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Oral history interview with Juana Alicia, 2000  
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**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Interview

**Interview with Juana Alicia  
Conducted by Paul Karlstrom  
In Berkeley, California  
May 8, 2000**

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Juan Alicia on May 8, 2000. The interview took place at the artist's home in Berkeley, California and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is an interview with Juana Alicia on May 8, the year of 2000. The interview is being conducted in her dining room, in her home in Berkeley, California. This is session one. The interview is part of a Latino Artist series. That gives it a sort of territory in which it participates. The interviewer for the Archives of American Art is Paul Karlstrom. This is tape one, side A.

Well, first of all I'm glad that finally we're doing this because we talked about this well over a year ago, and I'm glad that everything's come together to make it possible. I also should say that in our conversation beforehand we talked about just a format, how to proceed, and we agreed that it might be interesting to start with more recent projects—specifically, I think, the big project at SFO—San Francisco International Airport—in the new international terminal, which is a big deal. By god, is that going to be visible!

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, wow!

JUANA ALICIA: Have you seen it?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no, not yet, although I spend half my time in that airport.

JUANA ALICIA: But you can't get in there until. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not yet.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I could take you in there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that would be great.

JUANA ALICIA: I'm taking several people in there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That'd be great. I would love that. In fact, it would make sense before maybe our next session. But what I would like to do. . . . I'm going to renege slightly, as I mentioned, on that agreement because I feel for the benefit of this oral-history document we probably should know a few basic things about you: where you were born, something about your own background. When did you come to California? Or are you from here?

JUANA ALICIA: I came to California in the very early seventies.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Seventies.

JUANA ALICIA: And I was born in Newark, New Jersey. I really grew up in Detroit. I grew up in the heart of Detroit in the black community in the fifties and sixties. Born in 1953.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But near the DIA. Near the Detroit Institute [of Art—Ed.]

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, near the DIA, and that was a formative, early experience. I'd say that my early cultural contexts were Motown, the black community in Detroit. We were the only Spanish-speaking family for quite a few blocks around in a mostly black neighborhood.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did that. . . Sorry about interrupting here, but I'm curious to know how you remember that experience. Did you feel then part of the black community, or were you aware to some degree of some difference?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, of course I was aware of some difference. I mean, my mother's side of the family spoke Yiddish and English, and my father spoke Spanish and English. My father spoke to us in Spanish; my grandparents spoke to us in English mixed with Yiddish, and my mother spoke to us in English. So we had three languages in the house if you don't count what's now called Ebonics. But that was also in the house. We grew up down the street from one of the Four Tops. Duke, the low voice. And we were very immersed in the Motown culture, and my godmother [Dr. Cledie Collins Taylor—Ed.] was very active in the visual arts scene. She's a black sculptor, who owned a gallery and still owns a gallery. It just celebrated its 50 years, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In Detroit?

JUANA ALICIA: Uh huh, Arts Extended.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Arts Extended, is that the name of it?

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. And so, although I noticed difference—that was unavoidable—I really felt part of that whole experience. You know, the day that Martin Luther King died was probably one of the most significant moments in my childhood. Everyone was actually out there wailing in the streets, you know. My mother was very active in the farmworker movement stuff. Both my parents were interested in the arts. Music was very much a part of our lives. I met Paul Robeson when I was very young when he was visiting our next door neighbors and came over.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was that like? Do you remember that at all?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. Oh yeah, he came over to our house because my father played the piano for him and he sang.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow. This is high culture. What you're describing some people might describe as, "Within the black community it must be, well, ghetto culture or something like that," but what you're describing is a true, very rich cultural setting, and in the terms of "high art."

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah. Well, I don't really see. . . . I think that's a really false division and. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no, I understand that, but that's the way people perceive it.

JUANA ALICIA: Ah, that's racism for you, but, you know, I just read the commencement speech that Mumia Abu Jamal just gave on audio for Antioch's graduation, and he noted. . . . He talked about Ella Baker, Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Dubois, Angela Davis. He made a list of people, and he asked what they all had in common, and he kept asking, and what it got down to was that they abandoned their class associations for the good of humanity—and their class advantages. And Paul Robeson was really such a person. You know, he really identified with the working class, even though he was a Rhodes scholar and an incredible football player and, you know, everything.

PAUL KARLSTROM: A Renaissance Man.

JUANA ALICIA: Absolutely. And there was a Renaissance taking place in the black community—a second Harlem Renaissance happening in Detroit when I was growing up. And even though it was a poor. . . . Well, it was a middle working-class black community.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Auto industry?

JUANA ALICIA: A lot, you know, and white collar workers and people who had sort of middle-echelon jobs or people who had done everything from worked as porters to, owned businesses, and it was a very rich cultural environment. Motown was exploding. Barry Gordy had a big mansion down near DIA, as a matter of fact, in that area. We used to go down and drive by it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that right?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, and you know my best girlfriends in high school were all black women, and, you know, it was a revelation because I came out here in the early seventies at the invitation of Cesar Chavez, who I hadn't met. I was working. . . . I was doing posters for the boycott, the farmworker movement, and I met Cesar Chavez at a rally. I showed him one of the poster's that I'd made—"Boycott A&P"—at a speech he gave. "Boycott grapes in A&P" markets. And he said, "This is really great. Why don't you come out here, out to Salinas, and work with me on El Malcriado, the newspaper.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What year was this?

JUANA ALICIA: '72.

PAUL KARLSTROM: '72.

JUANA ALICIA: And I said, "That's a great idea and \_\_\_\_\_. I don't have any other plans." [laughs] And I came out to Salinas with the idea of working for the union on the Malcriado. And it was a real revelation for me because, although in Detroit there were a lot of puertorriqueños, and where my sister was born right outside of Detroit in Pontiac there were a lot of mexicanos, just in that area. There weren't very many mexicanos in Detroit. Mostly italianos and puertorriqueños, and to come out here and all of a sudden see. . . . Oh, my goodness, this is the whole raza out here. Boy, this was something else for me. I realized, "No, I'm not black. I feel black, but I'm not black."

PAUL KARLSTROM: That is so interesting.

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, well, whatever, as much as race might be a social construct here in this country of other places—anyway, part of me is black, but, you know. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's something that'd be really interesting to pursue a bit, because it's like taking on to yourself—in a way choosing or in response to you environment—identity.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that these other identities can be available to us depending on sympathies and contacts.

JUANA ALICIA: Right. That's true. I mean, I always feel that it's very important that the color line be considered in this country, because basically you're judged by your color. And you're judged by the way you speak and what your presentation is. \_\_\_\_\_ black. But you know, although I'm sure my family—between the Moors, the Spanish, the Mexicans, and the Jews—all had roots in North Africa—I have no doubt that's the mother land. You know, in this country black people are treated differently from everybody else, so there is a color advantage socially in this country in terms of the perks that are given, so I respect that a lot. But one should never make assumptions. If you look at the work of Adrian Piper, you know that she has to hand out business cards saying that she's black and she's not going to have any of your racial comments right now on this bus—you know, that kind of thing. So that's how she takes that on.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that is to a large extent her art form.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You don't mind a little dialogue here.

JUANA ALICIA: No, I don't know. This is the more interesting stuff to me than, you know, "What were your early influences?" Well, I mean, we know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, it's okay. It's important to say that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We'll get some of that.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But it'll come out naturally. But a little comment just to make—and this is about you and not about somebody else—but on Adrian Piper I was interviewing Bob Colescott recently down in Tucson, and we'll be doing some more interview, and he has a quiet different view about her. It's quite interesting the different perspectives you get from these individuals, but on how much she really \_\_\_\_\_

JUANA ALICIA: Just shows how none of us are monolithic, right?

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . how the idea of passing then becomes then a self-conception in some ways as well. I mean, it wasn't a major part of this interview, but it just came to mind as you were mentioning her. But the basic point is very well taken—I don't have to reinforce this—is that we think we know all about somebody by—I won't say superficial evidence—but. . . . Well, it is, actually.

JUANA ALICIA: It is superficial. But at the same time, even though you know. . . . Like Diego Rivera used to say that he was Jewish just to annoy the Fords, and he claimed that, and he took that on, and I think that's beautiful.

That's very cool. But there's a caste system in this country that's based on all that superficiality, and that's part of our work as artists is to—artists of conscience—is to take on that caste system. And it gets into very interesting discussions. I mean, we live in an Indian neighborhood right here, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, is that what this is?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, it's Indian from India. Yeah, a lot of Indians, Pakistanis, black, and Latino. And my daughter, who is a mix of Mexican, one tiny, tiny, tiny drop of Irish on her father's side, and Mescalero Apache, Pima, Jewish. You know, she. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: She's got it covered.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, but she know she's Indian. And since she was born she's been knowing she's Indian, and when we moved into the Indian neighborhood she couldn't understand what Indian was. What kind of Indian are you, because these people were Indian and they didn't have sweats or look anything. . . . I mean, actually there is a resemblance between our peoples, physical, but. . . . And the smells of the spices are pretty intriguingly similar in the Indian market on the corner and in the market in Xochimilco.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh huh.

JUANA ALICIA: But anyway, she's like, "Well, what are these people doing being Indians. I don't get it. I'm a different kind of Indian." She'd play with the little girl, Komal, down the street. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maya, well. . . . How old is she?

JUANA ALICIA: She's seven.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She's seven now. Wow.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, she understands now. And I heard a great poet the other night at the Galería de la Raza. . . . Gosh, I can't remember. . . . I'm trying to remember his name. I've never met him before, but anyway he did these little like haikus and question-and-answer things, and one of his things was, "What kind of an Indian are you?" And he said, "One without reservations."

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs]

JUANA ALICIA: But anyway all of these things are incredibly fascinating. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you know one thing. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: . . . constructs, but which we debate all. . . . You know, just like Bob Colescott and Adrian Piper probably have really strong differences on these issues. You know, you find them within the raza, too: who qualifies, who doesn't qualify, within the native-American community, whether Chicanos are considered actually Native Americans by the Native American community. You know there's all kinds of. . . . It's very, very interesting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, but the question I have for you. . . . I have lots of questions already from what you've been saying, but one of them is this important idea of self, of identity, of self-identification, and what struck me right off the bat in your talking about your early years and growing up in Detroit was that, because of your environment, because of what surrounded you, identity—I won't say a false identity—was formed, but one that was not strongly Latino, Latina, or Chicana, which. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I should I ask you rather than commenting. I know a little bit about this, in that this more narrow identity at one time in history—perhaps it really was the early seventies, and maybe a little earlier than that—it was extremely important to establish that, and I guess I'm wondering about your thoughts on that, on this recognition going to Salinas, coming to California.

JUANA ALICIA: Right, well, I mean I think this happened. . . . You know, my life is simply one of many people who. . . . We form a stream of a national or nationalist or internationalist identity development that. . . . If you ever see Culture Clash, they're so funny. They talk about. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, I know that. I met them.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . "When did you become a Chicano?" sort of thing. And if you've ever heard Monica Palacios. . . . She was one of the original members of Culture Clash. She's a very funny, lesbian, feminist Chicana comic—a

stand-up comic. She's hit it pretty big in New York City. But she says, "Once I was a Mexican American, and I then I became a Chicana, and then I became a Latina, and then I became a Hispanic—and where the hell is Hispania anyway? I never heard of that."

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs]

JUANA ALICIA: But it's like this whole evolution, and what happened I think to me was a revelation. You know, a lot of it is about context and your cultural context and where you are, but have you ever read Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No I haven't.

JUANA ALICIA: It's a great book of essays by her—on the omission of black culture in the formation of mainstream North American culture. And the act of omission actually formed oppositional mentality among whites and others, but mostly white people who were the authors of the culture, the published authors of this culture, but in their act of omission or resistance to acknowledgement they actually formed themselves in a way. And although black culture. . . . I mean not to say. . . . I definitely had a Latina and a Jewish culture going on in my family when I was growing up. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: In the home.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . in the home, and that was real—and my language and my understanding of food and customs and all those things. That wasn't absent; that was there. But there wasn't a large context to support it. When I went to Chicago with Emmanuel, when he had his one-day show there at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum there, I thought, "God, I've arrived at the largest country in Latino America where it snows." And it was so great to be in Chicago, because here we were in the Midwest. It was hysterical because there were all these other Chicanos that spoke with a Midwestern accent in English, and it felt very much like Detroit, but there were a lot a lot of mexicanos and Chicanos there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There were a lot of murals, too. I mean, isn't that one of the. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, there's a lot of murals.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I haven't studied that there, but I understand that's the case.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, actually one of the places where the birth of the modern mural movement in the sixties was was in *The Wall of Pride* in Chicago, which is a black mural situation.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: And there has been this incredible interweaving, whether we go all the way back to the Nubian shipbuilders who came to influence the Olmeca culture in pre-Columbian times, or we talk about the Harlem Renaissance and the connection—you know, that *Roots of Resistance* show—the connection between the mexicanos and the black culture. Or in the sixties and really the black civil rights movement. . . . We have an incredible social and cultural debt to that, because they were really the model of resistance from which we took our cues. They had the baptism of fire, in a way, that we learned from in the Chicano movement, the farmworker movement, organizing. Saul Olinsky and Rosa Parks and Ella Baker and all these people—they were our teachers in a lot of ways. And Cesar Chavez's teachers. And so there's been a very. . . . I would say we're close cousins anyway. But, of course, I had no vocabulary for this in 1970—or 1970 through the early seventies. I had no vocabulary. I just knew. . . . I went to Black Panther meetings when I was a teenager, because that was the closest thing to a social revolution that I could relate to that was available.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was that in Detroit?

JUANA ALICIA: In Detroit.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: But when I moved out here and the whole farmworker movement was busting wide open, it was like, "Oh, this is where I want to be." I didn't work for the union. I went to work in the fields. Because that's where the cultural revolution was happening. That's where my own ability to self-define and re-define and identify was so marvelous. Here were the people that felt so familiar and that I had grown up with but not had all around me. Here they were, and it was like, "Oh, my god, this is a rebirth; this is a revelation." I think a lot of people realized they were Chicanos in the early seventies. And the name: basically what Ruben Salazar said about you know "A Chicano is a Mexican without Anglo self-definition," or something like that. I'm paraphrasing badly. But anyway. . . . Or "self-conception of one's self." And it was like, "Oh, my goodness!" And, of course, the Vietnam War resistance. I was very involved in that—and feminist politics, and everything that was just

exploding then. I mean, I started reading for the first time, because. . . . Although I could read, I mean, I wasn't an avid or an interested reader, because there wasn't that much material that really drew my attention.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That, what, touched your life you mean?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, and then all of a sudden, yeah, you know, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Factories in the Fields*, writings on Chicano history, Carlos Muñoz, Betita Martinez. All these people. Rubyfruit Jungle. Everything that was about race, sex, ethnicity, language, was like "Oh, wow! This is a world opening up." So it was a very exciting and easy transition, I guess, in like the concept of where I fit in the world in terms of like accepting, oh, that big change. Also going from a very urban environment to a very rural environment at that time. And going from working in restaurants and whatever jobs I could get in the city situation to—because that's where I was working when I was 16—to working in the fields, which was really different. And it was extremely vital. It was extremely. . . . You know, the strike in 1973 in Salinas and then in '76. I worked for Interharvest and Freshpict, which was the strawberry growers and then Interharvest, which was the United Fruit-owned lettuce company.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That must be the source for that fabulous painting of yours.

JUANA ALICIA: *Las Lechugueras*, yeah. Thank you. Yeah, that's an autobiographical piece. I worked up until September of 1976 in the fields, and then I stopped because I was seven months pregnant with my son and I had pesticide poisoning.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, my God.

JUANA ALICIA: I had pesticide poisoning and chronic pneumonia for several years—like everybody else that was working out there—and I had to stop when I was seven months pregnant, and then I went to work as a paraprofessional in a bilingual classroom next to the corralón and the hiring hall for UFW in Salinas. Then my son was born in 1976, December 1976, and I stopped working in the fields entirely, because I was told I shouldn't go back, yeah. *Las Lechugueras*.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I wish that it could get restored.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I've tried twice.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We're talking about the mural.

JUANA ALICIA: I have applied to the city twice for funding to redo that, and they've turned me down, and I'm gonna apply again. What I really want to do, instead of restoring the mural, is I want to do a permanent mosaic tile piece. I'm getting a little worn out on the painted [exterior—JA] murals because I'm getting older.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUANA ALICIA: Like you said, we get of a certain age. And the [painted exterior] murals don't last. I painted this in '83, during the courtship of me and Emmanuel. We've lasted the same amount of time, but believe me, me and Emmanuel are in a lot better shape than the mural.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You seem to be.

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: But, you know, that's a really interesting question.

JUANA ALICIA: And that needs to be. . . . Yeah, that's a whole important question.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's a big issue, because ideas of permanence and what is it about—is it something fugitive if it's outside, and we can't talk about. . . . I want to talk about that at some point.

JUANA ALICIA: It is fugitive.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: It's fugitive and ephemeral and everything is, let's face it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's true.

JUANA ALICIA: But. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: But still.

JUANA ALICIA: You know, why that's so much work. What I was interested in doing—what I'm still interested in doing and I have a lot of interest on the part of a lot of people, including Mujeres Unidas y Activas, the women's organization at the Women's Building, founded by Clara Luz Navarro, a Salvadoran immigrant who. . . . She's won Rockefeller grants and all kinds of international recognition for her work with women on domestic violence—escaping domestic violence—and starting mini empresas [micro businesses—JA]. But she works with the immigrant Latina community, and they've recently in recent years been working with the immigrant Asian community of women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh.

JUANA ALICIA: And I wanted to do a mural on the parallels of our experiences as Latinas and as Asians on that wall—about sweatshops—and do a new mural in mosaic tile on that wall. I haven't proposed mosaic tile to the city, but I have proposed that other concept. I just said a new mural on working women, but my friend, Miriam Ching Louie, has written a book on Asian women and Latina women immigrants in the workforce. The current mural that you saw downstairs with the butterflies on the wall. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . I'm doing right now in collaboration with Beatrice Aurora in Mexico. This is my most recent work on women in labor on both sides of the border. And we're doing a mural in Erie, Pennsylvania, in August, which is the one you saw in process of design, and another mural in Leon Guanajuato next year in Mexico.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now this is another. . . . Are they related?

JUANA ALICIA: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, the theme's the same; one's going to be in Mexico

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, the theme. . . . Yeah, it's a collaboration between the women in the United Electrical Workers Union and the women in the FAT—the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, Mexico, and that's a collective or conglomeration of left—very left—unions, nonaligned with the government in Mexico, from like mini empresas, like little tiny businesses—women-run collectives and stuff—to large union organizations.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do they think of NAFTA?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, it'll be about the World Trade Organization, NAFTA, and Neo-liberalism. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: The global economy and. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, the whole neo-liberal exploitation issue. You know, basically. . . . I mean I know I've been taking my daughter, Mayahuel. . . .

