

EXPLORING QUEER MEXICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY THROUGH ART

BA Thesis by Sammy Rutten

Summary

Queer Mexican American immigrants face various hardships. Many are raised in a conservative culture and have to hide their queerness. Those that are undocumented have to hide their illegal status. This study looks at artworks from the 1960s through today to explore the intersectionality of queer Mexican American identity. It focuses sharply on the Axis Mundo exhibition and the UndocuQueer Movement. Most of the artistic expressions deal with societal issues, ranging from the AIDS crisis in the 1980s to the immigrations politics banning people from Mexico, inflamed by the Trump Administration. The artists often incorporate traditional and contemporary symbols to convey their struggles and ideals. Their messages question binary gender norms. Their art renders their lives visible. This, in turn, helps them achieve freedom. The fight for acceptance of queerness takes place within Mexican American communities as well as in the larger nation. The battle raises questions about immigration policy in general and notions of the border specifically.

Key Words: art, undocumented, intersectionality, queer, Mexican American.

S. Rutten

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Introduction

This paper focuses on art. The central assumption is that meaningful art enlightens, inspires, and empowers.¹ Artists do this by shedding light on contemporary issues, developments, and problems. The problem that this paper addresses is the struggle of people with intersectional identities. Specifically, those that are both queer and Mexican American. It does this by focusing on LA-based queer Chicano art of the 1960s through the 1990s, and the UndocuQueer Movement² that was started in 2012 by visual artist Julio Salgado. The former focused mostly on the place of queers in the Chicano community. The latter focuses mainly on immigrant rights.

Drawing from academic and historical writings on Mexican American culture and queer theory, articles addressing both art movements, as well as the art pieces themselves, the following analysis argues that politics intersect with art. Artistic expressions and movements provide clear insight into social constructions of race, ethnicity, and gender. This paper begins with an historical overview of queer activism within the Chicano Movement and is followed by a brief literary review. Chapter II explores the art of queer Chicanos of the 1960s through the 1990s, and Chapter III explores the art of the contemporary UndocuQueer Movement.

What makes this study of marginalization and activism vital is the current anti-immigrant and Nativist social and political climate in the United States. The Trump Administration seeks to undermine the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative, set up by Barack Obama to protect approximately 700,000 undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. since early childhood.³ Seeking to decrease the Mexican population, Trump also used the Covid-19 crisis to temporarily close the border with Mexico, to automatically deport unauthorized border crossers, and to halt ordinary visa processing.⁴ In other words, under the guise of “keeping America safe”, Trump actively targets Mexican people. The targeting speaks to a politics of exclusion.

¹ Judy Chicago, “What Does Art Have to Do With the Coronavirus?” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/opinion/art-social-change.html> Accessed on May 30, 2020.

² The UndocuQueer Movement uses the originally derogatory term “queer” as a conscientious effort to overcome internalized oppression. The literal meaning of queer is “unusual, strange” and it in the past it was used as a pejorative toward LGBTQ people. However, the LGBTQ community began reclaiming the term and it now no longer has hateful connotations. It serves as a non-binary umbrella term to include all genders and sexualities. Carrie Hart. “The Artivism of Julio Salgado’s I Am Undocuqueer! Series.” *Working Papers in Education* 1, no. 1, 2015, 2

³ Joanna Walters, “What is Daca and who are the Dreamers?” *The Guardian*, Sep 14, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/04/donald-trump-what-is-daca-dreamers> Accessed on May 30, 2020.

⁴ Daniel Denvir, “In True Nativist Fashion, Trump is Blaming Immigrants for US Problems.” *The Guardian*, Apr 23, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/23/in-true-nativist-fashion-trump-is-blaming-immigrants-for-us-problems> Accessed on May 30, 2020.

Dreamers,⁵ the undocumented immigrants that were to be protected under DACA, risk deportation. Art expresses their fears and hope and the UndocuQueer Movement illustrates how. Representatives of this movement strive for acknowledgement of individuals with a double minority status. They are both undocumented and queer. This dual identity places them in a metaphorical closet. UndocuQueers express their identity and protest the political opposition that they face through art, both in the physical space and online. They raise awareness by creating billboards and murals, for example, and by using the hashtag #UndocuQueer on Instagram, where artists post their works and activist messages.

In the 1960s, decades before the UndocuQueer Movement came into being, queer Chicano artists spoke of their politics through their art. They focused on hybrid identity, and “social, political, and economic self-determination and autonomy for Mexican American communities” throughout the U.S.⁶ This contrasts markedly with the contemporary focus on deportation. The Mexican American activists identified with the term Chicano/a. Today, many opt for the gender-neutral term Chicanx, rejecting the gendered o/a suffixes of the Spanish language. Others prefer to identify as Latinx, as belonging to *La Raza*, or simply as being Mexican American.⁷ A striking similarity between those living in the 1960s and those in the 21st century, however, is the discriminatory treatment resulting from gender orientation and immigrant status.

The art of queer Mexican Americans of the 1960s-1990s and that of the contemporary UndocuQueer Movement spotlights the intersection of identity politics and art. In 2017, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries organized *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, an exhibition that featured works by over forty queer Chicanx artists from the 1960s to 1990s. The collection represents queer Mexican American artists with works portraying individual stories. According to VICE reporter Muri Assunção, bringing this many works by queer Chicanx artists together “helps the community fill in historical gaps and serves to spark a dialogue about queer history that should not be forgotten.”⁸ The works that are presented in Chapter II were retrieved from this exhibition, as they represent queer Mexican American artists from the era.

⁵ The name Dreamers comes from the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (Dream) Act that was originally introduced by the Obama administration but that never passed. Instead, the DACA program was introduced as a compromise.

⁶ García, Alma. “Introduction.” In *Chicana Feminist Thought – The Basic Historical Writings*. (Routledge, 1997), 2.

⁷ For more information on Latinx ways of identifying, see: Suzanne Gamboa, Sandra Lilley, and Sarah Cahlan, “Young Latinos: Born in the U.S.A., carving their own identity.” *NBC News*, Sep 14, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/young-latinos-born-u-s-carving-their-own-identity-ngo8o86> Accessed on May 31, 2020.

⁸ Assunção, Muri, “Queer Chicano Art Is as Timeless As It Is Vital.” *VICE*, Sep 16, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8x8nxz/queer-chicano-art-is-as-timeless-as-it-is-vital Accessed on May 12, 2020.

Chapter I: Historical Overview and Literary Review

The following section begins with an historical overview of Chicano/a activism. It then touches on queer issues in immigration. A review of the scholarly treatment of Chicana Feminism, machismo, Mexican Americans' attitude towards homosexuality, intersectionality, protest art, and border art follows.

The Chicano Movement, or *El Movimiento*, of the 1960s marks the height of Mexican American activism. Mexican immigrants were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. César Chávez emerged as a leader, establishing farm workers' rights as one of the main foci. Other concerns ranged from restoration of land grants and enhanced opportunities for education, to awareness of harmful stereotypes and empowerment of Chicano identity.⁹ The term 'Chicano' was originally a derogatory label for second generation Mexican immigrants, who Americans believed to be too Mexican, and who Mexicans believed to be too American. During *El Movimiento* Chicano became a term that was accepted as a symbol of ethnic pride.¹⁰

While the Chicano Movement challenged inequality between the Chicano and the *Gabacho* [white man], it also ignited a debate between the Chicano and the Chicana about gender contradictions within *El Movimiento*.¹¹ The anthology *Chicana Feminist Thought: the Basic Historical Writings*, edited by Alma M. García, includes over 80 essays by Chicana Feminists. From the essays by Elvira Saragoza, Elena Hernández, and Rosalie Flores it becomes clear that many Chicanas felt that *El Movimiento* ignored women's needs and instead only focused on empowerment of the men. But Chicana feminists quickly came under attack because the struggle between the sexes was deemed as secondary to the struggle between the ethnicities.

According to Saragoza, however, Chicanas wanted to have the option to combine the domestic with the intellectual role.¹² They wanted to be able to use their mind, to speak out, and to have a place in the Movement, to join the Chicanos toward empowerment of the totality of *La Raza*.¹³ To do this, they started attacking *machismo*, an elusive Mexican value that, according to Flores, is "inbred and fostered by parental anxiety for the males in the family to show manliness, virility, honor, and courage."¹⁴ This pressure to be macho leads to insecurities. This is confounded by a lack of jobs and dignity – as often experienced by

⁹ John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen. "The rhetorical worlds of César Chávez and Reies Tijerina." In *Western Journal of Communication* (Routledge, 1980), 167, 171.

