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# THE ROAD TO AZTLAN

## ART FROM A MYTHIC HOMELAND

VIRGINIA M. FIELDS
VICTOR ZAMUDIO-TAYLOR

*With contributions by*

Michele Beltrán
J. J. Brody
Enrique Chagoya
Constance Cortez
James D. Farmer
Acelia García de Weigand
Ramón A. Gutiérrez
Stephen H. Lekson
Miguel León-Portilla
Danna A. Levin Rojo
Elin Luque
Amalia Mesa-Bains
John M. D. Pohl
Carroll L. Riley
Polly Schaafsma
Rina Swentzell
Karl Taube
Victoria D. Vargas
Laurie D. Webster
Phil C. Weigand
Anne I. Woosley

# Inventing Tradition, Negotiating Modernism

## Chicano/a Art and the Pre-Columbian Past

Victor Zamudio-Taylor



A defining feature of Chicano/a art from its very origins has been its engagement with cultural identity. Linked in its constitutive phase with the Chicano movement, or Movimiento, of the 1960s and 1970s, Chicano/a art articulated and mirrored a broad range of themes that had social and political significance, particularly with respect to cultural affirmation. At the core of these meta-artistic concerns was the representation of alternate narratives that had as their goal the development of a historical consciousness as well as a sense of place and belonging within Mexican, U.S., and indigenous histories.

The invention of a tradition centered on the myth of Aztlan provided the Chicano movement with a historical and geographic grounding that accounted for notions of resistance to the dominant culture as well as the engagement in practices highlighting cultural difference. With respect to art, intrinsic to upholding Aztlan—as myth and as the nucleus and matrix of an alternate history—was the invention of a tradition rooted in the pre-Columbian past and drawing on its material, intellectual, and spiritual cultures. To varying degrees, the pre-Columbian past informed a broad range of artistic expressions that adapted and translated it to suit contemporary political issues as well as the fashioning of diverse cultural identities that characterize the heterogeneity of the Chicano/a experience.

The ideology of *mexicanidad*, or Mexican renaissance, which was informed by the project of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), served as the inspiration and model for the employment and articulation of the pre-Columbian past in Chicano/a art. Mexican nationalism exalted the

past in order to highlight the role that indigenous cultures had played in the making of Mexico as a nation. As scholar Enrique Florescano has underlined, successive generations "have reconstructed, mythicized, hidden, deformed, invented, ideologized, or explained that past."[1] In the aftermath of the revolution, the pre-Columbian past was key to the deployment of the mestizo ideology as a constitutive element of Mexican cultural identity. In a parallel manner, Chicanismo, the ideology of the Chicano movement, also deployed the pre-Columbian past to reconfigure a sense of cultural identity and place.

*Mexicanidad*, from the outset, was a problematic model for Chicanismo insofar as it was linked to state politics and, by extension, to the mainstream and establishment in Mexico. In its initial phase, the challenge for Chicano/a art was to adapt this model to a qualitatively different context with very different goals. The most illustrative example is a comparison between Mexican and Chicano/a muralism. Whereas the Mexican muralists painted images of the Mexican past primarily on the walls of government buildings, the Chicano/a artists represented alternate histories on the walls of the barrio and in public and contested spaces.

The link of Chicano/a art to a real and invented pre-Columbian past was paradoxical. This art had sources in Chicano/a vernacular culture, as well as established artistic movements and languages such as the Mexican School, Social Realism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Pop art, and Conceptualism. Nevertheless, the use of pre-Columbian iconography, forms, and themes was perceived by the Mexican and U.S. artistic mainstream, as well as the cutting edge, as conservative, if not anachronistic. While artists such as Rupert García and Luis Jiménez deployed pre-Columbian motifs and themes in a hybrid manner, combining them with other formal vocabularies, many Chicano/a artists—particularly those from the first generation who did not have a well-rounded academic training—engaged tradition in a more romantic fashion. This romanticism, coupled with the first Chicano/a generation's lack of formal rigor, contributed to the negative reception of Chicano/a art. At the crux of this reception was a prejudice toward art grounded in meta-artistic endeavors, particularly art that embodied an ideological or political agenda.

Yet in many respects the real and invented cultural identity of Chicano/a art anticipated formal and thematic concerns that were later articulated as postmodern. These formal concerns include but are not limited to strategies involving *bricolage* or pastiche, such as altar-based installations and ready-mades. Thematically as well as theoretically, a defining aspect of Chicano/a art has been its blurring and defiance of hierarchical boundaries with respect to "popular," "vernacular," and "high" cultures.

Its combination of both traditional and postmodern elements may very well account for the conflictive and negative reception Chicano/a art has received. While its sociocultural value has been accepted, its artistic merit continues to be an issue in terms of exhibition and collecting practices and in the field of art history. At the core of its reception is the challenge that it poses for the body of Mexican, American, and Latin American art history insofar as its very existence and outlook require a critical revision of the canon and the body of knowledge that form the foundation of these histories.[2]

In more general and contemporary terms, the relationship between Chicano/a art and pre-Columbian culture needs to be considered within the framework of the larger issues surrounding modern art and non-Western cultures. Like Chicano/a art, a field within its corpus, modern art sought answers to its meta-artistic concerns, as well as its desire for new forms, in non-

Western artistic expressions and cultural practices. This contextualization of Chicano/a art within the tradition of modern art creates a place and genealogy for it in qualitatively different terms, opening the way for the fashioning of new art histories.

