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EXHIBIT CATALOG

THE PACHUCO ERA

by

DAN LUCKENBILL

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Catalog of an exhibit
University Research Library
September–December 1990

by

DAN LUCKENBILL

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FOREWORD

Unique material for the study of Chicano history and Chicano art history came to the UCLA Library at least as early as the 1930s, when it received from Miss Lucy Starr, sister of University of Chicago historian Frederick Starr, a gift of prints by the Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada. The work of this artist—particularly his playful *calavera* [skull] imagery—was one influence on Chicano artists as they sought to create an art free of European and Anglo-American influence to express a unique heritage. Material relevant to the theme of this exhibit came to the library in 1945, when Alice McGrath turned over records of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee to Robert Vosper, then head, Acquisitions Department. Carey McWilliams gave the library his collection of material on topics of interest in the history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in California. The collections have been used continually ever since. Luis Valdéz has noted that reading a battered copy of Guy Endore's *The Sleepy Lagoon Mystery* set in motion his thoughts about what became his play *Zoot Suit*. The department also has the papers of Guy Endore. The UCLA Oral History Program, administered by this department, has further documented this period in interviews with Endore, McGrath, McWilliams, and others.

Material is regularly added in support of research in this period and all periods of Chicano history. I am pleased to announce the acquisition, on the occasion of this exhibit, of a print of the color photograph, *Clavo*, by Los Angeles Chicano artist John M. Valadez. The department is privileged to mount *The Pachuco Era* in conjunction with *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation (CARA), 1965–1985*.

David S. Zeidberg, Head
Department of Special Collections
University Research Library
University of California, Los Angeles

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The impetus for this exhibit came from having seen the material used for so many years, but never actually to have been showcased. A class given by Visiting Professor Victor Alejandro Sorell confirmed the interest in relating Special Collections material to what promised to be a distinguished Wight Gallery exhibit, *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation (CARA), 1965–1985*.

I thank those who have given permission to include unique material in the exhibit and catalog: Alice McGrath, John Valadez, and Luis Valdéz. José Montoya has given permission to use his phrase “those times of the forties and early fifties” in conjunction with the exhibit. Works from *CARA* reproduced in this catalog are by Juan R. Fuentes and José Galvez.

I would like to thank Professor Sorell. I especially thank those persons at the Wight Gallery who have created the *CARA* exhibit. They have given of their time and assisted with ideas and details of this exhibit and have reviewed the catalog. Those persons are: Edith A. Tonelli, director; Elizabeth Shepherd, curator; and Holly Barnett Sanchez and Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *CARA* project coordinators. Any errors remain my own.

James Davis and Lilace Hatayama have advised in all details of the exhibit. Simon Elliott arranged for reproductions for the catalog. Steve Kunishima and Ellen Watanabe printed the signs and posters. Paul G. Naiditch assisted in the editing and publication of the catalog. Judy Hale and Christopher Coniglio in UCLA Publication Services produced the catalog.

The department thanks UCLA Chancellor Charles E. Young for his continued support of its publications.

I would like to dedicate the work on this exhibit and the catalog to Onofre di Stefano, whose interest in these topics has long spurred my own.

INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation (CARA), 1965–1985* reads:

Chicano art is the modern, ongoing expression of the long-term cultural, economic and political struggle of the Mexicano People within the United States. It is an affirmation of the complex identity and vitality of the Chicano People. Chicano art arises from and is shaped by our experience in the Americas.

The Pachuco Era focuses primarily on situations and events beginning in the late 1930s and culminating in the early 1940s, but with continuity and extension into the present. The exhibit relates Chicano artists' concerns and even inspiration to Chicano social history and the literature and art of *el Movimiento*, the Chicano movement. Examples of *CARA* themes pertinent to this exhibit are:

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Works of art dealing with issues of resistance to immigration policy, the Vietnam War, police relations, voters' rights, etc.

URBAN IMAGES

Most Chicano art was created in and about the urban *barrios* or neighborhoods. Portraits of *barrio* residents and stylized "types" became important subject matter. Variations on the character of the pachuco in the familiar "zoot suit," a social prototype of Chicano resistance, were documented and transformed by artists, writers, and performers. This section is devoted to a presentation and examination of this imagery.