¹⁰ Edward R. Simmen and Richard F. Bauerle. "Chicano: Origin and Meaning." In *American Speech* (Duke University Press, 1969), 227.

¹¹ García, "Introduction" 1.

¹² Elvira Saragoza. "La Mujer in the Chicano Movement." In *Chicana Feminist Thought: the Basic Historical Writings*, ed. by Alma M. García (Routledge, 1997), 77.

¹³ Elena Hernández. "La Chicana y El Movimiento." In *Chicana Feminist Thought: the Basic Historical Writings*, ed. by Alma M. García, (Routledge, 1997), 85, 86.

¹⁴ Rosalie Flores. "The New Chicana and Machismo." In *Chicana Feminist Thought: the Basic Historical Writings*, ed. by Alma M. García, (Routledge, 1997), 95, 96.

Mexican American men – that, as Flores explains, can lead to the need to prove manhood in the home by dominating women.

Chicano domination resulted in Chicana submission. The “Ideal Chicana,” a picture as painted by Chicano cultural nationalists, was one who maintains the home as a safe haven for her family, assuring the survival of Chicano culture.¹⁵ Within this idea of the Chicana being the protector of the family, lesbians are particularly marginalized, because they do not fit into this heterosexual family frame. They laid the ground for Mexican American queer intersectional theory. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, both Mexican American lesbians, contributed heavily to Chicana feminism. Their feelings of alienation within both the Chicano Movement and the Feminist Movement led these two women to edit a collection of essays that explores intersectional feminism, entitled *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.¹⁶

In this anthology, Moraga writes that “one of the biggest sources of separation among women of color in terms of feminism has been homophobia.”¹⁷ But she refuses to make a choice between her cultural identity and sexual identity, between her race and her femaleness. Anzaldúa proposes that women on the bottom throughout the world, “the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged,”¹⁸ form an international feminism with independent movements that struggle together.

While Moraga and Anzaldúa focused on the lesbian experience, Tomás Almaguer focused on gay men in Chicano culture. When he wrote the essay *Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior* in 1993, literature on homosexual Chicanos was scarce, so he had to rely on writings by Chicana lesbians as ethnographic evidence for exploring the Chicano homosexual experience in the U.S.¹⁹ His findings indicate that because Chicanos are subordinated in the U.S., their family life is vital to their survival, and they are therefore “less free to violate family expectations than Anglos are.”²⁰ This often leaves the gay Chicano to engage in homosexual acts in secret and enter a marriage with a woman nonetheless. This restriction might explain why homosexuality among Chicanos is typically shrouded in secrecy.

¹⁵ García, “Introduction” 6.

¹⁶ Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. “Foreword” In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. by Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), xvi, xxxv.

¹⁷ Cherrie L. Moraga. “Between the Lines” In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 113.

¹⁸ Gloria E. Anzaldúa. “El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision” In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. by Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 218.

¹⁹ Tomás Almaguer. “Chicano men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior.” In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Michèle A. Barale, and David M. Halperin, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 256

²⁰ Almaguer, “Chicano men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior” 255.

The situation in Mexico itself has improved somewhat. There are a number of laws in place to combat discrimination and there is more queer representation in cinema and on TV. American tourism has led to the queer community gaining some agency. This, however, offers a new set of problems. José Quiroga, in the year 2000, referred to Latin America as a toy store for Western sex. Underground prostitution rings, that are still present in various big cities, allow tourists to benefit from the queer community in secret, while said community remains unaccepted within their own communities.²¹ The invisibility of queers is thus kept intact, whilst Latin Americans have actually crafted numerous alternatives to the understanding of gender and sexuality.

More recently, scholars focus on the intersection of religion and sexuality. What adds to many queer Mexican Americans not coming out is their fear of condemnation from the Catholic Church. In 2014, 55% of Hispanic Americans identified as Roman Catholic, according to a survey by Pew Research Center.²² And while this number keeps dropping every year, the Church still has a significant influence on Mexican American culture. Queer Latinx often struggle to reconcile their sexuality with their faith. Human Rights Campaign, America's leading civil rights organization for queer equality, published a pamphlet called *Coming Out: Living Authentically as LGBTQ Latinx Americans*, aiding queer Latinx in navigating intersectional challenges when coming out. It argues that coming out can be especially hard for Latinx, because it often requires "a unique approach that can cut across multiple languages, cultures, nationalities, religious identities and family generations."²³

Human Rights Campaign also highlights immigration matters as one of the important issues affecting LGBTQ people in the U.S. Approximately 20% of queer immigrants are undocumented, with many coming from Central and South America.²⁴ These undocumented queers face challenges, including possible mistreatment by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).²⁵ A 2013 report by the Government Accountability Office found, for example, that while transgender detainees only make up one in five hundred ICE detainees, they were victims of one in five sexual abuse and assault cases.²⁶ Other issues are language barriers that hinder accessibility to government services and a higher rates of HIV in these communities. On top of that, deportation for many queer immigrants would mean having to

²¹ José Quiroga, "Tropics of Desire: Intervention from Queer Latino America," (NYU Press, 2000), xiv.

²² Cary Funk and Jessica Martínez, "Fewer Hispanics are Catholic, so how can more Catholics be Hispanic?" *Pew Research*, May 7, 2014, Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/07/fewer-hispanics-are-catholic-so-how-can-more-catholics-be-hispanic/> Accessed on June 8, 2020.

²³ Human Rights Campaign, "Coming Out: Living Authentically as LGBTQ Latinx Americans" 2018, p. 7. Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-living-authentically-as-lgbtq-latinx-americans>

²⁴ Crosby Burns, Ann Garcia, and Philip E. Wolgin. "Living in Dual Shadows: LGBT Undocumented immigrants." *Center for American Progress* (2013), iv. Accessed on June 8, 2020.

²⁵ Human Rights Campaign, "Being Latinx & LGBTQ: An Introduction" n.d. Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/being-latino-a-lgbtq-an-introduction> Accessed on June 8, 2020.

²⁶ US Government Accountability Office, and United States of America. "Immigration Detention: Additional Actions Could Strengthen DHS Efforts to Address Sexual Abuse." (2013), 60.

live in a country where queerness is condemned, if not illegal, where they would risk physical violence.

A common way for political movements to spread their messages is through art. This is because, as Zoë Lescaze puts it, “art does not just reflect the world – it engages with it”²⁷ In respect to U.S. Immigrant activism, a clear example of this is border art, a contemporary art practice that deals with questions surrounding borders, immigration, identity, race, and nationality. Border art about *la frontera* was started in the 1980s and is highly political, which has led it to be studied by various scholars and journalists.²⁸ For example, Anne-Leure Szary argues that the closing of a border not only reactivates cultural production in the borderlands, it also transforms the meaning of that border.²⁹

Border art can constitute paintings or photographs that make use of the picture of the border and that raise questions about the essence of borders. Some artists travel to the literal border and make it into an artwork, creating huge paintings or installations that speak to the masses. An example of this is the work by muralist Werc Alvarez, who is portrayed below in front of one of his murals at the entrance to the Stanton Bridge, that connects El Paso, USA, with Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.



Werc Alvarez: *Untitled Mural*, 2013³⁰

²⁷ Zoë Lescaze, “13 Artists On: Immigration” *The New York Times Style Magazine*, 18 June, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/t-magazine/immigration-art.html> Accessed on June 8, 2020.

²⁸ For more information, see: Antonio Prieto, “Border Art as a Political Strategy,” 1999; Jo-Anne Berelowitz, “Marcos Ramirez Erre: Border art ‘from this side,’” 2006.

²⁹ Anne-Leure A. Szary, “Walls and Border Art: the Politics of Art Display,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 27, no. 2 (2012), 213.

³⁰ Werc Alvarez, “Untitled, 2013,” [Mural]. Stanton Bridge, El Paso, TX. 90 x 11 ft. Photograph taken by Stefan Falke. Retrieved from <https://borderartists.com/2013/04/03/werc-alvarez/> Accessed on June 26, 2020.

The relevance of activist art is described by historian Katy Deepwell, in *Feminist Art Activisms and Artivisms*. According to her, “art made with a view towards social and political change aims to transform our understanding of how social and political issues are experienced, felt and understood, [...] encouraging us to see the world and how it operates differently and presenting different models of art production and social organization.”³¹ Activist art can range from fine art – exhibited in museums, meant for the elite – to art that is displayed on protests signs – legible, and reaching the community – to murals, graffiti, and billboards, that occupy the public space year-round and engage with everyone who passes it.

