's Sister Karen. I want to go, "Thank you Sister Karen!"

JEFFERY RANGEL: She heard you.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I call her "sister" because we became very close friends. I became her mentor and she became

mine because I had a residency there. I worked at Plaza de la Raza and I needed a . . . what did they call it? A site so CAC could -- I could get the grant. And they wouldn't support me at Plaza de la Raza.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Why?

PATSSI VALDEZ: That's what I want to know. It caused big controversy. Actually walk outs happened. I don't know. I don't even remember but we got no support there. So Sister, I called her on the phone and I said, "Sister, you know, I need a site." I go, "Would you support me and da . . . da . . . da?" And she said, "Sure! No problem." And that's how she was. And so I got the grant and I went over and got a studio at Self Help. But, of course, before that that space was always there for artists to exhibit. To do those prints. I mean, it was like a safe haven. That was another great thing in the heart of East L.A. to have this Self Help Graphics, you know. So, she - Because Self Help wouldn't exist without Karen. And Sister Karen was an artist. And she totally knew I think what it was to be an artist and that's why she was so supportive. And also, see, I guess I'm getting tired.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was your relationship with her before you placed that phone call?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Oh, well, that's what I'm saying. In the early years, you know, we'd exhibit there and they had the Day of the Dead and they had all these functions. So it was a safe haven then.

JEFFERY RANGEL: But my understanding, Patssi, has always been that at least the way as a member of Asco that you guys entered into those Day of the Dead celebrations were - I don't know if controversial is the right word but it wasn't kind of reverential in spirit.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No.

JEFFERY RANGEL: in seeming with spirit. So it struck me as

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't agree because people have difficulty with Sister. They didn't like her. Or personal things went on with Sister and her . . . I think whoever's saying these things, because they had difficulty with her, or with the center. But I never felt controversy or that we were doing anything out of context ever. I think it's a personal

[END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A].

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

PATSSI VALDEZ: is that we . . . because she never said, "No, you can't do it."

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 2, Side B with Patssi.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. So, I mean, I think that's a really great, you know, point that if

PATSSI VALDEZ: I know she was a difficult person. She had a strong personality. But you had to be just as strong. I know maybe she hurt people or whatever, but -- Even with me, it happened. But I confronted her on it. And I asked for an apology and she gave it to me. So if you were weak -- No, not if you were weak. But she had a very strong personality. So anyway, no, I didn't feel that we were -- I don't think any of it was true. We even did the "Mur Murs" film where Willie jumped out of a window. He spray painted the wall. You know, she let us do things that

JEFFERY RANGEL: That was done in the lot at Self Help?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah!

JEFFERY RANGEL: I didn't know that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Think about it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I didn't know that.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Think about it. She's the one who allowed all those punk rock bands to happen, Vex or whatever, the beginning of it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Club Vex

PATSSI VALDEZ: The only reason that it stopped because the people from the west side and destroyed the whole place one day.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Oh really? During the show.

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. So I always had -- I respected her and she could be difficult. But, you know, so could I. So

JEFFERY RANGEL: So how long were you in residence there?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think it was two years.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's all?

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. I think it was two years. I'm not real sure. Two. Maybe three. I doubt it. I probably left in my third year. And anyway, I maybe we always thought that it could be run better or differently, you know, because she was getting old and she was tired and overworked and all that. But she was so - Her pattern was set. You know, she ran things a certain way that it just didn't happen. So, but I really loved her and thought she was a really -- I really liked her a lot. She was a really -- And when you got to really know her, she was a bright understanding person. You know? So when I heard things that I just thought, "No. You just can't handle her she's so strong." I don't know. She was.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That makes sense.

PATSSI VALDEZ: She was. Real strong. If she knew something about it, she'd say it out to your face. So it was up to you

JEFFERY RANGEL: To deal.

PATSSI VALDEZ: To deal with her or come back . . . have a dialogue about it. I met a young man in his twenties and he said, "When I first met Sister, I was terrified!" He said, "I was so scared of her!" He goes, "But after awhile, she's a cool lady." You know? Because she'll give you what you need if maybe you can show her that you really mean business or she takes awhile to notice you or to see what you're doing. But if you go up to her and you have a need, she would give it to you. That's the kind of woman that I knew. And once I had no where to live and she took me. I actually lived with her in the basement apartment. And so, you know. She didn't need to do that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That speaks

