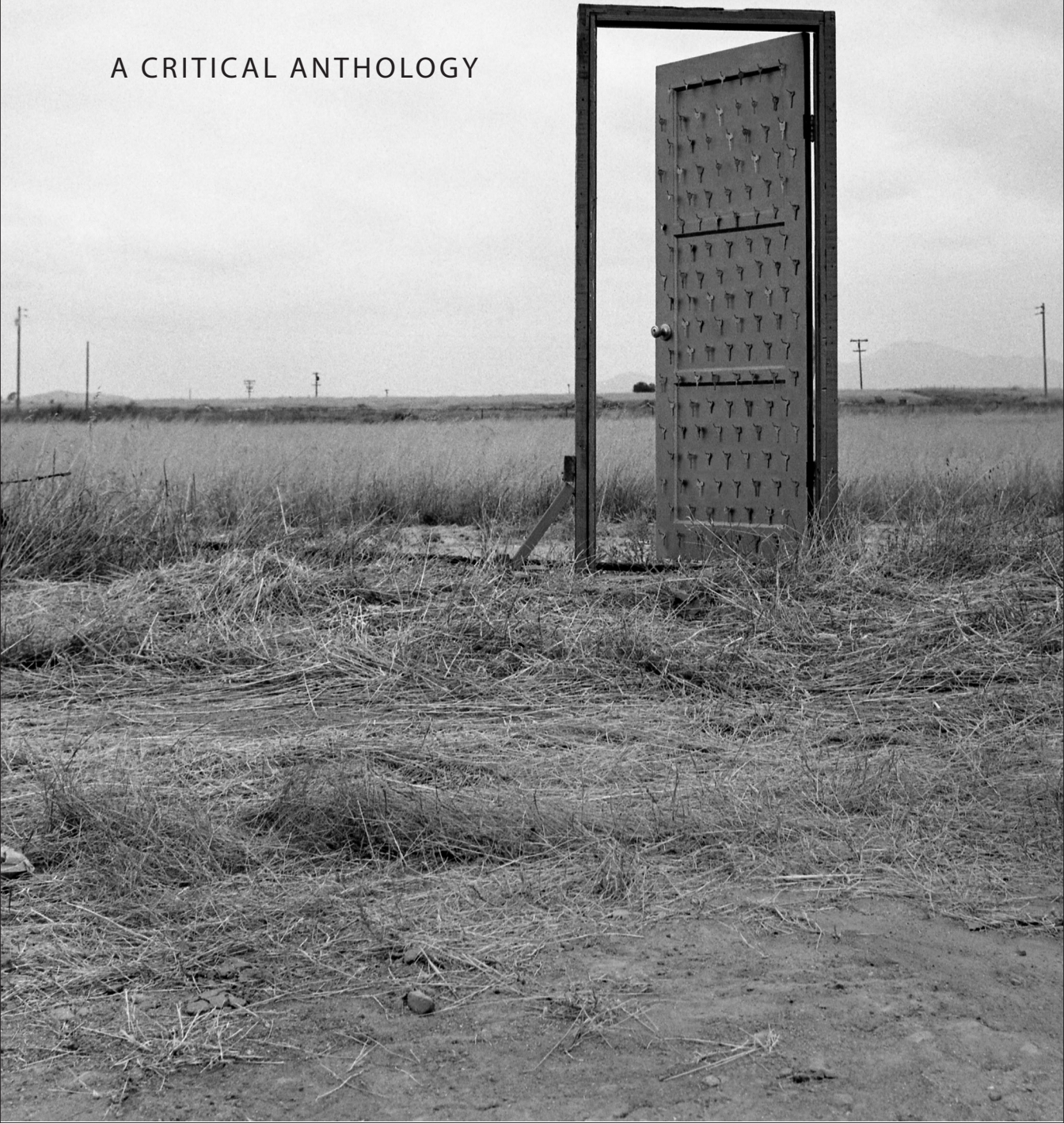
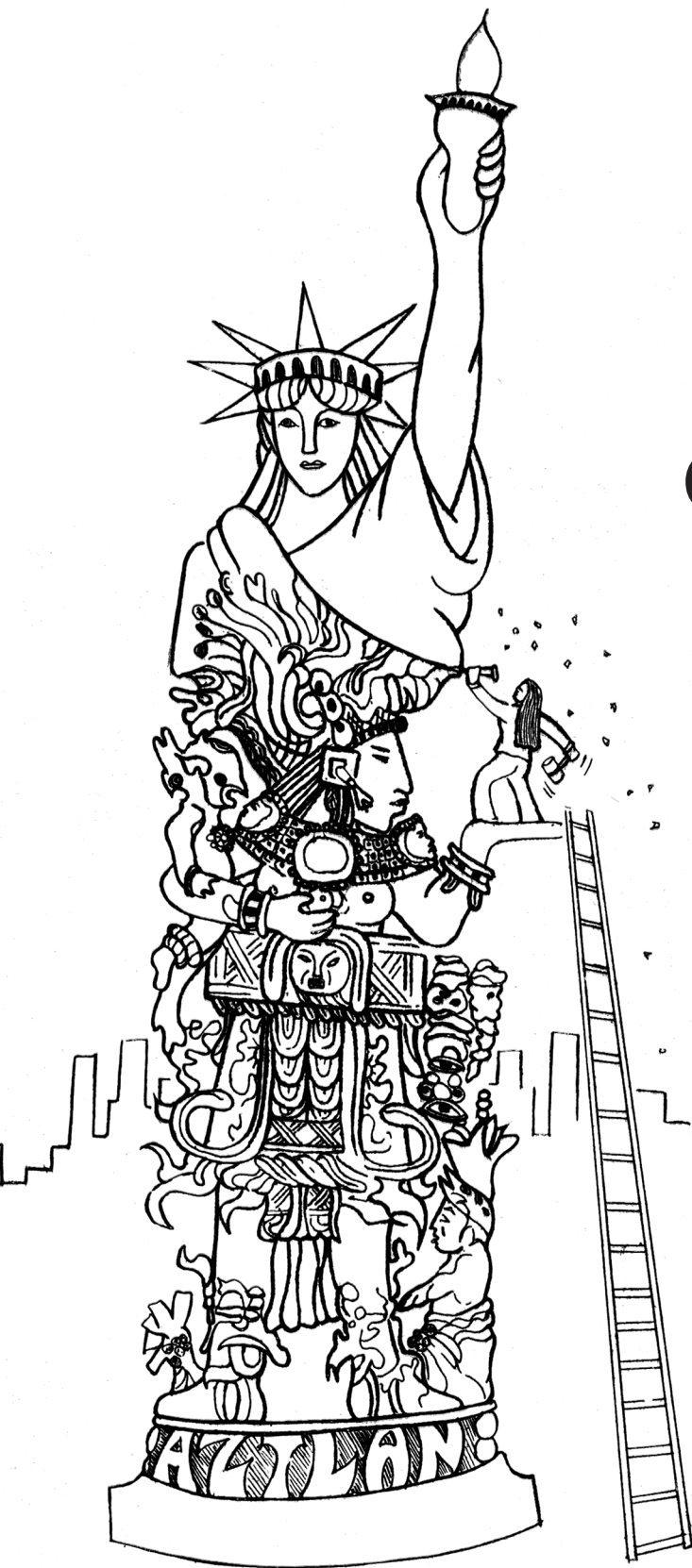