These and other themes are fully developed in publications meshed with *CARA*. Terms alluded to—or given brief definitions—in *The Pachuco Era* are fully defined and given full context in *CARA* publications. *The Pachuco Era* gives brief contexts for further study through a display of material difficult to obtain or unique to the UCLA Library.

THE PACHUCO ERA



Los Angeles Daily News photograph. 1942. A report to a 1942 Los Angeles Grand Jury implied that Mexicans were like “wildcats.” This supported the assumption that if a pachuco were detained, it would be “useless to turn him loose without having served a sentence.” The wildcat “must be caged to be kept in captivity.” This photograph shows one technique of labeling the pachucos as “hoodlums.” The bars of a jail imply guilt. Actually, the pachucos show a sense of style in their resistant stance.

“THOSE TIMES OF THE
FORTIES AND EARLY FIFTIES”

During this period the Andrews Sisters recorded “Zoot Suit,” with its jitterbug rhymes: reet pleat, stuff cuff, and drape shape. From the beginning the zoot suit fashion was reported negatively. In 1942 *Newsweek* wrote that Harlem was the “breeding ground” where “the disease appeared.” Young Mexican Americans adopted the style, which they referred to as being “draped out.” They maintained the style longer than did others. They added distinctive speech, body movement, and body adornment. These young persons were known as pachucos, the style having originated in El Paso, which is called Chuco in the patois they used.

“Sleepy Lagoon” was another popular song of this big band era and was recorded by Harry James, among others. A rippling piano and a gliding trumpet suggest a boat on dreamy waters. Violins add the romance of a motion picture score. The reality for young Mexican Americans, who in this period suffered discrimination even in recreation, was a swimming hole nicknamed Sleepy Lagoon in an abandoned gravel pit in Montebello.

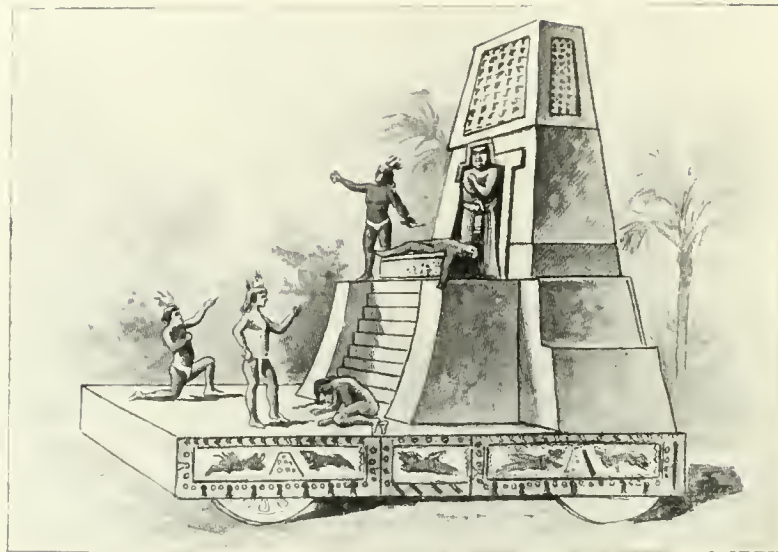
A death at Sleepy Lagoon in 1942 put the Mexican American community on trial. Riots the next year put the community under attack. Because the pachucos maintained their style in the face of disapproval from both the dominant society and their Mexican parents, they have been seen as the first Chicanos. The history and imagery of the pachuco era, a time of social resistance, were significant elements Chicanos recovered to identify, develop, and celebrate their heritage.

1. LA FIESTA DE LOS ANGELES

Carey McWilliams wrote that “Los Angeles has not grown; it has been conjured into existence.” This was done largely through booster activities of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1888. La Fiesta de Los Angeles was first presented in 1894. The program for 1895 announced the theme: “the achievements of the Spanish pioneers, ... the striking customs and life of the strange races which they conquered, to be contrasted with the march of American civilization.” The word “Mexican,” which by this time had negative connotations such as “untrustworthy” or even “criminally-oriented,” is suppressed. “Pioneers” is a concept with which Anglo-Americans could identify, subtly tied to the latter part of the quotation, which restates Manifest Destiny, the philosophy which had led to the war with Mexico in 1846.