Chapter II: Axis Mundo

In 2017, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries organized *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, an exhibition that was presented at the ONE Archives’ gallery in West Hollywood, and at the MOCA Pacific Design Center. The exhibition featured works by over 40 queer Chicano/a artists from the 1960s to 1990s, and introduced “the notion of collaboration and community as a means for survival, inclusion, and the recording of history.”³² The curators considered the artists’ works in the context of broader movements, both artistic and cultural, like fashion, alternative print media, and responses to the AIDS epidemic.³³ The works in this exhibition provide a clear understanding of queer Chicano/a art activism.

The title of this show refers to the Axis Mundi, which in mythology represents the connection between Earth, Heaven, and Hell. The literal meaning is the Earth Axis, the Celestial Pole. The curators changed Mundi to Mundo, in honor of Edmundo “Mundo” Meza, a central figure in the movement that worked with other visual artists in the public sphere.³⁴ Meza was involved in the integration of the gay community in LA and tried to make the city a more inclusive place. Unfortunately, Meza lost his life to AIDS at only 29 years of age.

The foreword of the exhibition catalogue explains that the mission to uncover Mundo’s work was what inspired co-curators David Evans Frantz and C. Ondine Chavoya to start their extensive research into the history of queer Chicanx experimentation and the way that these artists tried to shape and make sense of their world.³⁵ And while Frantz and

³¹ Katy Deepwell, “Introduction” In *Feminist Art Activisms and Artivisms*, ed. by Katy Deepwell, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2020), 10.

³² Michael Valinsky, “Queer Chicanx Artists Find a Home in L.A.’s Axis Mundo Exhibition.” *Out*, Dec 8, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.out.com/art-books/2017/12/08/queer-chicanx-artists-find-home-las-axis-mundo-exhibition> Accessed on March 26, 2020.

³³ MOCA, “Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.” (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.moca.org/exhibition/axis-mundo-queer-networks-in-chicano-la> Accessed on April 9, 2020.

³⁴ Valinsky, “Queer Chicanx Artists Find a Home in L.A.’s Axis Mundo Exhibition.”

³⁵ Joseph Hawkins, “Foreword” In *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya, David Evans Frantz, and Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 23.

Chavoya ended up including works from many different artists, Mundo's work functioned as the Axis Mundi of the exhibition.



*Mundo Meza: Window Display, Early 1980s*³⁶

One way in which Mundo clearly shaped the public space was by creating window displays. Mundo and his friend Simon Doonan used to collaborate on displays for stores, a picture of one of which was shown at the entrance of the Axis Mundo exhibition. The displays that these two artists made were extravagant and theatrical, including a wide range of props like animal taxidermy. The display that was showcased in the exhibition featured one of Meza's paintings. He was a multimedia artist; a painter, costume designer, make-up artist, and he even made a cameo appearance in the Kim Carnes music video for *Bette Davis Eyes*.³⁷ He moved through different worlds, scenes, and movements by using different forms of art, like the window displays, but also paintings and performance art that he worked on with artists like Joey Terrill and Robert Legorreta, known by his stage name Cyclona.

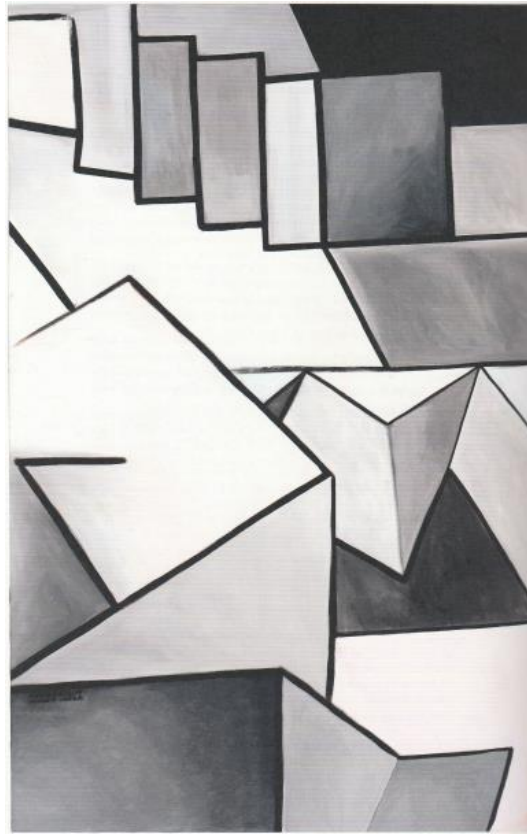
While Meza worked with a number of different art forms, toward the end of his life he turned to abstract painting, perhaps as a means to make sense of his disease. Javier Guzmán, assistant professor in the department of Gender Studies at UCLA, wrote an essay about Mundo Meza, asking if his battle with AIDS inspired his interest in abstraction.³⁸ In the 1980s, the growing epidemic left many victims desperate for government attention. Federal government did little to contribute to a cure for the disease, or to educate its citizens to

³⁶ Mundo Meza, "Documentation of a Window Display at Maxfield Bleu, West Hollywood, c. Early 1980s," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 8-9. Photograph by Meza.

³⁷ Catherine S. Ramírez, "Book Review: Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA." *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 3, no.1 (2019): 101.

³⁸ Javier Guzmán, "Between Action and Abstraction," In *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 303.

prevent the spread of HIV. Many artists used their works to spur the public to action, sharing personal experiences on the national stage.³⁹



*Mundo Meza: Sensorium, 1983*⁴⁰

Meza actively sought to do this through his abstract paintings. Guzmán argues that with his work *Sensorium* (1983), that Meza made shortly before his death, he produced “the very thing that its title names: a continuum of senses and feelings that provokes an uncertainty of meaning.”⁴¹ What Mundo attempted to represent with this painting, is the absence of someone to experience the sensorium that the painting generates. The work shows the intersection between abstraction in art and the abstraction of trying to understand something as abstruse as the AIDS epidemic.

Abstraction seems to have been a vehicle through which Meza could make sense of the racialized disparities that existed in the AIDS epidemic⁴², as well as offering support for how to live with a sick body. This is apparent in the male nude that Meza painted around the same time that he made *Sensorium*. In this painting the viewer’s gaze is drawn to the model’s profile, but there is nothing to be seen. Instead, the man’s face explodes into shapes and

³⁹ See, for example, Nicholas Nixon, Keith Haring, Aziz + Cucher, and David Wojnarowicz.

⁴⁰ Mundo Meza, “Sensorium, 1983,” in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 302. Acrylic on canvas, 110 x 70 in.

⁴¹ Guzmán, “Between Action and Abstraction,” 303.

⁴² For more information on the impact of race on the AIDS epidemic, see: Lynn Weber, and M. Elizabeth Fore. “Race, Ethnicity, and Health: An Intersectional Approach.” In *Handbooks of the Sociology of racial and ethnic relations*, 191-218. (Boston, MA: Springer, 2007).

shades, hinting at disappearance. This represents the young Chicano body with AIDS. The white space illustrates his inability to grasp his impending and early death. Therefore, the painting represents darkness and grief for the suffering of the community.



*Mundo Meza: Untitled, c. 1983*⁴³

While these later works by Meza focus on the complex feelings fueled by the epidemic, other artists explore the intersectionality between queer identity and Chicanx identity. Joey Terrill, for instance, produced hand-drawn T-shirts that were emblazoned with the words *maricón* and *malflora*,⁴⁴ Spanish slurs for gay men and lesbian women, respectively. The T-shirts were worn by participants in the Christopher Street West Pride parade of 1976. A picture taken by Teddy Sandoval graces the cover of the *Axis Mundo* catalogue. For Terrill, these T-shirts went against “the erasure of *Latinidad*”⁴⁵ in gay liberation struggles as well as against homophobia within Chicano culture.”⁴⁶ These t-shirts reclaim the derogatory and homophobic phrases, giving the wearer a chance to demonstrate pride, rather than shame.

⁴³ Mundo Meza, “Untitled (Male nude), c. 1983,” in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 315. Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 70 in.

⁴⁴ The term *malflora* can more broadly be applied to “a perceived disruption of normative gender comportment. (Leticia Alvarado, “Malflora Aberrant Femininities,” In *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris, (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 95.

⁴⁵ Latin identity.

⁴⁶ Richard T. Rodríguez, “Being and Belonging: Joey Terrill’s Performance of Politics.” *Biography* 24, no.3, (2011): 476.



