

## SEEING IS BELIEVING: Visualizing and Performing Testimonio in Chicana/o and Latina/o Art

Ella Diaz

*This analysis of the Chicana/o-Latina/o aesthetic considers several works of art as forms of testimonio. Drawing on important literary frameworks for testimonio in Latin American Studies and in Chicana/Latina Studies, the essay proposes that artists like Regina José Galindo and Claudia Bernardi visualize and actualize testimonios in response to genocide and crimes against humanity. Galindo's and Bernardi's artistic achievements are not exclusive innovations in the field, however. The essay also addresses testimonial-like traditions inherent to 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o visual art, as well 1980s and 1990s performance art by Native Americans and U.S. Latinas/os. The visual artworks of José Montoya, Juana Alicia, James Luna, Coco Fusco, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña are antecedents to twenty-first century visual and performance testimonios. Each of these artists integrates elements of the literary testimonio into their visual and performance art works. Since Chicana/o-Latina/o art originates in, and continues to evolve through, transnational mixtures, internal migrations, and cultural convergences, it is important to connect advancements in Latina/o visual and performance art to a relevant art history.*

In 2003, Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo stepped onto the streets of Guatemala City and headed toward the Court of Constitutionality. She held a basin of blood in her hands and, every four to five steps, she stopped to dip her feet into the bowl. Leaving a trail of footprints, she made her way to the National Palace, where a “line of police officers guarding it” met her (Goldman 2005–2006, 40). Next, she turned and quietly exited the scene. Galindo’s performance was captured on film and presented at the 2005 Venice Biennale (Fig. 1). Entitled *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (*Who Can Erase the Traces?*), Galindo’s procession protested the 2003 presidential candidacy of former dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt. Her quiet walk, downcast eyes, and bloody trail confronted the estimated 70,000



**Figure 1**

*¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (2003) Regina José Galindo. Foto Victor Pérez. Caminata de la Corte de Constitucionalidad hasta el Palacio Nacional de Guatemala, dejando un recorrido de huellas hechas con sangre humana, en memoria de las víctimas del conflicto armado en Guatemala, en rechazo a la candidatura del ex-militar, genocida y golpista Efraín Ríos Montt. Images courtesy of the artist. All images are available at: <http://www.reginajosegalindo.com>

people murdered or disappeared during Ríos Montt's presidency in 1982 and 1983, as well as the roughly 200,000 people killed or missing over the course of Guatemala's entire thirty-six-year civil war.<sup>1</sup> In *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?*, Galindo evoked conventions associated with the Testimonio, enacting the literary genre in a non-written form.

To perform a literary genre and, particularly Testimonio, challenges the written practices and conventions of academic disciplines, namely Latin American Studies, and literary fields in Chicana/Latina Studies. Yet *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* embodies many of the elements that define Testimonio as literature. For example, the centrality of the collective mode in Testimonio is a major part of its literary categorization (Beverley 1989). Although Galindo is the main person with whom we identify as we watch *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?*, its message is not only hers. Galindo's Testimonio conveys a collective truth, accounting for the dead, the missing, the oppressed, the living, and the defiant.

There are other twenty-first-century Latina artists redefining and, perhaps, *rewriting* the “testimonial narrative” (Beverly 1989). Claudia Bernardi creates shadow-box assemblages and works on canvases that bear witness to genocide in El Salvador. They also capture her memories of war and murder in Argentina. Merging conventions of autobiography and Testimonio, Bernardi blurs the individual account, or the witnessing of crimes against humanity, with the collective consciousness of a people caught in the midst of civil war.

While Galindo and Bernardi participate in a transnational, feminist arts practice that intervenes with Testimonio as a written tradition, their works also evoke a specific art history. During the 1960s and 1970s José Montoya created silkscreen posters in the collective mode, inviting the Chicana/o community to create an exhibit that reclaimed a significant event in Mexican American history. Now, in the twenty-first century, such posters are historical artifacts—or primary documents that testify to the events of an era and evidence a vivid cultural memory. Similarly, Juana Alicia creates community murals that testify to the plight of Central American peoples living through civil war, either firsthand or as expatriates in San Francisco’s Mission District. Lastly, the performance art of James Luna, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Coco Fusco are very much acts of Testimonio. Using their bodies in a collective mode, these artists respond to historical misrepresentations of Native Americans that are perpetuated by museums and other educational institutions.

With these twentieth-century precedents in mind, twenty-first-century Latina/o art signifies a hybrid form of Testimonio that merges conventions of the literary genre with that of autobiography—and propels them onto a visual field. This essay makes the case for reading Latina/o visual and performance art as Testimonio. The argument begins in the first section,

with a review of literary frameworks and definitions of the genre proposed by John Beverley and the Latina Feminist Group. Locating twenty-first-century artistic Testimonios within these related but distinctive frameworks, the first section analyzes scholarly definitions of Testimonio in relation to José Montoya's poster art and Juana Alicia's muralism; doing so directly connects Latina visual and performance Testimonios to relevant aesthetic traditions and art history. The second section considers the problems that Testimonio encounters as a literary genre, exploring the role of the interlocutor, or mediator of the "native voice" in testimonial narratives. James Luna, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Coco Fusco uncover the traps of authentic representation at the institutional level, where the museum often speaks for the native on display; each of their performances critique representational systems related to those of Testimonio. In the final section, an analysis of Bernardi and Galindo's artwork reveals meaningful connections to Testimonio because they merge the literary roles of the speaker/witness and the mediator/interlocutor. Ultimately, the works of these Latina artists redefine academic borders and literary definitions in their compelling accounts of crimes against humanity.

### **Models and Definitions of Testimonio**

Numerous scholarly frameworks exist on Testimonio—what it means, how it's done, and why it's different than autobiography (Spivak 1981; Foley 1986; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Most classify it as literature that bears witness to a life and to an important social, historical, and/or political event. John Beverley has explored Testimonio in great detail (1989; 1991; 2004). He defines it as "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" (1989, 13). The fundamental difference between Testimonio and

autobiography pertains to the former's disruption of individual subjectivity, or the singular perspective that prevails in the latter genre. Testimonio, Beverley asserts, "involves a sort of erasure of the function, and thus also of the textual presence, of the 'author'" (1989, 17). Subsequently, Testimonio reconstitutes autobiography as "an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode" (Beverley 1989, 17).

In Latin American Studies, the reconfiguration of the author in Testimonio formalized what is known as "resistance literature" (Harlow 1987), an oppositional prose that challenges western literary practices, or "all major forms of bourgeois writing since the Renaissance" (Beverley 1989, 17). Referencing the popularity of editor Miguel Barnet's *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1968) and, its "English-language equivalent," Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), Beverley notes that Testimonio was officially endorsed as a literary genre in 1971 when Cuba's Casa de las Américas offered "a prize in this category [and] put Testimonio on the canonical map of Latin American literature" (Beverley 1991, 6). He provides the organization's official rules for Testimonio:

Testimonies must document some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood as knowledge of the facts by the author or his or her compilation of narratives or evidence from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. In both cases reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable. The form is at the author's discretion, *but literary quality is also indispensable.* (1989, 13; 1991, 6)

The emphasis on the last sentence is Beverley's, and he draws our attention to it because it suggests a universal understanding and standard for literature.

But who defines these standards? And where do such definitions and values originate? Beverley asks, “Is there a determination of ‘literary quality’ that does not involve in turn an ideology of the literary?” (1991, 6). Beverley takes this question in a particular direction; he compares and contrasts the use of Testimonio in postcolonial and contemporary indigenous prose like *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1984), with the history of colonization in Latin America through Christianization and literacy (1991). Beverley’s analysis of Menchú’s Testimonio is explored in the next section, which locates key elements of the literary genre in her text and in the performances of James Luna, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Coco Fusco.