Chicano and Chicana Art

JENNIFER A. GONZÁLEZ,
C. ONDINE CHAVOYA,
CHON NORIEGA,
& TEREZITA ROMO, EDITORS

A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY





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FRONTISPIECE: Ester Hernández, *Libertad*, 1976.
Etching. Image courtesy of the artist.

COVER ART: Richard A. Lou, *Border Door*, 1988.
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Preface

My father, Crispin González Jr. (1936–2017), the oldest of fourteen children, was born in Claremont, California. His mother's family was from Juárez, Mexico, and his father's family from Lagos de Moreno, Mexico. His early life was difficult. His family was poor; he was punished in elementary school for speaking Spanish; he was punished at home for not milking the goats on time. He and his relatives worked in the orange groves that used to blanket the rolling hills of Southern California that are now called the "Inland Empire." Like many of his generation, he served in the U.S. military in his twenties but was lucky to get out before the Vietnam War. He went to college, planning to study political science, but ended up becoming a ceramic artist. He received his master of fine arts degree from the Claremont Graduate School and was a professor of fine arts at Chaffey Community College for thirty-five years. His works are now in several

museums and important private collections. He never took an active part in the protests of the Chicano civil rights movement, though I have a distinct memory of our family boycotting grapes in the 1970s. He once remarked, "When people asked me what I was doing for the movement, I would say: 'I am the movement.'" As a young girl, I never quite understood what he was talking about, but I later realized how radical his transition—his movement—from field laborer to college art professor had been, and how daunting. He always had a sense of humor, and he never complained. His life ultimately inspired me to be curious about art history, labor, politics, racism, and the Mexican American experience in the United States. I wish to thank my father and his generation for their courage and their commitment to the creative life and to social justice, against all odds. I dedicate this volume to him.

—JENNIFER A. GONZÁLEZ

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I wish to express my gratitude to all of the authors and the artists who agreed to have their works and images reprinted here. Their scholarship, artistic practice, insight, and creativity inspired this anthology, and I wish to acknowledge their contributions with my deepest admiration and respect.

Many years ago I proposed this project to my three coeditors, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega, and Terezita Romo. They all agreed to join me in this endeavor, though none of us was entirely sure what would result. I have served as the anthology's chief editor, but all decisions about the content, organization, and recommended reading lists have been shared. I cannot thank my colleagues enough for their critical acumen, their balanced approach, their political commitment, and their intellectual labor as the anthology has taken shape. I also want to thank them for their inspiration and their example; it is really they who have devoted their lives, energy, insight, and scholarship to the Chicano and Chicana art that appears in this anthology. Time unfolds in unpredictable ways, interruptions and life events always intervene, and we have all been patient with each other at different moments in the editorial process. For this, and for the camaraderie that comes from thinking through pedagogical and conceptual issues together, I am deeply grateful to each of them.

