CHAPTER 4: ARTIVISM FOR THE LOVE OF ART AND COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine yourself as a young child. You are at your favorite park, and someone has made a mural that honors your heritage and the stories from the past you had heard about, but had never seen in large, colorful, striking strokes. How would that change your view of the community, of yourself, of your neighborhood? For many people, art can change the way we see our position in the world. In the United States the transformative power of art challenges stereotypes and racial injustice, promotes inter-ethnic solidarity, defines group identities, and leads communities to broaden its acceptance of sexual and gender-based differences. Over the past century, artists have brought the struggle for social justice into the homes and to the streets of the community and they created a new space for collective dreams and transformational love geared toward a radically re-imagined society.

Eliseo Silva's 1995 mural, *Gintong Kasaysayan Gintong Pamana* (A Glorious History/ A Golden Legacy) located at Unidad Park in Los Angeles (*Tongva land*), inspired many in the community to make change. The mural features images of Filipina/x/o American activists and leaders in the farmworkers' movement, Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz. The mural depicts the awakening of Filipina/x/o national consciousness alongside the fight for Filipina/x/o worker rights in the United States. Integral to the area around the park being designated as a historic district, for Silva, the mural "elevates Filipinos as a major player in America's cultural landscape so our own Filipino community can earn and deserve that equal seat at the table of power and influence" (LA Conservancy 2020).

Silva's mural inspired many, including a local community educator named Artnelson Concordia, who argued that the images provided a counterpoint to the "raged neighborhood

feuds between young brown men and women, fueled by internalized self-hate, violently projected horizontally upon all of us in the community" (Concordia 2019). It inspired Concordia to co-design a frame for K-12 Ethnic Studies curriculum, which sought to empower students in marginalized communities. Some of the key tenets were:

> KNOWLEDGE (and LOVE) of SELF
>
> SOLIDARITY through mutual recognition and respect for all people, particularly those who are most marginalized and dispossessed
>
> SELF-DETERMINATION—develop child and youth agency to problem-solve their and their communities' most pressing issues (Concordia 2019).

Artistic expression has the ability to inspire Ethnic Studies, and vice-versa.

Art gives us insight into the idea that cultural politics is personal. It provides images and symbols to study, and a platform for people to create, unify, and imagine a future. The symbiotic relationship between pop culture, political and cultural events, and anti-racist, abolitionist, decolonial pedagogy is paramount to the art we study in this chapter. As activist scholar Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez writes: "The connections between people and their cultures are very important. When we make those links, we strengthen those capacities to be human, in the best sense"[1] (Liu 2011). Art lights the fire for this quest.

Certain artists' ability to access love - love of self, community, heritage has been important to the growth of Ethnic Studies. Art creates a dialogue between artists and community and provides visceral visuals and other sensorial images to bring the issues of Ethnic Studies to life. These artists serve as a bridge that makes Ethnic Studies palpable and engaging for people to participate. Their art questions some ethnic traditions but can also amplify traditions. Their art sparks new ideas and symbols for evolution of self and community, and other important issues within Ethnic Studies.

The artists in this chapter center collectivity in their practice, and understand the past, present, and future as material, inspirational, and as a dialogue with community, in which their art exists and manifests. Most of these artists do not create in isolation – their collectivity is a part of their practice. When we work in community, we work together, advocating for one another across social barriers. There is an implied critique of the normalized logic of society. The artists in this chapter do not fit the mainstream, patriarchal "straight" construction of art making. Thus, engaging in the act of collectivity, and striving for new outcomes, the artists become the outsiders.

> Artists who engage in the work covered in this chapter often live outside the boundaries of traditional artists yet retain their connection to their cultures and communities. Their act of artmaking is a part of their resilience and resistance. As radical artists and activists of color, they embrace a sense of time that reflects their non-binary gender identities, one where the past, present, and future live in their art at the same time.

This chapter starts with some of the historical foundations of the art and artists who emerged from communities of color. We begin the first section in the early twentieth century, as the Harlem Renaissance (*Munsee Lenape land*) influenced the nation and showcased how art

could redefine an identity and fight back against racist and stereotypical images. The second section looks at the radical art that emerged in the late 1960s, as communities of color began to take a more aggressive stance on resistance. In this section we pay particular attention to the art that emerged during the Chicana/x/o Movement. The final section explores how the art in communities of color has evolved since the 1990s and the post 9/11 era.