But for the sake of the task at hand, Beverley’s question provides a subtext for the definition of Testimonio and its formal acceptance as a literary genre. Once defined by a professional association of literati, how did Testimonio resist dominant traditions of literature? And, further, what are the “indispensable” requirements or, really, the boundaries that determine “literary quality?” Beverley’s reference to the Casa de las Américas’ definition, and his subtle questioning of its phrasing, challenges implicit understandings of what literature is. He expounds on this line of reasoning when he forecasts that,

[T]here may come a time when we have a new community of things we can call literature; but not now. Among the many lessons Testimonio has to offer us is one that suggests that it is no longer a question of “reading against the grain,” as in the various textual deconstructions we are familiar with, but of beginning to read against literature itself (1991, 18).<sup>2</sup>

Despite Beverley’s anticipation of new forms of literature (due to the flexibility of a genre like Testimonio), he fails to question if there are historical

precursors, or textual moments from the past that signal future literary innovations. For example, Beverley does not reflect on 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o and Latina/o artists who created Testimonio-like artwork, much of which predates and coincides with the 1971 Casa de las Américas guidelines. He only suggests that one day, beyond 1991, other forms of literature may materialize. But perhaps there is evidence of, or a traceable past to, these new forms. Perhaps the visual arts of 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o artists are aesthetic antecedents to the “new community of things” we can call Testimonio (Beverley 1991, 18).

In fact, Beverley opens the door for a history of other forms when he notes that Testimonio “coalesces as a new narrative genre in the 1960s and further develops in close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade” (1989, 13). The Chicana and Latina writers, scholars, and activists who comprise the Latina Feminist Group agree with Beverley’s historical framework for Testimonio. In 2001, they published *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*. Before they share their *papelitos guardados* with readers (1), they reference a genealogy that echoes Beverley’s nod to the 1960s and 1970s. They state the lineage from which their spoken truths had derived:

[F]rom a long line of workers, activists, theorists, and writers within their representative Latino communities. They have participated in various movements that denounce social injustice, including civil rights, anti-war, labor, human rights, progressive Cuban American politics, Puerto Rican Independence, Chicano political autonomy, Native American sovereignty, Central American solidarity. They have been central to the formation of Chicano, Puerto Rican or Ethnic Studies. They have taken part not only in the political but

also in the literary and artistic activity around these movements—  
*teatro* and *floricanto* (street theater, poetry and music festivals)—  
 which provide a language to celebrate cultural identity. (3)

Consciousness-raising in the 1960s and 1970s produced ethnic, racial, and cultural awareness and an established written practice, evidenced by the Latina Feminist Group's overview of the era and the publication date of their anthology. They elaborate on the ongoing trajectory of testimonial narrative in Latin American Studies and in the theory and praxis of Chicana/Latina Studies: "Latinas have contributed to empowerment efforts through literacy and giving voice, documenting silenced histories. *Testimonio* has been critical in movements for liberation in Latin America, offering an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community" (3).

The Latina Feminist Group's historical overview provides nuance to Beverley's description of the "generalized cultural radicalism of that decade" (13) in which *Testimonio* developed as a literary genre. In addition to the written practices of *Testimonio*, the Latina Feminist Group acknowledges the "artistic activity" that advanced "politicized understandings of identity and community" (3). Naming street theater, poetry, and music as a "language to celebrate" (3) culture and identity, the Latina feminists experienced the link between testimonial narrative and the visual arts long before the twenty-first century. While their reference is not comprehensive, their gesture toward "artistic form and methodology" (re)connects 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o and Latina/o art to the written tradition in which they now create "their own social and discursive spaces" (2).

The role of Chicana/o visual art in the 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement supports the Latina Feminist Group's knowledge of the multiple forms that

Testimonio takes. There are numerous interpretations of Chicana/o visual art and important perspectives of its purpose during the Chicano Movement.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, Chicana/o visual art primarily consisted of two forms—poster and mural. Both possess unique characteristics, but through each medium, Chicana/o artists created ethnonational solidarity across regional distance. They did so by utilizing commonly understood iconography and themes that expressed the civil rights platforms of the Chicano Movement, specifically its written manifestos (Pratt 1993). Chicana/o artists also created posters and murals in a collective mode, regularly involving their colleagues, students, and community members in the production process (Goldman 1984; Ybarra-Frausto 1993; Romo 2001). Thus, Chicana/o posters and murals united a regionally disparate diaspora of people by spreading a visual language based on a shared system of signs and codes.

“[D]isseminating messages from building walls, telephone poles, and other surfaces of the urban landscape,” Chon Noriega writes that Chicana/o posters “announced events or promoted specific causes” (Noriega 2001, 21). The posters’ transmission of literal information was also inscribed with cultural symbols and meanings that were deeply rooted in ideological/political values. Noriega alludes to the dynamic processes through which Chicano/a posters functioned in their immediate contexts and in more abstract ones, when he asks, “Do these images amount to something more than just another poster? Can art express and help build a community? Can artists create a visual language that is both self-reflexive and rooted in cultural difference?” (21).

The answers to Noriega’s questions are found in the creation story of one such Chicana/o poster. Addressing the relationship between Chicana/o art, collective consciousness, and testimonio, José Montoya declares, “The poster! *La palabra!* The word! The most decisive conveyor of the information crucial

in inviting a community to attend an important presentation regarding the historical truths of an earlier epoch” (32). Montoya’s proclamation is important for interpreting all Chicana/o posters, but he has one particular work in mind: the 1977 announcement poster for that year’s exhibition of an important event in U.S. and Chicana/o history—the 1940s Pachuca/o era.

Pachucos/as were predominantly Mexican American youth in urban centers that originated a unique style of fashion, language, and comportment called Caló. Mainstream contempt emerged in the United States for pachucos/as due to a series of sensational news stories that ran in William Randolph Hearst’s Los Angeles newspapers.<sup>4</sup> The stories concerned gang violence and targeted the fashion and dialect in which young Mexican Americans were dressing and speaking. News coverage peaked in 1942, with the Sleepy Lagoon Case and the twenty-two teenagers who went on trial for the murder of a Mexican teenager (Rosales 1997; Ruiz 1998; Escobedo 2007; Ramírez 2009). The Zoot Suit Riots followed in June 1943, when U.S. servicemen “stationed in the Los Angeles area commandeered taxi cabs and spilled out into the streets of East Los Angeles, beating up every Mexican teenager who crossed their path” (Rosales 103). For Montoya, “the historical truths” of this “earlier epoch” were meaningful for the 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o generation. American nationalism turned nativist in the 1940s’ World War II climate. The Zoot Suit Riots were both an expression and a perpetuation of a racialized logic regarding who was and was not American. The parallel with Chicana/o marginalization was palpable.

Female zoot suiters also faced a particular threat to their reputations, their autonomy, and even their safety in ways that connect with 1960s and 1970s Chicana public identity. Pachucas used fashion and make-up in new ways that were foreign to traditional Mexican cultural norms, and different than

U.S. mainstream preferences. Because pachucas were “flashy and ostentatious, their shared adoption of exaggerated pompadours, overstated lipstick, and short skirts visibly signified a sense of belonging to a distinctly Mexican American subculture” (Escobedo 149). Such a subculture was not viewed as an innovation, but as a deterioration of morality; subsequently pachucas were “vilified as incorrigible delinquents” in both Mexican and U.S. mainstream media (Ruiz 1998, 83). Elizabeth R. Escobedo has analyzed the double-bind in which pachucas found themselves amidst the 1940s’ xenophobic climate in the United States, and within the traditional patriarchal structures of their families. Escobedo writes,

Using style and behavior in a way to challenge ideas of respectability and to assert a distinctive identity, pachucas defied mainstream notions of proper feminine decorum and endangered rigid static definitions of Mexican femininity. As women’s social roles broadened more generally in the wartime environment, and the Mexican family struggled to maintain a hold on its daughters and its culture, the pachuca came to represent a female figure whose dangerous sexuality demanded restraint. (134–35)

While the double-bind of Pachuca oppression resonates with the experiences of many Chicanas who were active in the 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement, the connection does not just pertain to marginalization and criminalization.<sup>5</sup> Escobedo explains that “female zoot-suiters experimented with their social and sexual roles by adopting personas that asserted new claims to public life” (140). Likewise, the political and artistic activism of many Chicanas raised their personal consciousness in the civil rights era and created a platform for Chicana feminism.

