

Revista
Xhisme Arte

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SPECIAL
WOMAN'S
ISSUE



SABINA SANCHEZ is about 70 years old and has not stopped embroidering since she was seven. She learned embroidery, crochet, drawnthread, white embroidery and "Hazme si Puedes" (Do me if you can) smocking from her Aunt Zenobia. Her mother taught her the construction of a blouse and how to cut it.

In 1928, at the age of 15 1/2, Sabina married Emilio Mateos Perez, a baker. She feels fortunate that her husband was not one to limit her to cooking and housekeeping so that she could continue her embroidery. "I never put this work aside, never. I love this work. Even when I go to sell bread in the market, I take along my embroidery."

Life has changed very little over the past 50 years in Sabina's village of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, a flower-growing village in the Oaxaca valley. Traditional campesino life still exists, revolving around the weekly market day and social exchange. This village life and its traditions are the sources of Sabina's embroidered imagery. Every blouse is different in design and color combination but all are based on a distinct theme. There are many intricate smocking patterns but Sabina favors one of the little people smocked into the gathers then embroidered on the top in different colors. The effect is that of a row of people ready to dance.

Photos: The Craft and Folk Art Museum, "Mexican Folk Artists," by Judith Bronowski and Robert Grant.



EDITORIAL

This special issue dedicated to La Mujer is an attempt to recognize and bring into perspective her creative force, but it is only a microcosm of the creativity presently existing. Nonetheless, the issue is a valuable and historical contribution to the Chicano/Latino literary trend. XhismeArte's La Mujer is a promotional publication for a special anthology project, *The Latino Experience of Los Angeles* and will be used in the forthcoming special publication entitled *Homenaje a la Ciudad de Los Angeles 1781-1981*.

Histories exist that fail to recognize La Mujer as an organizer in the fields as well as a worker in them; as a political prisoner; a planner of revolutions, generator of ideas, traditions, cultures, beliefs, as well as propagator of her race. This denial of history also continues to permeate the one-dimensional depictions of La Mujer in the arts. She is not a diverse woman to the Anglo who describes her as dark and lustful with a sexual appetite worth pursuing until the next roundup. Unfortunately such distortions also prevail among the Chicano/Latino who describes her as strong but sexless, or sensual but intellectually sterile. La Mujer knows otherwise, and it is precisely for this reason that la artista can no longer allow herself to go unrecognized.

Under the weight of economic oppression, the denial of history is internalized into a denial of self, and La Mujer falls into self-negation. She considers herself not worth writing about, thinks of herself as incapable of creative expression, or believes her experiences have very little social or universal value. She asks "Who is interested anyway?" La artista, at one point or another, suffers this same process but first and foremost, she trusts the voice within her. She begins to explore her reality politically and culturally for an understanding of herself. There is a slow but steadfast awareness that prevails and she begins to understand the contradictions of her reality at greater length. Her art is a means of extending her understanding to others. Partly out of obligation and commitment, partly to channel her indignation, she begins to communicate and therefore to teach.

La artista is responsible for articulating, promoting and expressing the lives and futures of Chicana/Latinas. In a society that perpetuates inferiority by race, intellectual inability by sex, she must struggle constantly to create form and ideas against the bombardment of negation. Moreover, if little or no support is provided by her people, her family or her lovers, the battle is drastically increased and the struggle to communicate is doubled. La artista is a powerful warrior because she can teach. In order to continue to develop in her art, she finds it necessary to reach out to fellow women artistas. But she must also reach out to the men of her race, educating and thus sensitizing them to the plight of La Mujer so that they can work together as individuals, to create and share a literary and artistic consciousness that is balanced and unbiased.

The L.A. Latino Writer's Workshop was initiated to provide both critical and moral support so essential to the survival and growth of artistas. It promotes an atmosphere that allows for a collective exchange of ideas, constructive criticism, and exploration of intellectual rapport. While the workshop encompasses writers of both sexes, women writers have excelled in the first year of its existence.

The works that are presented here capture a reality which is often harsh and bitter but honest. On all levels of society, whether she is a professor or a mother, a wife or a teacher, La Mujer must struggle constantly. No matter how great her accomplishments are, she finds herself battling the same obstacles that have destroyed countless creative women of prior generations. Yet, in spite of her renewed indignation, La Mujer continues to be the concerned human being that has always made her different. As Teresa "Osa" de la Riva writes, "Let me be worried about you. Or let us worry about children that grow old before their time, of young people dying and old folks silencing the rebirth from the bottle."

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Ser Mujer



Illustration by Elsa Flores

BLOOD-LINE

My daughter called to tell me of her first grey hair: her accomplishment, her excitement was clear, "Like you, like you, mother." The

cat sits facing the lone, bloomed daffodil, as bright as the sun, and so many, so many roses—some

fading, some blooming, some invisible to the eye. They face the rising moon as loyal as

blood; and the cat with its clusters of seven within the swelling fur: as you grow

old with me, I grow young with you —blooming, bleeding from the same, sturdy bush, my daughter.

by Alma Villanueva

RITUAL

Pomade brushed into my hair each stroke glistening the tresses reaching to my waist

each parted section multiplies into trenzas pulling my eyes so they called me china

squirming with childhood impatience a crack on my head with the brush warning me to sit still

And I knew and now remember love

by Kathy Valadez

MADRE AUSENTE

Ya se acerca el 10 de Mayo, y yo otra vez en la Prisión, fecha que aunque no quiera, me destroza el corazón porque es día de las madres en México, mi nación.

De tres niñas y soy madre, y este también es mi día no porque estoy prisionera crean que me olvida, es que no lo demuestro. Sé que nada ganaría.

Más lo mío lo soporto con fuerzas y con valor; pero mi madre tan lejos, eso me causa dolor: que una hija sin su madre es un "Fuego sin Calor."

Parece que la estoy viendo llorando por nuestra ausencia y pidiéndole a Diosito que de ella tenga clemencia, y a nosotros nos de fe y también mucha paciencia.

Que triste y que duro es no tener LIBERTAD. Lo digo francamente pues es la pura verdad; ya que el cariño de madre es una necesidad.

Como te extraño mi madre, mi mamacita querida, me hacen falta tus consejos y todo lo que me decías; y yo en vez de hacerte caso, a tu espalda me reía.

Ahora que me encuentro presa me remuerde la conciencia, que todo lo que yo hacía, lo hacía a mi conveniencia sin pensar que sufrimientos yo to dejaba como herencia.

Cuando yo tuve dinero me sobraban los amigos, me llenaban de atenciones y hasta conmigo vivían, pero era puro interés, eso ya lo he comprendido como ya no tengo nada, he quedado en el olvido.