A NEW VOICE: THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND BEYOND

Artists of color today find their roots in many traditions including the **Harlem Renaissance**, the Civil Rights Movement, labor union activism, and various progressive movements of color since the 1960's. The Harlem Renaissance was a Black literary and artistic movement of the early twentieth century. It also represented a moment of expanding the limits of Black identity and the emergence of Black queer and feminist voices. In the 1920s and 30s artists such as Richmond Barthé and Richard Bruce Nugent painted with a freedom of expression rarely found in Black communities before that time, exploring Black sexuality, queerness, and the aesthetic beauty of the Black body (Smalls 1998). Although the Harlem Renaissance held influence in corners far beyond its borders, in many ways the expression inspired a collective imagination rooted in community. The dynamics of that place, the music, fashion, politics and the divergent traditions from different geographical locations fused together to create a fearless and defiant movement. Much of that expression was an affront to the anti-Black racism found in all corners of the country. Artists remembered the past, reimagining history from their own perspectives. Others began to paint with a quiet dignity, looking at the natural forms and features of the Black body, Black cultural traditions, and everyday forms of Black life in America. Some painted with a sense of style that was not so explicitly political. In both cases Black artists were free to paint images that came from the Black perspective; these images defied stereotypical

images that some artists and cartoonists used to promote the idea of white superiority. As the Civil Rights era came about, activist/artists, or **artivists**[2] began to push back with a more stinging indictment of white racism, oppression, and exploitation. The Harlem Renaissance paved the way for artists of color to have the courage and freedom to express radical views and to reimagine a new future.

BOX 1. Richard Bruce Nugent

Richard Bruce Nugent was an openly queer artist, actor, and writer who rose to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance. Although mostly known as an author, his art was seen as provocative for its portrayal of queer Black life. In 1926 Nugent published two drawings and the short story "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," which was criticized by some of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. The story, about a sexual encounter with another man, was Nugent's attempt to bring awareness of sexuality to African Americans. Together with artist Romare Bearden and others, he founded the Harlem Cultural Council. During the Gay Rights Movement, Nugent was seen as an avatar for many young activists.

Some artists of color began to paint for the sake of self-expression, looking inward toward their own communities. At times these artists evoke cultural themes, folktales, or even challenge certain behaviors. Images such as Elizabeth Catlett's 1944 *Friends* rejoice in the idea of simple Black friendship. While the piece seems purely aesthetic, the dignity of the individuals, the time in which it was painted, the similarity of their clothing, and the intimacy of their facial expressions show a much-needed solidarity for the time if we consider the issues their communities faced (Herzog 2014). The remarkable thing about Catlett's life and art is that it combines the power of Mexico's post-revolutionary aesthetics with the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Catlett was born in Washington D.C. (*Piscataway and Nacotchtank lands*) and educated at Howard University in an atmosphere of leading influential Black artists and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, including her professors Alain Locke and Loïs Mailou Jones.

By 1946, after her steady rise as an artist and university professor, Catlett moved to Mexico City. There she joined the TGP, el Taller de Gráfica Popular (the People's Graphic Workshop), a progressive artist collective with the goal of advancing social revolution. The Workshop was a collective of radical artists from around the country and abroad who had solidarity with and who often came from the working class. The organization primarily used engravings as an art form and made prints that depicted capitalist exploitation of workers, and at the same time, the dignity of the poor. They often printed flyers for rallies and marches against anti-labor policies. Because of her activism in Mexico and her association with the TGP Catlett was labeled an "undesirable alien" in the United States, prompting her to later become a Mexican citizen. Catlett died in Mexico in 2012 at the age of 96 (Herzog 2014).

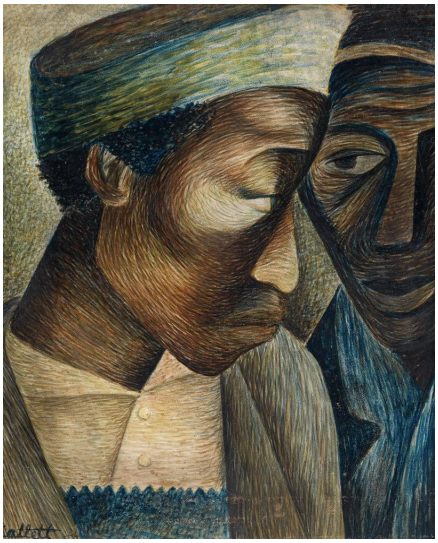

Figure 1. Elizabeth Catlett "Friends" 1944

The work and life of Catlett as an artist and an educator are important reminders that political art in communities of color has a complex genealogy. If we begin to look at the revolutionary art of the 1960s and 1970s, we can see how social movements and artist collectives began to shape a radical shared consciousness in the art world. Some artists began to paint in order to directly promote the cause of a movement, whether it be civil rights, labor rights,

immigrant rights, gender equality, or other causes. These are the types of artists that are particularly important to Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline especially if we consider their influence on contemporary artistic expression.