[Session 1, Tape 1, Side B]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Interview with Juana Alicia. This is tape one, side B, and you were cut off.

JUANA ALICIA: I was talking. . . . No, that's technology for us. I was talking about how I have been explaining to my daughter when she's observed these out-of-work or reduced-work situations in Pennsylvania with me, where people don't have jobs or their jobs are cut back, and then we go to Mexico and the children are begging in the streets, and she's very disturbed to see children begging in the streets where the adults are homeless here and begging in the streets. The shock of seeing the children begging in the streets, she was so angry and scandalized. She wanted us to give them all of our money right on the spot, and she was also very upset with people who would allow the children to be on the street, instead of putting themselves on the street, and I said, "Well, Mayahuel, the children get more sympathy. That's why the children are on the streets. They're not necessarily being mean to their kids, but you know this is what NAFTA and the World Trade Organization and the World Bank and the Forty Committee, and blah, blah, blah, have exerted on the world' population." The three hundred and something of the most affluent people in the world own 60 percent of the world's wealth or something like that?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I would think.

JUANA ALICIA: It was there. It's just on the front page of the newspaper today.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: This is not a big radical secret.



PAUL KARLSTROM: Nope.

JUANA ALICIA: And people are being downsized, and then people are being treated as slaves in Mexico, and she got to meet the strikers at the CRISA plant, the Congeladora del Rio, which is shortened to CRISA, in Guanajuato, and she was totally scandalized. She's you know seven years old, but really quite aware of all these things. I've been taking her with me because I think this is a really important part of her education about how the world works, and it's one thing to sit up here in Berkeley in a fairly progressive insular place, no matter what. I mean, even though we have drive-by shootings in this neighborhood and we're feeling the effects of all this here, too, we don't live in the hills. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, that's right.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . still, we live in a comfort zone that most of the third world doesn't experience, and it's really important part of her education to see the connection between those things actually physically, because, I mean, I could try to explain it to her, but if she goes to these places then it's really something I can't . . . it's much more visceral and is much more expansive than my vocabulary, my ability to explain. But anyway, these are very important projects, the Lechugueras—the remodeling of the Lechugueras. I'm going to apply again to the city. I don't know if I'll do it this year or the following year. I got my 90-day notice for that mural's destruction over two years ago, and it hasn't been destroyed yet. But the wall itself is falling apart. So it needs to be. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's all faded.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . completely resurfaced, yeah. The whole. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I photographed it recently again.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, you did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, I've photographed it a couple times and I show it in the \_\_\_\_ s.

JUANA ALICIA: It's an aging girl. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you know, let's talk. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: No liposuction for that one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's talk just a little bit about this issue of permanence, because I think more important than how long the image lasts is how long the ideas survive, and my sense is that that's what's really important to you.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And there it becomes then. . . . One looks at it, I think, in a different way—or I would expect that—because the ideas are timeless, that the images can change and that the notion of impermanence. . . . I've talked with a number of people about this. I'll just give you one example. I'm trying to remember the muralist involved, but the early attitude was much that these things are . . . nothing's permanent, and so it's much more in a bigger sense like a metaphor—or analog—for life experiences, so for conceptual artists this is. . . . “And so, fine, it goes away, whatever.” But then two things happen. One is these artists get older. They have a different view, and so that becomes a very human thing, I believe. But I think maybe even more important, your art is, as far as I can tell, dedicated to ideas and to social justice—if I had to describe you. I knew this anyway. And these are issues that, if you have an effective statement, you don't want to waste it. You want it to stay there. And so, I guess I'm giving an answer to the question I'm trying to ask you, but maybe you can respond to that—you know, how important these concerns are.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, you've said it very well, Paul.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs]

JUANA ALICIA: But, yeah. . . . Let's see, where was I starting my thoughts when you started down this path?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, the important. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: I think about the fresco, is what I was thinking. In this digital age. . . . And I don't know how long the digital age will last. We survived Y2K or Y2K, and we may have no crash of the overall wired system ever, and then we may end up back in some other kind of age that we hadn't anticipated—who knows? But I think at least for the moment the digitized, photographed, electronic version of a lot of images has permitted the world-wide viewing of those images and their dissemination to—albeit with its class restrictions—to an unanticipated breadth of audience in a very short time. The Lechugueras is my most published image.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is it?

JUANA ALICIA: My first mural. Well, to date, I think so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's your first?

JUANA ALICIA: My first mural in San Francisco. I started painting murals, well, in my bedroom in Detroit, but I would say that. . . . Actually in Watsonville I painted thirteen murals with my migrant students.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow, thirteen?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, before I came to San Francisco in 1980.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: And the big one that I did there in the high school with my high school students was destroyed in the '85 earthquake. '85? '86. What was it? '85. No, that was in Mexico '85. It was '89 here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: '89.

JUANA ALICIA: '89.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. '89 earthquake.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Loma Prieta.

JUANA ALICIA: Loma Prieta. About which I did another mural in Santa Cruz later. But at any rate. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: The most famous one. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: But the one that's been most . . . that I think I'm most known for is the Lechuqueras mural. I think it relates significantly to your question about Chicano identity, Chicana identity, how we identify as a people, what our evolution has been, in that it tells a story about our people. It's a biography of our experience, of our rural experience. Of course, most Chicanos in California now live in urban settings, not in rural ones anymore. But these are the roots of my generation, the generation before, its experience, the braceros and up through the seventies, the farmworkers, until actually . . . in the migrant experience until actually unemployment [insurance—JA] was available to farmworkers. I think that happened in '76 or sometime around then—where people were able to stay in one place because they could get unemployment during the winter and they didn't have to follow the cosecha everywhere. But anyway, it's significant in terms of an important moment—and the moment is ongoing, of course. Many people are still in that environment and suffering from the pesticides—and we all are now. One thing that I think has happened with us is that we have evolved from a nationalist identity for many of us—and this goes along with the issues of permanence. . . . I'm getting to your question.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, very well!

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm a long \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: This goes along with like. . . . Gone from a nationalist identity, from a more monolithic—you know, "We're Chicanos, we are this, we are. . . ." There were certain stereotypes that we lived with and felt pride in, and also I think many of felt oppressed by having to fit during the sixties and seventies—whether it was the brown beret or the low-rider or La Güisa, Revolutionario, the girlfriend of the revolutionary. Lorna Dee Cervantes has a great poem about that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's an interesting topic.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. Well, I mean, it's like women very much took leadership in the Chicano movement and

were very much unacknowledged and took a back seat in terms of acknowledgement in the sixties and seventies, and that definitely—definitely—applies to women artists. Women were not welcomed as muralists for the most part by our colleagues, though there are some outstanding exceptions, which I'm very grateful for—like Malaquías Montoya and Emmanuel Montoya. (They're not all named Montoya!)

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not all of them are Montoya.

JUANA ALICIA: Juan Fuentes. You know, there were men in the Chicano movement that were very, very supportive of us as women, but there were a lot of men that were like, "Get back in the kitchen. You don't belong on a scaffolding. You're too ambitious. You're taking our limelight. Sit down and shut up." And also as gay people, many of us felt very excluded and marginalized. It's like what happened to gay people in Cuba and Nicaragua learned the lessons of Cuba and put lesbians and gay people in commandante positions in the revolution. Not to say that it was perfect there, but that there was a lot more of a deconstructed attitude toward sexuality learning the lessons from Cuba, and Cuba has learned its own lessons. And I think that during the late seventies and into the early eighties we became much more of an international people. We understood that the anti-apartheid movement—you know, the liberation movement in Angola, the non-allied nations, the struggles of Cuba and Nicaragua and El Salvador—all of these were very central—coming out of the anti-Vietnam war movement—very central to our survival as a people—that the global economy was a reality way long ago. It's just been redefined by international trade agreements which have really sort of sewn it up in a heinous way for us. But nevertheless we were evolving as a people in terms of beginning to align ourselves with other liberation movements—within our country and without it. And this, I think, was a flaw of the left in the sixties and seventies of course, was the exclusion of women, gay people, brown people, black people, Asian people—you know, anybody who wasn't basically classic white male Marxist and left could not take leadership. And that's really turned over a lot.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: And white people have done some good work as allies for that to happen too, but at any rate we were evolving as a people to think of ourselves as. . . . You know, first you have to get your footing as where your roots are, what in this very divided, very class-oriented system. . . . You have to say, "Okay, I am this. I am not that. No, I'm not the mainstream and I am happy about what I have. I am in a cultural reclamation project for what has been taken away from me." Like fortunately I grew up in Detroit where I was allowed to speak Spanish, and Emmanuel, on the other hand, grew up in Texas. We went back to Texas every summer, but we did not live there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where was it in Texas?

JUANA ALICIA: That he grew up or where my family is?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, both.

JUANA ALICIA: My family was from various places, including Houston, Galveston, and then Las Cruces, New Mexico.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Las Cruces. Oh, I knew that.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: And we maybe did \_\_\_\_\_. But, anyway, his family's from Corpus Cristi. And he was slapped. Or there were kids in his class slapped. I guess he wasn't slapped. But he was \_\_\_\_\_. He was not allowed to speak Spanish when he was growing up in school. And he has a very beautiful, very moving [installation piece]. Have you seen the piece that he did, reinstalling in a gallery his fifth grade classroom or fourth grade classroom?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, my god, it's an amazing piece, and it's got an incredible video. It's got a video and it's got a soundtrack that goes with the piece, with this teacher screaming, "You will not speak Spanish in this classroom." It's just so . . . oh! But I was fortunate because I didn't grow up in that context. Nobody really cared, basically.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it was an advantage being in the north?

JUANA ALICIA: In that sense.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, in that sense.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, in that sense.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The weather wasn't as nice, but. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: The weather was horrible. But, anyway, it's a cultural reclamation project that we had to do on a very massive scale in the sixties and seventies, just to get a name for ourselves, just to. . . . It's like the Miwok people. The coastal Miwok people here in California are still not recognized as a tribe by the U.S. Government. You know, the depth to which our identities are all erased in this country is so profound. I was just reading on the internet yesterday that's there's this whole genome project for black people that they can go back and have a genetic analysis, where they can find out what tribe in Africa they were from, what nation they were from.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, with the mitochondria, because you know that's been erased.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: It's been seriously erased. At least in this country for mexicanos there was no border for a long time and we have a close contact. We are able to go back, we're able to look at it, we're able to meet to meet our maestros, we're able to put the puzzle together in a more accessible way. But it's been really erased very brutally. So in the sixties and seventies that was a cultural reclamation project. And then we were so busy saying, "We're not this, we're this." We had to do that first before we could also say, "Oh, but we're also all of you, because we're really not a pure people in any way." I'm certainly not. I'm totally a mixture.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Adulterated, that's what you are. Adulterated. [said very tongue-in-cheek]

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, well, in the most proud form. Devorah Major has a beautiful poem called, "I Speak for the Impure." She's black and Jewish. Do you know her work?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, but. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: She's well-published now.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: And she's from the Western Addition in San Francisco. And. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: What's her name?

JUANA ALICIA: Devorah. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, wait a minute. Okay.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . Major, with an "h" on the end of Devorah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: She's an incredible poet, but she has . . . it's sort of like this anthem for mixed race, mixed culture people, and it moves me to tears every time I hear her read it. She talks about not fitting anywhere, and how she speaks for the impure, and how. . . . This is California and in the new century, this is who we are.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you know those who are going to be marginalized, this is an interesting. . . . Again, this is about you and your experience, not about mine, but I'm like an unusual counterpoint to this because I'm a hundred percent Swedish.

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: A hundred percent!

JUANA ALICIA: Wow.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And born in this country, so all grandparents came from Sweden. Of course, who else would marry a Swede but another Swede, but. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: But it just strikes me that this is. . . . I have to have. . . . We all have to have—what shall we say—exercise an imaginative leap. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Uh huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . to understand, to empathize with what you're talking about, and I happen to believe it's possible. Others may say no.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, if it's not, we're doomed.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, we're in trouble. But what a difference, because what you've described is. . . . I'm interested in what it means to be American.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm an American. That's my field of study. And increasingly it's about impurity, and so then you have to ask yourself, "Where does this leave me?" That's, I realize, a whole other big topic of conversation, but I just want to sort of want to fill that in as. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: No, that's exactly central, and it's like Alice Walker says in the introduction to her book, *Horses Make a Landscape More Beautiful*. She dedicates the book to her great-great grandmother, about whom only a couple of facts are known—one, that she was Blackfoot, and that her hair was so long she could sit on it, and that she was raped by a white man named Walker. And to her great-great grandfather, Walker, about which few facts are known. I think she says he was Scottish—I can't remember exactly—and that he raped a woman. And she says. . . . The poem talks about all that and it says then, "Rest in peace in me, rest in peace in me."

PAUL KARLSTROM: In me.

JUANA ALICIA: "In peace rest in me." And she goes through. . . . And she taught, "This is being truly American." That's what she called it. That's in the front of the poem. This is about being truly American, what is truly American.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Ah, that's great.

JUANA ALICIA: It's a beautiful poem. I'm butchering it, but anyway.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Moving.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, very moving. And that is what it's about you know, and it is. . . . You know, I don't know by looking at you that you're a hundred percent Swedish. I mean, I love this photograph that's on the refrigerator—or has been for a long time—of my girlfriend, Olga Stornavolo, who's from Calabria. She has this photograph of this British couple. The man is white, the woman is black, and they're holding twins in their arms, and one of the twins is white and the other of the twins is black.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow.

JUANA ALICIA: And it's like, "Wow, that's great." It's what we call *La Lotería genética Mexicana*. That's like, "Okay." But at any rate I think when we're talking about permanence and impermanence and the evolution of a people, so much of what mural-making is about story-telling about our evolution. About my evolution. I'm really thinking about doing an autobiographical mural about not just the movement, me through my life, but the movement of my peoples across the globe, and that I'm just a metaphor. It's much more metaphorical than just one life, but. . . . Have you ever seen that movie, *Once a Bride*?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUANA ALICIA: *Que Te Vea de Novia* is the correct name, *Once a Bride* is the English translation.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Can you rent it?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, and it's really great. It's about these Lebanese Jews in Mexico who come in the early part of the twentieth century. It's people of my generation. Two women telling their story looking back on their lives. Anyway, there's a scene in it where the novio—who's mexicano, Spanish, and Indian—is looking for his novia, who's been banned from marrying him, and she's been secreted away to her aunt's house in Guadalajara, and the aunt is yelling at her, "Es el destino que no te casas con él." She (the aunt) goes through this whole thing about, "You can't marry him." And he's looking through the vestibule into the apartment listening to this whole thing unbeknownst to her, and then he finally gets up the courage to bang on the door, and she (the girlfriend) comes to the door, she sees him, and she runs out and runs to the street with him and he says to her, "Hemos sufrido de guerras mundiales. Tu gente vino desde el otro lado del mundo, te criaron aquí, y me criaron ami para encontrarme contigo, y tenemos que casarnos—ies el destino!" You know, it's like all of this coming together from all these four corners. This was what was planned, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I got that.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not all the details.

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: My Spanish isn't all that great.

JUANA ALICIA: And it's so beautiful, but anyway that's the sort of image, the sort of thing that I'm thinking about for this mural. We're telling a story about our history as peoples and our evolution, and so much of. . . . I can celebrate the ephemerality of things. We have to. We have to be able, as Buddhists, to let go—to say, "Okay, it's about. . . ." You know you can't be attached. Once you attach yourself to something you suffer with it. You have to commit but not attach, as a [Bodhisatva], somebody who wants to change things in the world and make the world better. So I can understand that. Like the 5,000-year-old painting tradition in south India—the women of Mitila who make these beautiful paintings and then wrap the fish in them the next day and throw them away. I understand that—the sand painting, all that. That's great, but because of the history of colonialization, Holocaust, conquest, and the destruction, the culture wars that are actually going on right now, it's very important that we leave a record, and, whether that record is digital or it's embedded in the plaster, it's important for us, and that's why I'm talking to you. That's why I'm talking to you.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

JUANA ALICIA: Because that record is important.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I wondered why. [chuckles]

JUANA ALICIA: Also, I find you very congenial.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Thank you.

JUANA ALICIA: I like getting to know you, but I'm talking to you because the record is important.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

JUANA ALICIA: And Smithsonian has a legacy of taking our ancestor's bones and not leaving the record we wanted.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's [there]. It's [better], very true.

JUANA ALICIA: So you know it's a mixed bag, but I know you're not that, and that's not what this project is.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, the bigger story is this remedial process now. I mean, that's something else we've talked about.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm, that's interesting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It is true that you're doing an interview for the Smithsonian. Actually, I'm glad that you point that out, because the fact that we're doing it within this particular project-mandated, in effect, by the Smithsonian—[is] serving my interests or our interests—meaning the Archives of American Art—very well indeed, because it helps us get out and do more interviews. You know, there's some funding available for it. But this is an encouraging sign of the changes that have been taking place, and now there's another. . . . The Latino division is well-funded. There are acquisitions going into the Smithsonian. This is not like an apology or a defense in any way, but it's interesting. I view all of this is of a piece, what you're talking about and then some of the effects. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . within the establishment big time.

JUANA ALICIA: Cultural institutions, yeah, public policy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And now the latest one is. . . . I mean, there's focus and concentration on African American art and communities, but also now the most recent one is the Asian-Pacific American, and so some of us are very much involved in that, too. So this is by way of saying that there are real encouraging signs of change, which I would suggest or, well, basically kind of underline, quite obviously is of terrific importance to you and to your

work.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. And that's great, and I'm glad for the support. I'm glad that it's going to be there. I'm glad the record's going to be there. You know, I have caution and I'm you know a little gun shy in a way, but I recognize the importance of engaging with the people who are going to keep the records, and whether that's at Stanford or with the Smithsonian or with the Chicano Archives down in LA or as many places as possible, we need to leave these records. They're our legacy. They're what our kids are going to know about, and so it's wonderful, it's wonderful—in terms of the murals and the permanence of that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's exactly what I was going to say, because that seems to me. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: You know, a lot of people, like my girlfriend Judy Baca, she's working on a lot of digital stuff.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah, Judy.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . and here I am on the other extreme. I'm working in the plaster. I'm working with the most ancient technique—which has endured since the caves in France and Spain and in Teotihuacan and in many parts of Asia there. . . . [telephone rings] Sorry about the telephone.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, that's all right.