Con lo único que cuento es con mi madre adorada, ese tesoro que tengo y que antes no cuidaba, pero ahora me doy cuenta de que estaba equivocada.

Pues el Amor de una Madre es una cosa sagrada, y sabemos que en esta vida: sin madre no somos nada.

por Alma Alicia Gastelum S.
Abril, 1978, Pleasanton
Women's Prison, CA

PROSA PARA UN POEMA

SER MUJER ES CAMINO INTERMINABLE el tiempo breve, azaroso el viaje, canto sin voz, o voz que a veces canta, lágrima oculta a solas derramada. Sonrisa, entrega, espejo, oásis, llama. Sartén, aguja, escoba, burla, aldaba... Altamar, bajamar, esencia y ala.

¡Hasta cuando, señores, hasta cuando! Esto de ser mujer me va cansando.

Es como estarse yendo sin marcharse. Extranjera en la tierra, ciudadana de un mundo atormentado, despojada de bienes y justicia — esta de parias desde el Paraíso— Eva ultrajada sin saber por qué.

Casada fiel o infiel por tanta afrenta, ultraje, deshonor, injuria, ofensa. Esposa y madre—alcoba sin ventana, lágrima sin pañuelo, voz sin eco, marea sin luna y volcán sin lava—

¡Anhelos inconclusos! ¡Hasta cuando! Esto de ser mujer me va cansando.

Difícil concentrarse en cualquier cosa con veinte interrupciones por minuto ¡El cartero mamá, te llegan cartas! los niños corren y los perros ladran, el niño se rompe las narices, la niña, frenética, lo abraza, timbra el teléfono, se derrama el agua. ¿Y el poema? Es barco que naufraga.

ADEMÁS: ser concreta y ser abstracta madera bien tallada, lindo traje rostro de ángel, pierna bien torneada comedida, cortés, atenta, urbana, asexual, voluptuosa, apasionada, —mitad maja desnuda, mitad santa— Mona Lisa, la Esfinge, Dulcinea, Beatriz, Polimnia, Palas Atenea; bailar "disco" flamenco, jazz, joropo y recorder las fábulas de Esopo. Ser graciosa, ser fiel, alabastrina y morena... Jazmín y golondrina. ETERNAMENTE JOVEN, sosegada. Ser su reina (sin trono) y ser su esclava. La niña de sus ojos y su almohada.

¡Hasta cuando, señores, hasta cuando! Esto de ser mujer me va cansando.

POSDATA: Pero... "la cítola es por demás, cuando el molinero es sordo."

por Rosa Elvira Alvarez

Xelina

UNTITLED

even before your alcoholic mother
put you in the hands
of a man who's laid his own
at 8 years of age you had already
been seduced by the sexual fantasies
of hot adolescent girls loose on the streets
he sold her body to the successful businessman
what a handsome price to pay
for a scrawny nine year old
pretty soon there would be enough
to buy that shiny green convertible
he has had an eye on

ENDURANCE

the hollow night brings no sleep
to these black encircled eyes
try to ignore the weight
of weary shoulders
stretched veins swollen with labor
yet these lips crack a smile
as faces of those loved
cradle my dreams and hum a lullaby
endurance endurance

UNTITLED

tía juana u glisten by night
sequined by dangling city lights
by day u are shrouded with misery
groping for a bite to eat
oh tía juana
esos perros scrounging tus calles
y el mosquero swarming la basura tirada
oh tía juana
que nos cure el curandero
ah, tía juana
disculpe pero hoy tiene demasiados enfermos
americanos
venga mañana
mañana volveremos a subir el cerro
a pie por los baches
arrastrando tus piernas dolorosas
hinchadas con venas moradas
mañana tenemos cita en la casa de carton
tal vez esos hueros con sus carruchas elegantes
no vendrán tan temprano
tía juana

SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

ruiz died of cancer
underneath his pile of client claims
he enslaved himself to the paper work
till his dying day came
in that old military building
he left a woman and her boy
to remember him frail yet hard as stone
now his wife and son have come
to stand in line
to file an SSI claim

me arden los dedos raspados
de sascar las nueces
que ayer pisque en san antonio

y
arde la memoria de la hermana,
emma t.
por su causa
y tanto dolor

Emma Tenayuca, leader of pecan shellers in San Antonio, Texas during the late 30s. She was jailed as a ring leader because she led the strike against the 1 cent per pound reduction in the rates paid.

Lin Romero

I DON'T SIT HIGH

I don't sit high
on green slopes
with birds flying
I watch low
from concrete stoops
lonely riders
mask away
troubles
with oldies but
goodies
in confused ways
on dirty streets
with no retreats
and fewer choices yet.

Oh these hungry times still cry
with no where to go
and oh them skeleton bones rattle my soul
uuh baby—baby—please don't go
please—these blues they hurt me so
my mag wheels still need more shine
and this revolution has so far to go...