Although the editorial team is responsible for the content of the book, it is also the hard work and dedication of numerous student research assistants that have brought this project to fruition. In the early days, when we were still gathering articles and trying to develop comprehensive literature reviews, Silvia J. Mantilla Ortiz, as part of the Williams College Class of 1957 Summer Research Program, worked with C. Ondine Chavoya at Williams College to help compile digital files of many lesser-known articles and manifestos. Chon Noriega kindly offered his home for several of our meetings, and we also received helpful assistance from Darling Sianez and Connie Heskett at the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA. Nearly all of the early articles and essays required transcription into a new digital format. Some essays were transcribed for the first time since their initial publication in the 1970s. This painstaking labor required keyboard speed, accuracy, and familiarity with Spanish, and was beautifully accomplished by two undergraduate assistants at UC Santa Cruz, Marco Suarez and Maya Deleon. I was also lucky to work with Cinthya Mendoza Gomez and M. Toro Castaño, both undergraduate research assistants who helped to summarize, organize, and compile articles and digital copies of images for the anthology.

Requesting and securing permissions for both images and articles for an anthology of this size is

an arduous job, requiring excellent record keeping and responsive communication. My graduate student assistant, Raissa DeSemet, initiated this process with diplomacy, rigor, and grace. Her work was then inherited and enhanced by my second graduate research assistant, Lucian Gomoll, who assisted with permissions for several additional sections of the book. He also helped to proofread numerous articles, and developed a system for organizing digital images and image permissions. His enthusiasm for the project was such that even after graduating with his Ph.D., he was happy to continue to consult with me as I began to bring the project to a close. These two graduate students made the initial process of permissions and organization not only possible but also wonderfully pleasant and effective.

My greatest thanks must go, however, to Mary Thomas, my current research assistant, who has not only wrapped up the article and image permissions requests but has also skillfully assisted in the final production of the anthology. She has rectified and unified citations and endnotes, tracked down remaining copyright requests, produced image captions, helped to create the art inventory, and offered critical feedback and intelligent suggestions—all with determination, focus, and good humor. For her truly outstanding work, she

has my profound appreciation—this book would have been impossible to complete without her.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Chicano/Latino Research Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz for their funding of one of my undergraduate research assistantships. The Arts Research Institute in the Division of the Arts and the Graduate Division at the University of California, Santa Cruz also supported the project through individual grants and graduate research assistance. My colleagues in the Latino Literary Cultures Project at UCSC kindly gave their feedback on early drafts of our table of contents.

Numerous arts and cultural institutions kindly granted permission to reprint images, frequently for little or no cost. I would especially like to mention the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Finally, I would like to thank the numerous friends, colleagues, and family members who offered encouragement, sustenance, enlightenment, and love throughout the long preparation of this manuscript, especially Kirsten A. Consuelo González, Warren Sack, and Kinán Leif Felix González-Sack.

Introduction

As an aesthetic credo, Chicano art sought to link lived reality to the imagination; to reflect and document the multiple realities of being Chicano in the urban *barrios* and the rural *colonias* throughout the United States. —TOMÁS YBARRA-FRAUSTO

Chicano art comes from the creation of community. . . . Chicano art represents a particular stance, which always engages with the issues of its time. —JUDITH BACA

Until we live in a society where all people are more or less equal and no labels are necessary, we need them to resist the pressure to assimilate. —GLORIA ANZALDÚA

The “Chicano” was famously defined by Los Angeles newspaper reporter Ruben Salazar as “a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself.”¹ The term has a distinct political inflection that is inseparable from the Chicano civil rights movement—*el movimiento*—of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Once used in a derogatory way to imply a working-class, uneducated Mexican, the words “Chicano” and “Chicana” became a self-defining moniker of pride for those who worked to improve farm labor laws, public schooling, and access to housing for an otherwise subaltern population ranging from recent Mexican immigrants to long-standing landowners

dispossessed by the U.S.-Mexican War of 1848. By rejecting the more assimilationist term “Mexican American” or the Eurocentric term “Hispanic,” Chicanos and Chicanas allied themselves with a specifically activist project that included a celebration of Mexican Indigenous cultural traditions, a nationalist return to territorial claims, a general critique of racism, and a rejection of unfair labor conditions for the working poor. For Chicanas, there was also a strong commitment to women’s rights and a feminist effort to resist the unequal power relations of both Mexican and U.S. patriarchy.

This complex intersection of interests, to which individuals allied themselves to greater or lesser degrees, offered both the condition and the desire for a parallel creative artistic practice. Early Chicano movement documents, such as “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” called on writers, poets, musicians, and artists to “produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary cause.”² From about 1965 to the late 1970s an efflorescence of activist posters, murals, theatrical productions, and literature rejected mainstream distinctions between folk and fine arts, and emphasized instead a set of familiar and popularly accessible themes designed to inspire cultural pride and recruit members to *la causa*. Grassroots exhibition and event centers across the country, such as Movimiento



FIG. INTRO.1. Yreina Cervántez, *Big Baby Balam*, 1991–2017. Watercolor, 24 × 18 in. © Yreina Cervántez. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIG. INTRO.2. Malaquías Montoya, *Undocumented*, 1981. Silkscreen. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIG. INTRO.3. Patssi Valdez, *LA/TJ*, 1987. Screen print. Framed: 29 1/2 × 23 × 1 1/2 in. Sheet: 26 1/4 × 19 15/16 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Art Museum Council Fund (M.2005.67.8) © Patssi Valdez. Photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA.