Among the projected floats was “An Aztec Sacrifice.” Although such a float was probably not built, its description provides an example of how a negative stereotype of Mexicans had taken hold in the Anglo-American imagination.

For the 150th birthday fiesta in 1931, “Mexican” was still avoided. Events were “Spanish barbecues” and “gay Spanish fandangos.” In this Depression year, alien workers were seen as threats to employment. There was a national deportation effort. Those most affected were Mexicans. A Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce memo shows that even Mexican American citizens were encouraged to leave. Newspapers stressed violence in the Mexican community, perhaps to gain sympathy for repatriation and deportation policies.



AN AZTEC SACRIFICE.

Artist unknown. *An Aztec Sacrifice*. Illustration from La Fiesta de Los Angeles program for 1895. Nineteen floats were to represent themes in the history of the Spanish conquest and of the west: Birth of the Inca, Siege of Mexico, The Missions, Old Spanish Life, and Sutter's Mill, for example. From the lengthy description of *An Aztec Sacrifice*: "Nothing could be more dreadful than the extent to which human sacrifice entered into the religious observances of the Aztecs before their conquest by the Spanish pioneers."

2. HAIR STYLES USED IN IDENTIFICATION OF HOODLUMS

The zoot suit style consisted of fingertip-length, wide-lapel coats and draped trousers that ballooned at the knees and narrowed tightly at the ankles. Cab Calloway called the hats (usually pork-pie) worn with zoot suits “righteous sky bonnets.”

The pachucos’ distinct speech derived from *Caló*, the argot of Spanish gypsies, believed to have been brought to Mexico by bullfighters. The border city of El Paso, known as Chuco, or Pachuco, gave its name to both the argot and the group of persons speaking it. Young men hitching rides on the railroads during the Depression brought the style to Los Angeles.

Pachuco mixes Mexican slang, New Mexican Spanish (which did not change, as did continental Spanish), words borrowed from the Aztec Náhuatl, English words Hispanicized, and Spanish words Anglicized. Pachuco is rich in words of emphasis: *simón* (yes; made by extending *sí*), *ese* (man), *nel* (no), *chale* (no, with emphasis). Some expressions are unique to pachuco: *órale* (right on). *Hay te watcho* Hispanicizes the English I’ll be seeing you, catch you later.

The pachucos had distinctive body adornment (crosses with rays tattooed between thumb and forefinger, for example) and body movement. In “El Paso del Norte” John Rechy described their style of movement: “They walked cool, long graceful bad strides, rhythmic as hell, hands deep into pockets, shoulders hunched.” He adds: “Much heart.” This translates the concept of *corazón* or *cora*. It is one of many words of binding Mexican American social mores, such as *carnal* (brother), or *camalismo* (brotherhood).

The press reported the zoot suit style as “comical.” Young men wore their *greña* (hair) in a ducktail. Newspapers called this the “Argentine Dovetail” and found it “appropriately funny” for the pachuco style.

Beginning in June and July of 1942, newspapers stressed violence in Mexican American neighborhoods. The pachuco style was termed “grotesque.” In the next few years newspaper accounts labeled youth groups gangs and sensationalized their actions: “young hoodlums smoke ‘reefers,’ tattoo girls, and plot robberies.”

Pachucos were arrested on suspicion only, from hearsay evidence. Charges might later be dropped, but this was not reported. Arrests remained on their records. They were often beaten by the police. If relatives came to inquire, they were detained and questioned. The pachuco style was proof of guilt and sentences were meted out accordingly: “Youths get hair cut to avoid jail term.”

3. “AND I THINK IT WAS A KNIFE”

In August of 1942 the unconscious body of José Díaz, twenty-two, was found near Sleepy Lagoon. He died before regaining consciousness. The circumstances around his death have never been determined. Henry Leyvas, nineteen, had been beaten up and when he and some of his friends later crashed a nearby party, they were accused of having murdered Díaz.