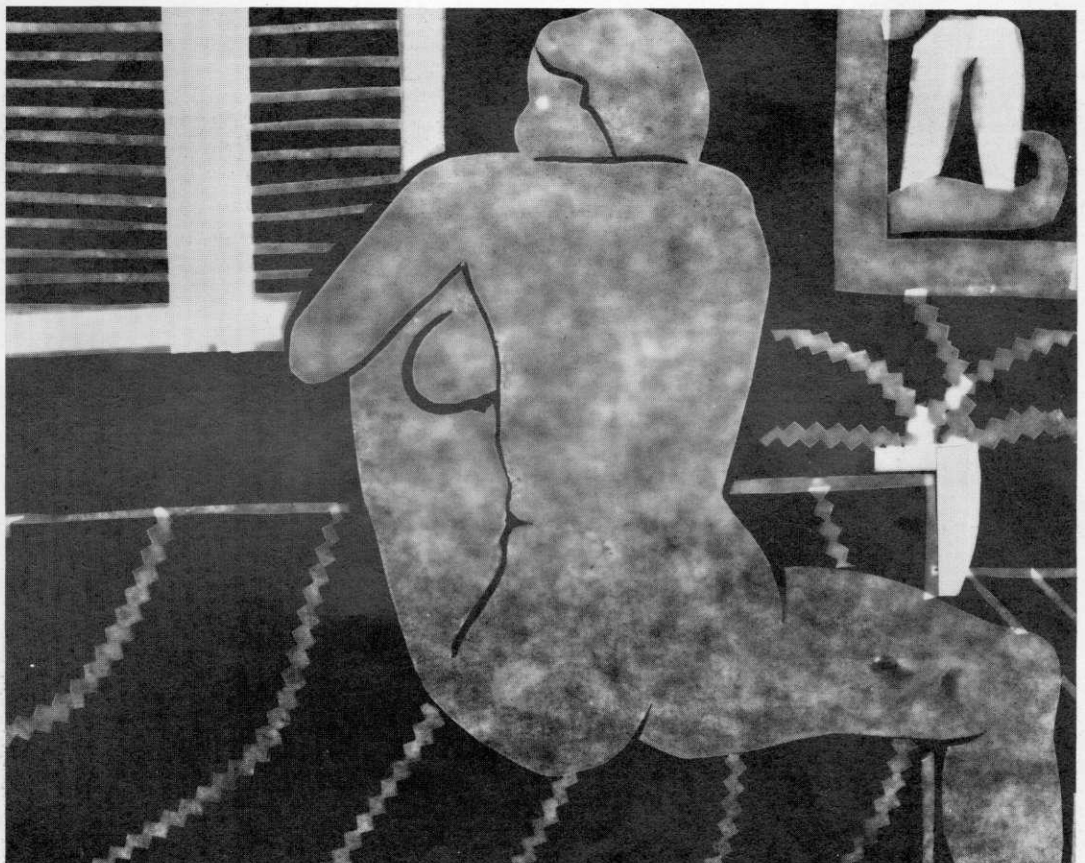


Photo by Dolores Guerrero-Cruz

UNTITLED

ya no canto canciones de quetzal
sus plumas fueron arrancadas
ya no brilla el sol en mis palabras
su ardor me quemó
y como regreso a un mundo mejor
si al llegar encuentro
los niños los hombres las mujeres
llevándose en trocas y trenes y ranflas sin llantas
pero que suave toca el radio anyway on this crazy day
of solidified welfare checks that are
tables chairs beds shoes love food sleep and despair
como canto de un día que no veo yo
yo la que vivo aquí y respiro la mugre de hoy
fue otra más desconocida que solo cantaba palabras de amor
ahora caigo como relámpago
ya basta con el show de groovy tunes y pistiando la sangre el sudor
de muchos que mueren sin saber que
ahora todo el dolor sin voz, todos los llantos
los levanto yo
que oigan sus chillidos
que se acuerden—aquí está la fuerza
trucha con la traición del corazon

c
h a i k u
i
c
a
n
o

proud pecho punza
dolor y vida
miles de mañanas
comienzan hoy
primer paso de tantas jornadas
pero me siento bien
como que suave todavía es esta realidad triste y loocaaa...

Teresa-Osa-Hidalgo de la Riva

MAC, BEYOND SOLEDAD

and how could forty thousand years sift
through my hand like grains of sand
weighing less than an ounce. when they
disconnected our first conversation via bell, i
muffled a what the hell if we grow so old
before our time. this is the only evident
crime.

how you came, reaping silver dagger, and
tore into my existence. caught me in a
frenzy whirling cycles of transcripts, papeles
and records we share, matted in my hair like
a madwoman this generation has not yet
felt. why do we cry so far away from each
other's grip. why can i feel you looking over
my shoulder.

everytime i leave that tiny apple, cuidad de
divino san pancho, i stare hard. he, lit up like
some lit up woman on a street tempting me,
teasing me to join. growing smaller at each
interval until he tries to crawl up my feet.

ah. then you call. long distance it will read
on next month's bill. we stumble for words,
when all the words come forth like troops to
follow mí corazón. they halt at the tip of my
tongue and then we are told it is time to go.

you, sweet primo, are worried about me. let
me be worried about you. or let us worry
about children that grow old before their
time, of young people dying and of old folks
silencing a rebirth from a bottle.

BETTY SCOTT

Betty Scott was a Black mother of four
daughters. She was a political activist who
believed in intercommunalism, the coming
together of different peoples. She helped
found and was a teacher at the Inter-
Communal Youth Institute in central Long
Beach. She was assassinated by the
California Highway Patrol.

I.

I am talking about two women.

The mama Betty
Was on her way to the City
The cops pulled her over
She reached for the registration
The cops blew her away
In her head,
She left four daughters,
The youngest nine months old
One year ago.

One night
That baby daughter Naeema
Was carried away, stolen
In the parking lot of a supermarket
By two men. A man found
The almost two-year-old
Black mind and black body
Fifteen minutes later,
In a trash can, dead.

I am talking about two women.

II.

I am talking about two women.

Funeral arrangements must be made
Sixty dollars for county cremation and pickup
Petition for plain-clothed police escorts
For that baby breaking the front page
With familiar black blood ink,
For the baby behind juvenile bars.

III.

Can you hear her whispers?

I never met her
I always knew her

Can you hear her screams?

I feel her soft breath in my ear
I shall never walk the same.

PSYCHIATRIC WARD

Zone-4

Lunch time.

Send the patients down.

Get your asses up
Lazy bitches sleeping all day
Put your make-up on
Make your beds
And hurry up!

Zone-4

No funds for the outing

Take them to Rap's Supermarket

Let them pick out a cheap Christmas tree.

In line asses

Let's all cross at once

We'll take this tree

These women are from the hospital

Give it to them for free.

Zone-4

Visiting hour.

No passes for you or you.

The ladies all get along here

She is doing fine

You have to be easier on her

Virginia,

Give your family a kiss good-bye!

Zone-4

We know it is freezing back there

Our electrical system has gone hay-wire.

God damn it,

You'll just have to wait

Until they fix it.

Take that taped paper off those vents,

Are you crazy!

Zone-4

The doctors are on their way

Patients in the TV room

For group therapy.

All of you are to be in the room now!

The doctors can't be waiting around for you

And act right this time!

They took Pauline today

For the treatment.

Jean gets to go home tomorrow

But she really does not want to.

Dorothy is still crying.

Let's go switch beds again.

Stop making out with Maria.

Steal our charts so we can see them.

Meet you in the shower room.

The pricks won't give me any medication.

Try sneaking past the nurses' station.

What day is it anyway.

Write on the walls.

God damn, it's cold down here.

At night, I am scared to go to sleep.

Illustration by Yreina Cervantez





Shylda Alvarez

ARRIAGA

by Shylda Alvarez

Mexico, 1933

It happened in summers, in Arriaga,
school in San Luis,
home from the convent boarding
where I would sleep
under the nun's eyes
my hands holding down a white sheet
to keep them from fluttering from beneath.

Home from the drone of nuns' chants
in fall, winter and spring,
in early mornings, afternoons, evenings
where I would shift my weight
from one knee to the other
as I fingered white rosary beads.

A drone that lulls me, gives me up
towards a different sleep,
one that lets me fly beyond the prayers
to the grazing land on the crest of a hill
that seems to fill the whole
of a Mexican village.

I wait for the opening
of the convent rail gate
to run through the cracked dirt of Arriaga,
beyond the adobe houses that crumble and fade.