Artístico del Río Salado in Phoenix, Galería de la Raza in San Francisco, Self Help Graphics & Art in Los Angeles, El Centro de la Cruzada para la Justicia in Denver, El Centro Cultural de Aztlán in San Antonio, Casa Aztlán in Chicago, and scores of other venues offered a platform for the voices and visions of the movement's emerging generation of artistic talent. Few mainstream museums, galleries, or theatrical venues showed the work of Chicano artists, or, for that matter, their Mexican American forebears, due to long-standing racism, political hostility, and general ignorance. Thus, as scholar Philip Brookman observes, "the artists created their own institutions rather than accept exclusion."³

Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a concerted effort was made to articulate how Chicana/o art deviated from the U.S. mainstream, while nevertheless remaining an important "American" art form with its own aesthetic criteria and regional specificities. Catalogs for exhibitions, manifestos, and artists' writings started to appear in print, setting out critical frameworks and relevant vocabulary for understanding and analyzing this quickly expanding visual arts discourse.⁴ Many if not most Chicano and Chicana artists were formally trained, with degrees from respected art schools, yet they purposefully devoted their efforts to a broader activist engagement with the Chicano political movement rather than trying to assimilate to a Euro-American art world. Nevertheless, some of the artists playfully employed the tropes of pop art, conceptual art, minimalism, or installation art, while simultaneously working to invent alternative vocabularies and cultural references.

For this reason, it is important to see the emergence of Chicana/o visual art not only as an example of public activism, but also as an innovative response to aesthetic traditions and contemporary art practices of its time. As with other artists in the 1970s and 1980s, many Chicana/o artists rejected the modernist principles of abstraction that had dominated the fine art of the mid-twentieth century, joining a general movement toward narrative forms, decoration, figura-

tion, and allegory.⁵ Along with other art movements of the earlier twentieth century (dadaism, surrealism, futurism, *arte povera*, etc.), each with its own manifesto, ideological and material proclivities, and national and linguistic inflections, Chicana/o artists purposefully integrated their works with discourses and practices of everyday life. At the same time, it would be a significant mistake to see Chicana/o art as simply an "ethnic" or "identity-based" art movement from the *barrio*; rather, it is an experimental, socially oriented art practice, produced from specific regional and historical standpoints (including the *barrio*) but in direct conversation with other art movements of its era.

Unfortunately, because Chicana and Chicano artists remained institutionally marginalized in the early years, due to differences of class and ethnicity, the iconographic nuances and transcultural references in their works were often ignored or misunderstood by mainstream art critics when, and if, their work was reviewed.⁶ In response to this enforced outsider condition, Chicanos and Chicanas curated their own exhibits, wrote their own catalog essays, and began to attract a devoted following. Eventually, sympathetic scholars and critics outside the community also started to take an interest in the work, and began to enthusiastically develop an analysis of its multivalent forms.⁷

Initially, the stakes were high for defining the contours and parameters of Chicana/o art discourse, precisely because there is an inherent difficulty in writing about art that adheres to a social movement or that has activist goals. Formal qualities of the artworks, their relation to historical precedents, and aesthetic questions of style were not the only considerations for critics and scholars; a certain political vision and social engagement were also assessed and articulated. Some conservative critics and scholars read activist art as inevitably inferior to other visual art produced without an overt political message. Their argument that it may be less beautiful, less formally developed, or "contaminated" by a message entirely misses the point. This perspective relies

on a misguided idea that art can be “neutral” or that it can exist in the world free of the economic, social, and political conditions of its making, exhibition, and circulation. All art is political to the degree that it joins in social systems of representation that are tied to power; all art delivers a message, even if its message is not about “politics” per se. Moreover, this perspective risks overlooking the incredible visual richness, layered complexity, ironic sophistication, and remarkable skill evident in numerous activist artworks. In effectively understanding the contribution of Chicana/o artists, both aesthetics and political tactics became important criteria for analysis.

Writing about Chicana/o art, scholars and critics started to develop a vocabulary linking formal and aesthetic criteria to broader conceptual and activist goals of the movement. Concepts such as “cultural reclamation” identified a turn to Spanish-language references, Mexican art history, folk life, and popular imagery; the recycling and investment in traditional religious icons, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe; as well as references to Aztec or Mayan sources. The cultural blending but also duality of Mexican and U.S. symbols, the coupling of two elements to create a third meaning, were celebrated in concepts such as *mestizaje* or *difrasismo*.⁸ Similarly, a transborder consciousness, a neither-here-nor-there feeling of the hyphen in “Mexican-American,” a gender ambiguity in queer communities, were likened to the Indigenous Nahuatl concept of *nepantla*.⁹ The turn to vernacular traditions of fabrication, to graffiti art, or to working-class strategies of making do with what is at hand were valorized and celebrated as a *rasquachismo*, or underdog aesthetic.¹⁰ Objects and artifacts of everyday life, domestic spaces, home altars and yard shrines, and the fences and porches of the barrio were employed as the medium of a larger “social sculpture” in which community participants were also active components of the final artwork, directed toward social change.¹¹ In short, for Chicana/o art to be properly understood, a new linguistic and conceptual discourse was necessary. For outsiders, without Spanish or Nahuatl language profi-

ciency, this eclectic, multilingual mix of references would at first appear purposefully alien and potentially arcane. In some ways, this was the intended effect, insofar as it constituted a self-conscious effort, to create a counterdiscourse or intellectual resistance to the English-dominant mainstream or, particularly with reference to Indigenous terms, a European history of colonization. At the same time, this borrowed and invented vocabulary held the excitement and promise of new ways of thinking about the world, and about art.