Twenty-four young men, including Leyvas, were indicted on conspiracy to commit murder. Several testified that they had been beaten by the police in attempts to obtain confessions. The lawyer for Leyvas witnessed “his bruised face, bleeding mouth, [and] saw him vomit from blows



Los Angeles Daily News photograph. 1942. Harsh photographs of the Sleepy Lagoon defendants taken under jail circumstances contributed to the effect of their being guilty before the trial. Henry Leyvas's smiling face transcends the circumstances of this portrait. A letter to Alice McGrath shows his later doubt: "I had rosy expectations ... [but] it seems like the whole world just folded up on me, and there is nothing I can do about it."

to the stomach." Two defendants requested separate trial and were never tried. Twenty-two were tried as one.

Two weeks after the indictment a report on Mexican Americans was read to the Grand Jury, and would have been known to the trial jury. This stated that Mexicans are descendants of the Aztecs, who had "a total disregard for human life, ... which is well known to everyone." Mexicans are biologically violent. Americans fight clean fights, but Mexicans like to use knives. They have a desire "to kill, or at least let blood." The research for this report seems to have been done in a publication such as the La Fiesta de Los Angeles brochure. An article in *Sensation* magazine called the defendants "baby gangsters." The writer drew attention to their "jet-black hair" and "black brows," emphasizing their non-western European "foreignness" and gave them qualities of motion picture villains.

At the beginning of the trial, the defendants were not allowed to cut their hair or change clothing. Newspapers called them "gooners," then simply "goons." Testimony was volatile, not factual. When one witness spoke about Leyvas, she said that "I saw something in his hand, ... and I think it was a knife."

The prosecution produced none of the weapons they charged the defendants with having used. Despite the fact that no evidence presented put any of the defendants near Díaz, three were convicted of murder in the first degree. Others received lesser verdicts. Five were acquitted.

The Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, organized to raise money for an appeal, was chaired by Carey McWilliams. Alice Greenfield (later McGrath) was the executive secretary. She published a

mimeographed newsletter, *Appeal News*, to send to the young men in prison. Her strategy was to nurture their awareness: "It is the most essential thing in your life to make a definite effort to have an outstanding record." She tapped the force of their self-expression: "To quote your letters and what you have told me in my visits to you is the very best [strategy].... It is very much to your benefit to be quoted."

Ben Margolis argued the brief in the appellate court, from ground carefully laid during the trial by George Shibley, one of the defense attorneys. The appeal was successful. October 4, 1944 Alice McGrath wired Leyvas: "Decision reversed. Victory. Will wire further details when we have them. Oh what a beautiful morning." Her notes on the activities of the day of the release of the young men indicate that Leyvas was not given the telegram until a week after it was sent.

4. "THEY STRIPPED ME, *CARNAL*"

During the summer of 1943 there were race riots in several large cities of the United States. In Detroit in August, thirty-four were killed in violence between Whites and Blacks. In Los Angeles there had been a riot in June, usually called the Zoot Suit Riots, which lasted ten days. No one was critically injured.

The riots are more accurately termed Servicemen's Riots, since groups of U. S. military got into taxis and went into Mexican American neighborhoods looking for "zoot suiters." They entered homes and motion picture houses. They beat up young men, stripped them of their zoot suits and other clothing, and cut their hair. Police stood by, or arrested the pachucos.

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National Chairman
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Executive Secretary

Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee

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Drawing of a zoot suit by Sleepy Lagoon defendant Manuel Delgado. The letterhead shows the diverse communities involved in the appeal, including professors from UCLA.

These charged symbolic events have been made the center of many creative interpretations. The Chilean writer, Fernando Alegría, used the stark facts above, in his story published in Mexico, “¿A qué lado de la cortina?” [“On Which Side of the Curtain?”]. As a young Mexican American watches a movie with his date in downtown Los Angeles, he realizes that the American dream depicted on the screen has nothing to do with the life he leads. He hears a great roar. It is the servicemen out to get the zoot suiters. He is hit and blood flows onto his light-colored jacket. He is separated from his date by the crowd. He is stripped naked, put into a paddy wagon, and sent to jail. A red-haired sailor takes advantage of a free seat and watches the end of the movie. His seat is that of the young pachuco. He has displaced the Mexican American.