Run through the marketplace
past a carcass that sways
in a room dizzy with flies,
Past the stand where hollow-faced women

wrapped in black shawls
finger vegetables,

Past the bakery
with bread that smells of warm flesh
closer than a thousand prayers.

I am here now, in Arriaga,
and the voice of my mother is bleak
in a lush summer,
soon I will hear it
soon it will catch me
call me to hoist water from the well,
call me to kneel before clay figures and votive candles,
call me to stand above the smoke of a coal stove,
up and stumbling in the dark
to wait on the ranchers
men who will hook their eyes on my body
who will slip a rough hand beneath my dress.

The voice will come again, not the drone
but a voice insistent
on discipline,
on the art of needlecraft—

I sit beside the stove in the evening,
count each stitch, each loop,
if I fail,
if I fail,
I can give up and fly
to the sound of nuns chanting
but if I give up

to the flutter of hands beneath my dress
she will bind my hands and legs
to a chair
to think white,
set me before the front door
inside a clay house
to wait for the end of summer,
for the fall of rains.

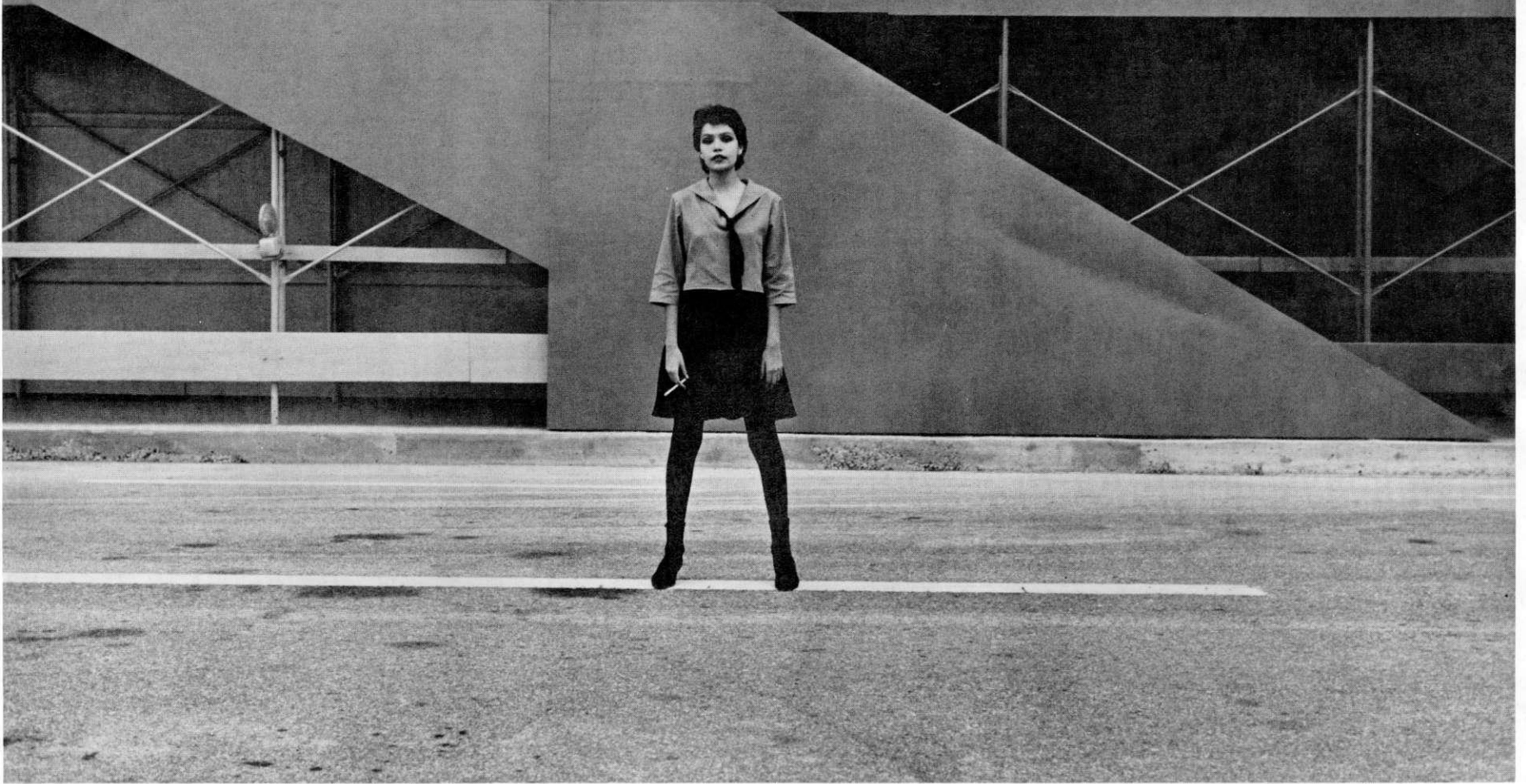
Gaze out to the grazing land,
hear the voices of the children
playing in the canyon
diving into canals lined with junipers,
hear the sputter of a car in the village,
see the bottle passed around in the hollow of a hat

Instead,
I see my goat on the banquet table
hear their laughter when they tell me
after the meal is done.

It isn't just this
it isn't just the voice of the children
or the grazing land that lies like a promise
before the front door.

It is this,
bound to a chair
waiting for fall rains.

Breathe, breathe
watch the clouds do slow somersaults
in the afternoon air.



Photos by Diane Gamboa

by Margaret Magellan

When Therese Covarrubias is on stage singing her songs with her group *The Brat* one is impressed with the quality of the visceral effect that she impacts onto the audience. At 20, she is amongst the most popular singers in what has developed into a resounding East L.A. musical explosion. Her performances are augmented by the level of command that she executes with her activating voice. As the only female lead singer to emerge from what is

basically a male-dominated Chicano new-wave band scene, Therese has been able to play a major role in reaching out to a cross-cultural audience. *The Brat* recently performed at the *Whiskey* in Hollywood, bringing Therese to the forefront in exposing a whole new creative Chicano element to the mainstream music scene.

As a lyricist, Therese has touched a wide range of personal experiences that probe the social subconscious.

She has written all of the songs which will be appearing on *The Brat's* upcoming LP recording titled *Attitudes*. It is an excellent collection of five original songs: *Swift Moves*, *XIE*, *Starry Nights*, *High School*, *Leave Me Alone*, and *Attitudes*. "I think more women should be involved in the contemporary music scene," comments Therese. Her initiative and success should serve as a model to those who suppress their own creativity.

STARRY NIGHTS

I saw him in a roller rink
Didn't give me time to act or think
Complications, petrified and bold.
His eyes, they slant exotic ways
When at work or when the boy's at play
Complications petrified and bold.
It's a starry night
Gonna make everything all right
I love it more and more each day
With every day, in every way
It's hanging in a gallery
A master's work of art and poetry
It's living in a life of its own
His eyes, they slant exotic ways
When at work or when the boy's at play
Complications, petrified and bold.