### "Primitivism" and Modern Art

Primitivism, and its complex relationship to the history of modern art, has been an area of research, criticism, and curatorial endeavor for the last two decades.[3] The renewed interest in the subject was triggered by the controversial landmark exhibition *"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York in 1984.[4] Organized by William Rubin, the exhibition highlighted the formal sources of modern art in non-Western tribal cultures, focusing, for the most part, on the School of Paris and German Expressionism. Rubin and most of the catalogue essayists do not deal with important meta-artistic issues that drove modern artists to look to historically colonized cultures in their quest for themes, sources, and formal solutions.

In the case of both "tribal" and "modern" works, scant attention was dedicated to the social and cultural frameworks from which the artistic expressions emerged. African masks and Cubist paintings were displayed as autonomous objects equally charged with a fetishistic power. Key to the exhibition narrative was a curatorial precept linked to desire and the fetish as well as to the production of unconscious affinities between the "tribal" and the "modern," as Hal Foster has underlined.[5] Namely, Rubin argued that modern artists, without knowledge of or direct reference to the "primitive" object, arrived at formal solutions and representations similar to those of their tribal counterparts. He refers to Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), whose *négriste* squatter figure purportedly had its source in an African Pende sickness mask. According to Rubin, this is not the case since the ritual object, which is in the collection of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren, Belgium, was carved after the execution of the painting.[6]

Absent from the exhibition was a discussion of pre-Columbian cultures—their place in the construction of primitivism and their impact on modern art. Articulating the viewpoint that pre-Columbian cultures were more advanced than tribal societies in the Eurocentric anthropological developmental scheme but less than a high civilization, Rubin justified their exclusion on the basis of their character as "courts." While Oceanic and African cultures were considered relevant to the history of modernism, ancient American cultures were not. In this respect, Rubin continued and fostered the practice in both exhibitions and scholarship of overlooking or minimizing the influence of pre-Columbian cultures on the development of modern art.[7]

### Pre-Columbian Culture and Modern Art

Categorically integral to the fashioning of primitivism, pre-Columbian art has had an important impact on European and Latin American modernists such as Henry Moore, Diego Rivera, and Joaquín Torres-García.[8] The question remains as to why it has so often been displaced, unaccounted for, or forgotten in discursive and exhibition practices. Such a curatorial approach would necessarily entail a revision of ideas regarding the evolution of diverse "modernisms" with different historical specificities and sociocultural frameworks, which would ultimately challenge the privileged centers and canons.

A key example of the erasure of the influence of pre-Columbian art on the development of modernism is the case of Paul Gauguin. The offspring of a French father and a mother who was of French and Peruvian

ancestry, Gauguin was the first modern artist to link formal and broader cultural issues with primitivism; his project also involved taking a stance against what he considered the dehumanizing effects of modernity. While Egyptian, Maori, Balinese, and South Pacific influences on his work have received attention, the significance of pre-Columbian cultures for Gauguin—particularly Incan, Moche, and Chimú—have not. Barbara Braun has argued in her treatment of Gauguin that his Peruvian heritage was a crucial influence on both his personal and his aesthetic development.[9] Pre-Columbian Andean expressions—architecture, textiles, and ceramics—played a central role throughout his artistic trajectory, as evidenced by his long-standing interest in design, pattern, and the use of clay to make an array of vessels and sculpture.

Yet Gauguin, as a Euro-American mestizo, was not exempt from the contradictions of romanticizing non-Western cultures from the standpoint of his privileged metropolitan location. And like the vast majority of pioneering modern artists influenced by non-Western cultures, he viewed them within the narratives and discourses of the World's Fairs that legitimized colonial projects.[10] Gauguin's position, like that of so many other artists regarding primitivism, was never to be resolved. His retreat to the French territories of Martinique, Tahiti, and the Marquesas took advantage of the colonial system, which was the real cause underlying the transformation of the premodern cultures he mythologized. Moreover, as he stated in various letters to fellow artists, Gauguin was most keen in anticipating the growing metropolitan market for paintings that depicted colonial exotica.[11]

Pre-Columbian art as a formal source and style, theme, and conceptual reference for modern and contemporary art has, to greater or lesser degrees, been linked to and framed by discourses and meta-artistic projects involving cultural identity and national narratives. In contrast to the deployment of primitivism as a response to the alienating and dehumanizing aspects of modernity, particularly in German Expressionist art, in modern Mexican art the use of pre-Columbian imagery coexists with the embrace of modernity. In Diego Rivera's fresco cycles at the Detroit Institute of the Arts, the representation of Coatlicue, the foundational Mexica deity, fuses with that of the industrial turbines of the Red River Ford automotive plant.[12] In the case of David Alfaro Siqueiros, it is emblematic that he experimented with industrial paints while rendering indigenous themes.

The first projects to seriously examine pre-Columbian cultures in terms of their significance for modernism were the important series of exhibitions at MOMA from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. MOMA's programming was linked to the Rockefeller-supported program of Pan-Americanism and the official U.S. government embrace of a continental shared historical heritage.[13] Of the exhibitions held at MOMA, several highlighted pre-Columbian objects in archaeological and ethnographic contexts, such as *Indian Art of the United States* (1941) and *Ancient Art of the Andes* (1954). Several important exhibitions, such as the monumental survey *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (1940), had a historical narrative and benefited from the participation of key cultural figures such as Alfonso Caso (for the pre-Hispanic section) and Miguel Covarrubias (for the modern one).[14]

The landmark exhibition, as far as our topic is concerned, was MOMA's *American Sources of Modern Art* (1933). As guest curator Holger Cahill stated in the catalogue, the exhibition's raison d'être was "to show the high quality of ancient American art" and "to indicate that its influence is present in modern art in the work of painters and sculptors, some of whom have been unconscious of its influence, while others have accepted or sought it quite consciously."[15] The exhibition included

FIGURE 257
Diego Rivera (Mexico, 1886–1957)
FLOWER DAY, 1925
Oil on canvas
58 x 47½ in. (147.2 x 120.6 cm)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Fund (25.7.1)



pre-Columbian objects from key private and public U.S. collections as well as painting and sculpture from such "contemporaries" as Jean Charlot, Carlos Mérida, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Max Weber, and William Zorach.