Teddy Sandoval: Joey Terrill's malfora and maricón T-shirts, 1976⁴⁷

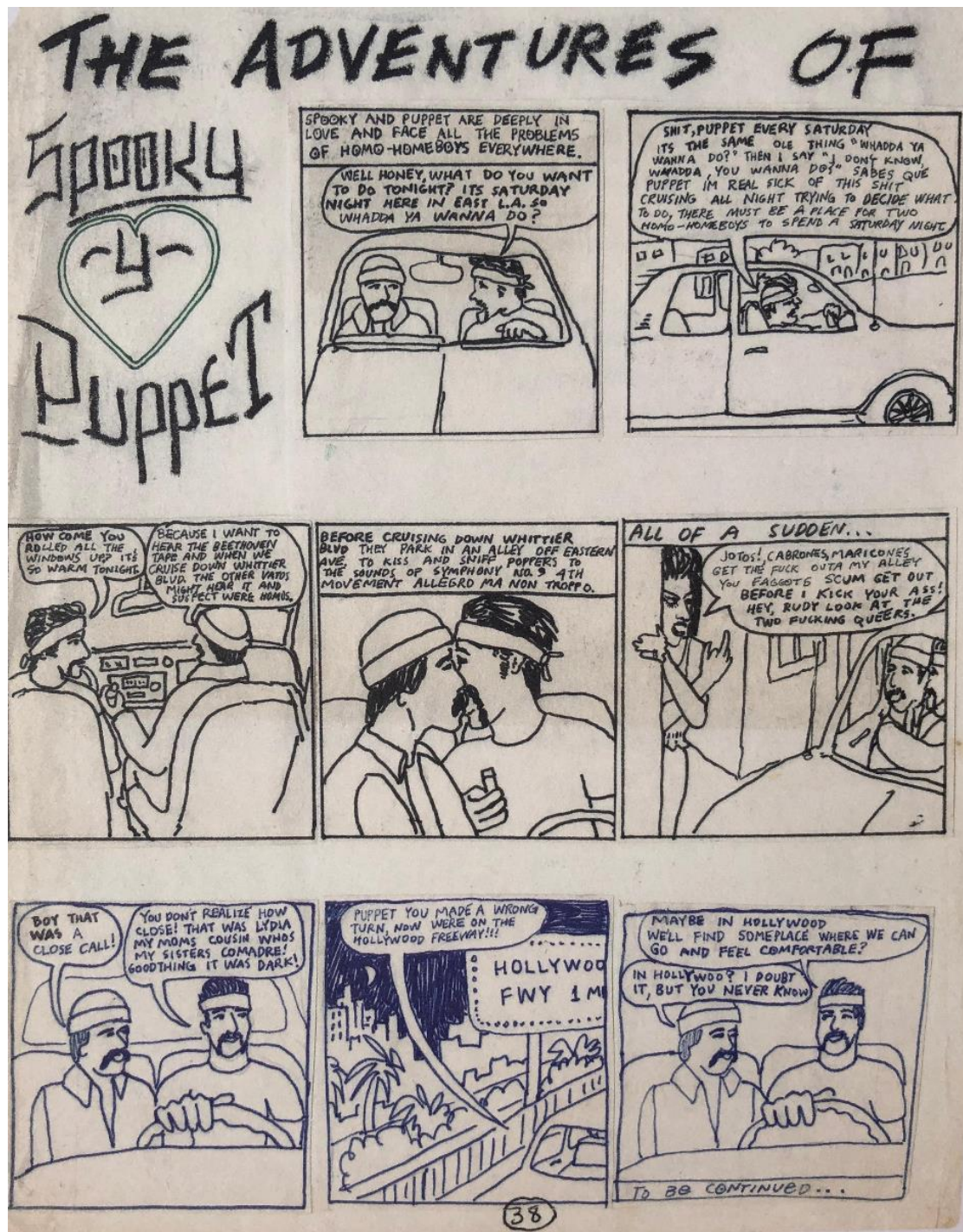
Joey Terrill was also the creator of *Homeboy Beautiful*, a collaborative publication that featured art, pictures, handwritten texts, and cartoons featuring gay men in a Chicano context. The homeboy esthetic, or *cholo* esthetic, was visible in the predominantly Mexican American East L.A. It sharply contrasted the gay epicenter of West Hollywood, where the population was white. While Terrill hated the unchecked masculinity and the homophobia that came with the gangster way of life, he did admire the expressive practices that characterized homeboy culture.⁴⁸ He thus created *Homeboy Beautiful* to question the place for the homo-homeboys.

One of the productions in *Homeboy Beautiful* was 'The Adventures of Spooky y Puppet,' a cartoon illustrated by Terrill. The cartoon demonstrates the struggle of nightlife. The first frame states, "Spooky and Puppet are deeply in love and face all the problems of homo-homeboys everywhere." This speaks to the universality of 'going out' gay. It also speaks to the dangers of enjoying small pleasures. For example, Spooky and Puppet cannot listen to Beethoven while driving through East L.A. This is because the music is associated with gay men, so the other *vatos* [guys] will know they are gay. They then park their car in an alley and kiss. A woman witnesses the kiss and yells slurs, "*jotos, cabrones, maricones!*"

⁴⁷ Teddy Sandoval, "Participants in the Christopher Street West Pride parade wearing Joey Terrill's *malfora* and *maricon* T-shirts, June 1976," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), cover, photograph.

⁴⁸ Richard T. Rodríguez, "Homeboy Beautiful; or Chicano Gay Male Sex Expression in the 1970s" In *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017): 116.

Unphased, the couple is relieved that she did not recognize them. The woman was a cousin of Puppet's mother and a friend of his sister. The relief suggests that friends and family do not accept homosexuality either. The last frame suggests that there is no place for them in Hollywood either.



Joey Terrill: *The Adventures of Spooky y Puppet*, 1979⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Joey Terrill, "The Adventures of Spooky y Puppet, in *Homeboy Beautiful*, no. 2, 1979," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 136. Illustrated cartoon.

The homeboy esthetic that Terrill refers to in the cartoons stems from the *Pachucos/as*, a Chicano subculture of the 1940s that challenged existing gender norms. Pachucos objected the idea that flamboyance was something that was reserved for women, while their female counterparts, Pachucas, contested the traditional image of (Latin-) American women's domestic role. Both expressed themselves through fashion and style. Men and women wore zoot suits, bending gender in the 30s and 40s. The suits for men and women differed little, marking both as potentially non-normative,⁵⁰ because they were more flashy than traditional men's suits, and less tightly-fitting than women's suits.

The zoot suits became a political symbol. The flamboyant design offered a distraction from the poor and somber lifestyle that many Mexican American youth were used to.⁵¹ White Americans, however, started associating the suits, and the pachucos, with gang activity. When during WWII Americans had to start rationing, the excessive suits that were worn by black and brown people came to be seen as unpatriotic, because they used so much fabric.⁵² Instead of dealing with the complex social injustices that these colored youths faced and the fashion reflected, white Americans started attacking their clothes, which for many pachucos and pachucas had become a declaration of self-determination and freedom. The tension led to the Zoot Suit Riots in 1943, in which American servicemen were pitted against Mexican American youths. This resulted in the suits being outlawed.

The figure of the Pachuca was used by Judith F. Baca, one of the few female muralists to emerge from the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s. While Baca achieved national and international success with her political communal works for the outside space (e.g. The Great Wall of Los Angeles), she also made works of smaller scale. In *Las Tres Marias*, Baca positions the 1940s Pachuca next to the 1970s Chola. Cholas were perceived as part of gang culture in the 70s. The work is a life-sized triptych. The left panel portrays a Chola girl wearing dark clothes and heavy eyeliner. The right panel features a Pachuca girl wearing a pencil skirt and red accents. The middle panel is a mirror. It indicates a genealogy between the two countercultures, leaving blank a link between the two that is filled in by the viewer. The piece is now part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American Art.

⁵⁰ Alvarado, "Malflora Aberrant Femininities," 101.

⁵¹ Douglas H. Daniels, "Los Angeles Zoot: Race "Riot," the Pachuco, and Black Music Culture." *The Journal of African American History* 87, no. 1 (2002): 100.

⁵² Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare." In *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984): 80.



*Judith F. Baca: Las Tres Marias, 1976*⁵³

The title of the installation, *Las Tres Marias*, indicates the prevalence of Marianismo in Chicano culture. Marianismo is the concept that young Latina girls are taught to look up to, and emulate, La Virgen Maria. What this means is that girls should be chaste, inherently good, and self-sacrificing.⁵⁴ Leticia Alvarado interprets the work as prompting “a consideration of the Marias as embodiments of aberrant femininities.”⁵⁵ So instead of this

⁵³ Judith F. Baca, “Las Tres Marias, 1976,” in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 103. Colored pencil on paper mounted on panel with upholstery backing and mirror, 68 ¼ x 50 ¼ x 2 ¼ in.

⁵⁴ Priscilla B., “We Need to Talk about Marianismo,” *HipLatina*, March 13, 2018. Retrieved from <https://hiplatina.com/marianismo/> Accessed on April 30, 2020.