HIGH SCHOOL

Catholic high school life's a game
Driving kids like me insane
Walk around in short gray skirts
Looking cute;
I'm looking worse
High school dance
Romance
Everyone's so happy
Looking cute and looking fine
Looking for the best
Didn't learn a goddamn thing
Didn't buy that fuckin' ring
I won't prance or make romance
Wish I could but I can't.

PSYCHOLOGY

So one has found his roots
Tall giraffes or walking boots
No more work and no more pay
Thinks his life is wasting away
Another's had fifteen today
We all smile and look away
Behind the round brown eyes
A severe neurotic lies
It's all psychology
It's all psychology
Manic shifts from high to low
Thnking that his brain is slow
Analyzing every move
Trying hard a nerve to soothe
Still another spends her day
Tolerating all they say
Meekly lights a cigarette
Desperately she will forget

BRAIN SPARKS

It starts off—just an idea
Sparks in brains too young?
So some may sit and ponder
Or stare at us in fits of wonder
Do they hear just what I'm saying
Or the music we are playing
Laugh at me, laugh at us
They always laugh at genius
It takes off, slowly sure
The silly boys and girl
With no oppression, no more hate
That kind of thing is out of date

VICIOUS LOVE

Dressed in your finery
Ten years older than me
You may look orthodox
Sly cool artie fox
My heart broke a million times
I let you slide for all your crimes
Did you walk all over me?
Was it love as love should be
I saw you down the way
It was you who made the day
Shaggy haired and dressed to main
That's how my first lover came
I often wondered why
A boy like you could walk on by
Now I greatly realize
It's all part of a compromise
Vicious love
Vicious love
I needed you
Wanted you
I loved you



Olga Talamante; UNTESTIMONIO

by Helen Maria Viramontes

For more than 10 months the Argentine government of Isabel Peron has held Olga Talamante—a 25-year-old Chicana from Gilroy, California—in a jail along with an estimated 3,000 other political prisoners. Her crime? Association with the broad mass of Argentine people who for years have struggled for the restoration of democracy in their country. For more than 10 months the U.S. government has been guilty of complicity by supporting this repression against the Argentine people and by refusing to press for Olga's release...

La Gente Newspaper,
November 4, 1975

You can say that everything is part of your whole political process but I know just by working in the fields and seeing how we lived in comparison to how the boss lived...well, it was a very stark picture to me. That's when you kind of begin to question things. But there's no one time that you say "Now I am taking a stance;" there's a variety of times you take stances...and a lot of times there are repercussions you are going to have to deal with...The experience in Argentina was a key time when the consequences of a political stance were very dramatic for us, very stark and very hard to deal with.

"From my experience I have learned that terrible things do happen in other countries as well as ours, and the mass killings that take place in Latin America are something to be aware of..."

La Gente Newspaper,
May, 1975

Before, I think, I had at least a superficial sense that things in Latin America were similar in a lot of ways to what was going on here: the type of system, the discrimination—although it's not exactly the same. But having travelled a bit in Central America and Mexico, you really experience the feeling that something's not right here. There's incredible poverty, incredible exploitation of people...Then, everything becomes connected. See the similarities that run across the continent...take a certain perspective of you identifying with poor people suffering anywhere, people being exploited, where people are starving, because it's the same with poor people anywhere. You identify with them not so much based on differences, but on similarities.

This particular concept is not very generalized among Chicanos. They identify on a cultural basis with Mexico. The cultural basis, I think, is

limited because you look at the reality of the people and ask yourself what are the real similarities because there are Mexicans who exploit people and those who are exploited. So which Mexican do you identify with? So now it's not a cultural question, but one of class.

State of siege declared in Argentina, suspending civil rights. Four days later Olga Talamante and twelve Argentine political activists arrested at a party and tortured for four days and nights by federal police in Azul, Argentina.

La Gente Newspaper,
November 6, 1974

I was going down to Argentina for six months. I had just graduated from college and wanted to take six months off. I had friends there, friends who were politically involved, so it wasn't like I was going to fly in and go to the beach, but it was more like I wanted to see if I could get into school. The University of Buenos Aires. When I got there, I had already applied. Politically the situation there was very fast. Elections had happened for the first time in 18 years, military was not in power, and a popular government was in. There were a lot of contradictions, a lot of different problems but I was happy to be there thinking I'll be going to school...Then the Director of the University got thrown out the second week I was there. There were strikes, demonstrations and you couldn't go to school. It was all incredibly exciting—incredible energy going on. Also there were changes going on... There were a lot of popular movements, reforms, political prisoners were freed, freedom of the press was established. A certain period of freedom existed right about the time I got there. People were just bursting with energy and organizing. The friends that I went to visit worked, so when I got there, they would invite me to go down to the barrios to see what was happening there.

Building. There were a lot of popular projects going on. They were building a first aid station, and bus stop shelters. Kind of like work brigades, active young people.

So that was what was happening and I identified with that because it was not so unlike the work we had done with the farmworkers, working with people, working on projects, getting people organized. There was a kind of political opening in Argentina...then it clapped down again. That was the time I got arrested. But for a year and four months, the people

could do a lot of things.

Although I had planned to stay only six months, I definitely stayed there longer. And I was going to return just about the time I got arrested, too. I was there for a year and five months before I got arrested. But before that, it was sort of a pick-me-up. It was an incredible reality to see masses of people right there on the streets organizing, demanding, really accomplishing something. And that in itself was a very important political experience for me because I saw in actuality what I had believed in thought. It just happened. Thousands and thousands of people out on the streets, organizing their communities...It gave me a lot of faith in what I believed in.

Then things changed so that the right wing took over the government. What we were doing at one point was sort of legal and sanctioned by the government, then in a very short time it became illegal. That's when the harsh oppression came down on us and we were all arrested. Some are still in prison, others are dead.

Mr. and Mrs. Talamante, accompanied by parish priest and community leaders, make a plea to Argentine Consul Ricardo Elizondo in San Francisco that Olga be released in "the spirit of Christmas." Elizondo replies that "There is no torture in Argentina. Your daughter will receive a just and prompt trial."

La Gente Newspaper,
December 18, 1974

The arrest. I was definitely worried about it. It was definitely the kind of situation where you have very little control and if they shoot you, well, they shoot you. What can you do? For the first two days in prison I really believed I was going to be shot. They had a gun right to my head. What could I say? They wanted me to talk, wanted to find out names, who else was I working with, and so on. And the other thing was getting you to admit you did things like bomb this place or that.