Rivera, like Gauguin, is another important figure whose positioning remains contradictory and problematic. The scholarly record has highlighted Rivera's precocious engagement with pre-Columbian cultures and their monuments, paintings, codices, and other objects.[16] Yet his stay in Europe from 1910 to 1921, with the exception of its impact on his relationship to Cubism,[17] has received scant attention with respect to the modernist vogue for primitivism. Most certainly, Rivera viewed non-Western objects during his Parisian and Italian *séjours*. The question remains, however, as to how viewing objects and painted manuscripts or codices in metropolitan frameworks informed his aesthetic project regarding the pre-Columbian past, particularly with respect to Mesoamerican cultures.[18] What is clear in his mammoth artistic production and in the scholarly record is his idealization of the Mesoamerican past and its influence on his iconographic and formal approach.

## PRE-COLUMBIAN HISTORY, *MEXICANIDAD*, AND ART

*Mexicanidad* is a complex and contradictory set of discourses and representations that formed the ideological and cultural focus of Mexican nationalism after the revolution. Art, from the outset, played a crucial role in the fashioning, nurturing, and ongoing trajectory of the national cultural project. Rivera's idealization of the pre-Columbian past had a political and social function that was absent from the primitivist endeavors of his European counterparts. Fashioning a mythic past to promote the ideas, values, and programs of the Mexican Revolution, he reaffirmed a history that had been devalued in colonial and postcolonial Mexico. Bringing together Italian Renaissance precepts and formal devices such as the predella; Cubist use of space; and Mesoamerican iconography, styles, and sources, Rivera conceived his murals as modern-day visual histories for the masses. This approach imbued his mural production, as well as his works on canvas and paper, with an avant-garde character. In one of the first paintings in his ongoing series depicting calla lily vendors, *Flower Day* (1925; fig. 257), the composition and stylistic rendering of the figures are inspired by pre-Columbian sculpture, yet the theme emphasizes the vitality of indigenous culture in contemporary Mexico.

Well informed by his dialogues with scholars in the field, Rivera was a prime supporter of the rewriting of Mexican history. Like the Russian Revolution—which linked the arts, culture, and the new society—the Mexican Revolution triggered a parallel process, with a similar project linking art to education and the vision of the new society. The call and imperative for a revalorization of tradition and the past was stated by Siqueiros in his 1921 Barcelona manifesto: "Let us observe the work of our ancient people, the Indian painters and sculptors (Mayas, Aztecs, Incas, etc.). Our nearness to them will enable us to assimilate the constructive vigor of their work. We can possess their synthetic energy without falling into lamentable archeological reconstruction."[19] The leftist Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors—which included among its members Charlot, Mérida, and Rivera—played a significant role in carrying out Siqueiros's dictum through diverse styles and conceptual underpinnings. Mexico, like the Soviet Union, became an avant-garde magnet for artists, cultural producers, political figures, and bohemians, attracting Sergei Eisenstein, Tina Modotti, John Reed, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston, among others.

## *Mexicanidad*, Aztlan, and Chicanismo

Inspired by *mexicanidad* and the work of such key figures as Rivera and Siqueiros, Chicano/a artists accorded a central role to the pre-Columbian past, linking it to a cultural and political discourse and the fashioning of a national identity. While Siqueiros's influence was formal and ideological, Rivera's was key regarding the use of the pre-Columbian past as a source for iconography, themes, and narratives. Articulated as a vital component of the Chicano/a project of cultural reclamation and affirmation,[20] artistic expressions from the 1960s to the mid-1980s served as a vehicle for Chicanismo, the ideology of Chicano/a nationalism. Privileging neo-indigenism, the exaltation of Mexico's Indian past, Chicanismo articulated and upheld a history that Anglo-American culture underestimated or denied. Chicanismo was a cultural marker, an assertion of difference and of the right of self-determination, and a historical claim to the Southwest.



Like the Mexica, who created their own sense of historicity and invented traditions to justify their cultural and political claim to Mesoamerica, Chicanismo also reinvented history by inscribing the present into a cultural corpus of long-standing legends, traditions, and cosmologies derived from pre-Columbian civilizations. Chicanismo upheld Aztlan as the mythic homeland or place of origin.[21] As symbol, metaphor, and allegory for the Movimiento, it represented the vitality of the past, its relevance to contemporary artistic, cultural, and political projects. Aztlan brought together the remote past and a precise present, linking Chicano/a struggles to liberation struggles, particularly those of Native Americans.[22]

While many activists who upheld neo-indigenism did so romantically, many Movimiento participants made an effort to study pre-Columbian cultures, using historical sources as well as important publications by such scholars as Angel Garibay and Miguel León-Portilla. In the late 1960s painter Carlos Almaraz studied key texts on pre-Columbian art and literature as well as Mexica philosophy,[23] and artist Gilbert "Magu" Luján incorporated the study of pre-Columbian cultures into his Chicano studies courses.[24] This research led activists to read key texts of *mexicanidad* and become acquainted with philosophical projects grounded in the interpretation of the past in light of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath.