5. RESISTANCE AND AFFIRMATION

Early interpretations of the pachucos stated the sociological facts of the discrimination which oppressed the pachucos and related these facts to Mexican Americans in general. Louis Adamic founded the journal *Common Ground* in 1940 “to invite diversity” and “produce unity.” Contributors included Langston Hughes, Carey McWilliams, and William Saroyan. Beatrice Griffith published short essays on the pachucos, later gathered with sketches (some about the riots) in *American Me*. In 1943 George I. Sánchez published “Pachucos in the Making.” He delineated the ethnic prejudice of the era: in education, separate and inferior schools; in religion, separate services; in recreation, separate facilities or denial of facilities; in

employment, denial of work or more menial work or work for less wages.

El Movimiento, the Chicano movement, began with the strikes of César Chávez in 1965. Chicano literature and art supported this social action. Luis Valdéz wrote *actos* (short skits) in support of the strikes. Chávez and his brother Manuel invented the emblem of a black eagle on a red and white background to make their cause more effective.

El Movimiento issued *planes* (manifestos) in support of political action and educational reform. Political platforms included seeking recovery of lands from which Mexican Americans were displaced, following the 1848 treaty with Mexico. *El plan de Santa Barbara* adopted the self-designating “Chicano”—used by pachucos, but a word with previously negative connotations—as “the root idea of a new cultural identity.” The Aztec origin of the word positively asserts the Chicano heritage. The *plan* again reversed negative imagery and supported the *barrios* and *colonias*—Chicano urban and rural communities—in that “man is never closer to his true self as when he is close to his community.”

Chicano art, then, is not only personal statement, but also an alliance: to family, to urban youth, workers, farmworkers, and protesters. It rejects European sources, is politically motivated, and concerned with educating a broad community of interests, rather than appealing to a select few used to museums controlled by the dominant majority and the commercial spaces of galleries. It is a public art and, as often as possible, done by or with the community. *Centros* (centers, workshops) such as Self-Help Graphics and Art in East Los Angeles

are a strong part of *el Movimiento*. The Chicano philosophy led to the use of art visible to the *barrios* in the form of murals or art available widely and inexpensively: posters and other graphic art.

Mexican poet Octavio Paz had been in Los Angeles briefly in the pachuco era. He began his influential work, *El laberinto de la soledad [The Labyrinth of Solitude]*, with an essay on the pachucos. He applied the then-current existential philosophy to this lifestyle. At the beginning of the *Movimiento* Chicano anthropologist Octavio Romano asserted that the pachucos were the first separatists and termed their youthful activities a movement which was existential.

Poets such as José Montoya and Tino Villanueva followed—or concurred with—this interpretation. Villanueva's "Pachuco Remembered" begins with a startling call to attention—"¡Ese!"—and then speaks of the pachucos' "will-to-be culture" and "aesthetics existential." The poet allies himself with Romano also in the fact that he makes the pachucos the first protesters, resisting the criticism of Anglo-American teachers: "Speak English damn it!" / "Button up your shirt!" / "When did you last get a haircut?"

In time, the interpretation by Paz was seen to be lacking in the perception that the pachucos created a culture of their own. With tools of new critical theory, approaches argue that the elements of the pachuco style—language, dress, and music—were strategies to resist assimilation by the dominant society, a resistance which was a tenet of *Chicanismo*, the philosophy which developed from the Chicano civil rights movement.

Luis Valdéz proceeds from an existential reading, but his defining the pachuco as

"an actor in the streets" and his invitation to perform—"put on a zoot suit and play the myth"—allies him to more recent approaches. In *Zoot Suit* the dramatist used aspects of lives like that of Henry Leyvas to reverse with dazzling scenes of his own the negative imagery presented by the press in the 1940s. Valdéz used all the elements of the theater—story, scenery, costume, music, and dance—to restore the style of the pachucos. Songs written by Eduardo "Lalo" Guerrero in the 1940s were included in both the theater and motion picture productions. (Guerrero's pachuco songs have been considered forerunners of bilingual Chicano poetry.) Ignacio Gomez created a striking poster (in *CARA*) illustrating El Pachuco, played by Edward James Olmos with authentic gestures from the period, as coached by Sleepy Lagoon defendant José "Chepe" Ruiz. When the actor models his zoot suit and says "*Watche mi tacuche, ese*"—"Check out my zoot suit, man"—he is lit not by a newsman's stark flash, but by the full art of theater lighting.