Their main objective was to rape you politically. To make you change your mind, give up those ideals that you have. Make you think "Is it worth it? Are you going to go through this just because of what you think? If you are, you're a real fool." They would say "Everybody else has talked, everybody else has turned you in..." "You're an intelligent young woman," they would say. "What are you doing being stuck in this? Why don't you tell us what so and so has done, and we'll let

you go." Politically and psychologically it was raping to the point of turning other people in or driving a wedge between you. Because politically, they know the best thing that we have going for us is the unity, loyalty, respect and real caring that we have for each other. And that's what they wanted to break. That's why they would isolate you so that you wouldn't be able to say "What did you really say to them?" It was all very scientific.

Then there's the physical part...electric shocks, beatings, coming in the middle of the night and putting you up against the wall like they were going to shoot you...

"They took all my clothes off and then strapped me to a bed. They tied me spreadeagle fashion...then they proceeded to apply the electric shocks throughout my body. On my head, on my eyes, on top of the adhesive tape, on my nipples, vulva, vagina, the joints of my legs, and my fingers and toes."

La Gente Newspaper,
November, 1976

I survived it because everybody else does too... We all did and I think it was all on the basis of the strength of our ideals, our commitment and what we have done, knowing that giving in to them is not only giving in, but giving up all we ever believed in. It was a political battle carrying on right there and then. You don't come through it perfectly but the main thing is to be able to sustain yourself by having faith in the other people, your friend who have also been arrested and not turning other people in. You ask yourself the question "Am I only giving in to save myself? Or should I hold out?" And you hold on, on the basis of other people doing it too.

"Love life enough to struggle." wrote that in a letter...and what I was thinking was, I read an article in the newspaper about how these crazy yelling subversives didn't care about life. We're so foolish and crazy, we don't know what we're doing. I remember the article had that tone to it wrote in response to say that I felt I loved life so much that we were willing to struggle for it. And it's true. We want to live, but in a certain way. A way to achieve it you begin to struggle for a better life for everybody, and times you have to suffer for it.

I did the most writing while in prison because that was one of the main ways to communicate. That wasn't a whole lot you could do. There were five women that got arrested

too. One of them was pregnant and she had the baby in prison. It was a lot of work to keep her well fed, well kept. In some ways, it was one of the few joys we had. We were all kept in one cell. And that was good because we were all together. There were other prisoners too...Then later on, they started shifting us to other prisons because that was another form of harassment.

Actually, there's a whole kind of life that you have to live within those four walls. It's just incredible how everything revolved around their schedule. Our objective was to control as much of our time as possible because you have very little control to begin with. You're locked up and that's it. So our main objective throughout the day, throughout the week was to plan our time, and there were different things we could do at different times. Sometimes we could have books, sometimes they would take the books away. Most of the time we did have writing privileges.

Demonstrations in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and in Mexico protest the 10 months of lies and deceit by the government of Argentina and the U.S. and demand the immediate release of Olga and her companions.

La Gente Newspaper,
September 5, 1975

During the time of political opening in Argentina, they saw once again what kind of organizing force people can be. Discontented people isolated—on their own—aren't a threat, but organized people are a main threat. So they decided to change the whole thing, forget this political opening, and cut the head off of the movement by going after the organizer. Then, it extended to people who were doing no organizing at all, but were associated with someone who was. The repression reached incredible levels. I was there at the beginning, but then towards the middle, it got brutal, and you asked yourself "Why the brutality?" because it was almost overwhelming. It's hard to take that. Hard to imagine, really visualize those scenes of torture, but there were some scenes that were even worse. The brutality corresponds with the kind of threat that people were, and that's how they answered to it...If there wasn't a possibility that organized people would change things, then of course, there wouldn't be a need to...saw people's arms off. And again you ask "Why?"

Right now the military is still in power. The military took over in 1976,

in fact when I was released. So ironic. I was released when the military took over, but that happened because there was a formal change in government. Also the big campaign that had been done here, people having reached the state department, congress...were very concrete pressures in the state department to try and negotiate with the Argentina government to get me out. Then, when the coup happened and the military took over, they didn't want to deal with the campaign, and so they released me. The release was an attempt to start with a clean slate...

It's funny how I was released because I didn't know it until I was driven to the airport. Most of the days were kind of nerve-wracking. I was in prison. First they took me to solitary confinement. They just did those things, isolate you. I thought I was going to be transferred. The coup had taken place and the military was in power. Everything was very tense, very scary. They came in with a full display of horses, and they took everything away from us—radios, books—they came in one day with a little cart. Really just to dispossess us of any kind of life. Those are the little things you can have control of: manual arts, crocheting. So they came and took me to a cell, and they told the women to get my things ready. They didn't say I was being released, so I couldn't even say goodbye to them. From there, they flew me in this little plane which is used to transport prisoners. They handcuffed me to these chains on the plane. I don't know why. They probably thought I was going to jump out of the plane or something. They took me to Buenos Aires. I stayed there in a big cell all by myself. I didn't see anybody except the guards for the two days that I was there...then they transported me and when I saw the sign to the airport, I knew. I was put on a Pan Am flight to New York and from New York, here. It was a long flight from Buenos Aires to New York. I felt numb, more than anything else, because I thought about the people I had left behind.

"I see a lot of Chicanos that are more involved then before I left. I see a lot of people doing things but going in different directions. I wonder if we're all aiming for the same objectives."

La Gente Newspaper,
May, 1976

I think what has not happened with the Chicano movement as well as other movements is really identifying the struggle that we have, focusing in



a directed way so as to see what we are all really trying to accomplish, what our objectives are. There's no set direction, just pockets, different aspects of activities. It's frightening. Very, very frightening...I think there is a range of Chicanos who have different kinds of objectives. And with the Chicano population, we are broken down along class lines; a Chicano who is an executive is different than one who works in a cannery. The Chicano executive would have much more in common with a white executive, or black executive, regardless of how culturally identified he might be...The executive wants to maintain his position and continue to escalate, and for him to do that he has to be in agreement that a group of people have to be exploited—have to be the working class—in order for him to continue his position. At the same time, a working class Chicano needs to fight against the same exploitation in order to aspire for a better life.

I went into the Chicano movement genuinely and intensely, and I saw from a very definite concrete experience that what would come in the way would be personal aspirations, escalation, all on a personal basis. I don't think we should not aspire. In fact we need more Chicanos everywhere. But the key is return it to the people. Some people have, but to a large extent, most people have kept it to themselves...

Maybe we should fight for bilingual education here, and we should address the immediate goals, but in the long run what I want is to change the system to where Chicanos, blacks and other peoples will be able to fully actualize themselves, and go to school and be whatever they want to be. The fullest realization of a human being. I find people who want absolutely the same thing, and they're white, black, Asian, and they've been in a nationalistic kind of movement or an anti-war movement, or whatever, and they stepped back to say "This is not gonna do it," because in the long run, this is just not going to change the system.