ART AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

If we trace the origins of Ethnic Studies to the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State University (*Ramaytush Ohlone land*), we understand how adept student leaders were at using art to promote their movement. Within their ranks were members of the Black Panthers who knew the impact that revolutionary images had not only in their community, but across the United States. *The Black Panther* as the official publication of the Black Panther Party, used an array of scathing political images to reveal the ubiquity of police brutality in the Black community and the scourge of US imperialism across the globe. The TWLF used simple images with information and encouraged a unified front against the lack of diversity and eurocentrism found within the ranks of the university. Members of the TWLF understood the importance of art and both individual artists and group collaborations expressed the passion and fury of the protestors. These artists learned from the previous generation of artists like Catlett, Ringgold, and others. But they were clearly informed by a new set of circumstances, one that leaned heavily on the collective movements within communities of color. In 1969, a group of unknown artists within the TWLF created *A Servant of the People,* a screen print that shows the burgeoning artistic expressions of student protestors. The poster has a simple design, a selection of colors, and powerful words that reveal the hope of a movement to bring revolutionary education to the people.[3] As in previous movements, screen prints, flyers and posters became a primary tool for artivists. The rapid and inexpensive production of political posters with inspirational and revolutionary images helped to ignite a fire within the community.

By the time the TWLF movement erupted on the San Francisco State University campus, Emory Douglas had already been the main revolutionary artist and Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party for about two years. Douglas' art continues to inspire artists who use their work to promote revolutionary change within the community. His images of pig-faced police officers and soldiers who oppressed poor communities not only showed how they affected the Black community but also spoke about US imperialism on an international level. Douglas, in fact, shared images with the artistic leg of OSPAAAL, the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, a collective of radical, third world artists that produced decolonial and anti-imperialist images. As the main artist of *The Black Panther*, Douglas' art was widely distributed and influenced many other movements to include revolutionary art in their organizational periodicals and newsletters (Gaiter 2018).

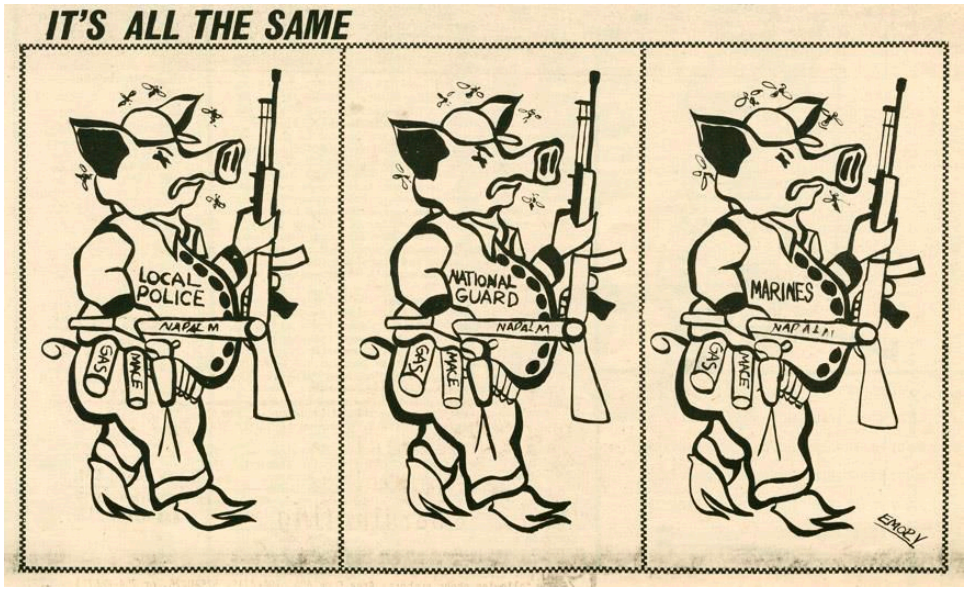

Figure 2. Emory Douglas "It's All the Same" 1968
https://news.artnet.com/art-world/emory-douglas-interview-1889924

BOX 2. OSPAAAL

The Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America was founded in Havana, Cuba in 1966 after the Tricontinental Conference, which brought together over 200 delegates from 82

countries across the world. It produced an internationalist magazine called Tricontinental in order to promote liberation movements across the globe. As part of its solidarity efforts, it produced colorful political posters from political artists. The posters were folded and distributed on an international scale through Tricontinental Magazine.