Attempting to “set the record straight” about the Pachuco/a era in Mexican American history (Montoya 31), Montoya and the Chicano arts collective, the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF), planned and implemented an art show that reclaimed and rewrote the historical misrepresentations from personal memories and “knowledge of the facts” (Beverley 1989, 13; 1991, 6). Entitling the exhibit, “El Pachuco Art: A Historical Update,” Montoya created a series of sketches and watercolor portraits of Pachucas/os based on his childhood recollections of his older siblings.<sup>6</sup> But the show’s announcement was a tribute to Montoya’s “ideological mentor” during his training at the California College of the Arts in Oakland (28). He writes, “El Ralph Ornelas: *pinto* poet, revolutionary, and accomplished thief and scholar. This is the same Ralph whose memory I was posthumously honoring in the Pachuco Art Poster” (28). According to Montoya, Ornelas “had instilled in us the power inherent in uncovering the true history of Chicano people and exposing the lies” (33). Using a “*Pachuco calaca*,” or skeleton figure evocative of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century illustrations of Mexican engraver and artist José Guadalupe Posada, Montoya claims that he wanted the poster’s message to move “beyond the regular venue information” (32). Thus, the skeleton encapsulates multiple narratives (Fig. 2). It is at once a biographical memory, a culturally identifiable symbol for an emerging ethnonational community, and “a historical update” to the distorted record of twentieth-century Mexican American history. The layers of meaning are further contextualized by the words placed to the left of Montoya’s depiction of Ralph Ornelas as a “*Pachuco calaca*.” Montoya writes, “La Verdad.”

Montoya’s account of the poster’s creation also describes the collective mode in which it was produced. While Montoya drew all of the images, directed their placement, and stated the necessary text, his RCAF colleagues Rudy Cuellar and Louis González actually “pulled” the poster (Montoya 33). The



Figure 2

José Montoya's Pachuco Art: A Historical Update. Ca. 1978. Silkscreen. 31 x 13. José Montoya, Rudy Cuellar, and Louie González. Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

color of the paper was also Cuellar and González's decision. Montoya muses, "They had found a stack of pre-cut, lawn-sign color stock, a horrible yellow left over from some political campaign job" (34). But the size of the stock paper worked for Montoya's design, and Cuellar and González "even had time to do a third and a fourth color run. Like finely placed signatures: white for the bony *calaca*, the artist's name, and the date, and a golden brown for the hat and the zooter drapes" (34).

"El Pachuco Art: A Historical Update" opened in December in Sacramento, California, at the Open Ring Gallery on J Street; it was also the subject of a documentary film entitled, *El Pachuco: From Zootsuits to Lowriders*, directed by Joe Camacho. The film captures the opening reception and includes many shots of the exhibit, which not only featured Montoya's art, but also numerous photographs, letters, and personal belongings that Montoya had collected from the Chicana/o community (Fig. 3). Montoya adds, "High schoolers were given the task of raiding their family photo albums for snapshots of the forties to be blown up for the show... Other high school students had learned to dance the jitterbug... And there were enough older ladies in the classes who could still rat an outrageous pompadour" (2001, 31–32). Drawing on the 1971 Casa de las Américas requirements for Testimonio, Montoya's exhibit documented a "direct source," compiling "evidence from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses" (Beverley 1989, 13; 1991, 6). The show traveled to San Francisco and Los Angeles between 1977 and 1978, and was advertised with the aforementioned poster. At each opening reception, Montoya and the crowd performed Pachuquismo; they dressed in zootsuits, wide-brimmed hats, well-polished shoes, and coiffed their hair.

Chicana performances of Pachuquisma at each of the show openings also intervened on the historical marginalization of the female zoot suiter, (re)

claiming her as a direct ancestor/precursor of the 1960s and 1970s Chicana activist. Photographs from the 1977 and 1978 exhibits, housed at the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives (CEMA) in the “Royal Chicano Air Force Collection,” document numerous Chicanas wearing Pachuca fashions—“including the long fingertip coat, short skirts, exaggerated pompadours, and stark make-up.” Keeping “company with male zoot-suiters on city streets” in downtown Sacramento and in the Mission District of San Francisco, Chicanas performed an identity that was “more than just a fashion rebel” (Escobedo 134). Escobedo asserts that pachucas’ “reappropriated cosmetics in order to fashion a racial identity that challenged the vision of mainstream U.S. beauty ideals” (149). In turn, I argue that Chicanas who embodied Pachuca identity at both of the show openings used “aesthetics defiantly as a means of public presentation and group consciousness” (Escobedo 151).

In his opening address to the crowd at Sacramento’s Open Ring Gallery, José Montoya remarked on the historical rendering of Pachucos/as in U.S. history and, subsequently, in the collective consciousness of the Chicana/o generation. He declared that Pachucos/as were “the first Chicano freedom-fighters of the Chicano movement” (Montoya 1977, 1). Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg claim that the collaborative process of Montoya’s “documentary exhibit” transformed it into an act of “collective remembering” (1992, 561). The show testified to a collective—and not individual memory or experience. Mixing personal belongings with a public performance of Pachuca/o identity rewrote “the imagery and symbolism of the *pachuco* into contemporary Chicano art and *barrio* life” (Sanchez-Tranquilino and Tagg 1992, 561).

Furthermore, the exhibit and performances reenacted some of the historical events it questioned, both literally and symbolically. During the show’s



**Figure 3**

Figure 3: "Pachuco Art: A Historical Update." December 9, 1977. Open Ring Gallery. No photographer named. Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara, and "Pachuco Art Show by José Montoya. Ca. 1978. Galería de La Raza. No photographer named. Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

opening reception, the local police prohibited several central valley “car clubs” from entering Sacramento; the incident is captured in Joe Camacho’s documentary. The circumstance was ironic and not lost on Montoya. Like the battles that Pachucas/os faced during the 1940s for social-spatial equality on the streets of downtown Los Angeles, history repeated itself when Chicana/o car clubs were denied access to downtown Sacramento.

Montoya’s story of the poster’s collective origins, as well as the collaborative processes enacted during the show, resonates with the Latina Feminist Group’s framework for Testimonio. In their 2001 publication, the Latina Feminist Group acknowledges that “scholars often see *Testimonios* as dependent products, an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity” (13). Wanting to take ownership over the testimonial practice, or speak/write for themselves, the Latina Feminist Group “created our own *Testimonio* process” (13). Working together, and speaking and reading “our individual pieces to each other,” the Latina feminists “broke into small groups, each with diverse ethnic, national, or geographic membership, and addressed the following questions: Why did we pursue higher education? What did we think we were doing? What was the enticement? What did we get out of it?” (13)

While the Latina feminists refer to a specific meeting in Baca, Colorado, that led to their publication (9), their methodology and questions echo throughout the 1977 Pachuco Art Show. The creation of Montoya’s poster was a process of negotiation, of collective questioning, and interdependence. Cuellar and González incorporated Montoya’s images and text onto backgrounds that they selected and to which they added new color designs. In doing so, the poster, both its content and form, has multiple authors. Likewise, the show’s

direct involvement and exhibition of a community's historical memories—and not the individual artist's perception of them—asserted the participants as political subjects in history and on their own terms. The community's performances of Pachuquismo, much like reading aloud one's written Testimonio, restaged a significant social, political, and historical event in Mexican American history and in Chicana/o consciousness.

The Latina Feminist Group's testimonial process is evident throughout the history of Chicana/o visual art. Chicana/o artists were concerned with local causes and the broader historical representations of their communities; but many Chicana/o artists understood the idea of "community" as a global context. Similar to the Latina Feminist Group's understanding of their "diverse ethnic, national, or geographic membership" (13), 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o artists represented numerous ancestries, cultural and social backgrounds that informed the content and form of their murals. Shifra M. Goldman observes that as the Chicano Movement evolved, Chicana/o art became more conscious of "the changing perception of the Chicano role in the United States, and in the international arena" (Goldman 50). While Goldman identifies the "Third World liberation struggles" that occupied many Chicana/o artists, she distinguishes a timeframe for their international concerns. The "history of Chicano poster making, like that of street muralism," Goldman writes, "can be divided into two periods: from 1968 to 1975; and from 1975 to the present" (50). Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (in 1985) express these time periods again as taking place between 1968 to 1975 and 1975 to 1981 (Davalos 2008). The primary distinction between the categories pertains to the political content of the artwork, or a lack thereof. Karen Mary Davalos writes, "The latter period typically is described as less political or confrontational than the former" (118–119).