I'm not a feminist in the feminist movement, or a Chicana in the Chicano movement. I think, in some ways, a socialist encompasses more of all the things that I am and I work with the Socialist Workers' Party.

The workers' party was founded by women, and it's not a feminist workers' party...we do have a very definite stance against sexism, but we think the way to fight against sexism is to unite women, not separate them, and bring men and women together on the basis of really working together to change the system. So it's very important to see this, because we think that women actually have a very central role to play in this society, in the U.S., towards a socialist movement, a socialist revolution. In terms of the work force, women, especially minority women, have the least to lose, and if things change, they couldn't change for the worse. Politically, as a grouping of people, we are working class women very ready to move, very ready to organize.

Women are incredible organizers...So when they get into a situation where they *have* to organize, they can usually do it. But some of the main organizers, especially this one who was just incredibly skilled who hadn't done anything like it before, was beaten by her husband because she would go to meetings...He would be so pissed off because she was doing something out of the home. It's an incredible tragedy. He would not recognize how much her being involved would change his own situation...

The vast majority of working people are bound to alienating jobs, particularly women. San Francisco has a strong financial sector and a lot of clerical work is done by women. It's a kind of job that you would think is not hard as compared to picking fruit. But it's like a factory where you have a hundred secretaries just typing memos and they're timed, from the time they turn to get pencils to the time they turn to type. In eight hours you don't even think of what you're doing. They rob that of the people because everyone is capable of thinking. But there's no need to, so that's even better. And that's what I say to Chicanas, that's what we have to think about. What kind of world do we really want and yes, we can have the world we want for our people, our children. But our children are part of a bigger world...For women, Chicanas, if we do say we want to change things, we really have to think, "What are the best ways to change things?"



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L.A. LATINO WRITERS WORKSHOP

Los Angeles is a city that has come full circle. From a small Mexican cattle town overrun by successive waves of European immigrants, to the Mexican, Latino city it has gradually become since the 1920s. Yet, with over four million Spanish-speaking inhabitants, this city can barely speak of its own indigenous literary tradition. A few poets of fleeting existence from past Los Angeles newspapers come to mind: Chantecler in 1919 (his adopted pen name), writing in *El Herald de Mexico*. Aside from purely commercial attempts, perhaps the first novelist to seriously depict East Los Angeles would have to be Oscar "Z" Acosta in *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Taken together however, these are still the fragments of a greater literary tradition yet to be established.

The L.A. Latino Writers Workshop offers a singularly important opportunity for Latino/Latina creative writers to focus on the city of Los Angeles as it comes upon its two-hundredth anniversary in 1981. This workshop assumes a number of important tasks: an opportunity to make an affirmative statement of who we are, accurately reflecting the diversity of this city's social geography from E.L.A. to Fifth and Broadway, to Echo Park.

XhismeArte presents the first in a series of issues which will feature the works of creative Los Angeles writers ultimately destined for publication in the anthology titled *Homenaje a la ciudad de Los Angeles, 1781-1981: The Latino Experience of L.A.* For those who would like to participate, you are cordially invited to our weekly workshop series at 814 So. Spring, #2A, every Thursday evening at 7:30 PM. For further information please call 629-5570.

The Los Angeles Latino Writer's Workshop is sponsored by SELF-HELP GRAPHICS AND ART INC. Funds are made available through the National Endowment for the Art's Literary Programs; Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, N.Y., NY; and the California Arts Council. All works herein are not necessarily the views of the Los Angeles Latino Writer's Workshop but are those expressed by contributing artists and writers.

The Food

By ALMA VILLANUEVA

"You must know *everything*, and then begin."

Djune Barnes

It was a time when her body was the forests, the fields, the meadows of the earth to me. To lay next to her and smell her—to touch her, my mother, was my first pleasure. In the early morning, I'd throw my legs over hers and she'd say, "Oh, those trees of yours weigh so much!" That meant growth, I knew. To grow into a tree, I thought, would be wonderful. I loved trees. I loved my mother, and admired her like a spindly sapling, running my hands on her smooth, nylon legs. When she walked, the swish-swish of her legs delighted me and made me yearn in a heart-sick, peculiar way. I knew she was leaving when I heard that sound, and her smell would linger awhile; and then, even that, would be gone.

Then, the smell of pressed flowers would comfort me: my grandmother would seduce me with a hot, buttered, flour tortilla. I might still be crying, swallowing my own tears (I liked their taste); then she would break off little balls of flour, dust the table and give me a glass to roll out tortillas of my own. And if that still weren't enough, she would give me the aged, wooden rolling pin that she'd used since a bride. I'd been told that my grandmother had locked herself in a closet on her wedding night—I tasted that memory later, in the hot, buttered tortilla; and when I was older yet, I sprinkled salt on the spread butter, small thanks to the power of seduction, to the curiosity of the young girl I still saw in her eyes on her death bed.

It was a still morning—perhaps to a child all mornings are still (nights are dark, certainly, running soundlessly as a thread to the dress): they're still and full as long as the child's fantasy isn't pierced, her play interrupted. So the scream must've startled me from my pretend stove in the corner, my fingering of the doll's plucked eyeballs, the dialogue with the invisible secret. Only

fight startled me that way—my mother's anger, my grandmother's tears, my aunt's silence. Then, I felt plugged like a three-way socket: over-loaded, I'd become hysterical and end their fight. This morning the shriek was terrible—dim now, mixed with other sounds: music, laughter, leaves have cushioned it, but it rises, alone and terrible, starting from my feet. It came from the alley, the back entrance to the flats where we lived. It came from the dark place, I knew. Whenever I ran through there, surrounded by walls and cement, my body felt vacant and I wanted to scream. Someone was screaming. My mother and grandmother grabbed a knife and a broom, and ran down the steps to the dark, my grandmother yelling, "Dejer lo! Hombres animales!" They brought him up, a boy my age, or younger, I thought, crying and crying. He remains so, because in that moment I knew he took my place.

Later, I heard them say, "He didn't have time to do everything." And I shuddered to think what would've been left of that boy if he'd (animal-men, they whisper things and they don't smile: they're mean: even the Sepetio is a man: I know, I saw him once and refused to speak to him) done *everything*.

If I had a father, I'd have loved him to be the old man in back of the store, who didn't speak, but pointed to the large, golden fish and let me sprinkle their food on the glittering water. His shoulders were hunched and he walked very slowly and he smiled all the time, especially when I stood on the tiny bridge that crossed the pond. He touched my curls and I'd kiss his funny face that made me happy for no reason; then he died, because I went to the back door of the store and the door was closed and the lady said, "Get away from there!" like I'd made him go away, and I knew the terrible thing had happened—*everything*.