Central to the intellectual and cultural project of Chicanismo was José Vasconcelos's concept of the "cosmic race,"[25] the mestizo race that incarnated nationalist concepts linking progress with Mexico's specific history and not with its denial. This approach stood in contrast to Eurocentric projects that saw the Indian past and *mestizaje* as inimical to modernity. Chicanos fashioned themselves as an integral part of Vasconcelos's cosmic race, the bronze race, the agency of cultural nationalism, as expressed in "El plan espiritual de Aztlán," adopted in 1969 at the massively attended National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, held in Denver. "We are a Nation, we are a union of free *pueblos*, we are Aztlan. We are a Bronze People with a Bronze Culture," declared the manifesto.[26]

"El plan espiritual de Aztlán," like various other forums—"plans," journals, conferences—understood art as a vehicle of the movement and of "revolutionary culture." Chicano/a art engaged an array of issues and forms articulating the geocultural heterogeneity of the Chicano/a experience across time and in different regions of the United States.[27] Shifra Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto have divided Chicano/a art into two distinct periods: 1968–75 and 1975 and beyond.[28] The foundational first period, which spanned only seven years, was dynamically interrelated with the movement for civil and labor rights and social justice and with opposition to the Vietnam War (see fig. 258).

Unique to artistic practices linked directly to the Movimiento is the formation of artistic collectives, or *grupos*, that articulated Chicanismo. The most relevant California *grupos* are Los Four—Almaraz, Luján, Roberto de la Rocha, and Frank Romero—in Los Angeles, who combined pre-Columbian iconography with barrio and vernacular expressions[29]; the Toltecas en Aztlan in San Diego; and the Royal Chicano Air Force in Sacramento, who privileged neo-indigenism. Ybarra-Frausto has underlined that the "linkage of indigenous thought to contemporary life gave the Chicano Movement mythic and psychic energies that could be directed towards its political and economic goals."[30]

Parallel to Rivera and Siqueiros, who played an essential role in the *mexicanidad* project, Chicano/a artists and collectives recast, invented, and negotiated a tradition and a history centered on pre-Columbian cultures. Alongside the mythologizing of history, Chicano/a artists also romanticized the Mexican School and established a broad pantheon of Mexican cultural and artistic figures linked to popular culture and spirituality and to the Mexican Revolution. The Virgin of Guadalupe, the Casasola brothers, the Flores Magón brothers, Miguel Hidalgo, José Guadalupe Posada, Francisco Villa, and Emiliano Zapata (see fig. 262) figure prominently in works in various media: mural programs, broadsides, posters, and paintings.