Artists of color in the 1960s could not help but be influenced by the revolutions surrounding them. A sense of rage was met with one of solidarity and unconditional love for community. In the Chicana/x/o Movement, artists continued the work found in post-Revolutionary Mexico, where the subject matter shifted from the European to the Indigenous roots of Mexico. The Chicana/x/o Movement was greatly influenced by the United Farm Workers Union and other movements focusing on land, public education, Chicana/x/o identity and culture, and more. In every organization, art was a key component in promoting the ideals of the Movement. Like the Black Panthers, and other movements before them, the United Farm Workers employed their own artists. Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta employed Andrew Zermeño to create posters and to illustrate the United Farmworkers official publication *El Malcriado.* The humble farmworker, exploited by the greedy bosses, became a revolutionary, rooted in the land, fighting for dignity. Zermeño's 1966 lithograph *Huelga,* illustrates this point. The UFW was embroiled in an escalating battle to unionize farm labor by promoting a nation-wide boycott of grapes. The images, the Farmworkers Theater, marches, and even César Chávez' hunger strikes were all performative elements to raise the consciousness of the North American consumer. The Grape Boycott reached into the minds of students, rural and urban communities, and even into the homes of ordinary families. Zermeño's piece, with the striking logo of the UFW and the farmworker in rebellion, is emblazoned with the word "Huegla!" – Strike! (CSPG 2021)

Figure 3. Andrew Zermeño “Huelga” 1966

Protest Graphics as an Act of Self-love

All of the major social movements that sought racial justice in the 1960s and 1970s used art in one way or another to promote their causes, to attract public attention, to rewrite historical untruths, and to unite the community in resistance against injustice. Although most of the art we discuss in this chapter can be regarded as **protest art**, this term is typically associated with the art that accompanies activists during a protest, sit-in, rally, march, boycott, or labor strike among others.

In the Chicana/x/o Movement artists were immediately drawn to the aesthetic style and cultural revitalization of Mexican artists. Mexican artists had been drawn to the rediscovery of their Indigenous roots with the cultural renaissance brought on by the Mexican Revolution (1910-17). After the Revolution the nation was divided, which caused the government to create a cultural movement known as **Indigenismo.** As part of this program the government commissioned the nation’s best artists to paint murals on government buildings depicting Mexico’s proud and dignified Indigenous roots. Indigenismo sought to rebuild the nation by reinventing Mexico’s identity to include the importance of Indigenous roots. The murals painted

all over Mexico on government buildings and public universities, reinscribe Indigenous histories onto the cultural, political geographies of Mexico. The government's interest in Indigenismo seems to have been the assimilation of Indigenous communities and the creation of a homogeneous mestizo identity – where everyone is Mexican.

However, the beautiful images of Indigenous life clearly resonated with many independent painters, novelists, photographers, and other artists who had no affiliation with the state. Although the cultural shift may have been incomplete, it was a major departure from the previous century. Massive excavations and reconstruction of Mexico's ancient temples and pyramids began. Some movies and novels began to portray Indigenous characters in a positive light. Muralists like Diego Rivera began to depict the Spaniards as evil imperialists bent on torturing and robbing the Indigenous of their birthright. Other artists, often tied to anti-capitalist, pro-worker movements, began to join collectives like el Taller de Gráfica Popular (Smith 2017).

Many Chicana/x/o artists traveled to Mexico and experienced this complex artistic movement first-hand. Others were born in Mexico and had been influenced at an early age by the cultural dialogue that was erupting in Mexican society. Chicana/x/o protest art had a distinct focal point in terms of being centered in the barrios of the Southwest. But it clearly shares some of the momentum with Mexican motifs of the early twentieth century. The protest art of the Chicana/x/o Movement came in the form of flyers and posters that often utilized historical references embedded in the ancient roots of Mexico's past or in the revolutionary heroes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, Xavier Viramontes' 1973 lithograph, *Boycott Grapes, Support the United Farm Workers Union* links the Native American heritage to the farmworkers struggle. The image implies that Indigenous/Chicana/x/o farmworkers are victims

of capitalist exploitation. Viramontes' work is a clear nod to the burgeoning shift in Chicana/x/o identity toward a more Indigenous, land-based consciousness.

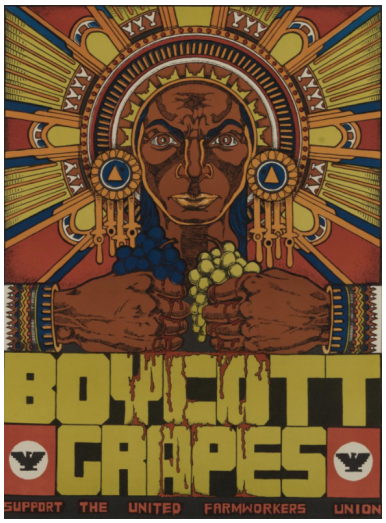

Figure 4. "Boycott Grapes" by Xavier Viramontes, 1973

Others made art that challenged certain behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that existed within Mexican culture. For example, Estér Hernandez, who moved to San Francisco (*Ramaytush Ohlone land*) in the early 1970s from the San Joaquin Valley in central California (*Yokuts land*), etched an iconic image *La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo los Derechos de los Xicanos* in 1975. Hernandez' Guadalupe is not the typical suffering female who endlessly prays for her child. If Guadalupe is to be the most iconic Mexican female, she should be powerful, free and independent. In her own words,

> I have always been taught that I am God, that God is inside of me. So in that way, the Virgin is inside of me. I think my notion of transforming the Virgin is sort of like that– that is me, I am the Virgin. We are all gods, we are all goddesses. The light is not just in heaven, but it's on earth. And we are living it (Latinopia, 2010).