PATSSI VALDEZ: No matter what.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And that space in general -- I know you can't really talk about Self Help without talking about Sister Karen. But the space itself you really felt was a safe haven for artists?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Well, you could go there and do prints and you never had to pay any money for anything that I remember. I don't remember giving a penny to anything. And you could - I mean, of course, you did trades of payment. But, you know, you could go and work with a master printer and go home with all these prints. And she always, I felt, had the artist in mind. And the thing about the print prices which her and I would talk about is like she just wanted to make money so she could keep the organization going. Because you can't really talk about it without her. It's very hard. How can you? She was it. Now she isn't there and now we have Tomás, who's doing a really good job. But, and I'm really - when they would ask me to exhibit, I would say, "No, I'm not going to exhibit here any more because this is for the new people. This is for the young people. I'm already okay. I can go exhibit somewhere else. I go, I don't feel right exhibiting here any more. I don't want to take the space up. This is for the new generation, the new people. I mean, I'll do it as a support but I won't do it otherwise? Why take up wall space?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So, thank God it's still there. And Tomás is doing that now. And it's just a whole new generation of artists are coming out of there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And what do you think of the stuff that's coming out?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I haven't seen it much. Well, I don't want to name names because it's a bit -- I won't name a name but someone was upset and they go, "Oh, my God, what is this stuff?! It all looks like copies from the past artists. How boring, how da, da, da." And I said, "You know what?" I said, "If that's where they have to start, didn't you copy your teachers when you were young?" I mean, that's sort of normal. And I said, "I think it's healthy that they're at least doing the art. And maybe they haven't their found their individual voice yet or their own style." I said, "But that doesn't come over night. That takes time. You have to be patient and let these people do this." That's part of developing. I copied everything my teacher did when I was in high school. And I just said, "I can't be that critical." And they said, "Oh, this bright color, you know, it's still all the same stuff." And I'm like, "You know, I don't think we need to be that critical. I don't think it's so bad. Let it - See what unfolds."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. Look at it in a longer continuum maybe.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. And I try not to be that judgmental about things any more. I'm not saying I never was.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

PATSSI VALDEZ: I try to be a lot more open and a lot more understanding about stuff. I could if I see something bad like, "Oh, he's killing that guy." Then I go, "That's horrible!" But this is art. Come on, let's not take it so serious. That's true! Isn't it?

JEFFERY RANGEL: For some.

PATSSI VALDEZ: It's art making.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. Actually, in the way that you were talking about imitating your teachers and sort of learning that way leads me to another question in terms of the painting right now, or say from the show. Can one read influences in those works?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Everyone does it every day. Oh, it's Matisse. It's Picasso. It's so-and-so. I go, "Well, I don't make . . . Well, I'm honored. Thank you." I am. I'm honored. You're putting me in that category. God, am I honored. But when I'm in this house and I have my easel and I'm painting that flower, that cupboard or that chair, I mean, if that's coming out, you know, I don't really know how it's happening because I'm painting my own environment. So if it is, I find that interesting.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What about a Willie or a Gronk, John Valadez, those people who you really . . . ?

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, because you're alone when you're working. So if somehow by -- I think there's a collective unconsciousness. I know you can be working on something, or my young friend who are always the critical one and that who are always like, "Oh my God, look at this," so, sometimes I hear, "Oh, they are copying me!" And I'm like, "I don't think so." Because I really believe in the . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] Don't flatter yourselves.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, I believe in the collective unconscious. I totally think that when there's something going on, the thoughts are flowing everywhere and we're all perceiving them. And I really totally believe that. Because someone has compared my work to Gronk's and I think it's really interesting because . . . how I think because we're around each other so much, maybe intuitively something is in my body or being, but I can't say that because his content and mine have nothing to do with each other. And maybe the strength. I totally see what they're talking about and it's the strength in the work. His work's very black outlined, bold, strong. Mine is strong and bold but in another way. There is no black outline. But it's probably just the boldness they're talking about. So, you know . . . But as far as going, "Oh, I'm going to paint that like Matisse, I mean, I don't even have thoughts." And I don't know. Maybe it's in my being. I don't really know. It's not conscious or anything.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So do you think . . . There's been talk about a generation of artists, painters who've come out of say this area and kind of grouping you guys together as a school, do you think that's a fair assessment? Do you think it's also a deliberate body that comes out as well as the collective unconscious surfacing?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think it's all of those things. Yeah, I believe it is a school or was a school or it was . . . certain things were happening at a certain time. I think now we're all sort of going off a little bit in different directions. But there's still commonalities. And I also think we did influence each other. I can't put my finger exactly on it. I know color's one of them. I think we have influenced each other. And I think that of course we have similar histories. And similar experiences. And then we also have really different ones too. So I think that similarities are what unites us. And then I think there is the collective unconscious happening. So I think it's quite a few factors that contribute to this. And then it sort of - And what's funny is when I went to Europe with this Chicano show, I have to admit a lot of the work I didn't really like. Chicano art. Some of it I didn't -- like with anything, you don't like it all. You go, "Oh, I don't really like that." But you know, and then, I went to Europe and I saw all this work in the same room on the other side of the world, and I'm alone in this space looking at my peers and I was blown away and I had a total change of heart. And for the first time it was all on the walls and, you know, an outsider put it together. Because you know, sometimes you can see better when you're apart from something. And so I looked and I thought, "Oh my God. Even the art that I really didn't care for fits a certain niche in this whole school, if you want to call it, or movement." Each artist played a definite role to make it a unifying whole. And for the first time I had total respect for every single artist that was in that show, whether I would buy their work or hang it. I had a whole different vision and view of it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What a powerful moment!