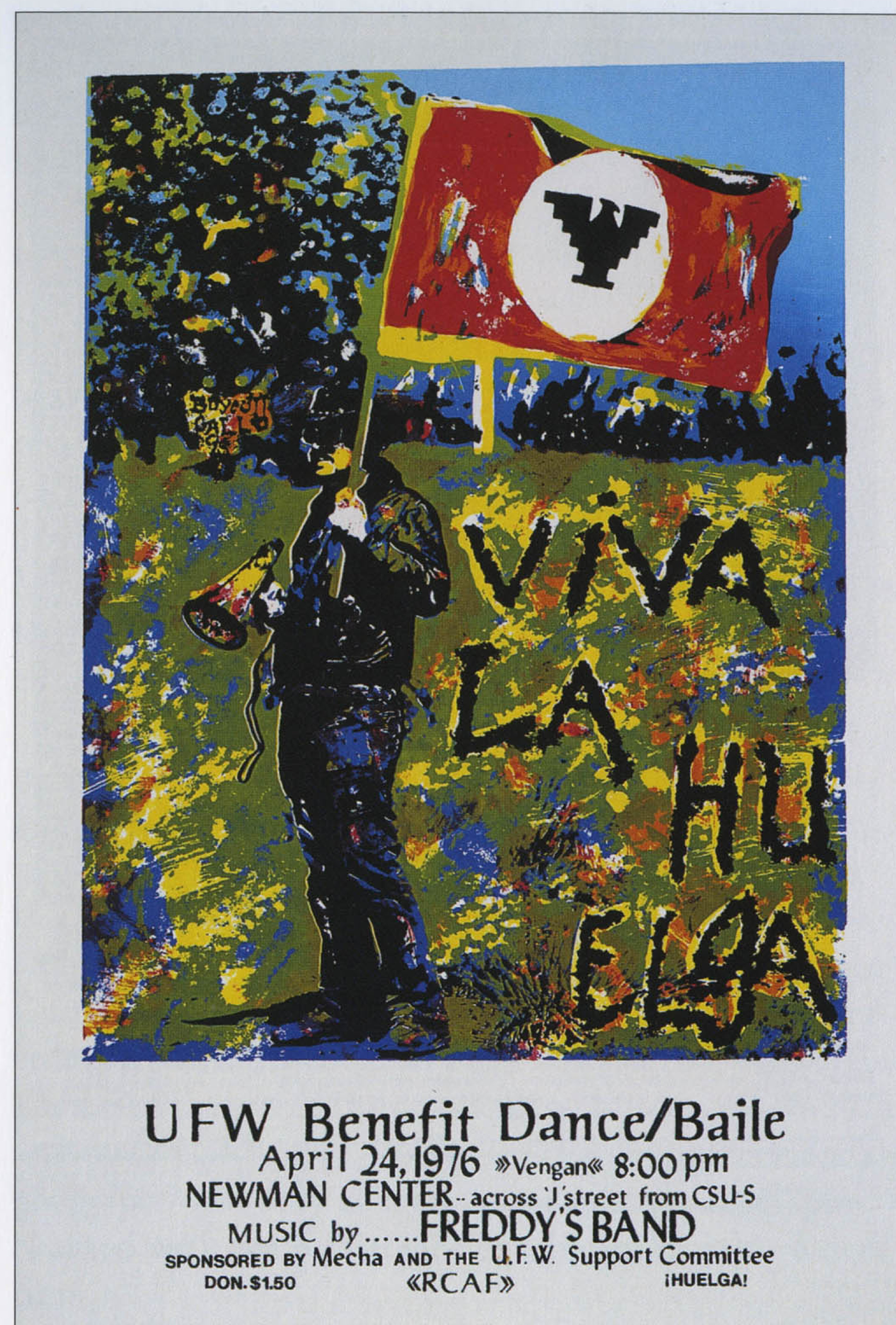


FIGURE 258
Louie "the Foot" González
Announcement Poster for a UFW Benefit and Dance, 1976
(Cat. no. 211)

### Myth, the Invention of Tradition, and Chicano/a Art

Pre-Columbian symbols, iconography, themes, and narratives form part of an active lexicon and cultural inventory on which Chicano/a artists drew. A real and invented pre-Columbian past instilled pride, empowerment, and difference as well as asserting a sense of place and historicity. Cast in contemporary registers, pre-

FIGURE 259
Rupert García
Festival del Sexto Sol, 1974
(Cat. no. 209)

Columbian heritage, along with providing Chicanos/as with a direct connection to an ancient civilization, also provided a normative cultural consciousness. Alurista's *Floricanto en Aztlan* addresses the Chicano/a experience, fashioning a social imaginary embedded with pre-Columbian symbols and political references.[31] The centrality of pre-Columbian culture in Chicano/a art is an operation that Walter Benjamin has described as "telescoping the past through the present," a procedure that may potentially "place the present in a critical condition."[32] Public artworks such as murals and graphics, particularly the works of Rupert García (see fig. 259) and Amado Peña, were the expressions of this first period that propelled the Chicano/a art of the movement and the movement of Chicano/a art.[33]

The second period of Chicano/a art, which scholars bracket between 1975 and the mid-1980s, actually extends to the early 1990s.[34] It is characterized by artistic expressions that are no longer directly linked to a political and ideological agenda, reflecting the evolution of political practices and countercultural movements. Different issues around representation, power, and cultural identity became central in the mid-1970s and 1980s, and these were articulated from perspectives highlighting gender, sexuality, and multiculturalism. Particularly relevant are Chicano/a artistic and cultural links to individuals, movements, and trends in Mexico, Latin America, and the Third World. Collaborations, exhibitions, and publications such as *Chismearte*, the journal of the Los Angeles–based Concilio de Arte Popular, edited by Carlos Almaraz, fostered cultural issues in broader ideological contexts.

## Cultural Identity and Art: Chicano/a Art after the Movimiento

The deployment of pre-Columbian symbols, themes, and forms in Chicano/a art from the second period became more hybrid and complex in character, both thematically and formally. This shift is related to postmodernist pluralism as well as the recognition of Chicano/a art.[35] Artists who came of age in the mid-1970s are also characterized by a more heterogeneous formation and trajectory.[36]

Artistic production from the mid-1970s onward incorporates the pre-Columbian past with the same dedication seen in the work of the first generation of Chicano/a artists. The fundamental difference is that the second generation has a more thorough knowledge of pre-Columbian cultures that does not supersede the romance with it. Another important difference lies in formal artistic training; most artists of the second generation have had a fine art education, and many hold master's degrees in fine art.

Exemplary of this more sophisticated use of pre-Columbian imagery is the work of Luis Jiménez, who has developed an artistic lexicon that combines aspects of Pop art and realism with the vernacular cultures of his native El Paso and the Southwest. Jiménez was a pioneer in the use of industrial materials such as fiberglass and resin, and in the various versions of his sculpture *Southwest Pieta* (1984), as well as in related drawings and prints (see fig. 260), a traditional theme is adapted to contemporary reality. The allegorical figures of the two volcanoes, the male Popocatepetl and the sleeping female Ixtaccihuatl, inspired by popular Mexican calendar art, are set in a Southwest visual context that fuses Mexica myth with Michelangelo's *Pietà*. Iconographically Jiménez's work draws on symbols such as the cactus, the maguey plant, and the eagle, which are key to the myth and history of the Southwest, the borderlands, and Mesoamerica. In his Border Crossing series, Jiménez layered religious and contemporary references in a similar fashion, conflating a Mexican family's flight across the border with the flight of Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus (see fig. 261).

In both her artwork and her writing, Amalia Mesa-Bains has conducted ongoing research into the formation of the Chicana universe, positing the concept of *domesticana* as the feminine counterpart to male-dominated *rasquachismo*.[37] Chicana artists such as Judith F. Baca, Santa C. Barraza, Yolanda M. López, Patssi Valdez, and Mesa-Bains draw from a variety of sources and languages to redefine a feminine universe by means of alternate chronicles or narratives.