In the early 1970s, Hernandez was a member of the art collective Mujeres Muralistas in the Bay Area (*Ohlone land*), which attempted to open the dialogue of Chicana feminism within the movement. Hernandez' Guadalupe transformed the power of the Virgin Mary. As the mother of Christ, and perhaps the most revered spiritual icon in Mexico, Guadalupe had always portrayed the ideal woman as one of chastity, suffering, and solace. Hernandez' piece represents a radical shift in consciousness.

Figure 5. "La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo Las Derechas de las Xicanas" by Ester Hernandez, 1975.

Graphic protest artists also shared a great deal of symbiosis across movements and communities. Many activists and artists understood that oppression existed within multiple

communities of color. Solidarity was a keystone of the Third World Liberation Front. The Black Panthers informed its supporters and members of Los Siete de la Raza across the Bay in San Francisco (See Social Movement Chapter). Chicano artists like Rupert Garcia and Malaquias Montoya routinely created art in support of Black liberation. Bay Area artist Juan Fuentes' 1978 poster *South African Women's Day*, shows the struggle and fearlessness of Black women amidst the ravages of Apartheid (Ramos 2021). The 1960s brought a new awareness to communities of color, opening doors for exchanges and solidarities that empowered their movements. Solidarity among artists within social justice movements was a key component of promoting power and showing love: love for community and the love of hope.

Figure 6. South African Women's Day Poster

https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/south-african-womens-day-116503

Making a Space of Love

An artist who understands the role of public art to affect whole environments and municipalities is legendary Chicana muralist, media maker, and sculptor, Judy Baca. She changed the way cities see **public art,** which is art that is produced in open, public spaces and is freely accessible to everyone. Judy Baca became famous for her *Great Wall of Los Angeles* mural, which she started in 1974. From this endeavor, she developed a methodology to build public murals. The mural was initially commissioned by the city of Los Angeles, and then subsequently grew through Baca'sown organization: SPARC: The Social and Public Art Resource Center, that she co-founded with two other artists. Through SPARC, she developed many of the processes, collaborative relationships, and even chemicals to protect murals that cities around the globe use today. Silva's mural, shown at the beginning of this essay, is a SPARC mural, and protected by a sealant SPARC developed to preserve public art.

Baca and others built SPARC as a beacon for other organizations who utilized public art to make institutional change. SPARC and Baca are part of a legacy of artists who built artist workshops and collectives that shared their ideas and promoted solidarity. An example, **Kearny Street Workshop (KSW)**, emerged during the I-Hotel Movement in San Francisco. The I-Hotel was an affordable housing unit near Manilatown and mainly housed elderly Asian migrant workers. The KSW, the oldest Asian American art collective in the country, was formed in the wake of the I-Hotel Movement. When the city decided that the hotel was to be destroyed to make way for an urban renewal project, a movement rose to protect the community. KSW developed programming, arts support and now serves as a resource supporting the next generation of Asian American artists.

Other groups include Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco, Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia (*Lenape land*), the Asian Arts Collective in Chicago (*Ojibwe, Odawa, and*

Potawatomi lands), the Japanese American Art Museum in Los Angeles, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio (*Coahuiltecan land*), and the Studio Museum in Harlem (*Lenape land*). Each of these organizations fed off the historical and cultural realities around them and decided to create spaces to bring voices of the various communities to the forefront of the art world; in turn, the artists they sponsored, developed, supported, and featured spoke about the times and sparked conversations around culture and community that we study today.

NEW HORIZONS: POST CIVIL RIGHTS-ERA ART

Artivists are increasingly displaying acts of love and radical solidarity, especially amid the rise of social media. In 2009, Dignidad Rebelde, a Chicana/x/o art duo out of Oakland, California (*Lisjan Ohlone land*), uploaded their Oscar Grant tribute poster for all to download and print in order to spread collective resistance. The rage in the Bay Area over the killing of an innocent Black man sent multiple communities into action (Salomon 2021). The team made up of artists Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes followed a tradition with a genealogy dating back to the early 1900s. Activist and social movements had often used art to relay the urgency of their messages. Bold images of culture, politics, and history, coming from a subjective place within the consciousness of communities of color, inspired change and promoted a community's imagination in very strategic ways. Artists that promoted social justice and solidarity also explored their own unique aesthetic forms and helped to challenge historical inaccuracies and stereotypes. Dignidad Rebelde's digital distribution of their Oscar Grant poster was one of many that ushered in the new age of social media. Oscar Grant's horrific death at the hands of BART security came at the cusp of two eras that utilized traditions of expression that transcended mainstream artistic values. They were part of an artistic movement that devised a new way for

art to be used as an educational tool for the people. This act is a powerful reminder of the genealogy of the artivist's self-love and love of community.