Davalos takes issue with this periodization because it does not account for political Chicana/o art created after 1975, homogenizing a Chicana/o artistic worldview and the different understandings of community. Davalos calls attention to Yolanda López's 1978 poster, "Who Is the Illegal Alien, Pilgrim?" In both image and text, López's poster is an angry, historical, and political rebuttal to nativist movements in the United States that continue to resonate throughout U.S. immigration history into our current reality. Davalos also provides biographical details of López's participation in the 1968 Third World Liberation Front's mobilizations at San Francisco State College and its direct impact on her global politics (34–35). López's eyewitness experience of 1960s and 1970s civil rights movements recalls the Latina Feminist Group's understanding of Testimonio from the frontlines of "a long line of workers, activists, theorists, and writers within their representative Latino communities" (Latina Feminist Group 3).

There are other examples of Chicana/o art created after Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto's periodization that contradict temporal divisions based on an ideological shift. Between 1976 and 1977, for example, Malaquías Montoya created the poster, "Argentina: One Year Of Military Dictatorship." Louis González created "Salvadorean People's Support Committee" in 1981.<sup>7</sup> Both works account for the Chicana/o artists' extension of Chicana/o consciousness and iconography to the plight of Central American peoples after 1975 and into the 1980s. Guisela Latorre explains the political and ideological commitment to third world liberation movements in Chicana/o visual art well after 1975: "The parallels between the Chicana/o/Mexican and Central American experience, including the Maya, were not lost on Chicana/o artists and activists and, in many ways, further galvanized the legitimacy of *la causa*" (Latorre 2008, 168).

Goldman and Ybarra-Frausto's categorization is also argued elsewhere in regards to 1960s and 1970s civil rights murals. Michael D. Harris, for example, classifies African American murals into two major periods: "1967–1975," or the era of "Art for the People," and "1975–1990," or the transition "From Revolutionary Effort to Creative Decoration" (24–43). Harris claims that post-1975 murals were no longer based on community concerns and, subsequently, not political. Instead, they reflected "individual initiative" and "individual creativity." Harris states that this was largely "due to the support of various educational and governmental institutions and publicly sponsored arts agencies" (30). Late 1970s and 1980s murals signaled the end of politicized community muralism because individual artists were receiving direct grants and commissions.

Eva Cockcroft and Holly Barnett-Sanchez agree with Harris that government programs transformed political, community murals. Although initiatives like the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 to 1982 generated important exposure and experience for young artists, Cockcroft and Barnett-Sanchez assert that it also "created an implicit (and sometimes real) threat of censorship that tended to dilute the content of these walls. The depoliticization of muralism in the late 1970s also corresponded to decreased social activism after the end of the Vietnam crisis" (Cockcroft and Barnett-Sanchez 14). Unlike the "force, specificity, and conviction" of 1960s and 1970s murals, those funded by government agencies and city arts commissions carried "more general, wishful, positive images" (Cockcroft and Barnett-Sanchez 14).

Yet the murals of Juana Alicia counter any claim that Chicana/o muralism shifted toward passive imagery once it was funded. Juana Alicia's murals demonstrate that a political perspective, firmly rooted in a global context,

continued into the mid-1980s and beyond. “Te Oímos Guatemala/We Hear You Guatemala,” for example, was created in 1985 by Juana Alicia and sponsored through PLACA, a subsidized mural program led by Ray Patlán and Patricia Rodríguez (Latorre 165).<sup>8</sup> This mural raised “awareness among the local community” in San Francisco’s Mission District, “about the systematic violence targeted at Guatemala’s Maya communities” (Latorre 166). Originally from New Jersey and raised in Detroit, Juana Alicia relocated to San Francisco in the 1980s and became immersed in the rich Chicana/o and Latina/o visual arts scene (Latorre 166).

The personal details of Juana Alicia’s biography are important for thinking about her role as community speaker or narrator of a local, historical experience. She was not a Chicana artist from the Bay Area or of Central American descent. But she created “Te Oímos Guatemala” in a veteran site of Chicana/o muralism, using the established form to bear witness to the destruction of Central American communities, and to the demographic changes occurring in the Mission District. Juana Alicia’s mural shows a Mayan woman crying out in despair as she covers the feet of her dead loved one (Fig. 4). The sheet then transforms into a mountain range, connecting the destruction of a people to the destruction of their homeland. Guisela Latorre notes that the woman’s scream was “heard all the way in the Mission District and its community, where Chicanas/os and Guatemalan exiles now share the same contested urban space and many realities” (168).

In a 2007 reflection, Juana Alicia recalls that a scene from the 1983 documentary film, *When the Mountains Tremble*, had inspired

the image of a retablo style mural: a Guatemalan woman in traditional clothing, kneeling and crying over the body of her beloved



**Figure 4**  
 Juana Alicia, "Te Oímos Guatemala/We Hear You, Guatemala." 1985. A preparatory drawing for the mural in Balmy Alley, San Francisco, CA. Courtesy of the artist. The sketch also appears in Guiselle Latorre's *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (2008). The artist does not specify the medium of sketch.

deceased, with the roof-tops of the Mission in the background, and a ribbon floating above them with the words, "Te Oímos Guatemala/ We Hear You Guatemala." (juanaalicia.com)

The rooftops of San Francisco's Mission District as the mural's backdrop suggests that the Mayan woman not only cries out from a distant country; she is also present in the United States, standing beside the mural's viewers, contemplating her homeland's fate and her new circumstances as an exile.

The idea that the woman's scream originates *within* the Mission District supports Latorre's interpretation and is historically evidenced by the reality of Guatemalans and other Central Americans living in the United States during the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> When "the military government in Guatemala embarked on a campaign to crush what they regarded as guerilla warfare among indigenous and rural communities in the country," Latorre explains, "these circumstances ushered in a new flux of immigrants to the United States, namely, the many refugees and exiles who were escaping the violence and political persecution in their home countries" (168). The forced migration and displacement of Central American peoples worsened when many were "denied asylum by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) because it claimed that they were 'economic,' not political refugees" (Latorre 168). Subsequently, numerous Central American peoples lived and worked in the shadows of cities like San Francisco. Aware of U.S. involvement in Guatemala's civil war and the crisis that domestic policy had created for Central American refugees (Latorre 167), Juana Alicia's mural captured the anguish of local viewers, many of whom heard their own voices in the scream of the howling woman. Perhaps viewers from the community found "Te Oímos Guatemala" as readable as any written Testimonio, or as a story that began in Guatemala, amidst warfare and the loss of loved ones, and ended in a new country, where they were rendered invisible by history and unprotected by law.

"Te Oímos Guatemala" was destroyed in 1990, but Juana Alicia replaced it in 1996 with a new mural: "Una Ley Inmoral, Nadie Tiene Que Cumpirla (No One Should Comply with an Immoral Law)" (Latorre 262). In the new mural, Juana Alicia maintains her reverent gaze to the south (Fig. 5), "honoring slain Salvadorian archbishop and human rights activist Óscar Romero" (Latorre 262). The destruction of the first mural and the creation of a new one reflect the physical reality of Balmy Alley, which is a narrow



Figure 5

Juana Alicia, "Una Ley Inmoral." 1996. Precita Eyes Mural Society. Courtesy of the artist.

corridor that spans the length between 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Streets in the Mission District. Balmy Avenue is an alleyway, "lined primarily by garage doors and backyard fences belonging to private homes" (Latorre 164). Juana Alicia created "Te Oímos Guatemala" on one of the garage doors that eventually needed replacement. But the ephemeral nature of Juana Alicia's murals is not counterintuitive to Testimonio, or western presumptions of the permanency

and, thus, history of the printed word. Rather, the succession of her murals reinforces their relevance to the Chicana/o and Latina/o community as a mode in which not only to express, but also to renew their commitments to local concerns that are global.