6. "LIKE TODAY I'M WEARING GRAY"

Con Safos was an early Chicano journal, published in Los Angeles, 1968–1971. It sought to express "the entire spectrum of feelings that are the soul of the *barrio*." In a short fiction, "Passing Time," J. L. Navarro's protagonist walks through the *barrio*, notes its low income untidiness, yet, after passing "Juan's store and Oscar's store, and then Manuel's store," which he finds "dingy looking," the sensations of the *barrio's* "sights and pleasant weather, ... its silent pride, ... its genuine wholesomeness"

confirm his perception that “all the components of this day were just right.”

Con Safos contained glossaries of *barrio* language, which had been neglected since the pachuco era, and was recovered as a literary code connecting generations of Chicanos. The journal took its name from an element of the *placa* (graffiti), which can include name or nickname (Lefty, Snake, Lil Man), *barrio* (White Fence, VNE—for Varrío Nuevo Estrada), statement of power (*Rifamos*—we rule), and finish with C/S (*con safos*), meaning, briefly, don’t touch or deface.

Mexican fine art—that of the muralists, for example—influenced Chicano art. Popular art was seen to be as important. The art of Mexican *almanaques* (calendars) restored the image of the Aztec as a proud warrior. The *calavera* (skull) imagery of José Guadalupe Posada added bite and playfulness. Gilbert (Magu) Sánchez Luján—among many artists in this fertile period—wrote in *Con Safos* of the varied *barrio* roots Chicano art should seek: “sculptured *ranflas* [lowrider cars], the calligraphy of wall writings (graffiti), the gardens of our *abuelos* [grandparents] ... *vato loco* [crazy dude] portraits”

Con Safos wished to include the “looseness of the *cholo*.” There is some continuity between the pachucos and the *vatos locos*, or *cholos*. Although *cholo* can be defined neutrally, as an urban youth, it more often refers to a gang member. When this style is adopted, it is called—similar to “draped out”—“choloed out.”

The pachuco style depended on expensive and at times tailor-made clothing. Newer styles used readily—and continually—available items in distinctive combinations. Army surplus khakis replaced the zoot suit. In

turn, khaki (and other color) work pants were substituted. An element of the pachuco style remained in the cinching tight of an oversize waist (instead of pleats). A white tee-shirt is worn, or a white sleeveless athletic shirt. An overshirt similar to a Pendleton plaid might be worn or carried folded in a stylized manner. Highly polished shoes and a web belt continue both the pachuco and military styles.

After the Chávez strikes, cotton bandanas were worn in wide folds as headbands. “Like today I’m wearing gray pants,” one *vato* noted, so he chose a black bandana. A 1940s hat might be worn over the bandana. Navarro made positive the imagery that had made the Sleepy Lagoon defendants seem criminal. In his poem “To a Dead Lowrider,” the protagonist is “Chicano all the way”: “for a crown he had rich / black hair that shimmered with / Three Roses.” The use of hairnets continues the generally sleek and low style.

In *Con Safos* there were depictions of *la vida loca*, the crazy life of the *vatos locos*. Navarro dramatized moments when the effects of drugs or alcohol, acting on suppressed anger, transform the tension or bravado of banal situations and exchanges into violence, usually *vato* against *vato*.

Methods of turning young men from this violence have included art projects committed to changing the community and its lives. *Ghosts of the Barrio*, a mural by Wayne Alaniz Healy, shows homeboys with three of their pride-instilling antecedents: Aztec warrior, Spanish conquistador, and Mexican revolutionary. Charles “Cat” Felix encouraged gang members to turn the tough energy of their young years (fifteen to seventeen) into murals at the Estrada Courts, where eighty-five were

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John M. Valadez. *Clavo*. 1978. Color photograph.