JUANA ALICIA: Just take it off the hook.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's do this. Since this is very close to the end, why not just put on a new one and see where we. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Okay.

[Session 1, Tape 2, Side A]

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . American Arts Smithsonian Institution, continuing this first session with Juana Alicia. What is it? Is it. . . . Yes, it's still May 8.

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: The year 2000. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom, and this is session one, tape two, side A. There are so many things to talk about and they all seem connected. It's lovely, because they seem to lead back to a few core issues, and I'm trying to remember exactly where we were, what we were talking about.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, we were talking about. . . . I mean, in our private conversation we were just talking about gender differences, but in the tape that we just left off with—and I think we could work our way back pretty fairly to the gender issues—we were talking about the issues of permanence and impermanence.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: And I was just saying about how my colleague and friend, Judy Baca, has worked in the more digital stuff recently, and my interest has been going back. . . . Not that I'm not interested in both things and not that she isn't either, but at any rate it's just interesting to look at the two media, not really try to make a case for contrasting philosophies, because I think we're pretty close in terms of our visions of social change and the role of art and the artist and a lot of those things, and the issue of a record. But I was saying about like the cave paintings in France and Spain and the Egyptian tombs and the paintings in Teotihuacan and the paintings in India and Cambodia and other parts of Asia where fresco has survived for millennia—you know, for many millennia as much as, you know, 10,000 years—that I am in love with the actual history of that medium and the legacy that Diego [Rivera] and David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Orozco resuscitated, when ancient techniques and pre-Columbian imagery and artifacts were on the dust pile of history, where the colonial mentality and the European imposition of technique and image had dominated Mexico—or what had become Mexico—for three or four hundred years. They were involved in the same cultural reconstruction that we inherited from them as Chicanos, although we have reinterpreted it.

We just celebrated Cinco de Mayo. It's not just about la batalla de Puebla y los niños heroes. It's about being Latinos in this country—Latinos, an indigenous people in this country—and our triumphs and our struggles. It's not just about the Battle of Puebla. That's what it's about in Mexico. But here it's much more about everything from the farmworker movement to the cultural arts movement to bilingual education and all of our struggles—as not just Chicano people but Puertorriqueños, about Vieques, about Nicaragua, about sovereignty, about all of that.

So the reclamation of the fresco technique. . . . Diego went to Europe on a scholarship as a young man to study fresco in Italia, learned fresco buono, the Renaissance process of fresco. It's been done differently in different parts of the world. For example, in Teotihuacan they didn't use brushes. They used little straw-like tubes, and

they actually spit or blew the pigment through these tubes onto the plaster. Highly toxic, I'm sure. And some it was mica, which wasn't used in the Renaissance, and mica glitters in the dark, and it was incredibly beautiful, I'm sure, in these ceremonies with candlelight, peyote (or mushrooms or whatever they used), and the twinkling of the walls, and the images on the walls and the animal characters and the glyphs all coming to life, and all of that. Difference processes have been used at different times for different purposes. All of them, in terms of what I can understand, sacred purposes, whether we're talking about the imagery of Giotto, or we're talking about the celebration of a hunt or we're talking about the sacred rituals in Teotihuacan, all of these were sacred imagery that celebrated humanity's connection with nature and with the spiritual and were done in interior places. A fresco cannot survive on an exterior wall without a roof over it and good sheltering from the elements. So these are all sanctuaries, everywhere where a fresco is, and that's the title of Emmanuel's and my piece in the International Airport in San Francisco: Santuario—Sanctuary. Actually we had the revelation for the title of the piece long after we had designed it, when we were at a traditional Buddhist retreat a vaipasana, or eight-day silent retreat. At the end of the retreat, that's when the name for the piece came to us. But in that piece we are actually trying to celebrate issues of permanence and impermanence, of migration and indigenouness, of the peoples of the Bay Area who have come and gone, who have sought sanctuary here in a political sense, of the natural sanctuary that this place is for animal forms and natural forms aside from the human ones, and the sacred bienvenidas y despedidas that go on between peoples—you know, the greetings and leave-takings that go on between peoples in public spaces. So we're talking about the personal and private in the public context. We're trying to set a humane and sanctified environment for people who ordinarily don't see their images in those environments in that public space on a monumental level. And we're using old, old labor-intensive techniques. I use the fresco and Emmanuel's hand carving these monumental birds, wooden birds—actually the water birds that are threatened by the airport environment's incursion into that estuary. Unbeknownst to the Airport Commission. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me ask you about that. Okay, it's a digression, but I can't resist this.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Remember I fly almost every week in and out of that airport.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This actually is, now that I think about it, very much to the point. You have a fabulous opportunity for you two, as a couple. . . . I mean, this is great, this is the best.

JUANA ALICIA: It is. It's almost as good as sex.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No. Well, in some ways. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: It is sex, actually, but anyway we'll talk about that another time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We'll talk about that later because that's. . . . But what most people who read this transcript or listen to the tape won't realize is that the San Francisco International Airport Commission, or whatever runs the thing, has proceeded with a massive, massive expansion project, which is practically unbelievable, with a big international terminal where your work, from the barrio. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm, one of eighteen public art works. It's been redefined as a museum, I guess, by the National Museum Society, or something like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes. And this is going to be fabulous.

JUANA ALICIA: A BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit—Ed.].

PAUL KARLSTROM: All the good to that. All of this, this is good. The face of the matter is, they have created a monster that cannot with major changes do what it is created to do, and that is to accommodate increased air traffic. You have an airport that closes down half the time. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: With the fog.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . when the weather gets slightly bad. I know, because my flights are cancelled and delayed all the time. Here's an airport with two close runways, as you know, and on a regular basis one of them closes. Okay, if you can't even accommodate the traffic that we have now. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Add this whole element.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . how are we going to accommodate. . . ? I have many views about this and talk about it a lot, but what is interesting. . . . You mentioned the estuary and the endangered waterfowl. This is key to that



whole project in which you've participated, and the only way they're going to be able to fulfill the mission of expanding the airport is to fill in the bay.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, that's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There is no other way.

JUANA ALICIA: They're going to do it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm. So how do you feel about that?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, that's where our commentary is, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's what I was wondering. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, we don't feel good about that. I mean, it's a mixed bag, even doing the project out there—the politics around doing the project out there. I mean, I think since I started flying in and out of SFO and really using that place in the eighties I have dreamed about having a piece there. If there's any place that the world arriving in San Francisco, whether they're coming with the clothes on their back from Guatemala or anywhere else in any other way, whether they're coming to escape horrible medical conditions in Africa and seeking a cure for HIV or some kind of decent treatment, whether they're coming. . . . For whatever reason, that is the place where they will see the work. That is where I can be assured and insured, and this is a very big irony about the piece actually—I'll tell you in a minute—because arriving people can't see it. They have to go through Customs and through what's called the Sterile Corridor, and they don't see it. It's only departing flights that will see it, in that waiting room.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

JUANA ALICIA: It's the biggest irony in the world to us, because we didn't know that till we started doing it. We intended this to be a greeting for people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm, Um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: Who knows, that may change.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Like the Statue of Liberty.

JUANA ALICIA: Exactly. In a very different way. One of my students at Stanford last quarter did this whole essay on that figure. He saw this image and he did this whole analysis of the Statue of Liberty depicted as a Virgin de Guadalupe.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, it's really interesting. But anyway, yeah, and I love Ester Hernandez's image of the Chicana carving a Mayan figure out of the Statue of Liberty, but we have no Statue of Liberty at the Mexican border. In fact, they're building a big trench to try to keep us separate, and there is no welcome for people coming from Latino America to this country.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I thought they were going to put—I don't know where at the border—but a. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: El Paso?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, no, the Jimenez. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, Luis Jimenez's image of the son carrying the mother across the Rio Bravo?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, where'd that go.

JUANA ALICIA: I love that sculpture. Well, it was in front of SPARC [Social and Public Art Resource Centers—Ed.] for a while.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: I don't know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I saw it up \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ where they were. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: If they're going to locate that there, that would be fabulous, but even still the content of that

image echoes the fact that we are not welcome.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: That it is a struggle to get across that river—or like in that wonderful movie about the guatemaltecos coming over here, *El Norte*.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, wow.

JUANA ALICIA: You know, it's coming through the sewer pipes. You know, the attitude of this country towards Latin America is so upside down, so there is no real *bien venido* for us. The *bien venido* is the one you get from your family. And politically, mostly it's kick in the butt. This is not the land of good and plenty, in many ways, although granted there are some tremendous advantages here. But, at any rate, so that's why we had hoped. . . . That was one of the wonderful possibilities of locating in that gate room because we thought people would be coming in and seeing it. The cool thing is that you can see it from outside the window, and when the plane pulls up, if it pulls up at the right angle, you can see it from the plane. In fact, you can see it almost from the freeway. The windows are so huge, and you can see it way across the parking lot, which will actually be the tarmac. It'll be the airplane pulling-up zone. It's not going to be the car parking lot once the construction is done.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: And so you will be able to see it from outside. The planes will pull right up next to it. It spans two floors, so in a way people may see it. But, nevertheless, that was the concept that we were so energized about, and, yeah, it's full of ironies. That's why we included the water birds, and that's why there are a lot of statements embedded within the imagery. It went through incredible scrutiny and some censorship.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, really? Like what?

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah. Well, for example, the African man and African American woman who are embracing on the right side, the most monumental standing figures here, were embracing much more passionately originally. But the airlines had a fit over that, because they said that it looked like they were possibly saying good-bye forever, implying that maybe their plane was going to crash.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs] I never would have thought of that.

JUANA ALICIA: I mean it was just so. . . . They're so paranoid.

PAUL KARLSTROM: God, how self-obsessed.

JUANA ALICIA: Ah. But even still, when we redesigned the piece I think we resolved it in a way that we were still happy with, that it's still a very tender embrace, that it's still really about love, and there still is a lot of emotion in that. I mean, I think the gesture of his hand at her waist and her hand on his face are like the central gestures in the whole mural for me in the fresco.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now how big is the fresco?

JUANA ALICIA: It's two stories high.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We're looking at a print, actually, a graphic right now of the image.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, right, you and I, yeah. We're looking at a silk-screen, hand-pulled silkscreen print—hand-separated in eighteen colors.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm, wow.

JUANA ALICIA: Me and Emmanuel did it together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it's too. . . . But the fresco. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: The fresco itself. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . is two stories?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, it's 19 feet tall and 24 feet wide, and with the birds it's taller and wider. And . . . it's not actually taller. It's wider, because the arch is the top. But the other thing that they edited, or they wouldn't have. . . . There were two more things they wouldn't have. First of all, there's a couple of figures—Emmanuel and Mayahuel, our daughter, he's tossing her up into the air. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's what I was going to ask you.

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I thought that would be the. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, it was more controversial before, because he had his back to the viewer, and she was actually disengaged from his hands. She was flying like a bird. She was like really. . . . You know how you see children just like fly like an airplane like that when their parents toss them in the air. And they said she looked like an angel of death, that it was scary, that she was detached from her father, it looked really dangerous.

PAUL KARLSTROM: An angel of death? Where would that come from?

JUANA ALICIA: Talk about self-obsession.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They were pretty imaginative.

JUANA ALICIA: Who knows!?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Free fall or something like that.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, yeah, something like that. I don't know. It was really a nice. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I used to throw her up.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. It was really a nice image, but anyway I resolved it by putting them in profile and he's still holding her, even though she's being tossed, and that was okay. And then the other thing that they objected to, which you don't see here, is that there was an airplane taking off over the hills in the distance through the window, and they don't allow any images of airplanes near the gate rooms in the airport because it would remind people of what they're about to do, which is get on an airplane and risk their lives. So that had to go. But what we did was strongly emphasize, before it wasn't so obvious, the paper airplane that the little girl in the center is tossing, and we made that a big arc, and made that work that way. So I think that that drawing actually improved overall after their attempts at censorship.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you. . . . Well, how so?

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, we had a moment when they gave us all their comments, which were really sort of brutal the way they put them in the letter to the Art Commission, and the Art Commission conveyed to us. We just went, "Oh, is this worth it? Ahh, do we really have to compromise ourselves? Is our intent going to get destroyed?" and blah, blah, blah. And we decided to try to work it out so that it could be what we wanted and comply with their imposition. And I feel very good about it. I don't feel like we sold out or that we lost too much of what we wanted to do. In fact, I don't think we lost anything.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, especially. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: We preserved the nature of everything that we had.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Especially for those who will see this and don't know about the earlier versions. But since we're doing this, let me ask you as an image-observer several questions. The African American couple embracing: This is very tender. I mean, you get the point that there are all kinds of different embraces, but this is one of tenderness. I guess they're either greeting or saying good-bye, as we do. I mean, it is so usual. You see this all the time. You just walk around seeing people, which actually does. . . . Let's face it, you make sure you do this when you part—not greeting so much, of course; I mean, that's relief, I think—but when you part, so I can see. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Because you never know if it's going to be the last time you see somebody.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right. But then that's life, when you say good-bye in the morning. But I wonder if. . . . I don't want to push this too far, but you said it was a more passionate embrace and one of the things that occurred to me is maybe there was a sort of stuffiness. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . on that as well. And then carrying it even further, although I may be the only one who would think about this, that there are stereotypes about African Americans.

JUANA ALICIA: Black people being more sexualized.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: [Hot lay, Hot] Latinos, you people. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, and so get it like this, with this, quotes, “animal nature” and so forth.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, well, of course. Who knows what they were reacting to on a subconscious or conscious level in terms of that. I mean, there’s a very engaged embrace between a bi-racial couple, a Japanese man and a mixed-blood African American woman, in the far background, which you don’t see here, but you see it in the airport.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, good. Where?

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, you can see it. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where?

JUANA ALICIA: . . . right behind the Guatemalteca, the very center of the mural.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, good, so you got some of that.

JUANA ALICIA: Right, and then, of course, the Latino family is all connected. They’re all hugging each other, or holding each other’s hands, and the little girl’s pulling the little boy, who’s trying to grab for the paper airplane. I mean, you have to sort of look at it in more detail and see it. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, I understand.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . on a more monumental scale to see it. So you could start to go there, but I just think it’s absurd, and that you could see these gestures between everybody and the tenderness and passion I was attempting to convey in that couple. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is there.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . was something that I experienced. You know, it’s not. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Everything is about you, isn’t it? [chuckling]

JUANA ALICIA: Well, sure! I mean, everybody’s work is a self-portrait. Everybody does a self-portrait all the time. You know, it’s an issue of whether you acknowledge that or not and sort of get over it, because I really believe that everything we make has at least three basic sources or influences. One is what the artist is feeling at the moment, which is a result of her or his life history—emotional and cultural and psychological and political histories all coming at that moment. You know, it’s the mood, it’s the accumulation of your experiences. That’s one thing. Then there’s the mandate of the work that comes from whether it’s the commissioning body or the need to eat and you need to produce something of your own choosing, but you need to produce it and sell it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: Or whether it’s the audience that you’re trying to speak to for the purpose of your work. That’s the second major influence on what happens in the work. And then the third major influence on what happens in the work is everything from what we would call godhead to great spirit to whatever you want to call that spiritual force that comes through us that we do not . . . control? and we can’t stop. And if we’re really in a deep meditation of doing our work and we’re listening carefully to the forces around us and to the voice inside of us, that comes through us. There is a monk chanting somewhere in the Himalayas that’s feeling the same thing that I’m feeling when I’m working on this mural. From Erie, Pennsylvania, and Leon Guanajuato.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So is that a sense of the universal?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, it’s the universal spirit, you know. It’s God or whatever you want to call it. I don’t really call it that so much, but it’s like this life force. The Chinese call it the Chi. It’s what’s coming through you that isn’t

just you. It's that bigger spiritual force. So those are the three sort of mediating forces that are exerting themselves through the artist in any work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's see, I wonder if maybe it's included in point one, but then again maybe not, but there is then this cerebral, this sort of intellectual aspect that's brought to bear in. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and for which we try to. . . . Actually, it is the way we control.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, it's one and two.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's one and two?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because I was thinking. . . . I can see that. But I was thinking of the consciously political or social content of the work.

JUANA ALICIA: I'd like to give you this piece that I wrote on how I make murals.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

JUANA ALICIA: This mural-making thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I would like to see that.

JUANA ALICIA: Because it talks a lot about process. It doesn't address these three concepts specifically. I don't use these as a point of introduction or reference, but it contains them. And I don't really believe like in that sort of mind/body split anyway. And, of course, that's about, you know, feminist politics of the body and a lot of other issues that we started to talk about off tape.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Good issues.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. I mean, I think that we are taught to split the mind and the body, but that's not really how we function organically, nor is it a very sensible analysis of our human development—body and mind splitting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You don't like this dichotomy.

JUANA ALICIA: I think it's a false dichotomy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Probably a lot of them are, especially if you don't allow them to touch and overlap. Oh, there's so many interesting things to talk about around this, and I love doing it because I believe—certainly with you and I think with other artists; not all, but many that I've interviewed—this is the way to get behind the work. And it gets into that area that you, I think, tend to want to avoid a little bit, which is the personal, but it's actually a fundamental personalism that isn't detailed, if you take my meaning. It's more of a general and shared thing, and it has to do with. . . . I've just written about this. Again, this isn't about me. I just wrote an essay on modernism, where trying to, as they would say now in "theory talk," privilege the emotional, the unconscious or subconscious, the direct expression overlooking its specific stylistic influences, and describing art strictly in terms of the pictorial, and what I'm sensing—and you can tell me if I'm wrong on this—is that this is where our conversation is going, that whatever you want to call this force coming through that the more directly it can come out the more effective the work can be. That to try to control it or channel it too much may be the error, and that may be the classical as opposed to the romantic side.

JUANA ALICIA: Maybe. Although, see, I think it's this sort of schism that—or false dichotomy that we were talking about in another paradigm—that. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Could we turn the tape over please?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

[Session 1, Tape 2, Side B]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, this is tape two, side B, and I rudely cut you off.

JUANA ALICIA: There's a false dichotomy between, say, like the personal and the political, as the feminist movement put it in the seventies. And also like. . . . You know, I don't think it's. . . . At least at this point in my development as an artist I'm not interested in seeing any one of those three prongs take precedence over the

other in a hierarchical sort of way—that when the artist really gets detached from the political and the social and the social-justice considerations of their spiritual revelations then we're in big trouble. I mean, it's those sort of divisions that have kept people from being effective in their movements, in their liberation movements, I think. The Cubanos are so great about it in so many ways, and the Nicaragüenses, in terms of not just having culture be a decorative add-on to their movement or their liberation struggles, but that the culture is the fabric of it, that now that we're dealing with culture wars in this country, culture is really a central ground the people are struggling over. It's not just decoration or artifice. It's really the content—the content that is embedded in our cultural expressions of what our meanings are and what our struggles are. And I don't want to get too esoteric here, but. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I'm with you. I'm with you on this a lot.