⁵⁵ Alvarado, “Malflora Aberrant Femininities,” 104

self-imposed picture of the Chicana as being like Maria, Baca seems to offer a more realistic picture of Chicanas, of how they actually present themselves, opposing Marianismo. In contemporary society, Mexican American girls try to break free from these gender-based restrictions that Marianismo puts on them.

The installation was accompanied by a photographic study of Baca posing as La Pachuca, the picture that she would go on to paint in the triptych. The photographs add another layer to the interpretation of the work. Both the Chola and the Pachuca in the paintings carry concealed razorblades, making the girls seem confrontational to the outside world. This is also how both countercultures were often regarded by white people, as being a threat. The razorblades in combination with the theatrical photographs of Baca, transform these paintings from threatening to performative. The photographs are almost campy in their excessiveness. They add to the idea that *Las Tres Marias* proposes an alternative to the conventional understanding of Chicana femininity. The chola style is not necessarily threatening, it is just a form of self-expression.

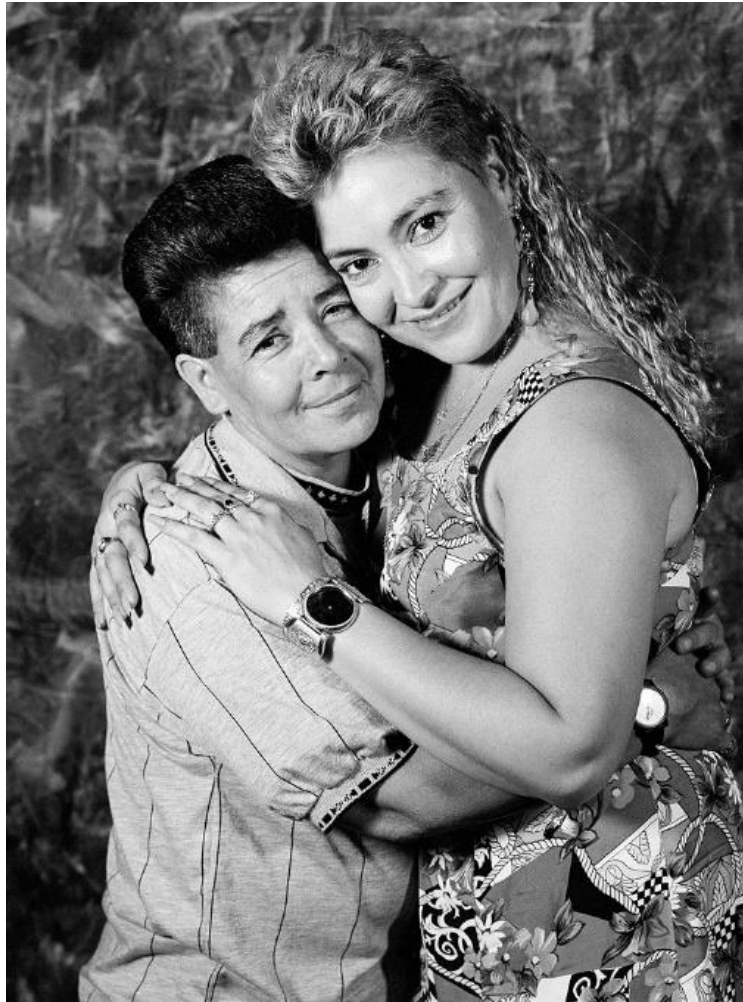


Donna Deith: Judith F. Baca as La Pachuca, 1974⁵⁶

While Baca focused on the representation of Cholas and Pachucas, Laura Aguilar's black-and-white portraits documented the variety of Chicana queer life in Los Angeles. The photographs were taken in the back of the Plush Pony, a lesbian bar in the El Sereno neighborhood. The place was often targeted by plainclothes police, but inside was a safe haven for Chicana lesbians from the whole of Southern California. Aguilar created a

⁵⁶ Donna Deith, "Judith F. Baca as La Pachuca, 1974," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 104. Photographic studies for the triptych *Las Tres Marias* (1976).

makeshift studio in the back of the bar to document this marginalized community. The process of taking the pictures did not only create bonds between Aguilar and her subjects, but it also brought the attendants of the bar together, because once they saw the pictures, everyone wanted to have their portrait taken.⁵⁷



*Laura Aguilar: Plush Pony #15, 1992*⁵⁸

Aguilar's pictures radiate love, friendship, and togetherness. They showcase a hidden community in pride and confidence. *Plush Pony #15* presents a lesbian couple. The woman on the right has a mullet, a signature 90s lesbian hairstyle. The woman on the left wears her hair in a pompadour, which was made famous by pachucos and pachucas in the 1940s.⁵⁹ Wearing her hair like a pachuco/a signifies her gender non-conformity. This photograph of a lovers' embrace offers an intimate and queer alternative view of romance that is unbound

⁵⁷ Macarena Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives" In *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017): 324.

⁵⁸ Laura Aguilar, "Plush Pony #15, 1992," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*, ed. by Macarena Gómez-Barris (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries, 2017), 320. Gelatin Silver Print, 14 x 11 in.

⁵⁹ Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives," 323.

from normative ideas. It also contends the normalized heterosexual viewing of female bodies in art. The male gaze has no place here.

The works that were exhibited in Axis Mundo offer an alternative understanding of Chicano/a culture. By showing the underground queer communities in full glory, these artists empowered the marginalized. The biggest issue for the queer community at the time was the AIDS crisis, which artists have reflected in their art. They also addressed the erasure of *Latinidad* in queer rights activism, as well as the homophobia that plagued the Chicano community. Many of these artists tried to create a space for the queer Chicanos/as because there was no place for them. In these spaces there was room for alternative presentations of masculinity and femininity. Similarly, through art, and by referring to Chicano styles of the past, they could safely attack traditional gender norms.

Chapter III: The UndocuQueer Movement

The UndocuQueer Movement began in 2011 when queer immigrants “came out” as undocumented, unapologetic, and unafraid. “The Movement is a powerful network of queer undocumented immigrant activists organizing for the rights of undocumented youth and their families.”⁶⁰ Issues they fight for are equal opportunities in the job market, the right to live and to love, and to have their truths documented and realities understood.⁶¹ Their activism puts them at risk for deportation. Nevertheless, they tell their stories and raise awareness about the intersectionality of identity reflected in the term ‘undocuqueer.’ It speaks to the realities living in both communities simultaneously.

Prominent members of the UndocuQueer Movement are illustrator Julio Salgado, photographer Beto Soto, and Jose Vargas. Vargas, who is a Pulitzer prize winning journalist and filmmaker, came out in the New York Times Magazine in an autobiographical piece called “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant”. He wrote about the fear of people finding out about his immigration status. He started linking success to being discovered. The more popular he became, the more afraid he was of someone finding out about his illegal status. “The more I achieved, the more scared and depressed I became. I was proud of my work, but there was always a cloud hanging over it, over me”⁶²

In the same year, Julio Salgado, undocumented and queer, emerged as a leader in the movement. He illustrates the intersectionality of queer and immigrant rights. Salgado

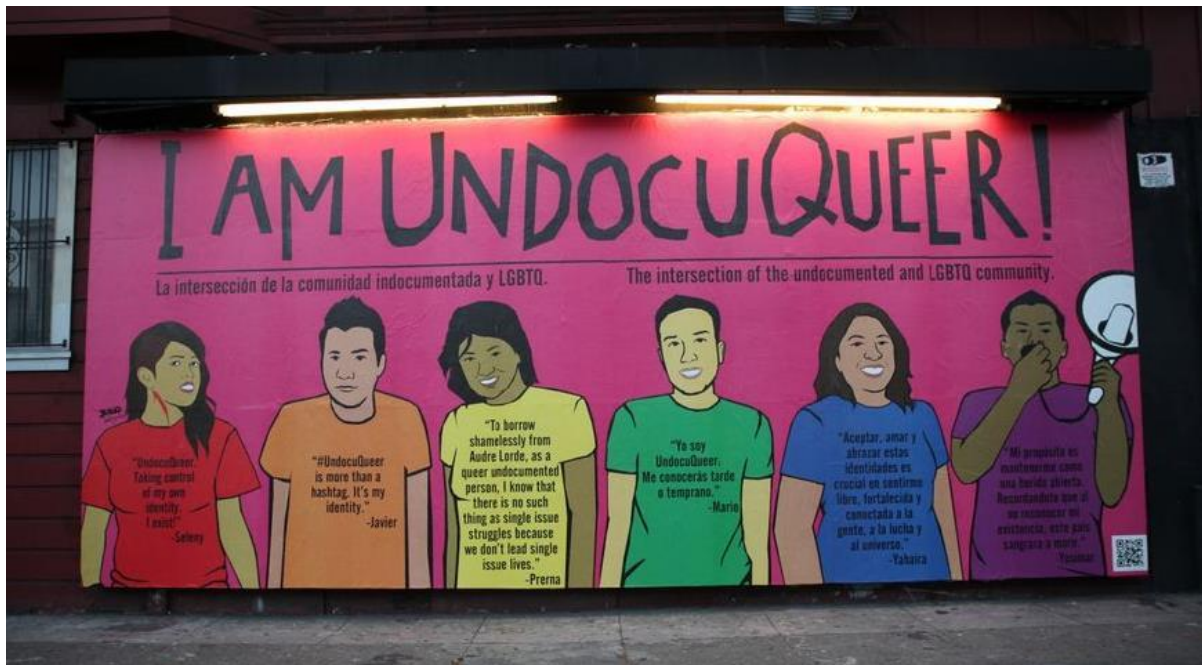
⁶⁰ Equality Archive: UndocuQueer Movement – ISSUES [webpage] (n.d.). Retrieved from: <http://equalityarchive.com/issues/undocuqueer-movement/>