Although there were a number of group and solo exhibitions of Chicana/o art throughout the 1980s,¹² the watershed exhibition *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985* (CARA) (1990) brought many previously marginalized artists into the U.S. spotlight. The exhibit traveled from Los Angeles to San Francisco, Fresno, Denver, Albuquerque, Tucson, El Paso, San Antonio, and Washington, D.C., thus covering a broad territory in the Southwest and the nation’s capital. A commitment to the original Chicano political movement was evident in the works selected, and the collaborative labor of the organizers revealed an inclusive approach. In her book *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master’s House* (1998), Alicia Gaspar de Alba addressed the degree to which the CARA exhibition posed an institutional and psychological challenge to mainstream museum discourses and simultaneously produced polarized responses from the press, from high praise to outright condemnation.¹³ Chicana/o and Latino/a audience responses were generally positive, but not without some ambivalence about terminology and inclusivity. Both the CARA exhibition and Gaspar de Alba’s book revealed that the idea of “Chicana/o art” would continue to be debated and contested, its meaning inevitably changing across geographical regions and generations, each with their own political allegiances and stories to tell.

In the mid-1990s, artists’ writings, exhibition catalogs, and scholarly publications continued to develop an increasingly intertextual reading of Chicana/o art, while also changing

the terms of debate. For example, *The Chicano Codices: Encountering Art of the Americas* (1992), *From the West: Chicano Narrative Photography* (1996), and *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr.* (1998) articulated formal and historical relationships between Chicano art and broader contemporary art practices by emphasizing intersections with, as well as deviations from, dominant cultural forms. A second generation of scholars and writers started citing first-generation texts, and began incorporating interpretations that moved beyond the frame of movement politics, much to the dismay of some practitioners and activists whose anti-institutional stance chafed at what seemed like commercial co-optation. This productive tension continues to influence the now burgeoning field of Chicana/o art studies.

Since 2000 there has been rapid growth in both traveling exhibitions and catalogs in the field, including, for example, *The Road to Aztlán: Art from a Mythic Homeland* (2001); *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* (2001); *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* (2002); *Contemporary Chicano and Chicana Art: Artists, Works, Culture, and Education* (2002); *Chicano Art for Our Millennium: Collected Works from the Arizona State University Community* (2004); *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (2008); and *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987* (2011). Solo exhibitions of Chicana/o artists have steadily increased, as has scholarly attention in the form of targeted projects such as the important feminist studies *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* by Laura E. Pérez (2007) and *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma Lopez's Irreverent Apparition* (2011) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. Carlos Francisco Jackson's excellent *Chicana and Chicano Art: Protest Arte* (2009) was the first single-authored book to offer a general overview of the artistic movement with a significant emphasis on public art forms such as posters and murals, as well as a close attention to art collectives, community art centers, and workshops. The more recent *Born of Resistance: Cara a Cara Encounters*

with Chicana/o Visual Culture (2015) by Scott L. Baugh and Victor A. Sorell takes a more intimate, focused approach by selecting nine key artworks around which groups of short essays are clustered.

Our anthology is designed to complement these previous publications by compiling critical and historical writings about Chicana/o art spanning several decades.

We have not tried to produce a comprehensive history of Chicana/o art, nor a global representation of all the important movements, themes, groups, or works—ours is not an encyclopedic project, nor a comprehensive bibliography. Its goal is rather to offer a provocative sampling of essays and ideas that will hopefully spark discussion and debate. Anthologies are always imperfect and incomplete; like any compendia they are marked by their omissions and defined by their limits. When I approached my coeditors about the need for a teachable collection of texts that could offer a general introduction to the non-specialist, we decided to focus on key themes and historical benchmarks that have shaped the emergence and current status of Chicana/o art. Many of the artists, critics, and scholars who played a significant role in the initial discourse about Chicana/o art are now respected elders, and some have passed on. It is partially out of a desire to map this legacy of thought, but also to tie it to an active and growing body of scholarship, that this project came about.

All of the editors participated in the research and selection of articles and images for each section of the book, and we are collectively responsible for the final result. We worked in teams of two on each section, but approval of the overall document and final form was a collective effort of all the editors. Individual editors wrote short introductions for sections they helped to prepare in order to offer readers a conceptual map and intellectual rationale for the selection and ordering of the essays. Although there are a few minor exceptions, the emphasis throughout the anthology is on the visual arts, rather than the performing arts. This was a question of editorial areas of

expertise, as well as the sense that we could not do justice to the broad domain of theater, film, and performance art while also providing an in-depth analysis of the visual arts. We hope that other scholars will pursue similar efforts in these fields.

One goal of the anthology is to demonstrate how vocabularies and conceptual frameworks for understanding Chicana/o art develop and change over time; it also tries to bring particular thematic concerns to the fore for closer scrutiny. Articles were selected because of their resonance, or sometimes their conflict, with others in the same thematic section. Each section can therefore be read as an integrated set of arguments and observations from diverse perspectives that coalesce around a given issue or topic. Occasionally, repetitions within sections or echoes across sections occur, though we have worked to reduce redundancy wherever possible. For this reason, several of the articles in the anthology are presented in excerpted form. As editors, we recognize the importance of the conceptual integrity of authors' written texts, and therefore requested excerpts only when clear overlaps appeared, or when a given section began to exceed projected page limits. We are extremely grateful to the authors for allowing us to publish these shorter versions, and encourage our readers to explore the full-length essays when they can. We are also grateful to the artists and their generous willingness to have their works reproduced in the volume. To make the book affordable for classroom use, images are printed in black-and-white. However, we strongly encourage students and teachers to look for the artworks online, and explore online databases to enrich their visual experience of this art.¹⁴