JUANA ALICIA: But really I don't see like. . . . You know, I always had trouble with people who were into like going off to meditate or being into "the spiritual" by itself. I saw a lot of the [say] spiritual movements of the seventies and eighties being very white and being very unconscious in terms of what's happening in the worlds of color. Now there's like a national Buddhist movement among people of color here in this country that I'm very interested in and very happy that's happening, because it brings the issues of spiritual practice into daily life in an effective way. And that's happening in a lot of religions, the whole liberation-theology movement of Latin America is very important to me as well, because Christ was suddenly a Sandinista, and in the feminist movements of the Chicana art movement the Virgin de Guadalupe became a very powerful active woman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: And it's like we can retake these spiritual icons and myths and metaphors to be our own and to serve us instead of disabling us. And if you cut out economic considerations from this whole picture of what the artist has to look at and what their place is in it and what their power is in the society and you're simply . . . you need a patron so that you can produce and you succumb to the desires of that patron all the time and you're no longer the author of your own destiny, well, then that's a big problem too, so I think it's really important for the artist to keep awareness of those three things. . . . You know, not be manipulated by market forces that you aren't aware of, that you need to understand who you're producing for, who can exploit your work. You want to be the author of your own . . . the destiny of your work. There's a lot you can't control. You put your artwork out in the world and it's open to everybody's interpretation. You know, yesterday Mayahuel had painted this wood carving to look like an alligator, and at first I thought it was a dog, and she was very upset.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because you thought it was a dog?

JUANA ALICIA: Uh huh. But then I realized it was an alligator, and I said, "Look, Mayahuel, I put my work out all the time and that happens to me. You can't control what people are going to think about it." But if you speak about it and you advocate for it and its purpose and you do that for others, you become a cultural activist. You're not just an artist. You know, you're a cultural worker, you're an activist. You're engaged. You're not just saying, "Oh, whatever. I just made it and it's just whatever anybody gets from it." Well, yeah, sure, that's always going to be true, but it's really abandoning the responsibility of the care and feeding of the work, which, you know, once you make the work that's only half way through the artistic process. Then there's the care and feeding, the dissemination, the intellectual property, the production, the reinterpretation, the work just being one of the variations on a theme, one of a whole oeuvre that the artist is responsible for.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, there's a big issue that I almost hesitate to introduce, but this is begging it. I mean, it's hovering right there in the background, and I'm very close to it right now because of working, as I was telling you, I'm sure, off tape about writing recently on Jacob Lawrence.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, on Jacob Lawrence.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is like central to the understanding of his work and how he's positioned in relationship to race and community, and then another side, which you would say perhaps is a false division, but he doesn't necessarily see it that way, and other artists I've spoken with don't see it that way, and it's like an independence. There's this notion, in modernism at least, of operating quite independently. . . . That's not to say, as you described, "Well, I'm just making this thing and whatever people see it." That isn't it at all, but it has to do with pretty much a modernist notion of the individual, the creative individual. And then there are different ways to dedicate your art, and one of the big ones for people of color is—I imagine you would agree with this—what is the obligation to community?

JUANA ALICIA: See, I have no problem with that. Look at that table. I mean, that's one of my works of art. I didn't sit down with a committee to paint a rose on a table.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, right.

JUANA ALICIA: I do many works that are not “political,” that like I said. . . . Okay, well, I guess maybe there’s a fourth category, and that would be. . . . No, it’s in the third category, I’m sorry. It’s within that spiritual force that’s coming through you? I sat down and wrote a long narrative about what I think the murals in Mexico and Erie and are going to be about, but when I got to the wall the imagery changed completely. When I started drawing there were butterflies and cocoons and chrysalises, and the freight train wasn’t the central metaphor, though it is a metaphor in the imagery.

In that force that’s coming through you, you have to be open, like Martha Graham says, to all of what’s coming through you. You cannot be about judging things in the moment. It’s not up to you, as she says, to decide whether your work is good or bad. It’s your obligation to continue to produce and not sit in judgment of yourself all the time. And there are many things that I make that the community has not asked me for nor would they want.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, this is what I. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: I have a great respect for collective action, for collaboration, for community development, for getting people together and working creatively together, but I do a hell of a lot of work as an individual without any of those constraints. And not that all of those things. . . . What I say is that all those things come into to play in my consciousness, in the first category, but, I mean, this piece was not done by committee, these butterflies.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, yeah, and I wasn’t even suggesting that any of it was done by committee. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Or even. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . but a sense of obligation that becomes perhaps a determinant. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . in choices.

JUANA ALICIA: No, because I. . . . You know, who is the community? What is the black community? Black community can’t decide. Who is the Latino community? Who is the indigenous community? Who is the Chicano community? Who is the quote, unquote, “Hispanic community,” hispanic.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles]

JUANA ALICIA: You know, it’s like. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Herspanic.

JUANA ALICIA: [chuckles] We people can’t agree on these things, and if I have to wait for people to agree on these things so that I can get my orientation and my bearings as an artist, I’ll never produce anything. And so there’s a tension and a dialectical relationship between those kinds of works. I mean, there was a point in my life, I was telling my compadre, and he keeps making me eat my hat on this, about how, “No, I’m not going to do any more commissioned murals because I’ve just had it. I just can’t. . . . I’ve really got so much of my own interior material to do that I can’t do those.” But now sort of I’m seeing a way to do both things, and they influence each other, they’re part of the same oeuvre, they look very different, but people will say, “Oh, is that yours? That doesn’t look like your work.” I have this piece downstairs about childhood sexual abuse, which is three Raggedy Ann dolls. It’s a nine-foot-tall pastel drawing, and when I’ve shown it people have gone, “Whoa, what is that? Whoa, what. . . .” The image is a triptych, a vertical triptych: the first image is the doll, new in a box, the tissue paper around it, smiling and everything. And the second one, the doll has been knifed up, and the stuffing is all coming out. And in the third one the doll sitting on the earth in a garden and her wounds have been stitched up. And they go, “What? Is that yours? What is that? Oh, those are pretty dolls. Oh, no. Oh, what is that?” And I have a lot of pieces, pieces that certainly that I’ve done around the AIDS death, my brother’s death. Like that piece in there, Reverence—that watercolor that’s a portrait of my brother.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: Where he’s taking the host, but he’s sticking his tongue out at the cross at the same time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: And he had his own goddess named Yellow Feather, and there’s yellow feathers floating all through that image. But anyway it’s a very personal piece, and maybe someday everyone will know who Yellow Feather is, I don’t know. Maybe nobody’ll ever know. It doesn’t really matter.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you know?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, I know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, you know who Yellow Feather is.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, yeah, I know Yellow Feather. And my children know, and my extended family knows. But it's that I don't feel. . . . I mean, the community changes their mind about what they want from their artists a lot of the time and turns on the artist and isn't as evolved as the artist sometimes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, yeah. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: And we affect each other's evolution.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I've heard this. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: It doesn't make me. . . . That doesn't mean I'm denying my commitment as a community artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I didn't say that.

JUANA ALICIA: But I recognize the fact that some people are seeing visions that everybody doesn't see. That's our job.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it's not something to go into here, but there's a great, within the black sort of Harlem Renaissance. . . . You see it more in literature I think. At least I hope so, since that's what I wrote.

JUANA ALICIA: Langston Hughes talked about it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, sure, but the big debate was, in effect, between Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, and very, very clearly drawn and very sophisticated and not at all simple to resolve. And in my view, in looking at Jake Lawrence, this is very much, that he was extremely good actually at moving back and forth between, but that for him at times. . . . I mean, he was in the sixties accused of being a Tom.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so I don't think this can easily be put aside, and it's one of the things that white males, again, don't have to deal with. This is the real sign of privilege, when they can afford to indulge themselves—and there are a lot of Jews doing this as well—but that represents an intellectual, where the realm of ideas, pure idea, is enough. And it's to me it's very compelling, very interesting to understand these kinds of limitations, and then the way you guys negotiate. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. There must be some kind of [always] negotiation involved with, say, an individual work, where that fits, and I'm not saying that it has to be all divided. I think it slides, that it's connected. Do you see yourself. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, no, I understand what you're saying very well. And it's a tension we experience all the time. I mean, we know that the distance between what we're capable of and what we actually produce and what the world perceives we're capable of producing is so wide there's no convincing anybody. I mean, the distance between the real person and the stereotype is this tremendous gulf, and we're trained in our educational institutions in this country to internalize our racism and our sexism—our homophobia—and we're trained to hate ourselves, and we're trained to deny ourselves and our heritages, and the whole cultural inventory that we should have access to, and to boil it all down to a sound byte, and to simplify everything, and to paint ourselves as caricatures of our cultures. And it's an incredible injustice that we live with every day. And for those of us who are female or colored, the world, when they look at us, projects right on to us. You can see people's accounting going on when they assess you in the supermarket.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's always true. That's how we get information.

JUANA ALICIA: You know, people look at you and go, "Uh huh. Oh, welfare mother. Oh, non-English speaker. Oh. . . ." Whatever. And I can't tell you how many times in the supermarket white women have come up to me and said, "Speak English to your child."

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs] I didn't know that. Really?

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I actually am surprised.

JUANA ALICIA: Because I don't speak English to my children.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I actually am surprised to hear that.



JUANA ALICIA: You know, shaking their fingers at me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Say, "Hey, lady, this is my child."

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: "This is my life, these are my decisions." How rude!

JUANA ALICIA: How do you know that I speak English? Or "You need to learn English and speak it to your child." "How do you know I don't speak it?"

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, no, they say that?

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, sort of.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, yeah. No, no! Directly. I mean it's like just. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: They think they're doing you a favor.

JUANA ALICIA: The daily reflections of those assumptions is just. . . . You know, that's a violence done to us. It's a form of violence.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it's also rude. I mean, it's just rude. It's just sick.

JUANA ALICIA: Miss Manners would say that basically manners are about just good social behavior. It's rude, it's very rude. It's an intrusion, and it's a violation of your personal space and all that. And, you know, just what you get on the street from men on a daily basis, whether it's "bitch" or whether it's, "Smile! You should smile!" Like I'm there to smile at them, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's all about them.

JUANA ALICIA: I'm getting this less as I'm aging, which is a relief.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I guess it is a relief in a way.

JUANA ALICIA: But it's this constant "You're here to decorate my world. You're here to serve my world. You're here to wait on me." I mean, I was sitting on. . . . [laughs] Me and a couple of girlfriends—another latina and a black sister—we were sitting up at that view that goes over right above the Golden Gate Bridge before you go over to the headlands. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah, right.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . Marin Headlands, and looking out over the city. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure, sure.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . and we were sitting there, and group after group of tourists came up to us asking us to take their picture, and they singled us out. There were other people sitting around, but they kept coming up to us, asking them to take their pictures.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe you were more interesting. Had you considered that?

JUANA ALICIA: Maybe, but we had one response when we said, "No, we're busy talking. We're talking. We've taken a lot people's pictures. Now we want to talk," the woman said. . . . What did she say to us? She said something that implied that it was our responsibility, I don't know, for us to take her picture.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because you were in a service capacity.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, we were in a service capacity, you know. Ahh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Gender based. Well, then this is, of course, one of the big, big, big things, and it's so complicated. We'll talk more about this more next time maybe.

JUANA ALICIA: Okay.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because this is the area where it all, of course, embraces life experience, and also some

things that'll be very difficult to change, especially the gender stuff, and I will be interested to hear what you think about that, because it's like you have the two things going on—this wonderful life force that's. . . . Some of us would rather be dead than lose that entirely.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But then it is, of course, how it's enjoyed and how it's respected, on the one hand, in an equal way. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and then how completely it has not been in other respects, and that's what you're talking about.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I mean in terms of world trade and everything and the global economy and neo-liberalism. What's happening to indigenous cultures all over the world? And that wonderful life force in them? Is it becoming commodified by the tourists, where the people indigenous to the area no longer practice them—can't afford to practice them, can't do them, have to join the global marketplace and service industry—and the artifacts of their practices get sold in the marketplace, and they're no longer engaged in their traditional practices—nor do they have access to them. I mean, I think a lot—and these are big issues for women—because a lot of the traditional practices are ones that women have maintained and passed down through generations.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you know. . . .?

JUANA ALICIA: Talk about NAFTA.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you know Los [Bros, Brose] Hernandez, the comic strip? Well, that is, of course, below their level that they operate on. But it's Jaime and Roberto, I think. They're in LA, and they have the most fabulous. . . . "Love and Rockets" is what they created. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . which is one of the best comic art. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right. I know of it. I can't say that I'm really. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you absolutely must read. . . . I'll send you one. I have a collection. I know them. In fact, I'm going to interview them, and they're going to come into the Archives of American Art.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And the reason I mention this is—well, from what we've been talking about—but also I think that you're going to be extremely interested in these two Chicanos, these brothers, and what they have done with women. They love women, and they've created these strong, fabulous characters.

JUANA ALICIA: Hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Including [Leuba, Luba] and all these people in this fictional town called Palomar.

JUANA ALICIA: Hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which is somewhere below the border, but who knows where. And, I guess, for me what would be fun to talk about—I think we're sort of partly leading into this realm as well—is that you have these Chicanos, [where, here] we have another stereotype [apply, applied], which is machismo, and not always the most attentive or respectful or caring. I mean respectful, yes, but "mama."

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And to woman as an abstraction, but then beyond there we know enough about how [it, he] can operate. And these guys. . . . Well, I'm not going to say anymore, but I want to make sure that you get a copy. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, good.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . of one of the "Rockets," because I think that we could have a productive conversation around. . . . Because that is focused then on a community. They have a very strong sense of their being Chicano in that community. But at any rate, perhaps an interesting connection can be made. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, yeah. I mean, I've gotten into some gender debates in my community on quite a few occasions, one of which was. . . . One of the most recent was with Shifra Goldman, where I pulled out an exhibit. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Shifra.

JUANA ALICIA: Shifra. Where I pulled out of an exhibit that she had invited me to participate in—the Estandarte. Do you know that exhibit? Happens every year?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I haven't seen it. What. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: The Tijuana Cultural Center. They give you a prescribed matrix of 18-foot-tall by 6-foot-wide banner. It's an invitational, and it's goes all over Latin America, or all over Mexico.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh.

JUANA ALICIA: Estandarte, and then it has the year [e.g., Estandarte 1999—Ed.]. And I guess I was invited for '99 or '98 maybe, I don't remember. But Shifra said, "Now, I want you to do this and don't want you flaking out. The last person I asked flaked out on me or something, and the great thing is that last year a Chicano won first place. And you'll be in the presence of really great people, and it's an honor for you to be invited, and last year. . . ." Oh, God, what's his name? I'm blanking right now.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You're like me.

JUANA ALICIA: John. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Valadez?

JUANA ALICIA: . . . Valadez won the prize for best of show. And it's the first time a Chicano won the prize. They're very recently including Chicanos. "I've included the Chicanos and you're getting to be the second Chicano that's getting to be invited and John Valadez won the prize last year for the best piece, so will you do it?" And I said, "Yeah, I'll do it." And they sent me the requirements, and I did this huge mural banner on canvas called El Cordon Roto—The Broken Cord. One, it's about. . . . Because we've experienced so much gang violence here, and my daughter's preschool teacher, Alberto, was killed in a knife fight at Berkeley High that was the fourth death at Berkeley High that year among Chicanos, and it's sort of a memorial to him, and it's about the connection of motherhood to gang violence, and it's an image of [an] 18-foot-tall pregnant woman standing in front of the Bay and there's a huge umbilical cord that is the frame of the image, and the umbilical cord wraps around to the other side of the canvas, and on that side it's broken and exploding and blood is, [all intan\_\_\_].

PAUL KARLSTROM: Spraying.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, all over the place, and it's an image of a young man, a young Chicano, young cholito, being murdered in the street. And the pregnant woman on the other side is sort of celebrational and colorful and serene and beautiful, I suppose, and the other side is black and white. There's a police helicopter shining a light on him from above. He could be in a prison yard; he could be in West Berkeley or West Oakland. It's not really specific, but he's falling and he's got a wound in his chest. And the wound is in red and the blood coming from the umbilical cord is in red. And I was at the point of submitting the work when I got the poster for the show in the mail from the Tijuana Cultural Center—this is the poster that was going to be used to promote the show all over Mexico and Latin America, wherever it traveled. It was the image, [created by] the last year's winner, on the poster. And it was John Valadez's image of what I would assess to be about a 15-year old, basically nude, Asian or indigenous Latin American woman, shaved pubic hair, a porno image you could have pulled off of the web, with her hand on her genitals looking very seductive.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was the poster?

JUANA ALICIA: This was the poster, and my name was on her genitals. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow!

JUANA ALICIA: . . . as the first name in the list of people that were in the show. And when I saw it I was so outraged I pulled out of the show, and I wrote a letter. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's shocking.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . on the internet to everybody saying I won't have anything to do with this. First of all, I knew already that the image had been decontextualized, because the banner is a two-sided banner, and I knew he had a response to that image on the other side. But, nevertheless, that no red flags ever went off in him or

anyone else about making that image 18 feet tall when Tijuana is the center of the exploitation of Mexican woman, and that that image is viscerally intended to cause a seductive reaction in men who look at it—or even women—and that this was such an exploitive image that to monumentalize it in any form. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . was repeating it and endorsing it. And I wrote a very strong letter to the Tijuana Cultural Center, cc-ed it to Shifra and to the [Est andarte] show, and said, “I’m not going to participate in this.” And the fact that they used that image to promote that show all over Mexico, where the second highest cause of death in Mexico among women is illegal abortion, often because of rape or incest or abuse or the sex trade, that they could use that as a promotional piece, decontextualizing it, whatever his meaning was, and I guessed, without ever seeing or talking to anybody, what the other image was on the other side. I knew it was that woman brutalized.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm, um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: And, in fact, she’s dead in the image, and she’s been carved up and she’s. . . . And it’s like, of course, that is the answer to that image. That’s exactly what happens in this society, and whether Valadez thought that was a protest or not, the other side is a promotion.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, without. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Without the response.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then it’s. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: And so I pulled out of the show, and Shifra was. . . .