⁶¹ UndocuQueer: About Undocuqueer [webpage] (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.undocuqueer.org/about>

⁶² Jose Antonio Vargas, “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant.” *New York Times Magazine*, June 22, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/magazine/my-life-as-an-undocumented-immigrant.html> Accessed on June 8, 2020.

cofounded the media platform *DreamersAdrift*⁶³ and is a project manager for *CultureStrike*.⁶⁴ He mostly draws portraits in which he includes messages about social justice. His activist art is a means to fight for queer undocumented immigrant rights. And, as he explained in an interview with TIME Magazine, through art he hoped to honor the people that had given him the courage to come out as an undocumented person.⁶⁵

The billboard titled “I am UndocuQueer!” illustrates his approach to honoring. It was displayed in San Francisco’s Mission District in 2013 and featured six members of the UndocuQueer Movement. The goal of the mural was twofold. In addition to honoring the queer and undocumented community, it was an attempt to make clear that they were still a part of the gentrified Mexican American neighborhood. The people featured in the mural are members of the UndocuQueer Movement. Their portraits are accompanied by quotes that explain their politics. Three of the six have quotes in Spanish, the others in English. This is because the Movement wants to represent people that speak both languages.



Julio Salgado: *I Am UndocuQueer*, 2017⁶⁶

The woman that is displayed in a blue t-shirt is Yahaira Carrillo. Her Spanish quote translates to “to accept, love, and embrace these identities is crucial to me feeling free, strengthened, and connected to the people, the struggle, and the universe.” It is crucial for

⁶³ DreamersAdrift is an online media platform that includes videos, poetry, art, commenting on U.S. politics through an immigrant lens. See: <http://dreamersadrift.com/>

⁶⁴ CultureStrike is a broad network of artists and other cultural workers. They provide space and funding for creative development and collaborate with movement groups to fight for social change. See: <https://www.culturestrike.org/>

⁶⁵ TIME. “Undocumented Americans: Julio Salgado | TIME”. June 14, 2012. YouTube Video, [2:06]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRQHGMmtP1w>

⁶⁶ Julio Salgado, “I Am UndocuQueer, 2017,” [Billboard] Mission District, San Francisco. Photograph taken by Jesus Iñiguez. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/julio-salgado-undocuqueer_n_3480327?slideshow=true Accessed on 25 June, 2020.

Carrillo to embrace all of her identities. This will not only contribute to her sense of freedom but will also help bring her people together. In a KQED interview, for instance, she explains that although coming out as undocumented is risky, it is necessary. This is because people need to know that undocumented people exist. But she also wants to stress that they are like everyone else. "Your neighbor could be undocumented."⁶⁷

The billboard in its totality illustrates Carrillo's quotation. Embracing these identities makes her feel free and connected to "the people." Each unique portrait shares a graphic style. Individuals are distinguishable, but together they are part of something larger. As a whole, this series hinders any efforts to make one person stand in for all UndocuQueers, a tactic that is used to maintain an oppressive status quo.⁶⁸ Additionally, Salgado can keep making new portraits. It gives the viewer the sense that more stories could be added to the series, showcasing a whole spectrum of identity, and thus presenting "counter-narratives to discriminatory representation of queers and/or undocumented immigrants."⁶⁹

The quote of the woman in yellow refers to the double identity of UndocuQueers by delving into intersectionality. This woman is journalist Perna Lal. Her t-shirt quotes feminist scholar and author Audre Lorde. "As a queer undocumented person, I know that there are no such thing as single-issue struggles because we don't lead single issue lives." She thus spotlights the intersectionality between race, gender, and immigrant identities. Those who face intersectional oppressions are better able to understand the complex social structures that keep certain people in places of power, while oppressing others. Gloria Anzaldúa refers to this as *la facultad*: "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, [...] it is an instant "sensing." [...] Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized."⁷⁰

This sensitivity partly explains why queer people play a big role in immigrant rights activism, something that Lal wrote an article on for the *Huffington Post*. She explained that queer immigrant activists had been at the forefront of the Dreamers Movement since 2001.⁷¹ One of these early activists was Tania Unzueta, a queer leader who was undocumented in 2001. In 2018, she wrote about the grassroots history of #Not1More, an initiative that set out to abolish ICE: Undocumented people, women of color, queers, and grassroots organizers

⁶⁷ Zidee Stavely, "Queer and Undocumented: A Powerful Force in the Dreamer Movement." *KQED*, Apr 17, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.kqed.org/news/11405917/queer-and-undocumented-a-powerful-force-in-the-dreamer-movement> Accessed on March 26, 2020.

⁶⁸ Hart, Carrie. "The Artivism of Julio Salgado's I Am Undocuqueer! Series." *Working Papers in Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 11

⁶⁹ Hart, "The Artivism of Julio Salgado's I Am Undocuqueer! Series," 9

⁷⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, 4th ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 60.

⁷¹ Perna Lal, "How Queer Undocumented Youth Built the Immigrant Rights Movement." *The Huffington Post*, March 28, 2013. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-queer-undocumented_b_2973670 Accessed on April 10, 2020.

were the first to demand “not one more deportation”.⁷² They thus prefigured the current movement.

The self portrait of UndocuQueer artist Salgado also speaks to the theme of intersectional identity. It is part of the *I Exist Collection*, a collection of illustrations created specifically in support of the Dream Act. He chose this name for the collection to directly address the dehumanizing language of anti-immigrant discourse that obscures the identity of undocumented Americans. Think, for example, of the numerous instances of President Trump referring to Mexican immigrants as rapists and killers,⁷³ but also of the frequently used terms “illegal” and “alien” in reference to immigrants. Salgado’s illustrations contain the phrase “I Exist” and they are both a personal declaration and a rallying cry for the dream movement.⁷⁴



Julio Salgado: *I Exist*, 2019⁷⁵

⁷² Tania Unzueta, “We Fell in Love in a Hopeless Place: A Grassroots History from #Not1More to Abolish ICE.” *Medium*, June 29, 2018. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@LaTania/we-fell-in-love-in-a-hopeless-place-a-grassroots-history-from-not1more-to-abolish-ice-23089cf21711> Accessed on June 10, 2020.

⁷³ E.g. in the speech on June 16th, 2015 in which Donald Trump announced that he was running for president: “They bring drugs, they bring crime, they’re rapists.” See: Michelle Mark, “Trump just referred to one of his most infamous campaign comments: calling Mexicans ‘rapists’.” *Business Insider*, Apr 5, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.nl/trump-mexicans-rapists-remark-reference-2018-4?international=true&r=US> Accessed on June 15, 2020.

⁷⁴ Rahulb, “Interview Highlights: Dreamers Adrift and the “I Exist” Collection.” *Center for Civic Media at MIT*, Apr 8, 2012. Retrieved from: <https://www.civic.mit.edu/> Accessed on March 26, 2020.

⁷⁵ Julio Salgado, “I Exist, 2019,” Illustration. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/mexican-american-artist-julio-salgado-lgbtq-undocumented-unafraid-n799786> Accessed on June 25, 2020.

