

## EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

### Drawing Ourselves Whole

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Drawing and writing have always gone hand in hand for me. It's about seeing ideas come to life in different ways. Even now when I am drafting an article or a story, I often hold up my hands and make shapes, or I scribble patterns and faces as I try to think of the right word. Whether on paper or in my mind, I have to be able to see it first. You know, it's that moment that you hope no one walks into your office as you mutter, "¿Como se llama this?" as you wave your hand up and down in front of your face. "Oh... yeah. Undulate." To better understand an essay, I often have students read it and then start with sketching the literal outline of the work. Don't overthink it, I say; just think about the shapes that come to mind. When we can see the architecture of the writing, we can often find more ways into it.

How many of us have journals full of our sketches where we've drawn the elaborate symbols and signs alongside our lecture notes to help us keep Dr. Sandoval's five technologies in order? Or how have we story-boarded our work with cute monitos to help us frame out our larger projects? The relationship between visual art and the written word creates a third space in creative writing that can be expressed in many genres including comics, graphic novels, graphic memoirs, 'zines, and published journals. Because of how the visual works with the written, graphic texts simultaneously require added depth of understanding while making complicated concepts and theories accessible.

This form of creative writing is currently having high impact on representation and culture for communities of color; one need only think of Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Black Panther*, *World of Wakanda* by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Roxane Gay, or of Puertoriqueña author Gabby Rivera's Latina superhero, America Chavez. But aside from these mainstream comics, graphic text also provides avenues to grassroots publication. At local events in cities throughout the United States, writers are coming together to create visual representations of themselves through 'zines: self-published, small batch original works that incorporate texts and images. The images can be original, but are also often appropriated images that are redubbed. There are dozens of Chicana, Latina, and indigenous women's 'zines of note, including *St. Sucia* from San Antonio, TX or the *A'gin Youth* 'zine produced by Healthy Sexuality and Body Sovereignty Program at Tewa Women United in Española, NM.

The recently published young-adult novel, *The First Rule of Punk* (2017), by Celia Pérez uses these homespun 'zines as a framework for the story of a young Chicana going through major changes (plus the protagonist's mom is pursuing her dreams of becoming a Chicana PhD and her Chicano dad owns a punk record shop—a highly recommended read!). Other grassroots projects include the small batch publishing of comic anthologies, such as *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Elizabeth LaPensée and Weshoyot Alvitre, which features the work of more than a dozen Native women sharing stories of survival, empowerment, and healing (available at [NativeRealities.com](http://NativeRealities.com)).

All of this to say that this fall's creative writing section introduces us to the work of two artists working with graphic text. First we have the comic, "On Goat Herding and the Limits of Knowledge" by Fatima van Hattum. Fatima is currently a PhD student in the University of New Mexico's Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies program. Her comic reveals levels

of tension that many graduate students experience as they dive into the theoretical literature in their field. The sparse strokes of the images juxtapose the complex crisis that the comic's protagonist, a Muslim New Mexican woman, is feeling. Literally sliding into and narrating from the relative safety of a hiding space beneath her desk, the narrator contemplates the nature of knowledge—will she find it in the pile of books she is reading? Or would it come to her more easily if she became a goat herder? (Haven't all marginalized grad students asked ourselves this question at one time or another?)

Second, we have works by Tejana author Anel Flores. The series is from "Pintada de Rojo," a forthcoming graphic autohistoria, which uses the relationship between graphics and text to tell and show intimate moments in the coming-of-age story of a Chicana lesbiana in south Texas. The images share information with the reader that is not explicitly shared in the text. They deepen our relationship to both the images and the words and bring an understanding of bodies into the story that would not exist otherwise. In four graphic vignettes, we move through memories, inner monologues, and experiences through which we encounter wonder, joy, self-discovery, rejection, and suicidal thoughts. We are left with this difficult reflection in the series, and it invites us into the mind of a teenage girl becoming her whole self and into her journey through questioning binaries of male/female, heaven/hell, bullets/beans and the freedom of finding "five ways to love a girl."

I'd like to highlight Flores' piece entitled "My Body, My Choice," as a graphic and textual celebration of the Chicana, Latina, Indigenous, lesbian, queer, and gender-nonconforming artists who empower us to make changes in our personal lives and in our world. The trunk of the tree at the center of the image is rendered with a union of images and quotes from women of color,

and the surrounding images are the women activated through those words. It is a homenaje to the words that motivate us to protect that which is sacred to us, and to brave opportunities to be creative.

My hope is that you find these texts compelling, that they get you to look at your own sketches and drawings as works of creative writing and as opportunities to draw ourselves whole. We here at *Chicana/Latina Studies* would love to see more of your graphic work!