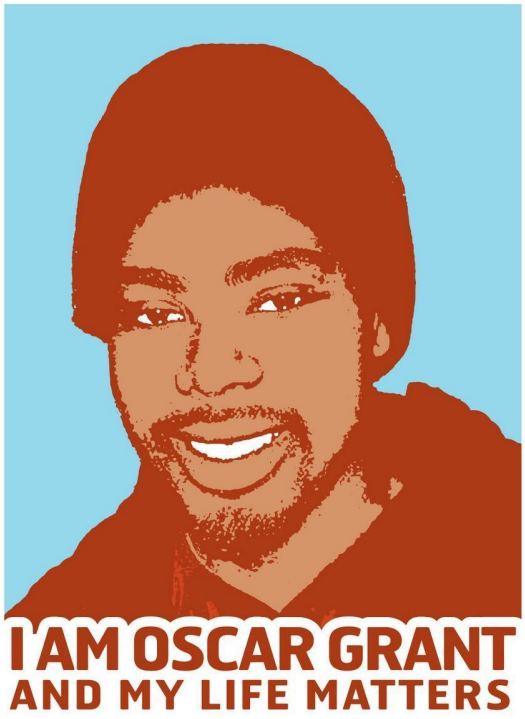

Figure 7. "I am Oscar Grant and My Life Matters" by Dignidad Rebelde

Giving Visual form to the Living and the Dead

The1960s changed the world in many ways. Not only were activists, educators, and entire communities fighting for social change, but also from within. Many began to take note of how colonialism had affected our personal beliefs, or lifestyles, and our own world views. People began to rethink their own entanglements to coloniality and how it had broken their connection to the past and to ancestral knowledge. Others began to reject the various normalized systems of mainstream societies; such is the art of Faith Ringgold, Laura Kina, and Shizu Salamando.

Sometimes art can help us to process traumatic events and the lived experiences of racism and colonial violence. Artist Faith Ringgold, for example, brings this idea into focus with her

iconic painting *American People Series #20: Die* (1967). Influenced by the periodic visits with her daughters to see Picasso's *Guernica*, Ringgold gave visual form to the racist events of her time that were being silenced in the media or ignored by the abstract art scene in New York (*Lenape land*).

> How could I, as an African-American woman artist, document what was happening all around me? I want to show a kind of abstraction of what the fights were really all about. And they had a lot to do with race and class, and no one was left out. It was to make sure that certain people on the bottom don't get to the top (Downey 2020).

This took form in a painting about spontaneous street riots, which Ringgold said never made the news in the 60s. Her intent was to inform people about what was going on and to change the public discourse on race relations. She would do so with brilliant artwork and the genuine self-expression of a Black woman. The painting, housed in New York's Museum of Modern Art, has evoked a variety of emotions from a white art patron's physical disgust to pride from Black women. Ringgold sees the painting now as a prophecy of our time in the early 21st century, and implores other artists to continue in this tradition. Ringgold describes this piece as "American society keeps repeating itself. Art should as well" (Modern 2018). One only needs to look at Ringgold's piece to see how true that statement is. The image shows the same two men and women, depicted in different violent actions, which indicates a repetition of racial disharmony. Two of the adult figures sit at the center of the piece as children, watching the horror unfold, learning the American language of racial violence, and ultimately becoming players in this unending drama.

Figure 8. Faith Ringgold. *American People Series #20: Die* (detail). 1967

Like Faith Ringgold, visual artist Laura Kina draws from a varied palette of social issues for her artwork. Kina's *Sugar* series of paintings, help us to understand theway stories of the past inform the future as a whole, both individually and collectively.

> I have this middle class urban professional life and yet despite all of this I have felt this huge sense of loss about "making it" and assimilating into whiteness (or near whiteness). In this new space there was also a huge void and multiple erasures… the sugar plantation world in Hawai‘i that my father grew up in no longer exists and the artifacts and stories from this time period were either absent from my life or not in any order that made sense to me. It was as if I found myself being pushed by this giant wave towards an idea of success and assimilation into the dominant culture and I never stopped to look at or question the forces that were generating the wave in the first place (Mori 2015).

Figure 9. *Sugar Study #2* by Laura Kina

In search of reconciling the past of her heritage with her present moment, Kina sought stories and images from her Okinawan and Hawaiian ancestry. Inspired by stories of the Obake (Hawaiian ghost stories), Kina painted ghostly figures of sugar plantation women. She is fed by the spirits of the past, and channels them onto her canvas. In this way, she is not just aiming to document these lives. Her journey becomes a way to activate our ancestors to nourish us when colonialism cannot feed us. As she says, "I'm not interested in mere illustrations of history or telling people in a didactic way what my politics are. I want to reanimate the past, to feel it, so that it matters for our present moment" (Mori 2015).