"Cholo, Live"

¡QUE PASA VATOS! PROUD-WARRIORS CREATING A BROTHERHOOD
ON DARK STREET CORNERS, EACH KNOWING VIOLENCE AGAINST
OURSELVES WILL NEVER FREE US!

Left to Right: Lucky, Bimpy, Shorty & Blunt

Juan R. Fuentes. "Cholo, Live." 1981. Offset lithograph. In *CARA*.

painted, using images from the *placas* as well as banderols and other visual imagery of tattoos.

Juan R. Fuentes's lithograph (from a San Francisco *centro*, La Raza Graphic Center) uses the eye-catching style of a concert poster. Its imagery records the *firme* (tough, bonded) *cholo* presence. The title is ambiguous: these young men could be musicians, in a "live" appearance; at the same time it is a directive to remain alive. The work exhorts the *vatos* to change and inscribes its message in a *barrio* calligraphy.

Fuentes seeks freedom from an oppression that, although identified decades ago, has changed little since the pachuco era: low income, fragile sense of identity, broken homes, life lived in the street, conflict with dominant authority.

The tension of balancing these factors to maintain the control that is the *cholo* front is revealed in the photograph, *Clavo*, by John M. Valadez. The artist, who grew up near Estrada Courts, has also used images of pachucos—for "the beauty of a people we have been told are not beautiful"—in his realist paintings and pastels.

Police relations have not changed and patterns of injustice still oppress as they had in the days of Sleepy Lagoon. To live in the *barrio* invites police scrutiny. Habitual offenders are defined by the number of arrests, not convictions, thus labeling young men early. California incarcerates ten times more juveniles than does New York. Eighty per cent of new inmates are Black or Chicano. In Navarro's "Toonerville," a character affirms his long-suppressed identity under the worst of circumstances, police harassment: "Every time they beat him he cried out: I'm a Mexican. I'M A MEXICAN."

7. ÓRALE, HAY TE WATCHO

José Montoya's poem "El Louie" is an elegy for "*un vato de atolle*" (a great dude), a pachuco of the *colonias* of central California in "those times of the forties and early fifties." Montoya preserves the *rasquachi* (playful, mocking) qualities of the pachucos, in his portrait of Louie and in his own fluid drawings (in *CARA*). Louie gave a sense of style to the *colonias* far from "Los" or "E.P.T.": "48 Fleetline, two-tone ... tailor-made drapes, el boogie." Louie's death was a loss for the "baby chukes" who looked up to him. The poem saves the pachuco spirit for the community.

Recent interpretations of the pachucos have stressed their style's performance quality, caught by Montoya when describing his character "who dug roles, man, like blackie, little Louie." Aspects of this style have been carried forward. A photograph by José Galvez is a reminder that there is a backstage with preparation and rehearsal. The style put forth must be constructed. Gus Frías has written of ironing his tee-shirt and slacks; and standing in the mirror to practice his looks and his *barrio* walk before his first day at high school.

The Galvez photograph also expresses *camalismo*, a bond shared and passed from one to another—like the baby chukes receiving inspiration from El Louie. Montoya was baby chuke to the real person about whom the poem was structured. Montoya the creator and educator is El Louie—*camal*—to a generation he, among many committed Chicano creators in the carefully constructed arts and literature of *el Movimiento*, has influenced. The knot is tied on the bandana for succeeding generations.

GLOSSARY

Barrio – Chicano neighborhood
Carnal / carnalismo – Brother / brotherhood, bonding
Colonia – Rural Chicano community
Con safos (c/s) – Don't deface
Corazón (cora) – Heart
Chingazos – Blows, fighting
Firme – Tough, together, bonded
Greña – Hair
Hay te watcho – I'll catch you later
Homeboy / homey / homes – Chicano pinto (prisoner) term for neighborhood friend.
Órale – Yes, right on
Placas – Tags
Rasquachi – Earthy, lower class
Simón, ese – Yes, man
Tacuche – Zoot suit.
 This is an example of an adaption from Náhuatl.
Vato / vato loco – Dude / crazy dude
La vida loca – The crazy life

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