[Session 2, Tape 1, Side A]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a second interview session with artist, muralist, painter Juana Alicia at her studio in Berkeley, California. The date is July 17, the year 2000. As I mentioned, this is a second session, and if all goes well, the final session. Interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom, once again, as before, and the. . . . Well, I think that identifies it. This is tape one, side A. Oh, there’s so many things to talk about. I mean we had a really great session last time, which we’ve reviewed. We’ve looked at some of your slides, and in the sort of pre-interview conversation come up with at least half a dozen themes that I think would be productive, including—and I would like to get to this at some point and maybe rather soon—your work on Positive Visibility. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . is the name of the mural that happens to be right around the corner from where my wife and I live, and you did really a restoration project, just wrapped that up. So I want to talk about that, but I would like to revisit briefly where we ended up last time, and that has to do with a controversy, something that was very unpleasant for you and that you’ve described, and it was the use of an image on a poster for an exhibition in Mexico City, was that right?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, the exhibition originated in Tijuana, at the Tijuana Cultural Center, and its name is Estandarte, and every year the name changes according to the year, so it was Estandarte Noventayocho, 1998, and curated by Martha Palau. I was invited to participate by Shifra Goldman, and I think we sort of laid that out in the last interview.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, and it was actually very interesting, and if I remember correctly it was like we were just getting into this a bit and then it was time to stop. But without getting into a critique or a discussion of the art of John Valadez, whose image is very problematic for you and actually caused you to withdraw. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You had yourself done a poster, is that right?

JUANA ALICIA: No, I had done. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not a poster, but an image that was to be included.

JUANA ALICIA: I had done a banner, because it’s a show exclusively of 18-foot-tall by 6-foot-wide, two-sided banners. That’s the condition for fabrication. And so I had already fabricated my banner—designed and fabricated it—and my image is called The Broken Cord—El Cordon Roto—and it’s an image on one side of a

pregnant woman in a sort of a naturalistic landscape, and the umbilical cord—a large, monumental umbilical cord—forms the frame of the very long rectangular piece, and it sort of encircles it and leads to the other side of the banner, so that it's going off of the frame. And on the other side of the banner the cord continues but is breaking and spurting blood all over the image. The image on the other side is mostly monochromatic black, white, and gray of a young cholo, a young Chicano, raza, man being murdered. And it could be a murder as a result of gang violence or police brutality or prison-yard brutality or anything actually that happens to a young man on the streets of the city—the cities of this country—or on the prison yard. He's falling, and his wound is also spurting, so he's either been knifed or shot, and it's the same blood that's coming from the umbilical cord. So this image is really about the connection between life and death, between motherhood and the brutality that our children are suffering for—our brothers or our spouses or partners or whoever our loved ones are. For me, as a woman, every time one of these deaths happens or this violence happens to our young men, whether we know them, as in the case here I feel pain and loss. This is a memorial piece for a young man named Alberto who was murdered at Berkeley High School trying to stop a knife fight, and he was my daughter's preschool teacher. It was the fourth gang-related death at Berkeley High School of a young Mexicano that year, 1998—or it must have been 1997, actually, when the deaths occurred. I was so distraught over this that I felt that a larger memorial was in order, and the portrait. . . . I mean, especially since you're interested in sort of like the artist/model relationship, the portrait of the mother is actually my friend Ana Olivarez, who's a teatrista and a psychiatric social worker, and she was pregnant at the time. She does a lot of work in her own life combating violence, and has struggled really hard. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: She's a psychologist?

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm., social worker and psychologist. Psychiatric social worker. She had struggled really hard to have this baby, and it's such a struggle to bring life forward anyway, and our community has a very high value on life, counter to the media perception that we don't value life, and we don't see life as cheap, and it's very painful for our community, and it's very painful for the mothers in our community to lose our sons or to lose our loved ones, so that's what this piece is about—in part. I had labored very hard over the piece and I was ready to ship it to LA when I received in the mail the flyer, which from my point of the view was the antithesis of my work, which was an image of a 15 year old (approximately) Chicana or Asian young woman. She looks very indigenous. She could be what we call a [numechini dianom]—"China," a nickname/misnomer for somebody's who real Indian looking with Asian sort of features—or it could be an Asian woman, and, I mean, that confusion there is really a whole issue in itself, about identity and about the nature of exploitation of young women both in Asia and Latin America, like our bond—whether it's been across the Bering Strait or it's as a result of world-wide child prostitution, child disappearances, the pornography industry, poverty, intense poverty as a result of neo-liberalism and neo-liberal economics, NAFTA—that many women in Latin America and Asia are being forced into prostitution, and particularly children. So here we have a very young woman with her pubic hair shaved and her hand on her genitals, turned on her head. I mean, it's to me a very precise metaphor or representation of the exploitation that our daughters and our children are suffering as a result of the globalization of labor and the economy. So that image in itself is very packed, without even talking about its counterpart on the other side of John Valadez's banner, which is her, dead and brutalized, because the initial image, which is supposed to be a pretty image, but already has a quirk to it because it's upside down. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: The first image is very problematic in terms of everything it implies, and this was the image on the flyer, and my name was printed right over her genitals, being in alphabetical order down the column, and I just found that the use of the Tijuana Cultural Center of John Valadez's image of this exploited girl without any kind of analysis or counter that perhaps even the counter that John proposed on the other side of his banner, which is the brutalized woman, without anything like that being used to advertise the show all over Mexico where the show would travel—I think it was going to Veracruz and Mexico, el D. F. and different parts—I'm sorry, but I found that totally heinous. And it would be very appealing on a glandular level to many who saw it in terms of the male audience that would see it. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . and very revolting to the female audience. The number two cause of death among women in Mexico is illegal abortion. That's a pretty heavy statistic. So women are still quite victimized by this kind of imagery, and to put that out in public as the ad for the show, assuming some kind of level of analysis and sophistication that Martha Palau and her colleagues did not reflect in their letter to me when I protested this use. . . . They didn't even have the sophistication, I don't think, in what they said to me in terms of John Valadez being a great artist and it was the winning banner from the show from the year before, and it's their policy. . . . Well, knowing that, when they selected the banner the year before, that they were going to use that image to advertise the next show, they should have thought twice about it—or changed their policy. But, at any rate, I just found it very objectionable, and I don't see it as a question of censorship or opposing something sensual. To me this is way beyond the realm of the sensual. This is about the destruction of women and the destruction of

women of color and our children.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Painted by a man of color.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm, painted by a Chicano, and you know Shifra was very quick to tell me how wonderful it was that a Chicano had won the first prize in this show and everything, and I say, "At what price? And to whose benefit?"

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, could we examine this just a little bit? And I realize it's not fair to ask you to put you and John Valadez's thinking or motivation about this, but I think. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: I don't know what John Valadez's thinking was, and I haven't spoken with him since—or before. We don't really know each other.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I was going to ask you that, if there was any kind of an exchange. But quite clearly from your perspective this was an assault on basic values and really, in a sense, an undermining of what I think you feel you're trying to achieve in your work in terms of depicting community.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, yeah. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: And depicting then women and the interacting with men and so forth. There are a lot of ways one can go with this. It's not just about—to my mind—about women of color, although there is, of course, the sex. . . . Actually, a lot of Caucasian women participate as sex workers in Japan and so forth, so it seems to me that in some ways this is really very much a broader feminist issue. Would agree with this?

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, definitely. I mean, everyone from. . . . I'm blanking. The woman who was sort of the far left of radical feminism who did this anti-porno work in the seventies. I'm blanking right now. About billboards and stuff. You know, a lot of people have taken this on as like a feminist issue, and. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, not McKinnon. That's a [mayor], Katherine McKinnon.

JUANA ALICIA: Right, no. I'll think of it in a minute. But anyway, is that. . . . You know, when we talk about basic values, I don't want to be in any way aligned with the far right. I believe that our sexual identities are really central to our health as people. I am a sensualist. I believe in the beauty of the human body and it's intended use as a source of pleasure. I think that we, like Alice Walker says, are put on the earth to enjoy each other. So I don't want to be portrayed as like this raving, crazy censor-happy caricature of feminism, because that's not what it's about. And in terms of basic values that's sort of like. . . . Even "basic values," the use of those terms which have been so claimed by the far right. I think we're talking about the value of human life here. And I think John Valadez might assert that when he talks about what he did in this piece. But I guess this sort of hearkens to what Alice Walker's whole campaign is about—combatting female genital mutilation. She talks about, in this one interview, in this movie on human rights that I frequently show to my students: Human Rights and Wrongs. It's a movie about how the. . . . The first half of the movie, which was done by Charlayne Hunter-Gault, is about how the UN still has not been able to pass a formal resolution that rape is a violation of human rights. Still. And women within the UN have been working very hard caucusing and organizing to get that declared a violation of human rights—like all of the rape that happened in Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia and all that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: That's still not a war crime. And that's the first half of the movie. And the second half of the movie is about FMG, female genital mutilation, and mostly it's an interview. . . . It's a dramatization and it's an interview with Alice Walker about her work on it. And people say, "Well, you know, this is some people's culture." All that, and she says, "This is not culture, it is torture. It is torture to mutilate children. It is just not culture. And if culture means destroying people, then we need to take another look at culture." And I think it's somewhat parallel to this whole thing. "Well, this is art, anything's game, this is high art, it's good painting." It's like, "Oh, come on, give me a break."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that becomes then something to kind of hide behind and indulge. I mean, one way to look at it, you know. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Just like the European canon has been used against us.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: You know, it's like why?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I I'm interested in, I guess, ideas of responsibility in image-making, how you make choices about what you do, and I think in these interviews we're getting a pretty clear idea of how you feel about it, the

position you take, and it then relates very much to other thoughtful artists, who I guess have to wrestle with this. Again, as we said earlier, we're not going to talk about John Valadez. We actually have, I think, an interview with him that was done [yes, completed in 1997], and wouldn't it be interesting if something about this were on there.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, and I'd like to talk to him eventually. But this isn't the focus of my work. I'm more interested in exhibiting the image of The Broken Cord. Like as soon as this happened, I thought "Okay, fine, The Broken Cord got displayed at an Amnesty International Conference and at an exhibit on Anne Frank and her legacy. I'm much more interested in focusing on the positive than getting into these little turf wars among people who should be allied anyway.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It is very complicated, and it opens up some big, huge areas of discussion for artists who have a sense of identity—or identities—that then involve potentially an obligation to dealing with the inequities, and this is certainly one way that I see. . . . I mean, I can tell and I know that this has always been very important for you in your work. And I suspect that an artist like John Valadez maybe in his way has some of the same concerns, but what we're talking about is the potency of imagery to even go counter to what may be intention. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and motivation, and I think it seems to me you recognized very well and did not want to associate yourself with. . . . No matter what the intention of the artist, it was read in a certain way. And I think that this. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, it was decontextualized, anyway.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But I think this also has to do with what we're saying now is a big difference—and it's a gender thing—that we are really different in some fundamental ways, men and women.

JUANA ALICIA: In terms of our thinking?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes. And what I would like. . . . Well, I want to suggest this. I'm not obviously saying anything is absolute, but certainly I've been learning more and more about this, even in just the artist and model. You know, what are you after? What do you want from this connection, this relationship, this encounter? And it's fascinating, because we learn about ourselves. But I would ask you—and I'm sure you must have thought about this—in terms of making images and how they are used and what they mean, are you able to spot some differences along gender lines that women would understand an image in a certain way, and men, sometimes the same image, in perhaps quite a different way, because of \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, every time I showed this image of the flyer to a woman, you know, she wanted to throw up, she felt disgusted, it was like, ah!, viscerally very offensive. And when I show the image to most men—and I'm talking about enlightened men—they went, "Huh. Hmm!" And I think if I had to name what their reaction was—and it'd probably be better if they named it themselves, but they're not here to do that—first maybe interest, maybe titillation, but these are intellectually responsible men, so then they would look at it again, try to turn it right side up, and I'd say, "No."

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs] That's what I tried to do. I said, "Why isn't she. . . ? Oh."

JUANA ALICIA: And I think men and women did that, tried to turn it right side up, because you want to turn it right side up. That's your inclination as a being that stands on your feet—most of the day anyway, or in public. And then the response sometimes was, "Well, what's the problem, other than that?" And sometimes the response was, "Oh, yeah, um hmm." But it took a lot longer with the men that I showed the image to for anything to register.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, why do you think that is? Are we so consumed by hormones and by desire that we see a woman, especially nude, with genitalia here on display, and we're hard-wired to be even aroused. Well, I realize this is actually a big. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: That's a big feminist question because we're hard-wired to be aroused, too. But I think that the conditioning, at least, towards certain kinds of arousal and certain signals for that is pretty heavy in the marketplace and everywhere. And because women. . . . Not that young boys aren't also subjected to brutality—everything from circumcision to domestic violence to. . . . I mean, they say one out of five boys has been sexually abused and one out of three girls.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's amazing.

JUANA ALICIA: So I think many women already know the experience of violence and sexual violence on a first-hand basis in that way, but also every day on the street, whether it's men harassing you or just whatever. To do your life, you have to combat that, in order to be professional, go shopping. Some women have to deal with it with their spouses. On and on and on. So for women the reality of sexual violence is a daily meal, and for men it's the flip side of it, at least in this culture, so I don't think you know the social conditions are in any way similar. Emmanuel is constantly shocked—but more so when we first got together—was more constantly shocked by the level of daily harassment that I'm subjected to—whether it's just walking out on the street with me or whether it's a workplace sort of thing, whatever it is. Or whether it's like being a strong woman and going up against traditionally male things or trying to do things that men ordinarily do that women don't do, on and on. But there's a daily dose of it that's very offensive, so to see it in a place where one expects some level of respect for one's work as an artist and a woman, that's pretty offensive. And so that's why I think women had a very big read on that and men didn't. So that's like one, I guess, metaphor or example for the differences, but it's so vast.

I mean, this project that I'm currently working on—this is going to be a very interesting thing—because this is in a union hall. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now this is what we're looking at right now.

JUANA ALICIA: What we're looking at on the wall.

PAUL KARLSTROM: On the wall.

JUANA ALICIA: The sketches, just the preliminary drawings for a mural that's going in a traditionally working-class environment, male dominated. Although this is the most progressive union in the country, really, the United Electrical Workers Union, which has had a standing policy since the thirties of equal rights for women. They struggled for equal wages right after the second world war. They were heavily red-baited during the McCarthy era, and the women were reduced to the backroom again, and it's been a very slow comeback. They took a pro-abortion stance in the seventies. They came out against the Gulf War. They're a very progressive union, but in terms of women, when I went to meet with them last year at their union hall in Erie, Pennsylvania, where this is going to get painted, I had a meeting with them about the content of the mural, and they explicitly. . . . This is part of a larger project that they're doing on solidarity between unions in the U.S. and in other parts of the world. It's about the runaway markets of NAFTA, right now particularly, the North American Free Trade Agreement.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: And so they've had this solidarity project with this union alliance in Mexico, which is also you know a left, progressive union alliance called the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, the FAT, and they had two artists, a North American man, Mike Alewitz, and a Mexican man, Daniel Manriquez, do two murals, one in Mexico City and one in Chicago, about five years ago, as a cross-border solidarity project that represented the solidarity projects that they're doing between the runaway shops here in the U.S. and the exploitation of people in those same shops in Mexico. It's a very powerful project. The murals that these two men did. . . . One was in the union hall in Mexico City and the other one, like I said, was on the street in Chicago. Then they contacted me because they're doing a women's cross-border solidarity project, and they wanted to do murals in Mexico and in the U.S. again with, again, a team of collaborating women—in this case myself and a woman named Beatriz Aurora, who is not a muralist, who is actually a "naïve"-style painter, miniaturist, and who has dropped out of the project for the third time now and won't be doing the collaboration. In fact, this has all been sort of left in my lap, and I guess as a Chicana they got lucky because I have a relationship and a deep connection. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Both ways.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . both ways, so we went to León Guanajuato, where the other mural's going to get painted next year. We went last year—me and my daughter and Beatriz and her daughter—and met with the people in the union hall there. We went to Erie, Pennsylvania, last year—to get back to my point—and when we met with the union people, it was 25 men and 5 women, and this is a mural about women and women's solidarity. Now these five women had been to Mexico and had been part of the solidarity project and had a very powerful read on cross-border relations and breaking down racism and stereotypes. The men had not been, and the men. . . . Not with the women's delegation. I don't know if anyone had gone to Mexico. But the men dominated the conversation. One woman was so upset about her issues as a woman in the union that all she could do was cry. She couldn't even talk. And the men teased her, some of them mercilessly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In public?



JUANA ALICIA: In public. And these are the progressives. And the union takes a very progressive position. The leadership in the union, the men who are in the leadership, are more enlightened. Some of them were there; they weren't behaving like that. But the point is, it is rank-and-file union, and these big shifts in paradigm are attempting to be made there, and people are working on these things. And none of us is completely enlightened, and I'm really grateful, and think it's entirely necessary, that they are taking this leap and trying to make this shift, in allowing a mural about women to dominate their union hall. This is going to be 50 feet long and 8 feet tall. Eight feet tall? Twelve feet tall. Twelve feet tall. I'm not grateful for it and, "Oh, thank you, thank you. Thanks for the chance." It's more like, I feel like we're a society in crisis and we have to do this work, but I am glad they're doing it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's flip over the tape.

JUANA ALICIA: Okay.

[ Session 2, Tape 1, Side B ]

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . side B, and we're discussing the Erie, Pennsylvania, mural project, which is in your hands now-exclusively, I guess, from what you've said.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And what's interesting, just to recap, is that here is a mural within a major. . . . It's the Electrical Workers Union. Is that the national headquarters there in Erie?

JUANA ALICIA: No, it's Local 506. The national office is in Pittsburgh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh.

JUANA ALICIA: The national headquarters is in Pittsburgh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But the mural's going to be in. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: This is a local. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see.

JUANA ALICIA: . . .but it's a very powerful local.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It must be. And so this will get a lot of attention, but what was. . . . Among the interesting points you raised is the fact that despite some sort of backward lapses in terms of communication or the way the women were treated, those who had been down to Mexico and should have been there really, reporting. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Leading the discussion.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and leading the discussion and informing their colleagues—after all, this is labor; they're all supposed to be in this together—but in fact the men, perhaps characteristically, tried to take over. Nonetheless, the project is really focused on women in the labor movement and connections with south of the border. Is that right?

JUANA ALICIA: That's correct.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so are you able to. . . . Well, I want you to finish saying what you want about this project, because this is, after all, about your work, but I'm always interested to know what kind of insights you yourself get—what is reinforced or what perhaps you learn new from these kinds of experiences, from this very experience of. . . . I suppose one question I would put to you: Does it appear that we're so different? We're mainly talking now about gender issues.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it's really beyond labor, it's beyond race, it's beyond community. I mean, these are obviously important to you, but we keep coming back—or maybe because I'm asking these questions—to communicating across gender, not just across \_\_\_\_\_. How do you \_\_\_\_\_ that?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I think they're so interwoven. For me it's very hard to just boil it down to that and just divide it down. I mean, one of the other things that happened when we went to Erie is that one of the guys in the audience stood up and said to me and Beatriz, "You know, it's not me, I don't feel this way, but I'm going to tell you straight up that there are people in this town who won't want you here, and whoreally feel that you're taking

our jobs away from us and. . . .”

