

Oral History interview with Leo Limon, Part 1 of 1

Limon, Leo, b. 1952
Painter
Los Angeles, California

Sound Cassette Duration – 6:54

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

DENISE LUGO: ...it really is a continuation of the L.A. Chicano school of Los Four. Let me see your work in respect to your uncle.

LEO LIMON: They helped me out a lot. I was influenced by whatever was closest to you. Being around them so long I didn't express anything when I was with them. I really wasn't drawing or anything. I was doing my own thing. When people saw that they said, "Oh yeah, you know, Carlos and Frank and ____," So they said, "Wow, alright. Leo's alright". But I wasn't really working at the fine art thing. I was doing commercial type thing. And they saw my *Día de los muertos* stuff so people said, "Aw, Leo's, Leo's doing stuff with graphics". When people tell me about the fact that, "Oh yeah your still in the..." I say well as far as what you see out there it's until you actually talk to them you start finding out what is to what I'm doing, with on that imaging.

DENISE LUGO: The content.

LEO LIMON: The content is actually just totally different from playful stuff. Frank used to do around ... so he's getting blasé actually. He's doing landscapes and stuff. Not talking about the human condition and what it was.

DENISE LUGO: Yes. That's exactly what I was going to ask you. During the beginning of the Chicano, not beginning but the early 1970's there was a tendency to not worry about the look but basically the content was actually more important than the quality of your work. Do you find that changed now, in your work?

LEO LIMON: I didn't realize that back then, I didn't. You see because there was just a learning process for [me] and just learning about art.

DENISE LUGO: There were messages all around, right?

LEO LIMON: Right. There were always messages inside of it, so when I did that skull and needle thing on the *Corazón* (heart) Hey you're shooting yourself. You're almost like shooting *raza* (Chicanos). You're killing *raza* (Chicanos) when you're doing that. So now I'm doing *corazones* (Hearts). I'm trying to relate it to universal image. Yet the indigenous images I put in there and it's with indigenous thought put behind it.

DENISE LUGO: Incorporation of Chicanismo?

LEO LIMON: Yes, exactly. It's very commercial, very political, very whimsical, because I have always found in my own humor. Double-speak, double-talk.

DENISE LUGO: At two levels?

LEO LIMON: Yeah. How do you say that, [...] the television stations were doing it; subliminal messages.

DENISE LUGO: Yes.

LEO LIMON: I said, "Hey I'm going to try to do that." But wow you see it wasn't within myself to express it in my art because I was not thinking.

DENISE LUGO: But you had most people seen your work. You know in that period and they said, "Wow, oh my goodness it's no message, no nothing. This is antique."

LEO LIMON: Right.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah. People told you that, right?

LEO LIMON: Oh yeah. That's fine, that's fine. You see people like yourself who finally start realizing that my art actually has some content in it which goes back a long ways. What I am trying to do and what I am trying to say is that I'm trying to bring in the message about what is going on today with government. I mean that's not real plain and simple like government. Oh yeah, its yeah its got America going, you know, its got America following. Ups and downs, you know? Lots of people don't listen what's government is doing, that's a lots of the things with the Chicano work, you know? ... The educational levels and so on are usually what you see, right, like the yuppies now. They had a lot of that 1970's stuff, the 1960's stuff. Now you see all these crazy kids out there because of all this simulated stuff into their brains and their simulating, what, the punk style?

DENISE LUGO: Yea-yea-yeah.

LEO LIMON: And so there's the wars are going on and there's the appeal of army lines. You know they are making it look like it's real glamorous when you know it isn't. You know they're going to tell you, "Okay your going to have to go out there and maybe kill a brown brother." You're going to kill someone who's just real similar to yourself who came from the same kind of situation. If they call for that but yet no one's- you know, everyone's like "Uh, it's okay, we got rock and roll, everything's okay, the economy's nice."

DENISE LUGO: I want to ask you a question. Looking back in a retrospective fashion when your talking with ... What do you think?

LEO LIMON: As far as what?

DENISE LUGO: First of all, on the *barrio* (Chicano neighborhood) level and mainstream, if any.

LEO LIMON: I never found any there. I never saw any relationship. It was like a supported type thing in the *barrio* (neighborhood) and it seemed like government said, "Well okay we can treat these guys okay." Okay? These guys who have gone to college who had experience with the Anglo society had in their structure already, you know? The European thought of art, *verdad* (you know?). And here's these guys coming out and they were doing the Zapata (Emiliano Zapata) thing, but yet not everybody was doing the revolutionary (Mexican Revolution) thing. You know, Zapata or Pancho Villa (Mexican revolution heroes). There was some, but then there were these other guys who were doing things about hey, drugs, crime, rape, in the *barrio*. That's going on too the *Pachuco* (Mexican-American neighborhood gang of low social status) and then there's these other guys who were just, you know, spraying walls with paint, just paint, like plaque. "Corazon" (heart) is out there.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah with black.

LEO LIMON: Uh-huh with black. Everybody had their own flavor. Everyone has their own simulation of whatever would be imposed *también* (as well). That's another thing, you see. Who wrote the books? We know who! (Laughs)

[End of Interview]