Shizu Saldamando portrays the living. Her upbringing in the Bay Area from Japanese American and Mexican American parents influenced her artistic perspective. Salamando combines the European artist tradition of portraiture with her skill in drawing to bring to life the people in her circles—"people who are…multifaceted and fluid, and who don't adhere to fixed

narratives that are constantly rehashed in media. I aim to illustrate those who actively reject those narratives by creating their own social scenes."[4] Saldamando's intent is to change the idea of who can belong, be a part of society, and who can be part of the quilt of culture:

> "By depicting familiar people that are a part of my life, I hope to show a broader idea of who can inhabit art and who creates culture in general. I like depicting creative peers who inhabit and have created their own social constructs; their own backyard punk shows, queer clubs, underground fashion shows and the like. Often, people of color are depicted in media in one-dimensional narratives—if shown at all."[5]

Figure 10. Shizu Saldamando

Through her drawing instruments and the wide array of canvases she uses, she expresses the complexity, complication and fluidity of the various cultures she intersects. She dynamically

critiques the cultures that exclude and celebrates the world that these people inhabit. In this way, like Ringgold, she fashions the world she wants to see.

World-building as an Act of Collective Resistance

Installation art is a way that artists build worlds for the audience and their creations to inhabit together. Artists provide various forms, and use multiple mediums to create installations, allowing the public to walk into an experience. It can be a short-term experience, or in the case of a socially **engaged art** installation, something that happens over a very long period of time. A socially engaged artist is one who creates an interactive environment for the public to engage with the art piece or the area around it. They use the issues that matter to them and the ideas of community members to build their installation. They usually prioritize the public's engagement over object making — the entire environment and the public's experience matter.

Pepón Osorio is a multi-disciplinary artists who creates socially engaged art installations. Taking over a funeral home to create an installation about HIV in the 90s in New York or a murder scene in the gallery, Osorio uses the **rasquatche aesthetic,** the idea of transforming the impoverished elements in Chicana/x/o life into an empowering art form that creates worlds for people to confront the issue. In *En la barberia no se llora* (1994) — his project in Hartford, Connecticut (*Sicaog, Poquonock, Wangunk, and Tunxis lands*), Osorio created an installation in a barbershop to invite community members to discuss the complications of Latino masculinity. As he eschewed the gallery system in the 90s to bring his art to the people, and "force downtown to come uptown" (Osorio 1994), he created thoughtful ways to engage communities with the issues he wanted to discuss.

First, when creating socially engaged art, Osorio uses a structured dialogue and develops a set of collaborative social relations of the people who frequently become the

subjects of his artworks or who work with him on its production. Second, the artist creates the conditions for encounters across communities, across divides, and across geographic barriers to the installations in their finished form. He invents these "**contact zones**" in order to bring diverse constituencies together in unexpected ways and unpredictable places.

Osorio's contact zones could be called *chisme* (gossip) zones — places where he creates work to get people talking together, spreading knowledge, engaging with him to discover the themes of the work and continuing the conversation beyond the artwork. The social relations become material for the artwork and help him design an experience that gets the audience to participate.

This starts with Osorio's visuality. He "blings out" a street-accessible barbershop that he designs to invite players to talk about the complications of masculinity in the work and in the community. These visuals become the rules and boundaries of the game of engagement he creates. He uses his understanding of visual art to make the barbershop beautiful and combines that with his history of masculinity as it relates to his culture.

In *En la barberia* he uses the *chucherias*, the trinkets of his past, to be the fabric of the piece to entice the audience to play. The barbershop chairs and other furniture become places where people can decide to share their stories; even the art on the wall becomes pieces of the game. What exactly is the game everyone is playing? The silence of men game. The object of this game: undo the silence and talk about what it means to be a man.

The barbershop itself already represents a place for integrated play and dialogue. Osorio's design works in tandem with its natural fabric, food and fun; the community feels ownership of the work and the artist and misses it when it's gone. As one community member wrote, "'The piece enhanced the environment, but then it was removed and deflated

cultural pride'" (Gonzalez 2013).

Socially engaged art can change communities in many ways. When combined with movements, art can produce powerful outcomes. Artist Miguel Luciano takes the rasquatche aesthetic to bling out a Puetro Rican piragua cart in his mobile public art project: Pimp My Piragua. "Luciano commemorates the innovations of Latino street vendors, transforming a traditional pushcart for selling shaved ice (piraguas) into a hyper-modified tricycle-pushcart with a hi-fi sound and video system." ("Miguel Luciano," n.d.) He takes the cart to town to bring joy to people. This object becomes a source of so much Puerto Rican pride, and also gives people something delicious and soothes them from the heat.