Inevitably, we were unable to publish as many articles as we would have liked. Faced with this dilemma, we developed a "further reading" list at the end of each section that we hope will inspire future scholars and students to delve more deeply. Again, this is by no means comprehensive, but these were articles we felt were particularly pertinent to the themes of each section, or could be productively paired with those we have

included. It is important to mention that in the research process for this volume we encountered an interesting editorial hurdle: a significant majority of critical and scholarly publications on Chicana/o art focus on works produced in California. From a historical standpoint this is probably predictable, since many Mexican Americans in the Southwest, including those sympathetic to the Chicano movement, lived in communities where the word "Chicano" was not commonly used; in New Mexico and Arizona, for example, the term "Hispanic," "Hispano," or even "Spanish" is still in frequent use to describe people of Mexican and Spanish descent. Even in California, not all art made by Mexican Americans can be called "Chicana/o" art—only that which is made by self-identified Chicana/os and in support of the larger Chicana/o political project. Determined not to limit the scope of the book to the California region, however, we made a special effort to broaden the geographical frame. Several scholars, including Holly Barnet-Sánchez, Andrew Connors, and Victor Sorell, were solicited for their expertise and suggestions on authors and artists working in other regions across the United States. Each section represents, therefore, at least two or more geographical regions. We were also committed to gender diversity, queer and feminist voices, and intergenerational juxtaposition between older and younger writers so that the harmony and dissonance of different positions could be heard.

Given this commitment, why use the terms "Chicana" and "Chicano" to describe the work in this book, rather than the recently coined and importantly gender-neutral term "Chicanx"? After a thorough discussion, the editors concluded that we fully support the term "Chicanx," along with its social and semiotic goals, but find it more consistent and historically accurate to use "Chicano" and "Chicana" in the title of this book and throughout the anthology out of respect for the authors and artists who deploy these terms. Moreover, the definitions, legacy, and usage of "Chicana" and "Chicano" remain important to the period in which they were created. As historians we agreed this

was the most appropriate choice for this particular publication. However, we enthusiastically support the use of “Chicanx” going forward.

A question that frequently arises concerning Chicana/o art is whether or how it is different from “Latino” art. One approach to this question is to address differences between “Chicanos” and “Latinos”: the former are U.S. citizens of Mexican descent identified with the Chicano movement, and the latter are U.S. citizens of Latin American descent. “Latino” is an exceptionally broad term that encompasses a widely diverse population of people who live and are born in the U.S. but whose families come from countries as far apart as Chile and Guatemala, or Brazil and the Dominican Republic. As Mexico is part of Latin America, Mexican Americans and Chicanos are also technically “Latinos.” The comparison becomes more complex in the arts, where the two terms are frequently used together. As early as 2005, Chon Noriega called for a need to “safeguard the history of Chicano and Latino participation in the arts.” He argues, “This history is fragile, ephemeral and—in terms of the archive—largely neglected, making the Latino arts something on the order of what [Harry] Gamboa calls the ‘orphans of modernism.’”¹⁵ For Noriega, the term “Latino” is used to encompass both Chicano and Latino art practices, and to signal the importance of their mutual relation but nonequivalence. Put simply, Chicana/o art can be understood as one culturally and ideologically specific kind of Latino art. Over the past decade the broader term “Latino art” has become more commonly used by scholars and museums, resulting in catalogs and exhibitions that include works by Chicana/o artists, such as *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino Art?* (2012), and *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art* (2013).

Chicana/o artists and scholars are thus faced with a subtle paradox. On the one hand, we want to articulate the characteristic and distinctive qualities that define Chicana/o aesthetic and political paradigms, to demonstrate their uniqueness and difference from other Latino arts; on the other hand, we want to acknowledge that

Chicana/o art emphasizes the condition of cultural mixing and celebrates a mestizo hybridity wherein all forms of ethnic and national purity are suspect. This delicate categorical dance reveals what it means to emerge from the cultural margins in search of self-definition: one must have an honest sense of the past, yet be open to transformation and change. Our goal is to show the complexity and intersectionality of this practice.

For this reason, part I of the book, “Definitions and Debates,” introduces the idea of Chicana/o art practice and its shifting conceptual frameworks. Early manifestos use persuasive language to situate Chicana/o art squarely in the tradition of radical art groups across the twentieth century and up to our present moment. They call for an art that is “off-the-wall,” an art that is a provocation, a “visual abrasion,” an “iconic friction”; they demand an art with a barrio aesthetic, with a “psychic harmony” and a “new world-view”; they want art to exist in the field, in the factory, and in the home. It is an art that cries out from the “stomach of the monster,” that is a free art, without restrictions or limitations. What then becomes of this art if it is collected, reproduced, or shown in a museum? Is it dead? Has it already lost the fight? What becomes of radical acts when they are anthologized and historicized? These critical questions emerge through an important exchange between artists and scholars, and serve as a fulcrum for exploring the way the definition of Chicana/o art has shifted and changed over time. What might a “new” Chicano movement look like? What might it mean to be “post-Chicano” or “post-movimiento”? Is it possible to ask these questions without losing the important political commitments of the past?