PAUL KARLSTROM: The women.

JUANA ALICIA: No, the Mexicans.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I see.

JUANA ALICIA: And that, “You all are the cause of our not having jobs,” and I said, “Yes, I understand that.” You know, I really do understand that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now wait a minute. They’re saying this to you?

JUANA ALICIA: To me and Beatriz.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: We’re artists, but we’re Mexicans.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, yeah, you are. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . .but you’re also Americans.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, we’re all Americans.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, okay North Americans. You. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: I’m a North American, but that he didn’t see that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, this is what interests me.

JUANA ALICIA: He didn’t see that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He automatically described you, understood you, as a native from Mexico.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. And because I was speaking Spanish and translating for her and all this, you know. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Doesn’t know much about diversity in the U.S., I guess.

JUANA ALICIA: No, not where they are. Not the same kind of diversity—though when I asked about diversity they were very quick to tell us how diverse they were. Oh, we have Swedes, we have Germans, we have Irish, we have everybody. Oh, by the way, the other Paul Karlstrom sends his regards to you. He says, tell him “hi” from another Swede.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That’s right.

JUANA ALICIA: Because I accidentally called his number.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where was he? I forget.

JUANA ALICIA: In San Francisco.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, that’s right.

JUANA ALICIA: And he’s an art historian, too, or an art critic or something, a curator.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUANA ALICIA: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess we have to get together.

JUANA ALICIA: You do. You have to meet each other. He was laughing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That’s terrible.

JUANA ALICIA: Anyway, they all told me how diverse they were. And yet we’ve gone into that union hall. It was

me and Beatriz, Robin Alexander, who's their international relations person (I believe she's Jewish), and Bob Clark, who is black, and he's the head of the union in Pittsburgh, and Gary Huck, who's their cartoonist. The union's got a full-time cartoonist. Anyway, the five of us walked in there, and we look a lot different from everybody else there anyway—bohemians and colored people and women leading the meeting. And that in itself was visually a different thing than this other group here that we were talking to. And so there were all kinds of things going on, and I really just do think that all these things are intertwined, and for me it's really hard to separate out gender from race and language and culture because I do think that they're all. . . . I mean, they don't see me as just a gender. They don't treat me as just a gender. They treat me as a different kind of other, too. Anyway, I told them then and there that some of my family has been in this country for over 500 years and that the border crossed us and we didn't cross the border.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: And, in fact, we can be Mexican and North American at the same time—and Native—and that actually they were the newcomers, and that we in many cases had seen them as taking our land and our jobs. So, just to give them a little historical grounding in who Mexicans are to begin with—Mexicans in the U.S. But, at any rate, what I'm saying is that I don't just see it as gender, but I do think gender is a very, very important part of it. You know, there's been all these arguments among raza—and among black people and among many other people—in national movements in this country—or nationalist movements in this country—about what is preeminent. Is it race? Is it gender? What is it? And I just think that the sand shifts all the time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, right.

JUANA ALICIA: It's not something that we can name the same way every time. The context changes. For an artist, the audience changes. When you were talking about being able to control people's read on things, well, that's why I'm doing this interview with you. I'm not trying to control anybody's read, but I do sort of want them to know my intent.

PAUL KARLSTROM: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: And I think the artist: even the “-ism” against artists, right, that artists are controlled by the class that pays for their work—or are controlled by their patrons or controlled by their audience or controlled by different sectors of the population, that's always shifting, too. But I think in this day and age in the post-modern, post-structuralist. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Post-feminist.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . post-feminist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles]

JUANA ALICIA: It's, of course, not post anything, but in this age, whatever we want to call it, it's very important that artists do speak up for what they have made—and what they've done, and why they've done it—so that there's a record of that. Because historically we've had to guess at a lot of this, and the artist has not had. . . . Except for people who. . . . There have been some outstanding exceptions, who've left a very clear record, like [\_\_\_\_—Ed.] [Griga, Riga] has records. I mean, on [LP, El P \_\_\_\_]. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: And Van Gogh for heaven sakes, his writings and letters. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: His letters to Theo, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. But that's the exception.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. And particularly artists of color, women. Our records have been destroyed, and so it's really important that we be advocates, I think, for our own voice and what we've made. And I encourage that in my students, too. So I do think it's important that I tell you, “Yes, well, my intent here is to bring up. . . .” I can show you, too, that in this particular mural—these are some of the storyboards—these two trains are going to be. . . . One has the logo of the FAT, the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, and the other has the logo of the U.E. on the front of it, and they're crossing the border, and there's the Rio Bravo that's flowing down through the middle and there's going to be the Pennsylvania landscape on one side and the Guanajuato landscape on the other. And on each train—on each face of the train—there'll be a storyboard like this one of what goes on in the women's lives, and in the history of their work and labor and their unions. And this particular storyboard focuses on the women at the Congeladora del Rio plant in Irapuato, near Guanajuato, where these women, aged eleven and up, work in this strawberry and papaya and piña packing plant for very long hours, for about five dollars a week. They've been on strike for a year. They crossed this really treacherous footbridge. They used to have to wade across the river to get to the plant.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [sighs in disgust]

JUANA ALICIA: It's guarded by armed guards and has barbed wire all around it, and the women have been on strike for a year and the Mexican government is suing these poor women for millions of dollars for violating NAFTA.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe they'll change with the new president.

JUANA ALICIA: [snickers?] Yeah, maybe.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You think?

JUANA ALICIA: No. Vicente Fox? I don't think so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, okay.

JUANA ALICIA: He's very pro-NAFTA.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, well, that's. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: No, I don't think indigenous rights will be high on his list either.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But he does seem somewhat. . . . At least he wants to, it seems, respond somewhat to inequities and concerns among his. . . . Well, I don't know \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, possibly, and at least he won't have the whole PRIista structure behind him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: You know, there is some hopefulness, and I think just the cynicism of eighty years of domination by the PRIs (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) in Mexico, the political cynicism that permeated every thread of the political fabric, has shifted. So that's really good.

But, anyway, these women have been on strike for a year, and the woman in the center of the mural here on the right side is Alicia Rosas, and she's one of the protagonists of the story, and on the left is Linda Leech, who's one of the workers in the U.E. plant—in the GE plant—up in Erie, and she's also a poet, and the words of her poetry are going to be crossing the border here, and Alicia's palomas (doves) will be crossing the border here. But, at any rate, each one of the faces of each car of both trains will have the different stories of the women's lives in the history of their union and their current struggles, and also this is an image of domestic violence, which had a big role in the lives of the women who had to go to work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this will go in to this mural as well? Is that right?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. Unless they fight me real hard, and they might.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where would that go? On the face of a train?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, on the face of the train.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How are these train's faces going to be big enough for all these stories?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, actually, I'm going to make the trains a little bigger, but each one of those quadrants will probably be about four by six feet.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, okay, I see what you mean. I understand. The entire visible exterior of the trains will carry these stories.

JUANA ALICIA: Exactly. And I put out, oh, I don't know, hundreds of surveys to the women in both places about what was pivotal in their lives in terms of their work lives—what put them in the work place and what their transformational experiences were in terms of becoming organizers—and a lot of them pointed to moments of domestic violence. A lot of the responses. So anyway, what was I getting at? [laughs] Or where would you like this to go next?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, there's so many ways to go. I suppose that part of what I keep thinking about is the very different way in which you approach some key issues that are part of your experience—actually part of all of our experiences—and what strikes me as interesting is that, even if there are some shared concerns between men and women, I don't detect much similarity, from what I know, in how these are addressed and how they are brought forward in art, how they're communicated. And I'm wondering about—if you're willing to talk about it a

little bit, if we haven't already. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: You mean the way men make visual art in general and the way women make visual art in general?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. And even if the concerns are shared, there seem to me to be some differences that come, again, out of the realities of their own experience as women within a culture, within a community. And one of them—and I don't even want to overplay this to say it's any different from the Swedish community; we'll just leave that aside—but within the Mexican-American—forget Mexico itself; I don't want to talk about that—but what we experience in this country, or seem to, some very ingrained gender role issues, and I wonder if you have any thoughts about that. In other words, that which unites you—I'm making this too long a question—but that which unites you, which is as Chicana, Chicano, the Mexican-American community, has perhaps built into it certain traditions and ways of relating and interacting gender issues that then actually . . . that divide.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I think in this country, being Chicanos, we have. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Such to. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: . . . certain freedoms, because this isn't a Catholic country here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: Neither of our families are Catholic, mine or my husband's. Traditionally. I mean, back there. But there's a context for a lot more diversity where we grew up. Even if we grow up in a fairly insular neighborhood, like the Mission or like East LA or somewhere like that where we've spent a lot of our lives, there's a lot of possibilities for different kinds of roles and lifestyles and that kinds of thing that we are exposed to and we see. You know, every family is different. The Chicano community is not monolithic.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: It's so hard to sort of characterize everybody in one way. I would say that in this country there is a context of greater freedom for women in terms of abortion rights, in terms of access to birth control, divorce, issues around gay/lesbian rights, all those things that we can access much more readily than we can in Mexico. And I would say that the backlash against feminism is happening in both places and that there are incredibly wonderful feminist thinkers in both places, in Mexico and here. And to sort of characterize Mexico as being this sort of backwater of these ideas isn't true, but I would say that, when we look at sort of the large effect that feminism as a cultural revolution has had on a national identity, I'd say that in the U.S. it's broader. It's broader. But for everything that I say there's a counter in Mexico. You know, there's something to prove me wrong, because I do know radical feminists, gay men, intellectuals, all kinds of people in Mexico, that have a different attitude towards women. And I'd also say that Mexico in terms of its indigenous cultures is so diverse that a lot of the western patriarchal thinking and the overlay of the oppression that Catholicism brings for women is not necessarily present in all those places. So it's a very mixed bag. But, leaving Mexico aside for a moment and just talking about the Chicano community, it's very hard for Chicanas. It's been very hard for Chicanas to be powerful, to be artists, to get recognized, to. . . . You know, we deal with sexism a lot from our own men. That's all true. And then I would say there are some very enlightened men among our men in our midst, too, that we have the pleasure of interacting with—like the one that lives in this house.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: And like my brother. And like Juan Fuentes and other Chicano artists here who have been very supportive. Malaquías Montoya. There's a list of them that I could run off, too, of men who have a very supportive and solid . . . in solidarity with our work, and I wouldn't be doing this work at the U.E. if it weren't for a white man, Gary Huck, who's the cartoonist at the U.E., promoting my work to the union and saying, "Look, you guys need to get a women's project here, and you ought to call Juana Alicia." So I think it's very important to look at both the structural issues and the individuals involved, because I wouldn't want to discount either of those things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I think that's wise, and I think it's absolutely accurate. Unfortunately, we tend to categorize, we try to simplify the world by creating . . . making it easier for ourselves by saying this is the way this group is. But the issue—obviously part of what I'm getting at here is something that's not certainly unique to Mexican-American community—but the term is Spanish and it's macho, machismo.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I'm not suggesting this is unique to any group, but the little I know about it—that it has

been operative, that it's a factor that, what shall we say, affects the experience of women.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. Oh, it's absolutely true, and, like I said, we experience a lot of violence, rape, incest, really horrible things at the hands of our families in some cases, in many cases. And I think that it's allowed to be, accepted, and overt, and it's not talked about, but it's allowed to go on on a daily basis, both in Mexico and other parts of Latin America and here. And it's places that have experienced revolutions, in many cases, who have taken it on—like Nicaragua, like Cuba, and like here within different sectors of this society, where people have taken it on and said no. You know, "As long as we're liberating everybody else we might as well like deal with the women, too," or the women have insisted on it. And I think that it exists in Anglo society in a different way, but it's equally violent. It might be more passive-aggressive. It might be even less talked about, but just as violent. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it's nice to think that other groups are the ones that suffer these problems, but certainly not our own. [spoken with ironic tone of voice]

JUANA ALICIA: Well, we know like among the military here in this country during the Gulf War domestic violence like tripled. I mean, it's very interesting to look at those sectors and, no, I don't. . . . I think it's more of a colonialist attitude, both towards women and property, that could be. . . . And we don't even have to call it European, but it definitely came from Europe, in terms of like what happened with the conquest in Mexico and what happened here with the total massacre and annihilation of the indigenous peoples, and the Salem witch burnings, and. . . . I mean, we can point to a lot of moments in North American history—European colonialism—that was just as machista and just as violent.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Probably. These are the big, big issues.

JUANA ALICIA: I think it's an ownership mentality.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I was going to ask you about issues of power, the power relationships, exchanges. Of course, we are talking about art. I mean, it moves. . . . This is what's so interesting, is that [in—Ed.] your work and number of other artists of our time, the art engages most of these big social problems and issues and makes it kind of hard to talk about, because you just go spinning off into these. . . . And it also moves then into opinion, and the only opinion that really matters here is not mine—you know, I'm asking questions—but is yours, because I absolutely agree this then lies behind, is the foundation, for your \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: Of the work. Right. And you know I have all of the concerns of artists that don't engage these issues, too. It's like being bilingual or bicultural. Not only do I know your history and your language, I know my own. And not only do I engage all of these issues, I also engage issues of composition, space, architecture, texture, color, value. I mean, all of the other questions that the quote-unquote "nonpolitical" artist engages I also engage, because I don't see that there's a dichotomy or a split between fine art and politics.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you've said that and you've made that pretty clear, and I think it's an extremely important point that. . . . Well, it brings to mind. . . . We were talking earlier about Jacob Lawrence and the fact that you are an admirer of Jake's work. Jake died just a couple months ago. And your daughter, Mayahuel, was, I guess, really impressed with works of Jake's that she saw, I guess at the Legion Show, at the recent one.

JUANA ALICIA: At the Legion Show, right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And actually there's a wonderful little drawing here that is her tribute, I guess, to Jacob Lawrence, but I am tending in my own work to look at what I see as parallels between the African-American experience—Jake's work—and I've talked with him about this quite a bit, and it relates to exactly what you've said—that for him I would say there is no division between his extreme interest in the history of his people and the experience of his community, Harlem, but he means that as a metaphor for the broader community. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and nonetheless he is very much an artist who found his own voice stylistically in what he would draw from other artists and from modernism. But this is viewed as. . . . Since I've just written about this, I don't want to say too much, because I could go on and on; this is not about me. But you're one of the artists who, I think, has a very close parallel approach and experience to Jake's, where you see these as not contradictory.

JUANA ALICIA: Hm mm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, your aesthetic interest, you interest in practice and in material and in form and in color. . . . And Jake I think came up with the same balance or integration. Nonetheless, I would suggest that your work is more politically driven than Jake's.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I can say this because of conversing with you. Or—now here's a possibility—that he negotiated a career at a much earlier stage, where he had to be less . . . I don't want to stay strident, because I don't mean that your work's like that at all. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . but less up front and obvious about issues that are being engaged.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, I mean, it's always a question about how much you're gonna really . . . which cut you're going to give to the interpretation of your work, and what side you're going to present, being a multi-faceted person. I mean, we could just talk about my relationship with Michelangelo for a long time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Hmm, let's do that.

JUANA ALICIA: That could be a whole theme and a whole conversation. And we wouldn't have to talk about any of these other issues.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Everybody likes to hear about them, though. That's one of the things.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I want to talk about them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know.

JUANA ALICIA: It's not like I don't want to talk about them, but I'm saying that there are other lives in me that exist that are quite vital and that I have. . . . You know, I'm very interested in light, in luminosity—that that in itself is like a central theme that's interwoven with all of the political themes, whether we want to call it Renaissance Enlightenment or what you want to call it in terms of light, what the metaphor of light means.. My comadre, Odilia Galván Rodriguez, is writing a book called *The Color of Light*, and she wants me to do the cover artwork for it. I think. But there are all these aesthetic interests that are very, very important, and I can live in that, very happily a lot of the time. But what I'm trying to do a lot with my work is to heal those schisms. This is not prioritizing one thing over the other. You know, why should I have to make a choice between our survival as a people from a political viewpoint and our survival as a people from an esthetic viewpoint? I mean, I do think that beauty and Art—I guess, with a big A—are just like just vital to our survival on a daily basis, that our culture—Mexican culture, Chicano culture—is so beautiful, and is so full of sensual, visceral, visual richness all the time, that I understand the artists who just want to get into celebrating that—that on it's own. I can get into celebrating that and making more of it from my own perspective, just sort of like the cultural read—let's leave the politics out and just do the cultural read—as if that were possible. I'm sort of into mending that schism. We don't have to leave any of this out. They are all part of each other anyway, so we don't have to prioritize these things. You know, first I'm a political artist. No, first I'm a woman. No, first I'm a Chicana. No, first I'm a this. No, it's like why should I accept those which to me are very false paradigms and schisms? You know. I'm not going to buy it. People argue from a very nationalist viewpoint sometimes, "It's the message that's the most important. We don't care if it's sloppily done, just get it out there."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: I know people who hate the concept of beauty. "Oh, beauty, that's bourgeois, that's an entrapment, that's anti-feminist."

PAUL KARLSTROM: But they get to redefine that. Now, that's sort of short-sighted. Why not. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, I think so. Then they just create their own esthetic.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: Don't call it beauty, but that's what it is.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: So you know I mean. No, I love that Alice Walker. . . .