In the self-portrait Salgado is wearing butterfly wings, thus incorporating the immigrant symbol of the Monarch butterfly. Monarch butterflies migrate from the North of the US and Canada down to Mexico each winter to escape the cold. To Favianna Rodriguez, who is a co-founder of *Culture Strike* and led the *Migration is Beautiful* project,⁷⁶ “the monarch butterfly represents the dignity and resilience of migrants and the right that all living beings have to move freely.”⁷⁷ The *Mariposa* is used by queer activists to speak to the many different ways in which queer Latinx have overcome oppression, and, as a literal butterfly, have transformed themselves.⁷⁸

The symbol of the *Mariposa* also aims to change the way we think about migration. It transforms migration from something that is wrong into something that is necessary and natural. Anzaldúa, too, explained that Mexicans have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks: *El Retorno* to the promised land, that began with the Indians from the interior of Mexico and continued with the *mestizos* that were born out of the relationships between the Indians and the *conquistadores* in the 1500s.⁷⁹ This continued for three centuries. During WWII, the U.S. welcomed the *braceros* [manual laborers] into the country to help build railroads and pick fruit. This speaks to the artificiality of the very concept of a border, and how it is not naturally given that the border is closed.

The phrases written in Salgado’s wings represent his identity and the two languages that define his self. For example, his central message, written on the core of his body, I exist/*Yo Existo*, is written in both English and Spanish. In addition, he uses the term *Jotería*, which translates to queerness. Salgado refers to the *Jotería* Movement that was as response to the exclusion of women and queer Chicanx in the 70s, when the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) hosted conferences for *Jotos/Jotas* to “reconfigure historical and social understanding of the *Joto/a* identity”⁸⁰ The movement reclaimed the traditionally derogatory word *Jotería* to represent individual narratives and embrace an array of identities. Laura Padilla, in her thesis on youth social movements in the U.S. Southwest, makes the argument that *Jotería* can be seen as having filled the gap between Chicana Feminism and the UndocuQueer Movement.⁸¹

The series “Five Tips for Queer Boys” by Salgado addresses the impact of colonialism and thus sheds light on the history, and social constructions, of gender. This, in turn, educates

⁷⁶ Migration is Beautiful was the project that launched the butterfly as a symbol to be widely used in protests.

⁷⁷ John Lee, “What do Butterflies Have to Do with Open Borders? Migration is Beautiful.” *Open Borders: The Case*, May 27, 2013. Retrieved from <https://openborders.info/blog/what-do-butterflies-have-to-do-with-open-borders-migration-is-beautiful/> Accessed on March 26, 2020.

⁷⁸ Mariposa Waves: Transnational Queer Latinx & Jotería History Project – HOME [webpage] (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mariposawaves.com/> Accessed on April 10, 2020.

⁷⁹ Anzaldúa, “Borderlands/La Frontera,” 33.

⁸⁰ Xamuel, Bañales, “Jotería: A Decolonizing Political Project.” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014): 155-166: 156

⁸¹ Padilla, Laura T. “Queering Diasporic Activism: Undocumented Latinx Youth Social Movements in the US Southwest (2006-2016)”. San Diego State University, 2017: 16

and empowers. The series was a collaboration with UndocuQueer poet Yosimar Reyes. Reyes identifies as Two Spirit.⁸² The history of Two Spirit people is addressed in the first 'tip.' In short, before colonization, Native tribes believed in a third gender or a gender spectrum. People that were not cisgender or heterosexual often held an honorary, and even divine position within a tribe.



Julio Salgado: Five Tips for Queer Boys, 2012⁸³

By referring to pre-Colonial times, Reyes highlights an often-overlooked history, demonstrating that homophobia/transphobia is not inherent to Mexican culture. For young queers with aboriginal roots, this can be comforting knowledge. It provides historical context around homophobia/transphobia in Latin American countries. This work is an example of how art can act as an educational device. If more people were to know the connections between homophobia/transphobia and colonization, they might rethink their fear of queerness.

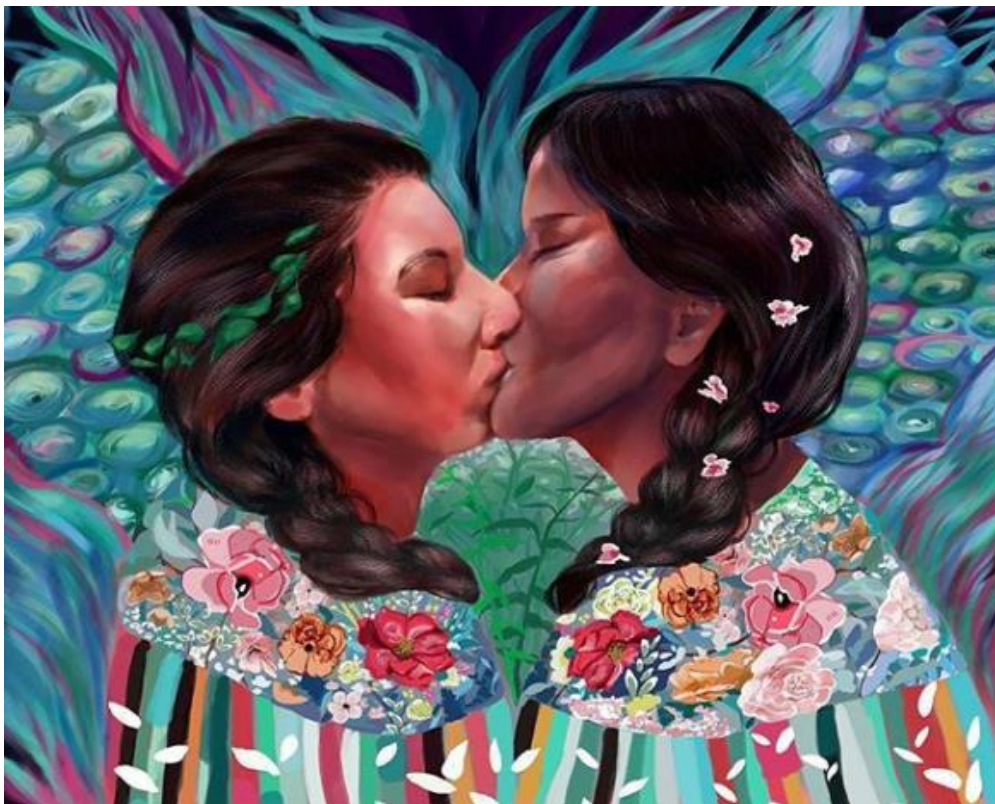
⁸² Two Spirit is a pan-Indian umbrella term that is used by some Indigenous Americans to describe the people in their communities that do not adhere to binary gender norms. While the beliefs differ for the various tribes, in 1990 the term Two Spirit was chosen to unite gender non-conformists from all tribes, and at the same time, to distance themselves from non-Native queers. See: Kylan M. de Vries, "Berdache (Two-Spirit)", In *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, ed. by Jodi O'Brien, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2007), 64.

⁸³ Julio Salgado, "Five Tips for Queer Boys, 2012," Illustration. Retrieved from <https://juliosalgadoart.com/post/15686930487/this-set-of-illustrations-which-will-be-updated> Accessed on June 25, 2020.

Pre-colonial sexuality and gender are something that Angelica Frausto (@nerdybrownkid) also includes in her art. She posts her art to Instagram using the #UndocuQueer hashtag. The work below is untitled, but the caption speaks volumes:

"I wish I knew all of the ways my ancestors loved each other. Secrets hidden in embroidery, in the shadows of the *milpas* [corn], in the corner of the *curandera's* [shaman] smile. This is what displacement feels like, generations later, a breath I'll never catch, clawing at nothing. How did you say I love you? There's a place on my tongue, where those words should land and I can't help but feel like I was robbed of you."

Frausto yearns for the culture of her ancestors that is no longer accessible. She will never know how they said "I love you." This piece is traditionally Mexican because of the patterns, the flowers, and the dark hair in braids. But Frausto presents something absent in traditional Mexican art, namely, the love that is shared between two women. By presenting these queer women surrounded by traditional Mexican glory, she asserts that there is a place for them in the community. Even though they are queer, they can identify with, and appreciate, Mexican culture.



Angelica Frausto: *Untitled*, 2018⁸⁴

Whereas the flowers, colors, and corn in the background of the above painting signify cultural identity, the body itself identifies culture in Karla Rosas' work on the next page. Rosas (@karlinche_) also posts her works on Instagram using the #UndocuQueer hashtag. Her

⁸⁴ Angelica Frausto (@nerdybrownkid), "Untitled," [Instagram post]. Published on May 18, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bi53FWlhVNM/> Accessed on March 20, 2020.

illustrations explore the relationship between “illegality,” family history, queerness, and self-identity.⁸⁵ The illustration below, called *Lupe Travels*, shows Lupe, who when she closes her eyes, is able to fly through the sky. Lupe is naturally hairy, breaking the stigma surrounding Latin women’s body hair. She points to all the places that she has called home and is thus portrayed as having the freedom to move anywhere that she wants. The illustration is accompanied by the words “vete a la chingada con tus papeles” which translates to “to hell with your papers.” It is a statement against the need for documentation. With her eyes closed, Lupe can make any place into her home without needing papers to prove it. “Home” is where she is.