In an artistic trajectory that his moved from altar making to more complex installation, Mesa-Bains has addressed themes of memory and the notion of place, which are central to the Chicano/a experience. These themes are articulated through the use of diverse symbols and languages that she draws from an inventory of pre-Columbian, Catholic, mass-media, and historical references, deploying them in an allegorical manner. Combining a sense of the sacred, spirituality, and history, works such as *Private Landscapes, Public Territories* (1996) deal with geography not only as *topos* but also as a cartography charged with the persistence of Chicano/a culture over time.

The range of styles, forms, and proposals of Chicana artists is broad and represents diverse aesthetic endeavors as well as the heterogeneity of Chicano/a culture. Born and raised in rural southern Texas, Santa C. Barraza has developed an artistic language that revitalizes such traditions as the pre-Columbian codex, or painted manuscript, as well as popular ex-voto and *retablo* traditions of Mexico and the Southwest. By means of these genres,

which represent a *mestiza* genealogy and are an index of Chicano/a reinvention of tradition, Barraza articulates lyrically infused narratives. Dealing with aspects of her own experience and incorporating it into a discourse that combines contemporary imagery with tradition and myth, Barraza's works deal with the tenacity of the Chicana universe. Her references to the Virgen de los Remedios, who appeared to her followers sprouting from a maguey plant, have a transcultural importance given the life-sustaining symbolism of the plant and its multiple uses in pre-Columbian cultures (see fig. 262). In Barraza's oeuvre, a diverse pantheon of Chicanos/as take the place of the Virgen de los Remedios, casting the past into contemporary registers.

Yolanda M. López, who was born and raised in San Diego and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, has produced a diverse body of work that is conceptually based and informed by performance. In her videos and installations, she has researched and dealt with the representation of Chicano/a cultures by mainstream cultures in the mass media. López recasts foundational feminine religious icons, linking them to the contemporary life of Chicanas such as the artist, her mother, and her grandmother. Her ongoing series on the Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, conflates myth and history with contemporary concerns. The symbolic and metaphorical matrix of the Virgin of Guadalupe's association with Mexica female deities such as Tonantzin and Coatlicue exemplifies the layering of cultures as a hybrid process. López's painting *Nuestra Madre* (1981–88; fig. 263) depicts the Mexica deity (excavated in Coxcatlán, Puebla) with all the attributes of the Virgin of Guadalupe, thereby fusing the two figures and calling attention to their centrality in the Mexica-Mexican-Chicano/a social imaginary. In her portrait series depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe in different apparitions and guises—as well as in her performances representing her as the "brown Virgin," or