Now, in the twenty-first century, Juana Alicia continues to express community history and politics on a global scale. In 2004, she completed “La Llorona’s Waters,” a mural at the corners of York and 24<sup>th</sup> Streets in the Mission District. Sponsored by The San Francisco Women’s Center and the Galería de la Raza, Juana Alicia also received funding from city programs, nonprofit organizations, and private donors ([juanaalicia.com](http://juanaalicia.com)). In this work, the muralist reconstructs the mythical figure of La Llorona, or the weeping woman who drowns her children only to eternally lament the act. In Juana Alicia’s rendering of La Llorona, viewers witness a contemporary indigenous woman caught in the midst of environmental disasters and human exploitations, each of which result from unequal trade agreements between governments and corporations ([juanaalicia.com](http://juanaalicia.com); Latorre 208–209). La Llorona is not a perpetrator in Juana Alicia’s interpretation, but a protector, kneeling next to her small child, with one arm around his waist. Her other arm is extended to the mural’s viewers, directly engaging them in her plight and those of the countless women who walk behind her.

“La Llorona’s Waters” also participates in the historical progression of Juana Alicia’s murals that renew the local community’s commitment to global causes. The mural is located at the former site of her 1983 mural, “Las Lechugueras/The Women Lettuce Workers.” This piece portrayed farmworkers and their struggles for environmental and social justice in California ([juanaalicia.com](http://juanaalicia.com)). After receiving a “90-day warning in 2001 that the mural would be destroyed because of water damage to the wall,” Juana

Alicia “developed the La Llorona project to pick up where Las Lechugueras left off” (juanaalicia.com). The succession of Juana Alicia’s murals at this site evokes a female chain, directly connecting the history of Chicana farmworkers with that of the twenty-first-century indigena diaspora.

### **The Role of the Mediator/Interlocutor in Testimonio**

Although there are meaningful connections between Chicana/o visual art and Testimonio, perhaps the posters and murals stray too far from the literary definitions. The 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o posters utilized a collective mode that somewhat erased the individual teller, speaker, and author. Montoya’s poster, for example, had multiple creators, each of whom authored elements of its story. Similarly, Chicana/o murals like Juana Alicia’s “Te Oímos Guatemala” privileged transnational perspectives of war and migration over the author’s life story and sociological context. While John Beverley explains that Testimonio disrupts the role of the “author,” reconstituting “the individual self in a collective mode” (1989, 17), the narrator is still necessary and “must be representative of a social class or group” (Beverley 1989, 15).

The narrator is required in Testimonio because she “speaks for, or in the name of, a community...approximating in this way the symbolic function of the epic hero, without at the same time assuming his hierarchical and patriarchal status” (Beverley 1989, 16). Montoya’s poster recalls memories of his mentor Ralph Ornelas, but Montoya was not a Pachuco or an eyewitness to the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots. Nor were many of the community participants who staged the exhibit’s reclamation of Mexican American history. Likewise, Juana Alicia is not from Central America, and while she moved to the Mission District in the 1980s and witnessed the mass migration of Central American peoples, she did not experience Guatemala’s civil war firsthand. Yet, according to the Casa de las Américas definition, the narrator of Testimonio must “document some

aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source” (Beverley, 1989, 13; 1991, 6). Both Montoya’s poster and Juana Alicia’s murals meet this requirement.<sup>10</sup>

The problem that Montoya and Juana Alicia’s artwork poses as Testimonio pertains to authenticity, or the truthfulness of the individual who speaks on behalf of a community. Authenticity in testimonial narrative has been a central concern for the literary genre, particularly in regards to *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Stoll 1999; Arias 2001; Beverley 2004). This book won the Casa de las Américas prize for Testimonio in 1983, despite allegations that Menchú’s interviews were not conducted and/or translated by Elizabeth Burgos, and Menchú’s claims that Burgos copyrighted the text in her own name and did not pay royalties to her charity (Arias 6–7). By 1999, Menchú’s Testimonio faced serious scrutiny over the accuracy of the events it documented (Stoll 1999).

In regards to the reliability of the narrator in Testimonio, John Beverley analyzes Menchú’s text as a mediated process, or a narratorial voice that is transcribed from oral interviews and then translated from one language to another. But Beverley also alludes to the judgments and values that are translated along with language. While *I, Rigoberta Menchú* represents the “life story of a young Guatemalan woman, which as she puts it in her presentation, is intended to represent ‘the reality of a whole people’” (Beverley 1991, 2), Beverley explains that her testimony is “an oral narrative told by a speaker from a subaltern or ‘popular’ social class or group to an interlocutor, who is an intellectual or professional writer from the middle or upper class” (1991, 4). Referring to Elizabeth Burgos, the “Venezuelan social scientist” who transcribed Menchú’s testimony, Beverley illustrates the cultural and class values that Burgos translates into Menchú’s testimony in the “debates” she

had “with herself about what to correct in the transcribing of the recordings of Menchú’s conversations” (1991, 16). Burgos was concerned with the assumptions readers would make about Menchú’s intelligence, based upon her grammatical errors, or any other mispronunciations that Menchú dare utter in Spanish. Her anxiety over correcting Menchú’s oration reveals the problems that Testimonio faces as a western literary genre.

The practices and standards of western literature are often at the center of Menchú’s testimony. Reflecting on childrearing customs in her Mayan community, Menchú states, and Burgos writes:

When children reach ten years old...that’s the moment when their parents and the village leaders talk to them.... It’s also when they remind them that our ancestors were dishonored by the White Man, by colonization. But they don’t tell them the way it’s written down in books, because the majority of Indians can’t read or write, and don’t even know that they have their own texts. No, they learn it through oral recommendations, the way it’s been handed down through the generations. (Menchú 1984, 13; Beverley 1991, 8)

Clearly, Menchú defines an approach to early childhood education that is unlike western notions of intellectualism. She elaborates on this perspective in another textual instance, when parents from her village force two outside teachers to leave because they do not want their “children to become like *ladinos* [in Guatemala, a Spanish-speaking white or mestizo]” (Menchú 1984, 205; Beverley 1991, 9). Beverley claims that in such statements, Menchú “does not accept literacy and book learning, and the narrative of cultural and linguistic modernization they entail, as either adequate or normative cultural modes” (1991, 10).

Although Menchú does not accept “literacy and book learning” as the standard by which all other forms of education are measured, her voice is revised, edited, and corrected. Readers of Menchú’s *Testimonio* are, after all, the “metropolitan reading public culturally and physically distant from the position and situation of its narrator” (Beverley 1991, 7). By the 1990s, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* reached international audiences, but, as Arturo Arias notes, it “never became a bestseller outside university campuses” (13). Thus, Menchú’s readers are very much like Elizabeth Burgos; they reflect an abstract “community” based on shared levels of access, privilege, and class (Beverley 1991, 16). And this community of readers becomes aware of “the reality of a whole people” on very familiar written terms—through the textually-correct voice of the speaker-author.

Around the time that Menchú’s *Testimonio* was gaining critical acclaim as a literary text and causing controversy as testimonial narrative, numerous critiques of authentic representation were staged by Native American and U.S.-Latina/o artists. In “Artifact Piece,” for example, James Luna used conventions of autobiography and *Testimonio* against the grain, or, as Beverley suggests, in a new era of literature, when there may come a time for genre deconstructions unlike any other (1991, 18). Luna first exhibited “Artifact Piece” between 1985 and 1987 at the Museum of Man in San Diego (Fig. 6). He performed it again in 1990 at New York’s “Decade Show” (Thompson 1998). Jane Blocker writes that “Artifact Piece” was a “critical parody of the ethnographic museum” in which Luna donned a loincloth and laid in a case amongst the Kumeyaay exhibits (Blocker 21).

Luna also placed traditional museum signage around his body, each of which provided biographical notes like, “The burns on the fore and upper arm were sustained during days of excessive drinking” (Blocker 21). Another sign



**Figure 6**

James Luna, "Artifact Piece." 1987. Museum of Man, San Diego. No photo credit given by artist. Photo courtesy of the artist.

mocked transcription as an interpretive act: "Having been married less than two years, the sharing of emotional scars from alcoholic family backgrounds [was] cause for fears of giving, communicating, and mistrust. Skin callous on ring finger remains, along with assorted painful and happy memories" (Blocker 21). Luna's descriptions are "educational texts," as Blocker notes, commonly found at most U.S. history and anthropology museums and accepted by most museum-goers as truthful, objective sources of knowledge.