Karla Rosas: *Lupe Travels*, 2019⁸⁶

Rosas also takes on the woman’s role within Mexican American culture. In the illustration on the next page, “ni tu santa, ni tu puta” translates to “not your saint, not your whore.” This work is a statement against the conception that women are men’s property, but it also speaks to the construction of girlhood. In short, girls fall into two classifications. They are either likened to La Virgen Maria and are thus worthy citizens. Or, they are regarded as *putas*, and thus undeserving of respect. The message of the art is that there are more expressions of girlhood, there are more than just two options. In this drawing Rosas also

⁸⁵ Karla Rosas, “About” [webpage] (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.maricosas.com/about-me> Accessed on June 21, 2020.

⁸⁶ Karla Rosas (@karlinche_), “Lupe Travels,” [Instagram post]. Published on June 20, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/By7nd6KIWGH/> Accessed on March 20, 2020.

presents the girls with hair on their upper lip and between their eyebrows, characteristics shared by many Latin American women. The rose is a classic symbol in Mexican Catholicism.⁸⁷ It refers to the apparition of La Virgen in Mexico. The way in which the roses are almost stamped onto the heads, that have Aztec-like hair, speaks to colonization. By referencing the roses and the Aztecs, Rosas demonstrates how Catholicism was forced upon Mexicans by the European colonizers.



Karla Rosas: *Untitled*, 2020⁸⁸

The UndocuQueer artists use different ways to directly speak through art. Their works are generally bold and legible, and make use of old and new symbols, like the traditional roses and the newly claimed symbol of the butterfly. Many of the works are accompanied by text, which lends them perfectly to activism. The artists' powerful messages about their hopes for the future are supported by elements from the past, demonstrating how the traditional culture can support their fight for awareness of both migration issues and queer issues. By embracing this intersectionality, UndocuQueers are able to reach across different communities and bring them together. The artists also present migration as something that is natural, and the U.S. – Mexico border as something that is not. The need to defy borders in

⁸⁷ Roses are part of the origin story of La Virgen in Mexican Catholicism. The myth goes that Juan Diego, a poor old widower, met the Virgin Mary on top of a hill. She asked him to bring her roses, which she arranged in his poncho. The rose symbolizes proof of the existence of La Virgen. The image of the rose poncho remains an important symbol. See: Whitney Hopley, "The Virgin Mary's Apparitions and Miracles in Guadalupe, Mexico," *Learn Religions*, 03 Feb, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.learnreligions.com/virgin-marys-miracles-in-guadalupe-mexico-124600> Accessed on June 21, 2020.

⁸⁸ Karla Rosas (@karlinche_), "Untitled" [Instagram post]. Published on Feb 20, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8y3UjXlu--/> Accessed on June 21, 2020.

order to live rich and full lives engages with border studies that question physical boundaries.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The presence of the past is clear in contemporary Mexican American culture. We can see trends of artists incorporating cultural symbols of the generations that came before them, like artists in the 70s that use the *pachuco* style of the 40s, but also the continuous use of traditional religious symbols like flowers, and the concept of *marianismo*. Unfortunately, putting elements of the past in a new light has not led to enough significant changes in beliefs on family structure and gender. These beliefs are still quite traditional and conservative, which makes queer activism still very much needed.

There has been some improvement, however. In the course of queer Mexican American art, you can see that artists are moving away from trying to create a separate space for queers, and that they are now affirming that the space for queers should be within regular society. The photographs of Aguilar and the cultural productions of Terrill, for example, show that Chicano queers needed a way to express themselves and spotlight the things that made them stand out from the heteronormative, binary society. Conversely, UndocuQueers now are establishing that they are 'just like' anyone else and that they fit into both American and Mexican American culture and society.

Perhaps this is a trend that is necessary for any type of movement towards recognition and acceptance, first you want people to know what makes you special, before you can create a space within 'the norms,' where those things that make you special can allow you to contribute to society. Within the scope of this study we can also see that the art that was made in the 1960s-1990s was, with exceptions noted, not necessarily meant for a larger audience. Mundo's paintings, Aguilar's photographs, and Terrill's *Homeboy Beautiful* were not distributed outside of the community. UndocuQueers, however, try to reach the public with their works, like Salgado did through his billboard. This reflects the implicit belief that visibility is a means of resisting marginalization. Visibility, in other words, leads to or equals freedom.

What contributed to this change, and what cannot be overlooked, is the rise of the internet. Since the internet was not available in the times of Axis Mundo, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the reach of both sets of works. The UndocuQueer Movement has definitely been able to reach all the people that it did because of the internet. A large share of the activist works exists in the digital realms of Instagram, something that would not have been possible fifty years ago. The medium of Instagram is also image based, which has assumingly changed the way in which art is made. Artists have to keep the very short

⁸⁹ For more information on border studies, see: Edward J. McCaughan, "We Didn't Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us," 2020; Henk Van Houtum, "B/ordering Space," 2017; James. D. Sidaway, "Decolonizing Border Studies?," 2019.

attention span of their followers into account and make sure that their works grab attention within seconds.

But, even without the internet, the Axis Mundo artists left an important legacy. By visualizing the layered identities of being both Chicano and queer, they enacted intersectionality before the term was coined. This proves how art not only reflects the world, but actively engages with it, and how art can give shape to academic and societal discussions. Partly supported by the writings of queer women of color like Moraga and Anzaldúa, intersectionality has been put on the map, and now offers an important framework for looking at every societal issue, like intersectional feminism and intersectional environmentalism, but also the Black Lives Matter Movement that is prevailing at the time of writing this paper.

The Black Lives Matter Movement has brought to light that there is a lack of representation and recognition of Afro-Latinx people within Latinidad activism. This is something that this paper does not address and that future research could look into. Within the limited scope of this study, there is also only marginal representation of artists on the gender spectrum. Only gay and lesbian artists are included. There is, however, enough art to be explored that is made by trans, intersex, and non-binary artists, etc. While this thesis hopefully fills a gap within intersectional scholarly literature, more questions remain. How has political art changed over the years, and what has been the influence of the internet? Do white Americans also question or protest the border in artworks, and non-Mexican immigrants, for that matter? And is there more to discover about the use of the metaphorical closet that UndocuQueers speak to?

This study does, however, present some more findings. The Axis Mundo and UndocuQueer movements share a number of similarities. Both generations of queer Mexican American artists reflect contemporary issues in their works. The central issue in the 1980s was the AIDS crisis. Now, the most pressing matter is immigration. Both also focus on finding a home and a place and look to their community for support. The art reflects this by portraying the individual subject and the communities to which they belong. The billboard is an example of this. 'I Am UndocuQueer' refers to the self and to the community. And while the Axis Mundo artists might have distanced themselves somewhat from the Chicano community, they still identified with being Chicano/a and ideally saw a future in which there was a place for them among straight Chicanos/as.

UndocuQueers are nearing this ideal future but are still working to diminish homophobia in the community. A new way in which they are doing this is by altering the Spanish language to become more inclusive of all gender varieties, think e.g. Chicanx and Latinx. This gender-neutral x also seems to be gaining some traction outside of the Hispanic diaspora, with more and more English-speaking feminists using the inclusive term womxn.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Natalia Emmanuel, "Why I Choose to Identify As a Womxn," *HerCampus*, Apr 16, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/washington/why-i-choose-identify-womxn> Accessed on June 23, 2020.

More Mexican American artists also seem to have started acknowledging their kinship with Native Americans. They are looking into a shared aboriginal culture, which provides them with new arguments against heteronormativity and the generally binary approach to gender in *La Raza*. By delving into pre-Colonial history, they also make the claim that migration is something natural, and borders are not.

The latter is an argument that can be used in the most pressing matter for most queer Mexican Americans today, and specifically for those who are undocumented, namely, abolishing ICE and putting a halt to deportations. At the time of writing this paper, the US Supreme Court unexpectedly ruled against President Trump's attempt to end the DACA program. This is a huge win for the Dreamers. The battle is long from over, however, because undocumented immigrants still face healthcare discrimination, disproportionate poverty, and their immigration status remains stigmatized. Mistreatment of ICE detainees continues, and the fear of deportation still results in many undocumented immigrants suffering from mental health issues. Better policies are needed, but the young artists that have contributed to this positive Supreme Court ruling will keep fighting for change and for their right to live, love, and exist.

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