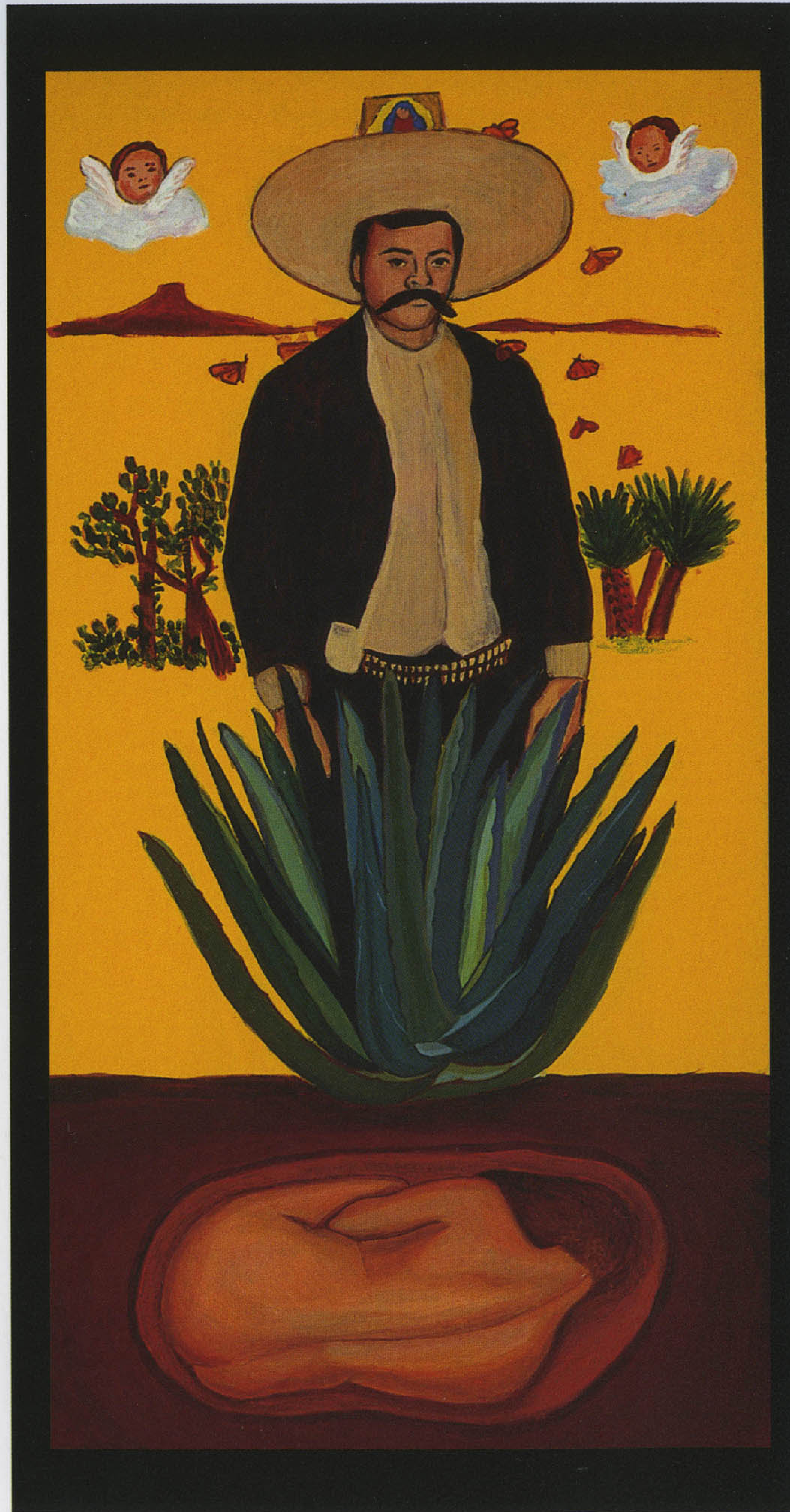

FIGURE 262
Santa C. Barraza
Zapata con Maguey, 1991
(Cat. no. 229)

FIGURE 263
Yolanda M. López
NUESTRA MADRE, 1981–88
(Cat. no. 234)

*la morenita*—López deals specifically with the construction of Chicano/a identity, agency, and empowerment.

Yreina Cervántez uses a similar conceptual operation in her 1995 *Nepantla Triptych,* which highlights a Chicana view of Mexica cosmology from an engendered perspective (figs. 274–76 ). In *Mi Nepantla* Cervántez achieves this by means of casting Coyolxauhqui in her own persona in the context of a spiritual and cultural *nepantla*, the in-between state.[38] Like Mesa-Bains, Cervántez collapses personal and epic histories as well as mythic and spiritual references, thereby underlining the ability of the imaginative and aesthetic dimensions of art to represent a universe that is qualitatively different from the established reality.

Among the artists who have investigated diverse in-between states in terms of border cultures and the dynamic relationship across time between Chicano/a and Mexican cultures are Mexican-born Rubén Ortiz Torres and Enrique Chagoya. Both artists, despite their distinct trajectories, call attention to and rework in a humorous manner stereotypical images of Mexican and Chicano/a cultures. Ortiz Torres draws from a variety of sources—historical materials, comic books, films, and popular music—to highlight and critique the allure and power of urban culture in such megalopolises as Los Angeles and Mexico City. In a Duchampian spin, he uses pre-Columbian culture to play with the use and abuse of the past for the production of hegemonic as well as critical discourses. In works as distinct as his collaborative video with Jesse Lerner, *Frontierland/Fronterilandia* (1995), and his series of customized baseball caps, there is a similar use of transcultural references and linguistic puns to create a hall of mirrors effect, reflecting both past and present.

Chagoya also works in postmodern pastiche. His proposals focusing on pre-Columbian culture deal

directly with its visual representation in early colonial sources, juxtaposing historical images to comic book figures in Pop art–like operations (see fig. 278). In Chagoya's aesthetic strategy, the importance of image in pre-Columbian cultures dialogues and merges with the centrality accorded to the icon in Pop art and in postindustrial mass culture. The dialogism that he articulates calls attention to the multiplicity of narratives and epistemologies in postmodernism.

Art historically, Chicano/a art may be approached as well as defined by its rich and conflictive relationship to the pre-Columbian past. As we have seen, Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto established two well-defined periods of Chicano/a art, which saw a transition from the militant cultural nationalism of the late 1960s to mid-1970s to the multiculturalism that was dominant from the mid-1970s to early 1990s. The art produced in these two brief, prolific, and defining periods (qualities that seem to be characteristic of times of aesthetic breakthrough throughout history) was linked to frameworks of cultural identity and the exaltation of difference for ideological and political reasons.

From the perspective of the generation of Chicano/a artists who emerged after the early 1990s (who might be described as "post-Chicano/a"), the Chicano/a art of the first two periods served a valuable and necessary function as a didactic vehicle that forged traditions and reinvented a mythic past.[39] Today, however, such practices appear clichéd and restrictive. That is not to say that, from a post-Chicano/a perspective, themes and formal endeavors that address and refer to the pre-Columbian past are obsolete. To the degree that post-Chicano/a practices articulate contemporary and global concerns with a consciousness of modernism and postmodernism, they establish a more layered and complex relationship to the past and its traditions.

As an alternate practice, Chicano/a art has exalted its specificity and, to a certain degree, its autonomy from the mainstream as proof of its critique of the establishment. Today, however, this appears as a mixed blessing insofar as it has led to the marginalization of Chicano/a expressions. Chicano/a essentializing discourses, combined with the prejudice of the mainstream toward art informed by political or ideological concerns, set into motion a kind of complicity, encouraging the exclusion of Chicano/a art from wider collecting and exhibiting contexts and frameworks of interpretation and analysis.

The challenge that faces us today is to find ways to exhibit, collect, research, and teach Chicano/a art in qualitatively different terms. From the outset this requires a reconsideration of the very status it has flaunted as a so-called orphan of modernism.[40] To be sure, the relationship of Chicano/a art to modernism, and to primitivism in particular, has been contradictory, yet to inscribe it into the tradition of modernism and postmodernism is not to neutralize its potential as a source of empowerment, as a site of recollection and memory, and as a ground for cultural differentiation. On the contrary, the work of Chicano/a artists continues to challenge art historians and museum professionals to reconsider their ideas and practices.