But Luna's signs are powerfully deceptive. On one level, they poke fun at the viewer's implicit trust of the authoritative basis on which the Modern Museum of Man narrates the "reality of 'Indians'" (Blocker 23). On another level, Luna's signs manipulate the role of the narrator in *Testimonio* in order

to conceal his particular, individual truth. Blocker writes that Luna's signs are "unified by references to drunkenness" (21), and Luna uses the stereotype of rampant alcoholism among American Indians as a screen, guarding the true history of his body's scars. By offering viewers a fictional account of the "burns on the fore and upper arm" and the callous on his "ring finger," Luna maintains his subjecthood; he does not speak on behalf of his community. Instead, he speaks back to the institutional standards and exhibit practices of U.S. museums, which have mediated the historical past of an imagined Native American community.

Following Luna's "Artifact Piece," Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco entered a cage in March 1992. They dressed in a combination of various visual stereotypes of aboriginal identity—from grass skirts and plastic beads to animal bones. They also mixed in references to modern, western consumer culture, like high-top sneakers and sunglasses. As the "Couple in the Cage," they called themselves Amerindians from "an island off the gulf of Mexico that was overlooked by Columbus" (Johnson 1993). The artists performed their sardonic take on indigenous bodies on display in Madrid, Irvine, London, Minneapolis, Chicago, and at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.

While encaged, Gómez-Peña and Fusco made voodoo dolls, paced the floor, typed on a laptop, and interacted with their confused audiences. In fact, many spectators believed they were *real* Amerindians (Johnson 1993). If the western museum is a type of interlocutor, or a mediator/translator of objects and subjects in history, Gómez-Peña and Fusco had spoken back to the institutions and disciplines that spoke for them. Mixing modern objects of technology with visual tropes of indigenous (read: antiquated) cultures, the artists responded simultaneously to the historical legacy and the existing perceptions of Native Americans as peoples of the past.

“Artifact Piece” and “Couple in a Cage” also illustrate the development of testimonial narrative in Chicana/Latina Studies. Prior to the Latina Feminist Group’s meeting in Baca, Colorado, the Latina Feminist Group writes that the roles of the subaltern speaker and the interlocutor/mediator had not yet converged in their academic practices and methodologies: “We had not yet participated in public renderings of our own life stories. We had not yet experienced being on both sides of the process, sharing and generating our own Testimonios with each other as Latina scholars” (2). Although the fusion of testimonial roles had not officially occurred for the Latina Feminist Group, they were conscious of the mediation process involved in telling “other” histories because their professional access and careers directly intersected with their racial, ethnic, class, and gender identities (Collins 2000). They explain:

Many of us, in one way or another, are professional *testimoniadoras* (producers of *Testimonios*), whether as oral historians, literary scholars, ethnographers, creative writers, or psychologists. From our different personal, political, ethnic, and academic trajectories, we arrived at the importance of *Testimonio* as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure. (2)

For the Latina Feminist Group, private stories in the form of a publication made the invisible more than visible; it made them historical. The personal had become intellectual and, ultimately, public. But the publication of the group members’ experiences did not create a unified, singular subjectivity, since they do not translate each other in their book. Instead, they listen and bear witness to many individual lives. The Latina Feminist Group’s testimonial process is a two-way street, a back and forth, where no-*body* is mediated.

Imelda Junquera tracks this evolutionary moment in Chicana/Latina prose, locating its convergence initially in Chicana lesbian literature. In order to decolonize their bodies—their very selves, which includes race, class, sex, and gender identities as well as historical memory—Chicanas and Latinas wrote their way out of the colonized, narrative body:

The enslavement and abuse of the female body, unable to express itself in a patriarchal and capitalist environment has encouraged the use of the practice of writing as a therapeutical effect. The narrative body becomes a virtual map where all types of experiences are inscribed, finding a place free of censorship (2005, 77).

In “Artifact Piece” and “Couple in a Cage,” James Luna, Coco Fusco, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña used their bodies as narrative, mapping the “enslavement and abuse” of their indigenous identities in U.S. history and by its principal teaching tool—the museum. Appropriating the established conventions of the museum—display techniques, staging, and signage—the artists created a space free of censorship by recoding institutional language into a subaltern force (Pratt 1993).

### **Twenty-First Century Hybrid Testimonios**

In the twenty-first century, numerous Latina artists have advanced hybrid forms of Testimonio that draw on Chicana/o visual art history and the performance work of Native American and U.S. Latina/o artists. Argentine-born visual artist Claudia Bernardi demonstrates one such fusion in her 2007 exhibit, “Silence Was Hostile and Almost Perfect” in Sacramento, California. In a photograph by Adrian Mendoza, Bernardi is flanked by two of her shadow boxes, and Mendoza draws our attention to a red toy horse; it prompts us to examine the other items on display behind her (Fig. 8). The “tiny red

horse,” Mendoza writes, “was discovered in the shirt pocket of a little boy... [It] became a symbol of the brutality and injustice perpetrated on the most vulnerable members of society in a war that was funded and supported by the U.S. government.”<sup>11</sup>

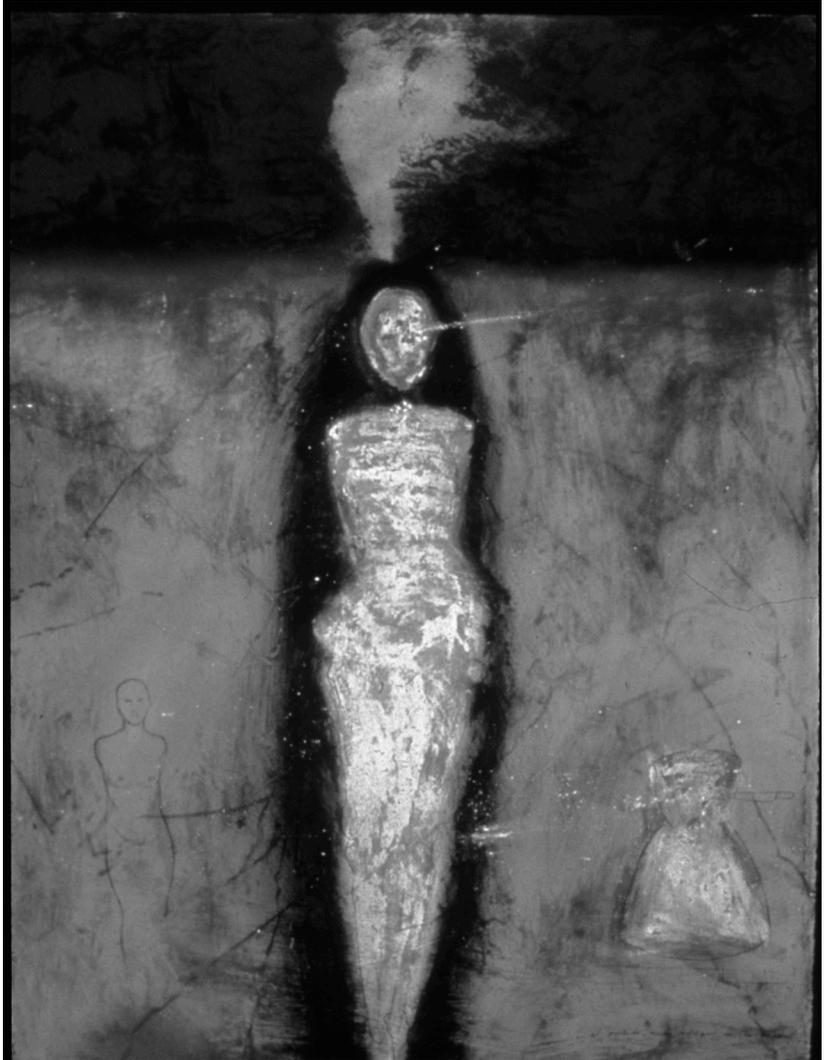
In 1992, Bernardi went to El Mozote, El Salvador, eleven years after the military massacred hundreds of people in 1981 (Engelund 2010). Working as part of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, Bernardi helped recover “the remains of 143 people, 136 of whom were children under the age of twelve” (News release, Forty Acres Gallery, October 1, 2007). In response to the exhumation, Bernardi proclaimed in her diary that, “After El Mozote, I will be a different Claudia” (News release, Forty Acres Gallery, October 1, 2007). Her shadow boxes visualize this proclamation by elevating and framing the red toy horse, the child’s shoe, and the crumpled dress. Each piece conveys the words of her diary; they are memories of *her* experience—and not only the ghostly remains of the children that they now represent. Bernardi also incorporated her “frescoes on paper” (Fig. 9) into the 2007 exhibit (Roth 2009). These “multilayered monoprints,” writes David Roth, “reveal bright, luminous landscapes whose super-saturated colors pull viewers into emotional and psychological states [that are] reinforced by the vitality of the spectral, subterranean figures and objects that populate her pictures at varying depths” (Roth 2009). The layered works conjure layers of memory, suggesting to viewers that Bernardi’s experiences at El Mozote were deeply influenced by another historical event.