[ Session 2, Tape 2, Side A ]

PAUL KARLSTROM: A continued. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Do you have Judy Dater?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, Judy's going. . . . Yeah, Judy's going to come \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: She's a fun \_\_\_\_.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I mean I interviewed her—I think I told you—just a few weeks ago, about artists and models.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, you did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, she said. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, you didn't tell me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, and she said she'd [moved]. I said, "Oh, I know you live near." But she's. . . . Yeah, I can't say for sure. I expect that she will like the idea of her things coming to. . . .  
So here we are, starting this tape, continuing the second session with Juana Alicia on 17 July 2000. This is tape two, side A, and, oh boy, we're talking about so many interesting things. Stay focused. Get focused. [admonishing himself] We've been talking a lot about politics, and I think we agreed we don't want to pretend or make out that that's all Juana Alicia's art is about, and I certainly never would have said that. I mean, my observation would be that your skill, your appreciation of old masters even, or of Diego, you mentioned Michelangelo, and other issues like light, put you. . . . It's a reminder that you have a sense of your own concerns and interests as an artist in participating in the history of art.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, you're well trained, and I would further suggest that conveying your message is done much more effectively using these resources and tools of pictorial . . . of image-making.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So, just for the record, because I think we talked about that off tape a little bit. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right, right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In fact, why don't you. . . . If you want to carry that a little further. . . . [phone rings]

JUANA ALICIA: It'll get picked up in two more rings.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Anyway, did you have anything further to say about that? Actually, you made a very eloquent case—I think it was off tape; that's why I'm bringing it up again—about how you could very easily spend a whole interview discussing the more traditional aspects of art-making in terms of. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right. Right, I think I said something about we could spend a whole interview talking about my relationship with Michelangelo.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: Because . . . well, for many reasons. Because of the connections to fresco through Diego, because I was fortunate to go to Italy a couple years ago and see some of his work—actually, the sculptural work at the Museo del Davide, and also some work in the Uffizi—and I'd have to say. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was just a few years ago that you were over there?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. I went actually for a pedagogical training in a little town a couple hours away from Firenze called Reggio Emilia, where I studied for ten days a school system—an alternative school system—where critical thinking skills are taught through the arts. So every school has a central atelier, and every classroom has a mini atelier, and the children are from 4 months of age to 5 years of age.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this is another arrow in your quiver, by the way, the fact you are an educator and you're always teaching, I think.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. This is an incredible revolution. It was part of the feminist movement in Italy, this school system called Reggio Emilia, which is the name of the town, Reggio Emilia. I centi linguaggi dei bambini, the hundred languages of children. It's a quote from Loris Malaguzzi, who's one of their leading pedagogists—pedagogisti—who said, "Children are born with a hundred languages and by the time they get to school they have only three left"—or that's what happens in school. The languages are many—the multiple modalities we learn in—but the arts is a big part of our language that they emphasize. Anyway, I had gone to Reggio Emilia to



study and then I took the train to Firenze, got to see the unfinished sculptures in the gallery of the David and the David itself, and then a couple of smaller works in the [Uffizi]. And I also got to see the Four Seasons and The Birth of Venus and some of the other works of. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Botticelli?

JUANA ALICIA: . . . Botticelli. They had just been restored, and they were amazing. The colors were totally amazing. I think I spent whole time nearly hysterical [laughs] with overwhelm and emotion, just seeing all of those works, and fortunately I was by myself and nobody could. . . . You know, who knows your ass in Paris? So I was able to emote as much as I wanted in public. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it must have been an incredible experience for you, because all you have to do, as Ann and I did—well, actually it wasn't last year; a couple years ago—really explored. . . . Ann went to school—that's my wife—briefly in Florence—Stanford in Italy, as a matter of fact. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, wow.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and we hadn't been back for a real big visit for many years, and so recently we then. . . . We'd [sit]. Florence was crowded. The place was way too crowded, but we went in there with a purpose—to visit as many chapels, and look at the frescoes. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Wow, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . as we could, including some of them that we hadn't seen before. And we were thrilled, especially seeing Masaccio, and my going back to the beginnings in some ways, or along with Giotto, but if we felt that way, I've got to imagine a little bit how you must have felt, given what your career has been and the importance of the mural form for. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. Oh, yeah, I mean I didn't even get to see what you saw. I was there for two days, and I spent my whole time in the Uffizi and the Museo del Davide. I wanted to see the frescoes and I'm just living to go back to Italy and see the Giotto's and everything.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, you have to do this.

JUANA ALICIA: No, it's mandatory.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: But, yeah, I was totally overwhelmed. I studied a lot, looking a lot at La Capilla Sistina in preparation for my work at the airport. So there are a lot of artists who are within the traditional white male, European canon—which is all a social construct, too—that are very, very important and interesting to me. But I think it's a misconception to say that because I'm part of a cultural [rescate], reconstruction, or sort of going back and saving what's been destroyed and recreating something new out of both that and other sources, that the other sources don't exist. They do. But, yeah, I am interested in technique. I just think it's boring to talk about technique. I think it's boring. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's [what you were saying].

JUANA ALICIA: You know, everybody's got their technique. If you're a welder. . . . If I want to learn welding, I want to talk about welding technique, and if you want to learn fresco, I'll talk to you about fresco technique, but to spend hours talking about technique. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . is sort of a waste unless we're in a training course.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's right, except I think it is important for this interview and for broader monographic looks at you and your work to make that connection, and we've already done a little bit earlier, I think. I even wrote a little bit of this when I was writing for a Diego Rivera catalog, about you and what you told me about the importance of the Diego Rivera murals at the DIA, when you were, I guess, in high school.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, that's pretty critical, given the way your career developed, so it's interesting for me—and very much to the point—to hear about your appreciation of Michelangelo and presumably other Renaissance. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Botticelli.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . pre-Renaissance.

JUANA ALICIA: Pre-Renaissance. Giotto. Brueghel. You know, people . . . contemporaries. People who are near contemporary, like. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: But what about Michelangelo?

JUANA ALICIA: . . . Ben Shawn or Käthe Kollwitz or Monet.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about Michelangelo, though? There may not be certainly a simple answer to this, but what would you describe as the main qualities that you respond to in his work? You mentioned sculpture, interestingly enough. Oh, the Sistine Chapel you mentioned as well.

JUANA ALICIA: Right. Well, the sculpture, I mean, well, seeing those unfinished sculptures with the material, the marble, being as evocative as the actual carved part—or the uncarved parts being as evocative—like the ability to. . . . And I know this wasn't intentional, because he just couldn't finish them, but the ability for the piece to be as evocative as something that was totally finished and almost sort of the encasement of the images in the mute parts of the unfinished work was incredibly moving. And also I think, whether it's a relaxation or a self-acceptance that happens to artists once they get older and they've been conversant in their media for a long time, is the comfort of leaving something unfinished, or that whatever you touch., even the minimal touch, has a level of eloquence in it that is powerful and sufficient. The other thing that I really relate to in Michelangelo—and maybe this is about technique, and then technique becomes a metaphor for a lot of other things—is his level of dedication or obsession to what he was doing. I mean, that Capilla Sistina, which just went on and on and on and on for years., that he could be so single-minded and so completely involved in something. And that he knew nothing about fresco when he went into it [laughs] and locked himself in there with the plasterers and told everyone to leave him alone is remarkable, although I'm sure the plasterers taught him a lot. But I'm pretty immersed in and obsessed with my work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Gee, I never would have guessed.

JUANA ALICIA: And do it all the time. And live in it, and it is in my house, and my children live in it, and my daughter does it, and my husband is obsessed with his work, and we spend more time in our studios than we do in the quote- unquote "living quarters" of the house, and that our. . . . We make our lives out of the work that we're doing all the time, that it's not like somebody who divides their work and their life at all, and I'm fortunate that I live with another artist who is equally obsessed and respects my obsession and supports it and critiques it and helps it grow. That's very fortunate for me—and for him. We have that together. And we really. . . . That's what we carve our lives out of, is how we're going to make our next thing, whether we're doing it together or separately.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, we talked last time about the big project at San Francisco Airport, in the International Terminal, which is opening. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: In a month and a half.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, September?

JUANA ALICIA: September seventeenth.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And Emmanuel has to be through. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: 75,000 people will be there from 9 to 7.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow.

JUANA ALICIA: I'll be hiding behind the ticket counter. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: But that was a good chance for you to bring your work—literally—together, which. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: It was a great opportunity for us to collaborate and work on something together, and it was a big leap because I'd never done a monumental fresco and he'd never carved anything before. [laughs] It was a rebirth for him, I think. He became a sculptor and a whole new person in this process, and I realized that I want to do monumental fresco work for the rest of my life and I love doing it, and that I feel a real kinship with the medium, and very at home in it, totally happy doing it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There's obviously so many ways to go with this. I do want to talk about a couple more of the

works. But one of the things that strikes me in looking through these slides and in looking at other examples of your art, there are, again . . . well, it's very people focused.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, you can tell what you're interested in, and a lot of them are women, and they're very powerful. You were talking about Michelangelo, and I was thinking the monumentality of the figure, often female, in your work, and certainly one can see that at least there was a model or an example in Michelangelo, but then in Diego Rivera as well. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . so it all fits. But I'm also very interested in works that may or may not be self-portraits, so if you're obsessed with your work it would seem to me quite natural. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . to put yourself in there.

JUANA ALICIA: You're obsessed with yourself, eh? [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, hey, it's all about us, remember.

JUANA ALICIA: I know, everything's a self-portrait.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I'm looking at one that I think is a terrific. Brooke Oliver has it, and it's from 1989?

JUANA ALICIA: Living on the Edge?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Living on the Edge. Well, I even like the title of it, but I can't see it very well here.

JUANA ALICIA: If you use the light table in a loupe, it'll help.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, it's a little bit better. And I'm not going to try to get too into this, but there are a number of elements in there that declare your identity, as far as I can see, as a Chicana, as a woman, and, you know, actually also as a homekeeper, and maybe by implication maybe a mother, I don't know. And this may be all just too obvious, but it's something that maybe [does, doesn't] get picked up on all time in your work. And then another portrait.

JUANA ALICIA: Why a homekeeper and a mother?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I don't know, by implication.

JUANA ALICIA: The apron?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, by. . . . Or an artist wearing an apron. I don't know what you're doing. I'm just. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: I'm painting. Well, I'm actually standing in front of a painting painting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, but these are the ways, without knowing anything about it, that it could be read.

JUANA ALICIA: Uh huh, yeah, no, it's interesting to me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's like iconography.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [\_\_\_\_\_] --Ed.] Penovsky said, "You see a man lifting a hat," and within a certain culture or society that tells. . . ." Okay.

JUANA ALICIA: Exactly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I don't want to go sort of interpreting your work this way. It would be inappropriate at this moment. Here's another slide, but since I have these slides. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: No, it's cool. I like it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Here's another one where, again, I have to look at it with the loupe, and it doesn't have a

title, but there is. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, I can tell you the title.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . a figure that looks almost like a superhero.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, Fact Wino [a role from the San Francisco Mime Troupe—JA]?

PAUL KARLSTROM: That one.

JUANA ALICIA: Hold on. This one?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: Oh, okay, yeah, well, she is a superhero. Yeah, that's Harlequin. That's a portrait of Marguerita Luna [Robles], the poet, and it's sort of a portrait of her as she portrays herself in the poem that she wrote about herself called "Harlequin," "Harlequin." And so that's a big pastel drawing. Are you going to have slides or images accompany this thing at all?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, it would be good.

JUANA ALICIA: How could it be without any imagery, that's my question.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's the nice thing about. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Assuming they can find it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I mean, the people who refer to this, hopefully, are serious and will seek out. . . . Unfortunately, it's not like an illustrated book at this stage, but, of course, it could lead there. And that's one of the reasons to have a little video component is good. I'm not equipped to do that at this stage, very much. The Harlequin, is that what it's called?

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, I'm going to. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, it has a superhero quality to it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: I hadn't thought of it that way, but yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's the way I see it, and I'll tell you why. And these are the connections we make. If we know a little bit about art and look at images, you make the connections, and it can be to Diego Rivera, to the past, to Michelangelo.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In this case—and this is in a sense maybe ironic, maybe not—but I think of Mel Ramos's sort of pop superheroes.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Men and women. He has Wonderwoman—this is a fantastic one—and then Batman and Robin and the Phantom and such. Then, of course, he pushed it in a different way that made him either famous or notorious, depending.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let me ask you, having made that connection, and I don't want to say there's anything to do with Mel, but I might ask you if [you were, you're] aware of these images yourself, or if they appealed in a certain way—the way they were painted perhaps. Kind of \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, Mel. . . . They didn't resonate with me, or maybe I just. . . . They felt very slick to me. You know, very facile and slick and commercial.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, that was the era of Pop Art.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. Yeah, well, we don't always fit with the era that we're in.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUANA ALICIA: I certainly don't. So, you know, I mean, look, I've never done an installation or a video.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. Well, you know. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Aaah, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You don't have to do everything. Let me ask you. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Or a digital mural. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me ask about one more, and that. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Not that I'm opposed to any of those things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I understand.

JUANA ALICIA: It's what's been working for me lately.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is sort of fun, but we can't do too much of this, because this is an oral history.

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But there. . . . I guess in a way I'm trying to dig a little deeper myself.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is kind of for me.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I don't want to take it off into. . . . You have this powerful woman or goddess figure interest, and you just—in fact, we'll talk about it in a minute—just did another one, right?

JUANA ALICIA: That was Positive Visibility.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But here's a portrait that is. . . . It's fabulous. It's up in your living room, and it's called My Brother's Boots.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Interestingly, I read that is what you would call sex-neutral or gender-neutral.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's because. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I thought. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, tell me about it. Because I asked you was this some kind of a self-portrait of you . . . and anyway.

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, well, because it's my son. There is a resemblance between us, so I think it's very. . . . Physically our resemblance isn't very strong. He's a six-foot-tall, blond, strapping young man at this point.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But then he wasn't.

JUANA ALICIA: But then he was. . . . He was still blond and he was still not looking like my side of the family very much, but we have a very strong *simpatía*, or, I think, personality connection. We're very, very close and we always have been, but at that age he was sort of androgynous looking. You know, he was an adolescent. He was 12 years old or so, 13 years old, and about my size at that time, and maybe a little taller, and he was going through a lot of changes that adolescents go through, but we were going through a very big change together

because my brother had just died. My brother was not only his uncle, but almost like a father for him and had raised him—with me—and my brother was very close to my son, and my brother was gay and very “out” and unpretentious about who he was. He was very straightforward—a self-described “flaming queen.” And he was very important in my son’s formation as a human being. He was a teacher and an artist and a dancer and a writer and just a very powerful man. And it was a very tragic loss for me and my son when my brother died, very hard.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was it AIDS?

JUANA ALICIA: Of AIDS.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: He died of AIDS in 1989, and my brother had been my main supporter as an artist. He was a person who had encouraged me to be an artist—the most of anybody. I had encouragement from my mom and my godmother as well—really strong encouragement—but my brother was my constant supporter, and we lived together. So when my brother died it was very tragic.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How old was your son?

JUANA ALICIA: My son was 13. And he left a lot to my son, in terms of a legacy of how to be as a human being, but he also left him those boots and the rug that he’s standing on and the harlequin mask that our friend, Tony [Apodaca], had made, and all of those are in the painting, so it was like my son’s inheritance from my brother in the painting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That’s a really interesting painting, especially for somebody who puts herself so much into the work, because if I were to write about that I would say it’s a triple portrait. It’s clearly a three-way portrait. That’s your brother, your son, and yourself, definitely.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so the reading of it. . . . It’s sort of almost spooky that I would look at it and say, “Is that a self-portrait?”

JUANA ALICIA: Self-portrait, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And, I mean, it isn’t a woman’s body particularly, but does that reading seem to fit the case for you? The way I described it?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. It could be, you know. It was in that show, Chicano Body Culture, and it went to—maybe it was Tucson or Phoenix—and somebody reviewed it and compared that figure to the David, in the review. [laughs] Funny.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, well.

JUANA ALICIA: You know, not that much of a difference in years, from the David and my son Justino, and, yeah, it’s like nubile, young boy, basically. I mean not quite as mature, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: Sort of in a jaunty little stance there, and my son was so jaunty that I would end up sending him out of the room because he was driving me crazy because he couldn’t hold still, and he was just a. . . . A terrible subject to try to draw as a 13-year-old boy. I mean, they don’t hold still at all. [laughs] But anyway, it could be. I mean, like I said, probably everything everybody does is in some way a self-portrait.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I think so, but I think some people more than others.

JUANA ALICIA: Frida [Kahlo—Ed.] more than others. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm. That’s for sure. Well, I’m just interested in and certainly have noticed in your work these powerful women figures, and I think of like. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, like the Rigoberta Menchu Tum up there on the women’s building, you know, mural.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: Or the Yemayá.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And then one of my favorite works that I'm tempted to ask you all about because I tried to understand it. I wrote a little bit about it and it was absolutely just my take on it. But that's the Mission swimming pool, the New World Tree. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . which was eighty. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Eighty-seven, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . seven, yeah. There are these heroic figures, male and female, and then children, so you know it's very much a family. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Tree. It's a family tree.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it literally is, but in a way that I think just emphasizes and underlines this kind of value, the importance of family, maybe of community.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The things that we've been talking about.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. Well, in that piece it's like the connection of all bloodlines, and the unity of all races and male and female and the duality—which is just straight up thievery from a traditional Mexican tree of life—the ceramic trees of life from Oaxaca—with the Adam and Eve figures on them. But, yeah, as a mural it's much more monumental, though some of those trees of life are very very big in Oaxaca, but, at any rate, it is a monumentalization of this connection and of the solidarity between peoples and that kind of thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There are other things that are very interesting about it. Now, in terms of scale, the figures. . . . And I noticed this. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: And that is a work that I did with Susan Cervantes and Raul Martinez. It's not my solo work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, I know. And so I don't know conceptually who's responsible for what, but I would [like—Ed.] just to share this with you. From the first time I saw it, I was very knocked out. It was years ago, and I just sort of happened on it, because I had friends that lived on Guerrero and nearby. But that there's this equality and presence between the male and the female that to me is very distinct.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I don't know if in fact she's a little bit smaller, doesn't have to be, but they strike me as having the same power, the same presence.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I even think—you're going to have to answer this on the other side of the tape—but there's a sense of—oh, what is the term we're looking for?—gender. . . . Not that these are androgyns. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Hm mm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . but in terms of a kind of presence. . . . Well, I would like to ask you this: if, in part, are you trying to visually make that connection in your work between men and women, visually bringing them together to emphasize that we're the same species. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . that we're really much more like one another than different?

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me turn it over, okay? You can think about it.

[ Session 2, Tape 2, Side B ]

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is the second session, tape two, side B. Once again, I asked an overly long question with different parts, but is it something that you have thought about? Do you see this as a possible way to look at. . . ?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, yeah, I wouldn't put it the way you did, but. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's okay.

JUANA ALICIA: I would say that it's not about sort of trying to make the point of gender equity or equality. I think. . . . I mean, for me that's overstood. It's more about. . . . Well, you said something earlier about how this particular woman artist likes men, but finds women more interesting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, D. J. Hall.