Part II, “Cultural Reclamation and Vernacular Traditions,” examines the efforts of Chicana/o artists, particularly the first generation, to recuperate Mexican and Indigenous aesthetic forms and conceptual vocabularies that were effectively repressed or nonexistent in a Eurocentric, American art context and pedagogical curriculum. Aztec and Mayan iconic forms, particularly

ancient deities that had been carved in stone, or images found in fifteenth-century codices, are also reproduced in murals and paintings, on posters and clothing. Reaching into the ancient past to light one's way out of a present impasse might appear to outsiders as superficial anachronism, but for many Indigenous-identified peoples, temporality is not linear—the past and the present exist together. The maintenance of a connection to the symbols of the past is a sign of continuity in the face of what has been a brutal and long-term colonial rupture (see Yreina Cervántez, *Big Baby Balam*; fig. Intro. 1). By recuperating what was already presented by a dominant culture as “myth,” Chicana/o artists seek to change the terms of analysis and the terms of critique as much as the aesthetic frameworks of contemporary mainstream art. Folk art, skilled craftsmanship, regional traditions, and local neighborhood rituals are also valued for the role they play in shaping the aesthetics of everyday life. Common practices such as graffiti become celebrated forms; photographers document working-class and Indigenous communities and histories; familiar icons are reworked with new materials. Feminist interventions result in novel revisions, and popular culture becomes a source for witty rebuttals. Throughout this section, articles investigate how Chicana/o artists valorize personal narrative, economic reality, colonial history, and cultural heritage through a set of vernacular strategies and tactics.

Part III, “Bodily Aesthetics and Iconologies,” tracks the Chicano and Chicana body as a recurring trope in the exploration of gender, religion, sexuality, and the prison industrial complex. How do corporality and embodiment articulate particular conditions of Chicano masculinity? In what ways have Chicanas engaged a feminist remapping of the woman as sacred and secular figure? How does racism factor into the positioning and repression of those with “brown” skin? What are the ways queer politics enter the picture to complicate and transform it? Authors in this section write about how bodies are kept invisible or are forced to signify, the ways they

are deified and demonized, categorized and codified. Figuration is the central concern, especially in relation to a long history of iconic forms that speak to the present. Surface and texture become epidermal layers to excavate: the tattooed skin of a prisoner troubles the semiotics of innocence; garments and textiles enable or hinder the women who wear them; queer subjects are named and unnamed through contested visual lexicons. Through centuries of colonization, the mestizo body that has hovered at the margins of power will not disappear, and will no longer submit to domination, to abjection. How will it shed this snakeskin that it has outgrown, while keeping an ancient and precious vitality? The essays in this section pursue these questions through studies of stereotypes, sacred icons, and sexual subversions.

Part IV, “Public Practices and Enacted Landscapes,” explores key works that engage the logic and materiality of urban spaces, social landscapes, and spatial experimentation through public art, street performance, and transitory monuments. Who explores the transcultural spaces of Los Angeles and Tijuana? (See Patssi Valdez, *LA/TJ*; fig. Intro. 3.) Who gets to walk there freely? How does a neighborhood transform into a kind of “social sculpture”? Recognizing their condition as not only culturally but also geographically marginalized, many Chicana/o artists have intervened in public space as a way of unraveling the persistent territoriality of hegemonic systems and architectural normalcy. In places like Southern California, where redlining to restrict ethnic groups to specific neighborhoods was a common practice well into the 1960s, the involuntary ghettoization of Mexican Americans is part of a “dark,” largely unknown history in that sunshiny place. Making home in a hostile environment is an act of bravery, not merely an act of survival; it is a creative act requiring invention, collaboration, and maintenance. Sanctioned and unsanctioned street murals interrupt the rectilinear status quo of buildings and windows, concrete and steel; they “occupy” a meaningful visual domain by insisting on a more colorful, complex, and politically

inflected environment. Temporary “instant” murals, costumed promenades, billboards, and countermonuments erupt into the spatial imaginary to render it unfamiliar, uncanny. A double deterritorialization and reterritorialization on the part of the artists operates in parallel to a generalized condition of dispossession.

Part V, “Border Visions and Immigration Politics,” is devoted to artworks that unearth the metaphors and realities of U.S.-Mexico border life. Articles in this section address the double consciousness of cross-border identifications and provide an unflinching view of the daily tragedies that accompany the unequal distribution of wealth between the two nations, so poignantly portrayed in Malaquías Montoya’s *Undocumented* (fig. Intro. 2). Because migration defines the family histories of so many Chicana/o artists working in the United States today, the border as site of memory, fear, pain, and nostalgia sets up a condition of ambivalence toward the idea of national belonging. What are the “borderlands”? How have visual artists worked through the bifurcation of forms that bleed across the frontier? Where is “home”? Two of the authors in this section cite Gloria Anzaldúa’s famous line “This is my home / this thin edge / of barbwire.” In order to decenter a familiar terrain, the articles in this section also reach beyond the Southwest to include Michigan and North Carolina, where the “border” extends to other latitudes, including those not registered on a map. Lines demarcating borders are artificial but not arbitrary; they divide the land and its resources, they define a nation and its people, they are invented by politicians, but then made manifest by police. *La migra, el norte, la frontera*—these are the hard edges where “xenophobias converge.” Living in the balance of two paradigms, two nations, two languages, requires nimble resourcefulness and the deployment of multiple sign systems. Humor laced with dynamite infects a “border consciousness,” or inflects a turn of phrase. The essays and poetry in this section move across linguistic, geographical, and psychological territory to map creative negotiations of this simultaneously fertile and oppressive liminal zone.