PATSSI VALDEZ: M-hm. It was like, "Oh my God, now I get it." But I had to get away from here, go away and be somewhere alone with it to go, "Ohhhh!" It all makes sense.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you think that's something that people here, either in Los Angeles, California or the United States, are too close to see? Do you know what I mean? How far apart from it do you think somebody needs to be to be able to put that puzzle together?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I think some people see it. And I think when you haven't had the experience, maybe you're so wrapped up in it that you can't see it? But I think there's some people who see it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you think that relationships like the experiences that you're talking about that make you so a part of that get worked out in paint?

PATSSI VALDEZ: You mean amongst each other?

JEFFERY RANGEL: M-hm. Or how does that get worked out in paint?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Or does it ever? Everyone is an individual and everyone -- I don't even think of working that out. Whatever that is. I just know that I respect my peers and that I will . . . and that I know that there's - You know, sometimes this stuff happens. Well, you're getting all the attention. Well, how come I'm not? Or this and da, da, da. If I wanted - I think, God, none of that matters because there's room . . . again, like I said, there's room for everyone. I can't be you. You can never be me. And I can't be that person and everyone's different and there's an audience for every single one of us, if we only knew that. There's no reason for me to try to push you off that square. None whatsoever. Because there's space for me right near your. There is no reason whatsoever for me to even compete. I don't compete at all. Nothing with my peers at all now. I have nothing to do with that any more. I do what I need to do and that's all. Because I'm not threatened any more. I don't know. Maybe tomorrow will change. I doubt it. But for now, I don't look at things that way any more.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So that means at one point you were seeing things more competitively?

PATSSI VALDEZ: I don't know if I was. I think what would happen to me is I'd feel bad when the younger people would say, "How come those other artists get all the recognition all the time? The same old ones." I felt bad. And I would think, "Little do you know that even the artists before me opened that door so I could walk in." You know, so we all need to look at it that way. We need to know everyone who walks through that door, or pushes it open, they're making room for you to get in easier. It's not about why you because maybe it's not your time yet. And maybe because you have that attitude you're not walking through that door yet.

JEFFERY RANGEL: M-hm. That makes a lot of sense.

PATSSI VALDEZ: And that's sort of why I would feel bad because maybe I was one of those people that again, you know, boring. I'm like, "oh well. I'll pull you along. Just hold on. Come on." And that's sort of what I try to do because I had a friend who said, "Oh my God, you know, people think Chicano art is just art with all this color." And I want to go, "You know what you're talking about, it's not just that." And so I pull that person along with me and they gave me a show. And they said, "Oh, you know, I'm never going to fit in. And I don't fit into this. And all that." And I said, "You have to educate maybe the older artists." She goes, "I don't have to educate anybody." And I'm like, "Wow." So when I heard that, I thought maybe it's my job then to know I support that person and that really different art making. So I said I want that person to -- I shared my show with them. That's how they feel isolated so maybe that's one of my responsibilities . . . or I don't know if it's my responsibility, but how I can give is to go, "Oh come on. Be quiet. Maybe you're just feeling sorry for yourself." I know it's hard. So I just say, "Oh come on, let's do this." So I think actually things are quite simple. Things aren't - I really believe that things are not supposed to be that complicated and if they are, then it wasn't meant to be.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You're missing something, huh?

PATSSI VALDEZ: Yeah. And I can say it all so easy now, can't I? But you know, I know everything isn't all crystal clear when you're going through it. So, when you're in the middle of it, you're like, "Oh God!" So I'm saying it being apart from it. And then when I always know that other thing - if I can give back one thing. When I was in Asco days, I used to think I was going to save the world. [giggles] I laugh now. I can't save the world. Well, first I have to save myself and then maybe I have enough for But what it is, some are saying, "Oh, you're not really political any more and you're not whatever." And I'm like, "Yeah, yeah." Well, I thought I am not going to go out there yanking young people into my studio and going, "You're going to do this." I can't do that. I know one thing, you have to take the first step and knock on the door and then I'll open it. But I'm not going to make you knock on the door. Get it? I can't do that. I just can't. It's like when you want to help change them and you can't do it. They have to take the first step. So if a young person or someone came and knocked on the door, or made the phone call, I'll be there because I know that they took the first step. But I can't go out there yanking people. They have to . . . you have to make the first step. And I think the other thing too though, other than the

first step, is to make - When you have the opportunity to go out and share what you do with others, I think that that's important too so that you can inspire. Hopefully, if you inspire one student, that's a big accomplishment. So I mean, I think that's the way I do my political work, or if I'm not political any more in whatever the norm is. I mean, that's the way I'll do my sharing. But, the other way, forget it. I mean, there are people who do that that way and I support them and I respect them. But if I don't go paint in my room, then I mean, if I'm just

JEFFERY RANGEL: Then you're no good to anybody.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No, I'm not. I've got to go do that work so I can share it and then I can do these other things.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I understand.

PATSSI VALDEZ: So everyone has their role, don't they?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. This seems like a really good place to wrap up, actually.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Okay, we're done.

JEFFERY RANGEL: [Laughs] Well, thank you.

PATSSI VALDEZ: Thank you.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Any last comments? She's tired. Okay.

PATSSI VALDEZ: No.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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