For Bernardi, digging up the bones in El Salvador began in Argentina in 1979, when she fled her home country after a military takeover of Argentina’s government. Known as the Dirty War, thousands of Argentines were murdered and/or disappeared between 1976 and 1983 at the hands of dictator Jorge



**Figure 7**

Bernardi at her exhibit, "Silence Was Hostile and Almost Perfect" in Sacramento, CA. Image by and courtesy of Adrian Mendoza. Black and white with color alteration by Mendoza.



**Figure 8**

Claudia Bernardi, "Que Mala Suerte, Niña/What a Bad Luck, Girl!" 1998. Fresco on paper: 30 x 48. Collection of Ian and Nancy van Coller. Image courtesy of the artist.

Rafael Videlas and the Argentine military.<sup>12</sup> Bernardi's sister, Patricia, helped "found the Argentine Forensic Anthology Team (AFAT)" in 1984. This is an organization "dedicated to investigating human rights violations against civilian populations" (News release, Forty Acres Gallery, October 1, 2007).

Bernardi took to El Mozote a set of professional skills and memories that spilled over into her arts practice. Roth explains, "Where Bernardi previously thought of art as an interior experience [or] 'a safe place to think about what I cannot think rationally'—she now sees her work in much broader terms, representing 'the sense of deep dignity that *people* can sustain even in times of deep crisis'" (Roth 2009). Turning the "interior experience" outward, Bernardi opened "the School of Art and Open Studio of Perquin," in 2005, "located less than five miles from El Mozote" (News release, Forty Acres Gallery, October 1, 2007). Through the Walls of Hope Program, Bernardi introduced art as trauma therapy, engaging survivors and the next generation in mural projects that visualize Testimonio in the collective mode.

During this time, Bernardi also partnered with choreographer Kimi Okada and the modern dance company ODC San Francisco to create *Flight to Ixcán*, a dance performance representing personal and historical events.<sup>13</sup> A physician from San Francisco, Okada's brother was killed in a "mysterious plane crash" in 1976, while "doing humanitarian work in Guatemala." In *Flight to Ixcán*, Okada and Bernardi merge their autobiographical references with the larger milieu of civil war and international interventions, mixing the "plane crash, congressional hearings, [and] the presence of the military." Bernardi also designed the sets, placing "large quantities of earth" on stage in order to emphasize excavation "as a revelatory process." The movement of the dancers' bodies with the movement of earth symbolized the "physical unearthing of information, retrieval of memory," and the "unlayering of historical facts and fiction."<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 9**

*Recorte por la línea* (2005). Regina José Galindo. Foto Alejandra Herrera. Performance realizado con la participación de uno de los más cotizados cirujanos plásticos de Venezuela, Dr. Billi Spence, en el cual marcó sobre mi cuerpo todas las áreas que debían ser intervenidas para llegar a tener el cuerpo perfecto, según los códigos estéticos manejados por nuestra sociedad. (Primer Festival de Arte Corporal. Caracas, Venezuela. 2005). Regina José Galindo image courtesy of the artist. All images available at <http://www.reginajosegalindo.com>.

Speaking directly to her audiences as a witness, as a survivor, and as a mediator, Bernardi's body of work demonstrates how the subaltern speaker and the interlocutor have converged in twenty-first century Latina/o art.<sup>15</sup> Her visualizations of *Testimonio* also correspond with the performance art of Regina José Galindo. Reflecting on *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* in an interview with Francisco Goldman, Galindo explains, "With this piece I was confident that I would be seen and analyzed from a general, popular perspective, not a formal, artistic one.... My long walk of the bloody



Figure 10

*Angelina* (2001). Regina José Galindo. No photo credit given by the artist. Galindo. Me visto de doméstica durante todo un mes, realizando así todas mis actividades cotidianas. I dress as a domestic worker and go about carrying my routines of daily life. Images courtesy of the artist. All images available at <http://www.reginajosegalindo.com>.

footprints was not initially understood as a performance, but every step was indeed understood as memory and death. As Guatemalans we know how to decipher any image of pain, because we have all seen it up close” (Goldman 2005–2006, 44).

Galindo’s reflection on her performance brings to mind the aesthetic values of 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o and Latina/o artists who created art for the people, and not for art’s sake (Cockcroft, Pitman Weber, and Cockcroft 1977). *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* is a Testimonio. It is an account of genocide told in the first person on behalf of a community, but without

mediation. While Galindo's testimony was filmed and broadcasted for a global audience (winning a prize at a prestigious international art festival), the work originated within *and for* a Guatemalan audience.

In other performances by Galindo, viewers witness bodies that are raced, classed, and sexed in the various patriarchal orders and cultural mythos of postcolonial societies. In her 2005 *Recorte por la línea*, (Fig. 10) for example, Galindo had her body publicly marked by a renowned physician on "all the areas...that would be altered in order to create the perfect body according to existing aesthetic codes" (Goldman 2005–2006, 42). In this piece, Galindo speaks on behalf of the world's women, a diverse community, who across nationality, class, and sexuality are evaluated by nonhuman standards of beauty and body size. The performance is especially important in the twenty-first century because it addresses the growing impact of global westernization.

In 2001's *Angelina*, Galindo wore the uniform of a domestic worker as she went about her usual routine (Goldman 2005–2006, 42). Reflecting on the performance, Galindo recalled:

The experience was extremely interesting right from the start, but as the days went by it became quite difficult...Guatemala is a racist, exclusive, completely divided culture. Being a servant has many disadvantages. You're a woman, and a poor woman at that, generally with little education and dubious origins. You aren't worth a thing, and so they look down on you.... They barely deign to notice you, they won't let you into many places, and when they do let you enter, they stare at you disdainfully. (Goldman 2005–2006, 42) (Fig. 10)

By performing *Angelina*, Galindo publicly intervened on the “complicit web” of gender, race, and class hierarchies in modern Guatemala (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000; Gaspar de Alba 2005). Having been born in the capital city, Galindo was educated at middle class schools and, while she informs Goldman that her parents were culturally traditional, they too were well-educated (Goldman, 43). Galindo has lived abroad in New York and in the Dominican Republic; she has traveled extensively in Europe with her art shows and is well known for her poetry.