JUANA ALICIA: D. J. Hall.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Whom I interviewed recently, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: I don't know whether I find women more interesting. I think there's different things to be interested about. But. . . . I mean, Helen [Caldicott, Caldecott] got a big rise out of an audience in a lecture she did for the National Association of University Women a few years ago. It's a really great speech, where she talks about women being powerful. She's says, "I want you to think of all the strong women that you know." And everybody's going, "Yeah, yeah." "And how many? Can you count them?" And then she says, "And think of all the strong men that you know." And the whole audience cracks up. They laugh. "Can you count them on more than one hand?" And it's like, "Well, I don't know." I mean, I do know some strong men that I really admire and love, but I think that we are coming to a time where women have to step forward and take some leadership and get responsible on a large level, not on just the familial level, not on just the small community level, but on an international level. Like Helen Caldicott says, "Somebody asks you go type a speech or do this or that, you say, 'Okay,' and somebody asks you to run for office and you laugh and say, 'Who me?'" And she says, "It's time to stop being ninnies about it and get out there, because the world is in a terrible mess and we're in a big crisis." And I'm not just saying this around women. I saying this around all disempowered people—that it's really time for people to take a very activist role in the destiny of humanity. We are a planet in tremendous crisis, and so I think it's very important to focus on the capacitación, the empowerment of people who haven't done this because otherwise we're all going to be dead. And so I think it's important. . . . It's very interesting to me, being a woman, to look at these issues for women and for Chicanas and for ourselves as a people, so I guess it's an interesting thing for me to look at our development, and our coming of age, and our ability to share in the power and to make change. And I think that I know so many powerful women, and I know there have been, historically, and that it has been a tremendous, violent force that has kept the evidence of this power from coming forward. And I guess in many ways in my work I'm interested in projecting the vitality and the life force in that power and inspiring other people to feel good about taking power. Women have always been taught to be quiet and to be good and to be out of sight and to be passive and not to make waves and not to offend anybody and not to be present and not to be heard. And so I really try to counter that in my work, because I think women have a lot to say and a lot of important work to do and they need support in doing it and there's a big, violent system that wants to shut us up. And the most eloquent way that I can make that statement is through what I like to do the best, which is painting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Again, so many directions to go with this. The notion of power, of course, in finally exercising it for social good seems to be a theme—a goal actually—in your art, and I think that that's pretty well understood. I was thinking about. . . . I'm hesitating because I don't want to set up a detour, but on the other hand we were looking earlier at this book on. . . . I forget what it's called. It 's the famous one on feminist. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Feminist art, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The Power of. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: The Power of Feminist Art, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which I have and have looked at, and I mentioned that I'm in communication with Joan [Simmel, Samul] in New York, and this is. . . . I mean, she was a feminist in the seventies who did a really extraordinary series of paintings that had to do with basically empowering women, and in terms of the model, the nude body, and the nudity as something that belongs. . . . is about her. It's about self.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not the object of, well, of the male gaze and so forth and so on. We don't need to go there. This is pretty much understood as an issue of that time. But her feeling was that that power—and this had to do with sexuality, but I think much as a metaphor for something else. It's like taking control, taking charge, in whatever area it may be. . . . And the focus comes back on self, and we can, if we want to talk about her more at another point, but what I'm leading up to here is that she in conversation bemoaned the fact that with the new generation, the post-feminists, is that they, because they got to choose to do it, could be the objects of desire. In



other words, this passive role. She describes it as this passivity, and having all the qualities bestowed upon you, rather than saying, “This is who I am and this is what I can do and this is what I want to do, and even if it’s in the sexual realms, this is my choice.” And so she tried to get. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: It’s sort of a liberalist position.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She tried to get this in her art, but basically doesn’t feel comfortable about what she sees as the evolution out of feminism of a certain kind where young women view as empowerment, in a sense, participating—you know, using their sexuality as an instrument of power.

JUANA ALICIA: But that’s been the tradition. I mean, that’s been our only route to power, right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, of course it is.

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, in many parts of the world these young women if they left whatever place of comfort they’re in and lived in many other parts of the world, would find that that’s their only power—that’s their only source of power—and it hasn’t changed. Hasn’t changed much anywhere. I think that’s an illusion of a certain class of people that have a certain level of privilege. Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But of feminism, as well, because this is one of the things that was clearly protested. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, white feminism, white, middle-class feminism.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . the use of the female body.

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I guess that’s all I’m asking because basically you seem to be really quite removed in your imagery from that even as an issue.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In contrast to John Valadez, by the way.

JUANA ALICIA: [chuckles]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I just wondered if that. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . brings up any issues that you think are worth. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, I do. It brings up the issue of like sort of a generational thing that happens, whether it’s from our generation to our children’s generation or whatever, in this country, particularly around the struggles of the civil rights movement. You know, a certain level of taking for granted rights that we had to struggle for earlier on. And I do believe we’re born with rights, and that these are not privileges, they’re rights. That we should have autonomy over our bodies. We have the right to autonomy over our bodies. We have the right to housing and a safe life and an education and good health care, and all those things are inalienable rights everywhere on the planet, and that there are places where people have to struggle a lot harder to claim them than they do in places where there’s a long history of that struggle or a history of that struggle where certain advances have been made. I do think that. . . . Yeah, some things are taken for granted in contemporary feminism in terms of like having the vote, certain levels of security, but I think it’s very tenuous, very fragile. And you look, see what’s happening with the Taliban of Afghanistan, or in different parts of the world where women’s rights have been ripped away, or if you read Margaret Atwood, and you read. . . . What’s that one about the future.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The Handmaid. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: The Handmaid’s Tale, right? I think we’re [not, that] far away from that. I really don’t. I think it’s a portrait of our times in many ways, even though my credit card still functions at the grocery store. But I do think the kind of structures that she describes in The Handmaid’s Tale are not that far away from the vision for this country of the far right at this point. And we are living in a police state, too. Look what just happened in. . . . Where was that where they got the beating of the black man, Rodney King, on videotape again?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, the latest one.

JUANA ALICIA: The lynching that just happened.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was Philadelphia.

JUANA ALICIA: In Philadelphia, that's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which is ironic because you know the convention is about ready—the Republican convention.

JUANA ALICIA: The Republican convention, right, yeah. Well, it's perfectly right on time, I mean in terms of what's really happening. And Mumia Abu Jamal on death row there, and on and on. I mean, there is a false sense of security we have here, and this young generation of feminists of some level of privilege can assume that—and maybe even of all levels of classes of women here can assume some level of safety. Because there have been some things put into the political structure and the social structure that insure our safety. There are rape crisis centers. There's domestic violence counseling. There are some safe houses for women. But having done eight murals with my students at Casa de las Madres in San Francisco, and my students all had to go through the security training, and there's like bullet-proof windows at the undisclosed site and everything. . . . It's pretty horrendous what's really going on in terms of a war on women here, so I don't think that it's an exaggeration to say that these dangers still exist, but there's an illusion of safety. But, yeah, I mean, I think that it's just a very. . . . I think any woman should be able to dress the way she wants, have the kind of sex she wants, have the partner she wants, all those kinds of things. Everybody should have that. Everybody should be able to do that. But I don't think that there's a supporting social structure for that, really almost anywhere.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, and, although I don't think we want to get into this at all, I think there are people nowadays who look at it and say, "That's the way it should be," but to a certain degree it's utopian thinking and it probably comes from—well, a topic for another time—but it's always moving closer to . . . to achieve this wonderful world where you get to make all of your choices and then go carry them out in to the world, probably a very, very long time away—and especially when sex is involved, and, I mean, I think that that's the big one, because. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: But men can do it now.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It could be that there's a difference, but that is absolutely another topic for conversation. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . because old feminism says it's all socially constructed. And as we watch the world and watch ourselves—you know, men and women, even the most enlightened ones, there tend to be a. . . . Shh! That's too big a topic. Let's talk, though, about something that is specific, and I'd like to get to this while we have plenty of good tape. When I came in today you showed me some wonderful photos of the restoration of the Positive Visibility. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, that's on the same topic so that's fine! [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's exactly right. And I think. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Because there we have it. I think one thing that really disturbed whoever put the hateful language, graffiti, and tags, and. . . . I mean, they literally threw buckets of paint on that mural. It wasn't just tagging or graffiti. It was buckets of paint. Two of the largest figures in that mural are right on the corner where all the buses go by and everybody goes by, and it's two young women scantily dressed. Could be sex workers. I think that's what my students intended to convey. Or it could just be women in light clothing basically. And I know that that probably pushed a lot of buttons.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now among which group?

JUANA ALICIA: Among whoever hated the mural.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, but whose buttons would be being pushed by scantily clad women, the representation of women that way?

JUANA ALICIA: Well, it's not like they're looking exploited, these women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: They're looking pretty powerful, and they're not scantily clad as in the John Valadez depiction. They just have short skirts on and some cleavage showing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUANA ALICIA: Right, which is. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Objects of desire? Or in charge?

JUANA ALICIA: They're in charge. They're in charge. They're very big. They're like, what 10 feet tall. And they're in charge. They're strong. They're not looking like anybody's victim. They haven't been visibly altered by any plastic surgeon or. . . . They're just sort of dressed, that's all. The one of them is holding. . . . Let's see, I have the photos here. Oh, no, she's not holding the condoms. There's another figure that's got the condoms in her hand. But a lot of my students at New College were also sex workers. I would say 60 percent of them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?!

JUANA ALICIA: Because that was the best paying work for a female student in the city.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Like the Mitchell Brothers and places like that?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, uh hum. Peep shows and stuff.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What? Forty percent did you say?

JUANA ALICIA: Sixty percent.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting. Gives a different perspective.

JUANA ALICIA: These are white middle-class women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um hmm.

JUANA ALICIA: Students.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And those were the students who worked with you. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Right, now the other women who worked on the project were from Walden House and they were in recovery, and I'm sure none of them were doing sex work at that time. Some of them had been in prison, some of them had done sex work. I'd say it's very hard to get through any university without finding a good portion of the women in the university—the students—as sex workers.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Gets into the newspaper if it's like Cal or Stanford or some place like that, right, but. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: New College isn't something to write home about maybe necessarily.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I mean, it's just different. [chuckling]

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, it's different. But I don't think it's that different.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, maybe you're right.

JUANA ALICIA: Having taught at Cal and Stanford and UC. Well, UC Santa Cruz is a little more rural; it's not quite the same scene. Urban campuses.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let me ask. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: But anyway. But I mean. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, tell me more about this and the way it came about, because I think it's real interesting. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, the way it came about—and this is partially, like you say, a goal in my own work—but I worked in a program at New College called Art and Social Change, and we had a video media program, we had a performance theater program, and we had a visual arts program, and I was the head of the visual arts program. We did a free mural in the community every year. So, like I said, we did a whole bunch of murals at Casa de Las Madres one year. We did a whole series of murals at Children's Protective Services down on Harrison one year. And one year we did this Positive Visibility mural, working with the community that is infected or affected by the HIV virus—the community of women affected or infected by the HIV virus. So it was a collaboration between my students at New College and the women in the HIV community—the women's HIV crisis and information line, a woman named Amy Becker. She was a principal organizer in this. So we worked with different AIDS organizations that support women in the city—and Walden House specifically. And what was on this wall originally was a mural that Chuy Campusano had done with his students.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, on that same wall? I don't remember that.

JUANA ALICIA: On that same wall, yeah. And we had a hell of a time finding a wall. Nobody in the Castro wanted to give us a wall. It was just pretty interesting to see the misogyny going on in the HIV community around actually doing a public piece for women. And Chuy came forward and said, "You can have my wall."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

JUANA ALICIA: He was working at Walden House. He was running a silk-screen shop at Walden House, because he himself was in recovery from alcohol. And he was beautiful, doing great work, and really generous to give us this wall. So he did, and let us white it out, and we did, and we put up the drawing that was done by my students and these women in the HIV community. Notably, an HIV-infected African-American woman named Hazel Betsey, and Hazel is thriving right now. She's doing a cross-country bike marathon for women and HIV, but she's been infected for quite a long time. The centerpiece of the mural is a poem she wrote. Starts out, "Dear Virus, I've been wanting to write you for a long time," sort of thing. Here's the poem over here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was her name again? Hazel. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Hazel Betsey, B-e-t-s-e-y. Here's Daniel Sanchez-Glazer writing Betsey's poem on this big [odalisque], that's this. . . . It's a corpse, and we've redone it and the corpse is like ascending. And the poem to the virus is on the corpse, and then out of the corpse are ascending these three women like a phoenix. They're a bird. You know, the phoenix coming out of the flames and the ashes of this woman. So you can see the ascending spirit coming out of this sort of cocoon with the poem by Hazel Betsey written on the body. And there's this inlaid mirrored glass that one of my students did. . . . She cut all that glass in the garage across the street. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I remember that part.

JUANA ALICIA: . . . for the phoenix's wings. And, of course, we've altered these three figures and one is. . . . One of my students did a portrait of me, and I did a portrait of her, Tomashi, and then the woman from the Palestinian family that owns the coffee shop on the corner there, The Grind. And here's. . . . Oh, yeah, one of the women, I mean, that might be a sex worker on the corner, the eight-foot tall. I guess she's about eight-feet tall, maybe ten feet. She's got a belt with a whole strip of condoms coming off of it. That's what it is. So that gives away the sex worker identity. Then there's another figure up here that has whole strip of condoms in her hand. Actually they were real condoms, but we chipped them off the wall when we restored it. They still look like condoms, but the actual rubber has come off, because it's corroded in the weather and looked terrible.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You're not supposed to use them after that long a time. [chuckles]

JUANA ALICIA: Right, they do wear down. And then the snake here represents both the life force and the virus or the bloodstream, and that like runs through the whole mural. And so this is something that. . . . This is the type of project where I didn't do any of the painting or the drawing. One of the principal designers was one of my students named Michaela O'Herlihy. There were two Irish-American students: Michaela O'Herlihy and Colleen. . . . Oh, what's Colleen's last name? [\_\_\_\_\_]--Ed.] She's changed her name now though to Spark, and she started a mural center in Ireland—in Dublin I believe—called Chispa, which means "spark" in Spanish. And they did some murals over there. But anyway, the principle designers were my students, not me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about conceptually? Did you let them come up with the theme?

JUANA ALICIA: Yeah, they interviewed the HIV-positive women. They went to Walden House, and the Walden House women came to New College and we interviewed the women in a class, and the women did some drawing with us to come up with their ideas. And then my students translated it into, you know, more worked-up drawings.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And then you went around trying to get a site.

JUANA ALICIA: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And not being successful. But whose initial concept was this? Did it come out of class discussions?

JUANA ALICIA: Came out of class discussions.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And what is something that we really explored together. "What's important? What do we want to make our mural about?"

JUANA ALICIA: Exactly. And, I mean, I definitely had a hand in teaching them how to negotiate those waters. "Well, how do you conduct surveys, interviews, research?" Eventually what I was teaching them became something that is now a nameable, pedagogical approach that me and my colleagues at Urban Arts [East Bay

Institute for Urban Arts—JA] developed over the years, and it's called CRAFT, C-R-A-F-T: Contact, Research, Action, Follow-through, and Teaching. And it's a very Freirian [as in Paulo Friere, the Brazilian educator—JA] approach towards doing community-based artwork—or art-based community making, as Tomás Benitez says.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What's the final one? Follow-through, then. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Teaching.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, okay. Thanks.

JUANA ALICIA: So Contact is getting to know the community, working with the community, doing a cultural inventory or who's there, finding out what the needs are of that community, what the major themes are. I've written a whole curriculum guide on this for Urban Arts that talks about how we do this and shows how we do this.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because that's where you were working on. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: But now it's become like a formal sort of pedagogical approach, but I'd been using it for many years without having a name for it. But what I do in a project like this where I don't do any of the design is I teach them how to do the work of the artist, how to do the community-based research, the information gathering, the dialogue with the community, the involvement of the community, the making of the mural, the technical instruction on how to do it (the technical instruction on drawing and painting), and then the care and the feeding of the artwork (how to disseminate it, how to preserve it), and how to teach others how to do it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's really a course in public art.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. Exactly. And in multi-cultural education.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, quite ambitious. You know, it strikes me that. . . . I'm not saying that this looks like your work, but I'm not at all surprised to hear that.—which I didn't know until today I think; I think I didn't—that you were involved, but that some parts of it certainly suggest your presence, looks kind of like. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, you know, you can't help having that influence.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, and do they go [every year]?

JUANA ALICIA: They're familiar with my work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, right.

JUANA ALICIA: They take my class because they are familiar with my work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, right.

JUANA ALICIA: They want to learn how to do what I do. I don't want them to be me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, of course not.

JUANA ALICIA: I want them to be them, so I'm trying to teach them an approach.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But they have a visual vocabulary, too, and a kind of style that. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm. Well, and in the restoration I did do some painting. And I directed the painting in both cases, you know, with Elba Rivera in this case [of the restoration—JA].

PAUL KARLSTROM: But do you feel that the resistance to this work and the unfortunate splashing of paint—which is really a desecration; I mean, no question about it.

JUANA ALICIA: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's not just a matter of tagging or anything like this here, that it's. . . . Well, it's like a challenge.

JUANA ALICIA: Well, it's a hate crime. It's a hate crime against women and women of color and people with AIDS of all colors and gender.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What if they had been a bunch of Caucasian blond women in bikinis, but just sort of like advertising. I mean, they're lots of them up in advertising. Do you think that. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: Well, there are some billboard [adjusters] that go around and try to take care of those things, but they can't possibly do the work that needs to be done.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles] But what do you think? You know, some bathers maybe in the sort of traditional Western art mode. What if the mural had been that. . . .

JUANA ALICIA: With the \_\_\_\_ bathers?!

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . not dealing with the issues that you have there. Do you think there would have been this kind of response?

JUANA ALICIA: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ [does, has] one

JUANA ALICIA: I mean, I think that somebody would have done something funny as a sort of modern-age critique of what those things are maybe, but I think that basically usually the murals are respected and that taggers don't do this kind of thing, and the people don't throw buckets of paint at the murals. That just doesn't really happen. I don't know. I don't know who did it. There was one man that came by, an older white man in a Range Rover or something like that. We got his license plate. We've reported him to the neighborhood safety program, who are the people that sponsored this mural. And he would come by and scream at us on a frequent basis about how the mural was man-hating and negative and doesn't belong in the neighborhood. He was yelling at us like "You people, get out of this neighborhood. You don't belong here." And that kind of stuff. I mean, he did this in our face, and Daniel, one of my assistants—Sanchez-Glazer—he got up in the guy's face a couple of times. But we got his license plate number and reported him to the city. I don't know if it'll make any difference. Some people, like him, were willing to come forward and just scream at us, but basically I think it's. . . . The neighborhood safety program, which fights hate crime across the city, and operates out of what is it, the jail on Bryant Street, they raised the money to get the mural restored. It was a community effort that really got the mural restored. I can't keep up with it all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, that was very positive, yeah.

JUANA ALICIA: I can't keep up with the restoration of a lot of my works. There are a lot of them out there and there's no funding to take care of them. And I can't afford to be restoring everything that runs down over time or. . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

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