Part VI, “Institutional Frameworks and Critical Reception,” surveys the public response to Chicano art, its acceptance and rejection by mainstream museum institutions, and the language of criticism that circulates and continues to define its contours. Although most Chicana/o art was not originally intended for museums, as with many other radical art movements it seems inevitable that the work eventually arrives there. In our current moment, art institutions become platforms for public or radical speech, in part because there are so few places to speak politically today. One complication that arises when artwork changes context—from the barrio to the Smithsonian—is that it can become illegible to its audience. Its subtleties and insider jokes, its particular aesthetic proclivities, its intertextual references, remain opaque to mainstream art audiences. This can produce alienation in art critics, but it can also produce a productive discourse or debate about questions of quality, taste, and cultural hierarchy. How can one judge a work of art by criteria to which it never aspired? How soon will the inherent racisms of U.S. arts institutions make way for a broader picture of American art? What role can museums play, and when must this effort take place elsewhere? Essays in this section closely examine museum practices, critical debates, and controversies associated with exhibitions featuring Chicana/o art.

We hope this anthology will draw the interest of students of Chicana/o history and culture, as well as art theorists and visual studies scholars who practice in a field that has, until relatively recently, generally ignored the contribution of Chicana/o art to American and contemporary art history. Fortunately, this is starting to change. Small mentions of the movement and its artists have appeared, for example, in Francis Pohl’s *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (2008), and one Chicana/o art collective is mentioned in Nato Thompson’s *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011* (2012), but these are rare exceptions. As the immigrant populations from Mexico and Latin America grow throughout the U.S., and as artists bring

their regional and synthetic artistic practices to the public arena, there will be a higher demand for knowledgeable scholarship on Latina/o and Chicana/o art practice and traditions.

What does the future hold for globally mobile citizens, refugees, Indigenous populations, and noncitizens? Are the terms “Chicano” and “Chicana” irretrievably historical and dated, or will they be taken up again, in a new way? How will marginalized populations respond creatively to ongoing, systematic economic and racial injustice? These are important concerns of our present time; they have changed little in the past fifty years since the Chicano movement was launched. Developing a response to these questions nevertheless remains one of the goals toward which Chicana/o art is directed, and to which this collection hopes to contribute.

Notes

1. Ruben Salazar, “Who Is a Chicano? And What Is It the Chicanos Want?,” *Los Angeles Times* (1886–Current File), February 6, 1970, ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881–1986), B7.
2. Rodolfo Gonzales and Alberto Urista [Alaurista], “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” *El Grito del Norte* (Albuquerque, New Mexico) 2, no. 9 (July 6, 1969): 5.
3. Philip Brookman, “Looking for Alternatives: Notes on Chicano Art, 1960–1990,” *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, ed. R. Griswold del Castillo, T. McKenna, and Y. Yarbrow-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, 1991), 182.
4. See, for example, Raymond Barrio, *Mexico’s Art and Chicano Artists* (Guerneville, CA: Ventura Press, 1978); Max Benavidez and Kate Vozoff, “The Wall: Image and Boundary, Chicano Art in the 1970s,” in *Mexican Art of the 1970s: Images of Displacement* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1984), 45–54; *Chicano and Latino Artists in the Pacific Northwest*, exhibition catalog (Olympia, WA: Evergreen State College, 1984); *Dalé Gas/Give It Gas*, exhibition catalog (Houston, TX: Contemporary Art Museum, 1977); Manuel Martinez, “The Art of the Chicano Movement and the Movement of Chicano Art,” in *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature* (New York: Vintage Books,

1972), 349–53; and Sybil Venegas, “Conditions for Producing Chicana Art,” *Chismearte* 1, no. 4 (1977–78): 2–4.

5. See Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master’s House* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 9.

6. See a discussion of this ongoing issue in part VI of this volume, “Institutional Frameworks and Critical Reception.”

7. See, for example, the work of Shifra Goldman, Philip Brookman, and Eva Cockcroft and James Cockcroft.

8. See analysis of *difrasismo* in Alfred Arteaga, *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6; and in Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Alterities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.

9. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).

10. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility,” in *Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo* (Phoenix, AZ: MARS Artspace, 1989), 5–8.

11. In the 1970s, the German artist Joseph Beuys defined “social sculpture” as an art practice that takes place in the social realm, requires social engagement, and leads to a transformation of society through the release of popular creativity. See Alan W. Moore, “A Brief Genealogy of Social Sculpture,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, Web Only Articles, accessed July 17, 2018, <http://www.joaap.org/webonly/moore.htm>.

12. See, for example, *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970* (1988); *Chicano Expressions* (1986); *Lo del corazón: Heartbeat of a Culture* (1986); and *Sin Fronteras, Crossing Borders: Mexican American Artists in the Southwest* (1989).

13. Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “Between the Ghetto and the Melting Pot: Popular Hegemony,” in *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master’s House* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

14. See, for example, “Documents of Twentieth Century Latin American and Latino Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston,” ICAA Digital Archive, accessed July 17, 2018, <http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/>; and ImagineArte Chicano/Latino database, University of California, Santa Barbara, accessed July 17, 2018, <http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/calisphere.html>.

15. Chon Noriega, “Preservation Matters,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 30, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 9.