Such a reconsideration of Chicano/a art in wider contexts and in dialogue with "art in general" allows Chicano/a artists to participate in a larger arena, one in which their work may be apprehended in all of its complexity. Post-Chicano/a practices by definition retain a concern with specific cultural narratives but are marked by a heterogeneity of contexts and discourses. Ironically, post-Chicano/a art revives and renews the critical impulse of prior periods, not by asserting its autonomy from modernism and postmodernism, but through its willingness to engage with diverse bodies of knowledge and artistic practices.

## Notes

1. Florescano 1994, 228.

2. See Zamudio-Taylor 1996.

3. See Foster 1985; the discussion "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Savage' Paradigm," with the participation of James Clifford, Virginia Dominguez, and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, in Foster 1987; Clifford 1988; the catalogue of the important exhibition organized by Jean-Hubert Martin for the Centre Georges Pompidou, *Les magiciens de la terre* (Paris 1989); Rhodes 1993; Perry 1993; and Barkan and Bush 1995.

4. Rubin 1984.

5. Foster 1985, 181–210.

6. Rubin 1994, 115–17.

7. Braun 1992.

8. See Braun 1992; Detroit 1986; Fletcher 1992; Ramírez 1992.

9. Braun 1992.

10. Of note are the Paris Universal Exposition of 1878, within which the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero opened its doors, and the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889.

11. See Nancy Perloff, "Gauguin's French Baggage: Decadence and Colonialism in Tahiti," in Barkan and Bush 1995.

12. See Brown 1986.

13. See Barnet-Sánchez 1993.

14. See Douglas and D'Harnoncourt 1941; Bennett 1954; Castro Leal et al. 1940; and Cahill [1933] 1969.

15. Cahill [1933] 1969, 5.

16. See Braun 1992 and Brown 1986.

17. See Favela 1984.

18. Betty Ann Brown mentions in passim Rivera's viewing of pre-Columbian and early colonial manuscripts in Italy, in "The Past Idealized: Diego Rivera's Use of Pre-Columbian Imagery," in Detroit 1986.

19. David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Barcelona Manifesto 1921," cited and translated in Brenner 1929.

20. See Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano 1991.

21. See Anaya and Lomeli 1989. For a more contemporary assessment, see Garcia 1997 and Cooper Alarcón 1997.

22. Emblematic of Chicano and Indian alliances was the D-Q educational institution in Davis, California, which took its name from Deganawidah, the founder of the Iroquois Confederacy, and Quetzalcoatl; see Shifra M. Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "The Political and Social Contexts of Chicano Art," in Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano 1991, 88.

23. Carlos Almaraz papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

24. Gilbert Luján course syllabus, California State University, Los Angeles, 1970, in Carlos Almaraz papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

25. See Vasconcelos 1979.

26. "El plan espiritual de Aztlán," in Valdez and Steiner 1972.

27. See Zamudio-Taylor 1996.

28. Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto, "Political and Social Contexts," in Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano 1991, 83–95.

29. See *Los Four*, exh. brochure, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1974.

30. Ybarra-Frausto 1979, 119.

31. Alurista 1971.

32. Benjamin 1983, 60.

33. See Ybarra-Frausto 1995.

34. Regarding periodization of Chicano/a art, I would utilize the framework from Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano 1991, which ends the second period in 1985. From 1985 to the present Chicano/a artists have begun to articulate issues and themes that go beyond frameworks of identity and deal with more hybrid global concerns.

35. Important traveling exhibitions dedicated to Chicano/a art or including Chicano/a artists include *Hispanic Art in the United States* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1987); *Les demons des anges* (Centre d'Art Contemporain, Nantes, 1989); *Border Arts Workshop / Taller de Arte Fronterizo: Colon Colonizado, tutto e mio de quien?* (Venice Biennale, 1990); *El Corazón Sangrante / The Bleeding Heart* (Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1991); *Art of the Other Mexico* (Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Chicago, 1993).

36. The only Chicano artists from the first generation to engage with other currents such as Pop art, Minimalism, and New Figuration were Carlos Almaraz, Luis Jiménez, Mel Casas, and Rupert García.

37. See Amalia Mesa-Bains, "El Mundo Femenino: Chicana Artists of the Movement: A Commentary on Development and Production," in Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano 1991, 131–40, and Mesa-Bains 1995. On *rasquachismo*, see Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarano 1991, 155–62.

38. See Miguel León-Portilla, "Conceptual Framework and Case Identification" and "Cultural Trauma, *Mestizaje*, and Indianism in Mesoamerica," in León-Portilla 1990; for a Chicana feminist perspective on *nepantla*, see Anzaldúa 1987.

39. The Los Angeles-based conceptual performance collective Asco and cross-media artists Daniel Joseph Martinez and Armando Rascón, as well as the painter Roberto Juarez, may be described as post-Chicano/a artists *avant la lettre*. This heterogeneous grouping distanced themselves from dominant Chicano/a positions, critiquing them at times with bittersweet humor and parody. The collective Border Arts Workshop / Taller de Arte Fronterizo and artists Jesse Amado, David Avalos, Alejandro Diaz, Celia Alvarez Muñoz, and Franco Mondini Ruiz emerged after the Chicano movement. Their work is characterized by an array of thematic concerns—personal, cultural, and political—and by the use of formal languages and aesthetic strategies such as Postminimalism, Conceptualism, performance, service art, new genre public art, and new media. Younger artists such as Rita Gonzalez, Salomon Huerta, Chuck Ramirez, and Dario Robleto may be described as second-generation post-Chicano/a.

40. For the phrase "orphans of modernism," see Noriega 2000, 361.