Cambodian-Muslim performance artist Anida Yoeu Ali also brings joy in her interactive performance piece The Red Chador. Her shimmering chadors harken to futuristic disco images that create a fantastic and beautiful world wherever she performs. It disrupts as well as delights. She states she wanted to counter the mainstream global media's depiction of the chador as "miserable and oppressed". Her public performances of the 8 year series center around her question: "*Why can't pious Muslim women have some fun, color, sparkle and 'fabulousness' in their lives?" ("The Red Chador | Anida Yoeu Ali," n.d.)*

"Black Lives Matter:" the three-word meme, social movement, developed by three artists which started as a hashtag also is part of this symbolic legacy. Affecting our everyday thoughts about police brutality, these three words: Black Lives Matter, have become a movement that affects all forms of civic life worldwide. Artists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tomet did not intend their call to action as an art piece, yet it took the mayor of Washington DC (*Piscataway and Nocotchtank lands*) to show the power of artists to manifest a tweet and movement into a civic public installation. In 2020, the mayor of Washington DC ordered city

workers to paint the three words on DC streets to declare her and the city's support of the movement (O'Kane 2020). This was not a usual public art project, where the city or a private patron fund an artist to create a public work of art, this was an elected official "making the mural," and it affected the whole discourse around the government's role in policing.

One of the trio that amplified Black Lives Matter, Patrice Cullors has built upon her earlier work, and uses dance to get audiences to embody revolutionary practice. " In her F*ck White Supremacy, Let's Get Free," she leads a worldwide electric slide dance party as a performance art ritual of healing. It takes place in the streets with people boogie-ing together in the name of joy and rejuvenation. As Cullors remarks about the ritual, "We are constantly being exposed to racial violence and death because of the US government and its neglectful response to COVID-19. We need joy and encouragement to keep fighting and winning. Our work is nowhere near done, but we can stop and celebrate what has been done so far." (Stromberg 2021)

Who Will Continue the Circle?

The artivists covered in this chapter all embrace important components of expression that challenge western European colonial notions of linear and progressive time. Their art specifically situates past, present, and future in a single moment, embracing a dialogue with ancestors and future generations on colonial violence and resistance. This circular understanding of and being in time marks a rejection of a western European linear chronology and the colonial refusal to confront the sins of the past. The colonial perspective necessarily rejects critical examination of the past in order to avoid responsibility and refuses to adequately imagine an inclusive future in order to preserve the enduring presence of whiteness.

In so far as they challenge western time and linearity, they challenge the most fundamental aspects of being human and being in the world. The embrace of the circularity of

time, where past, present, and future exist in every moment, also asserts collectivity over individuality, emphasizing connection and continuity. In many senses, the art covered in this chapter provides a path toward decolonial healing, restoring precolonial time, centering collectivity, and honoring our place within past, present, and future movements. The ethics of community and mutuality build on the scholarship, artistic vision, and re-imagining of an abundant collective future. All of this informs our activist work. The wheel of these relations is always turning. And, at any moment, we can join the circle as long as we hold and honor its memory. As an artivist, photographer JoJo Gaon told a crowd at the 2001 Asian American Spoken Word Summit in Seattle:

> When we go back to wherever we are from, we have to realize that we are a part of this circle, and we need more people in this circle. Through word, through visual arts, through whatever. We have to complete the circle. It's our family now...We claim our space together. We created it, we claim it. And never will that ever be taken away from us as long as we remember this circle.[6]

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the role or presence of public art in your community. How does its presence or absence affect how you view your community or yourself?
2. Discuss the efficacy of art and artivism within social protest movements.
3. Explore the possibilities of socially engaged art projects in your community. Where would be a good place to get people talking about something that matters to you?
4. Discuss some of the murals or art in your community or within social media that cover topics similar to the ones in this chapter.

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[1] Before her role as a key organizer with La Alianza, New Mexico's Land Grant Movement, Martinez was an organizer for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Her work in the Civil Rights Movement underscores the role of solidarity and inter-ethnic alliances that many employ in their work today.

[2] Many artivists are weary of what John D. Márquez calls, ethnic compartmentalization, where ethnic groups are " fragmented into a series of parallel, vertical, and seldom intersecting binaries between whites and certain nonwhites..." See John D. Marquez, *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South*, University of Texas Press, 2014, 20.

[3] Untitled, 1969, Oakland Museum of California.

[4] "Meet Artist-in-Residence Shizu Saldamando | Hotel Figueroa."

[5] "Meet Artist-in-Residence Shizu Saldamando | Hotel Figueroa."

[6] Excerpt of documentary "Pass It Around" from Villegas, "Redefined What Is Meant to Be Divine: Prayer and Protest in Blue Scholars."