The point I hope to make with a biographical sketch of Galindo is that, in this particular performance of *Angelina*, Galindo mediates the Testimonio of Guatemala’s working class women. By translating the experience of a subaltern class for a larger viewing audience, Galindo becomes the interlocutor of (an) other woman’s story. My interpretation of *Angelina*, however, does not intend to make moral claims or pass judgment on Galindo’s performance. Rather, I seek to expose the evolutionary process of a new critical lens for Latina-Chicana performance and visual art. What I find deeply interesting about Galindo’s role in *Angelina*, pertains to the similar obstacles she meets as a teller of a true story, but one that is not her own. In other words, Galindo’s performance (and other twenty-first century visualizations and performances of Testimonio) may encounter the same problems that John Beverley and the Latina Feminist Group pinpoint and analyze in the written and literary tradition of Testimonio. Recognizing the similar tensions in these new forms of Testimonio bears witness to the formal development of a new analytical framework for the Latina-Chicana aesthetic.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Death tolls vary. I use Harris, Bruce. 2001. “José Efraín Ríos Montt.” *moreorless: heroes & killers of the 20th century* [web site]. Retrieved February 2, 2010. <http://www.moreorless.au.com/>

killers/montt.html. See also: "Human Right Defenders Seeking Justice for Past Crimes." *Human Rights First* [web site]. Retrieved February 9, 2010. [http://www.humanrightsfirst.com/defenders/hrd\\_guatemala/hrd\\_jpc.aspx](http://www.humanrightsfirst.com/defenders/hrd_guatemala/hrd_jpc.aspx). "José Efraín Ríos Montt." *Economic Expert* [web site]. Retrieved February 9, 2010. <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Efrain:Rios:Montt.html>. For print sources and scholarly analyses of Argentina's Dirty War, see Iain Gain's *Behind the Disappeared: Argentina's Dirty War Against Human Rights and the United Nations* (1990); Gloria Lise's *Departing at Dawn: A Novel of Argentina's Dirty War* (2009); Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, eds. *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology* (2004).

<sup>2</sup> I believe that Beverley's idea of "a new community of things we can call literature" was influenced by the popularity of spoken-word poetry in the 1990s, as well as the proliferation of documentary films based on social justice, indigenous and women's rights. Numerous documentaries utilized Testimonio as a plot device during the 1990s and continue to do so in the twenty-first century. *The Sky: A Silent Witness* (1995), for example, begins with Juan de Paz González speaking about the murder of her father, a preacher, by soldiers in Guatemala, and her husband's kidnapping. González's family belonged to Guatemala's Quiché Maya and her memories of her father's and husband's fates narrate the opening scene in which "dozens of women and men kneel as they empty ash and bones into small coffins" (Heseford 2004, 104). According to scholar Wendy S. Heseford, González's account "negotiates the tensions between universality and particularity through the genre" (104). Heseford elaborates, "González's testimony, set against the backdrop of excavations, funeral rituals, and protest marches, establishes the narrative pattern for those of the other women featured in the film: name, cultural affiliation, and date of the action that led to individual and mass trauma, followed by a rhetorical gesture that highlights the importance of community and collective grieving" (104). Lourdes Portillo's 2001 documentary *Señorita Extraviada* resonates with Heseford's critique of *The Sky: A Silent Witness*. Portillo also utilized the Testimonio of one woman's experience of being kidnapped, tortured, and sexually assaulted to address the entirety of the ongoing femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. For more see, Hesford, Wendy S. 2004. "Documenting Violations: Rhetorical Witnessing and the Spectacle of Distant Suffering." *Biography* 27, no. 1: 104–144; *The Sky: A Silent Witness*. 1995. Directed by Midge Mackenzie. New York: Women Make Movies; *Señorita Extraviada: Missing Young Woman*. 2001. Directed by Lourdes Portillo. USA: Independent Television Service (ITVS) Production. For an important resource on documentary films that deals with social justice and women's issues, visit Women Make Movies at <http://www.wmm.lfchosting.com/index.asp>. Also, for more on spoken-word poetry as Testimonio, see Miazga, Mark. 1998. "The Spoken Word Movement of the 1990's." Holden's Lair: House Concerts, Baltimore, Maryland [web site], December 15. Retrieved from <https://www.msu.edu/~miazgama/spokenword.htm>; Olson, Alix, ed. 2007. *Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution*; Danni, J. 2001. "Spoken Word Artist." WritersCafe.org [web site], April 11. Retrieved from <http://www.writerscafe.org/groups/Spoken-Word-Artist/1795/>.

<sup>3</sup> Cockcroft, Eva, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft. 1977; 1998. *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*. 2nd edition. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

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<sup>4</sup> I purposely refer only to male zoot suiters in this sentence to acknowledge the different media portrayals of men and women who performed Pachuco/a identity. I switch the feminine and masculine endings of the term Pachuca/o throughout this entire section of my analysis to emphasize and/or differentiate the characterizations of Pachucas/os in the media (and public sphere) in relation to gender.

<sup>5</sup> For more analysis of the particular experiences of las Pachucas, see Ruiz, Vicki L. 1998. *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.; Escobedo, Elizabeth R. 2007. "The Pachuca Panic: Sexual and Cultural Battlegrounds in World War II Los Angeles." *Western History Quarterly* 38, no. 2: 133–156; Ramírez, Catherine S. 2009. *The Woman in the Zoot: Gender, Nationalism and Cultural Politics of Memory*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

<sup>6</sup> According to a postcard for the exhibit, Montoya's show took place on December 9, 1977. The exhibit traveled to Galería de la Raza in San Francisco's Mission District in 1978 and, later, to Los Angeles, specifically 5312 Whittier Boulevard, in May 1978.

<sup>7</sup> To see images of the posters to which I refer, use the University of California's Calisphere, the online collection of images and primary sources: <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb5x0nb6s1/?query=Malaquias%20Montoya&brand=calisphere> and <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb4h4nb5p2/?query=Salvadorean%20committee&brand=calisphere>.

<sup>8</sup> PLACA was not an acronym but the word used by Chicana/o-Latina/o youth for tagging on public walls. For more see Latorre, Guisela. 2008. *Walls of Empowerment: Chicano/Indigenist Murals of California*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

<sup>9</sup> Latorre implicates the United States' involvement in the period known as "la violencia" in Guatemala, since "many of the troops that carried out the attacks on the Maya had been trained under the U.S. Alliance for Progress program" (168). The systematic genocide of Mayan peoples in Guatemala during the 1980s occurred because of the "militarization of villages," according to anthropologist Victoria Sanford (2003). This militarization was a response from the United States to the civil uprisings and the advancement of leftist groups against the dictatorship and military

takeover of the government. To prevent Guatemala's political shift to the left, the United States was involved in the military training of Guatemalans through the CIA, funded by the United Fruit Company (Sanford 2003).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on Testimonio emerging from indirect experience, see Nuñez-Janes, Mariela, and Andrea Robledo. 2009. "Testimoniando: A Latina/Chicana Critical Feminist Approach to Racism on College Campuses." *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* 9, no. 1: 72–102.

<sup>11</sup> Mendoza, Adrian. 2007. "Argentine Artist Claudia Bernardi at her exhibit, 'Silence Was Hostile and Almost Perfect' in Sacramento, CA." *The Photoblog of Adrian Mendoza* [blog], December 2. Retrieved from [http://www.amenfoto.com/blog/archive/2007\\_12\\_01\\_archive.php](http://www.amenfoto.com/blog/archive/2007_12_01_archive.php).

<sup>12</sup> "Argentina Dirty War 1976–1983." *Global Security* [web site]. Retrieved February 9, 2010. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/argentina.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> The ODC Dance Company got its name from Oberlin College in Ohio where it originated. The Oberlin Dance Collective was started by Brenda Way in 1971. For more see, <http://www.odcdance.org/about.php>.

<sup>14</sup> *Flight to Ixan, Creative Work Fund* [web site]. Retrieved March 8, 2010. [http://www.creativeworkfund.org/modern/bios/claudia\\_bernardi.html](http://www.creativeworkfund.org/modern/bios/claudia_bernardi.html).

<sup>15</sup> It's also important to mention the performative acts of "Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," an organization of mothers of the missing and disappeared children during Argentina's Dirty War. Members of this group have protested every Tuesday in front of the Casa Rosada (Argentina's Presidential Palace) for over three decades.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Karen Mary Davalos, Marci McMahon, Marcelle Maese-Cohen, Maricela Oliva, Victoria González-Rivera, and Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales for their close attention to my essay and for their insightful criticism. Parts of this essay were presented for the Latina/o Literature and Culture Society panel at the American Literature Association's 2010 conference. I would like to thank Tiffany Ana López and Lisette Lasater for including me on this panel and for their efforts on my behalf. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues at the San Francisco Art Institute, Robin Balliger, Thor Anderson, and Carolyn Duffey, who early on provided me with thoughtful and important feedback.

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