I imagined the fish with the sun on their bodies turning, turning to be fed.

Mother: mother, when everything happened to me, I remembered your smell.

"The Food" is an excerpt from a larger piece entitled "Under the Influence."

A True Healer

By GINA VALDES

"The Indians say that a god lives in the maguey plant," said Ramón Portillo.

"Maybe a god or maybe a devil," mumbled his brother Refugio.

"They say that the juice of the cactus will cure anything," continued Ramón. "It's the alcohol in it," said Refugio. "It kills all the germs in your body—if you survive, you'll be cured of your illness."

"It's a good body rub," said María, Ramón's sister. "It's even good for arthritis, and a glass in the bath water will stop a cold or the flu."

So the Portillos always kept an open bottle of tequila in their house. They felt that it was more reliable than the family doctor. The doctor also had faith in tequila, but not a faith in it as a cure for backaches, but for heartaches. He was not interested in what the strong, fermented drink could do for his body, but in what it could do for his soul.

In any case, Dr. Hernandez did not believe in sickness of the body. He strongly believed that the soul suffered and caused the patient a variety of physical discomforts—all illusions of the distorted soul. When anyone in the family called on him, if they were lucky enough to find him,

whatever the ailment was, from a mild sore throat to impending death, the doctor would laugh his loud, vibrating laugh and assure the suffering Portillo that everything was all right. "Nothing's wrong with you," he said, "nothing at all. You're a healthy man, don't worry." And he laughed his good, deep laugh.

When they felt that it was a matter of life and death, the Portillos called all of the neighborhood bars until they found Dr. Hernandez. He walked into their house with a small, black bag and a wide smile and after greeting everyone warmly, he walked up to the sick Portillo, looked him in the eye and said, "You look fine, just fine. Is this what I was called for? This man is stronger than I am." He then slapped the moribund Portillo on the back, and after refusing payment, had the quick drink that was offered to him and walked out of the house with his unopened black bag.

The sick Portillos always regained their health. Be it faith or luck, nobody had died on Dr. Hernandez yet. He had thus gained the reputation of a true healer. Ramón, who had been cured of typhoid often said, "I know it was the slaps on the back that saved me, the doctor has miraculous hands."

"You could be right," said Refugio, "but I feel it's his penetrating gaze."

"That's right," said another Portillo, "those eyes could frighten away whatever evil spirits are responsible for ill health."

"If you'd have asked me," said María, "I would say that it's his laughter. The doctor's laughter could bring back the dead." Others had different opinions.

Ramón sat across from María with his back stooped. "Ay María, my back feels like it's broken."

"Have you seen the doctor?"

"Nobody has seen him for over six months—that's the longest he has ever stayed away from us. It's my bad luck to need a doctor when our good doctor has disappeared."

"I guess you'll have to settle for Josefina."

"I'd rather die with pain than put up with another one of her sermons."

"Try rubbing tequila on it."

"That's what I've been doing, but it doesn't seem to help."

"Sometimes it takes a while."

"I'll keep on rubbing with tequila María."

"And I'll pray that the doctor returns soon."

In spite of his nightly tequila rubs, Ramón's back became worse. He walked with his stooped back into a neighborhood bar. "If rubbing with it won't help, maybe drinking it will."

He immediately recognized the man sitting alone at the counter—no one else could sit so straight on the backless stool. He was drinking tequila in his usual manner, placing the salt on the back of his hand, slapping his hand, and letting the salt jump into his open mouth, then sucking the lemon, and finally swallowing the tequila in one quick gulp. Ramón called to him. "Doctor!" Dr. Hernandez turned, jumped off the stool and walked toward Ramón. The two men embraced fiercely. "Pero hombre," said Ramón, "you gave us a good scare. We thought that you had disappeared for good and that we would have to settle for Josefina and her sermons."

Dr. Hernandez laughed. Ramón felt comfortable with the doctor's laughter. "She's getting on in years," said Dr. Hernandez, "but she has good hands."

"I know, but her brews and her sermons get more bitter every time. The last time that I drank her foul-tasting brew I returned home worrying that I might turn into a frog."

"Don't worry camarada, that curandera can do better than that, she would at least turn you into a dragon."

They both laughed and Ramón could feel their laughter mingling. "Gonzalo, bring the good doctor another tequila, and serve me one, bring the whole bottle, serve everyone in the house, this calls for a celebration." Ramón drank his glass in one gulp. He shuddered and his face turned red. He turned to face the doctor. "Where have you been hiding?"

"I was down south, in Yucatán. I saw your brother-in-law down there."

Ramón's eyes widened. "You're kidding?"

"I saw him all right; stayed with him for a while. He's been living there for two years, says he'll never leave the place, at least not until his mission is accomplished."

"What mission? What is that guy up to now?"

Gonzalo refilled their glasses and Dr. Hernandez went through his salt and lemon routine again. "Efren is convinced that he's the reincarnation of the poet-king Nezahualcoyotl." "Me lleva la . . ." I always thought that my brother-in-law was strange, but he sounds like he's really gone now."

"He makes a lot of sense. He says that he knows that he's crazy, that we're all crazy, that that's the reason we're in this world."

"You mean he thinks the world is an insane asylum?"

"In a way. He thinks that we came to this world to recuperate."

"Recuperate? This place can drive the sanest person mad."

"Exactly. It's full of lessons."

"But who learns anything?"

"Efren says that it takes time and a lot of hard knocks, and that too many people go around shielding themselves from everything."

"There's a lot of fools running around with their heads full of bumps."

The doctor laughed. "That's why they keep coming back."

"You mean reincarnation?"

"Recommitment."

"You believe in all that, doctor?"

"I can see it."

"It sounds like you and Efren got along fine."

"It was a good experience. Yucatán is beautiful, truly the land of the gods. Efren built a hut near the sea: that's where he lives. During the day he lectures on ancient Indian teachings, and at night he writes poetry. His poetry is pretty good."

"How do the people down there take him?"

"Everyone in the area knows him. The Indians really like him, they call him El Gran Efren. The government doesn't bother him, they take him as a harmless, crazy monk."

"Hey Gonzalo!" called Ramón. "Bring us another bottle and have a drink with us." The bartender served the two men and himself.

Ramón offered a toast. "To the reappearance of the good doctor, and to my brother-in-law, El Gran Efren."

"I'm glad you're back in town, doctor," said the bartender, "if you hadn't returned soon the bar would have had to close down."

Dr. Hernandez laughed and raised his glass.

Quetzal, quetzal no calli

zacuan no calli tapach

no calli nie cahuaz

au ya, au ya, au quilmach.

Everyone in the bar clapped and raised their glasses. "To the poet."

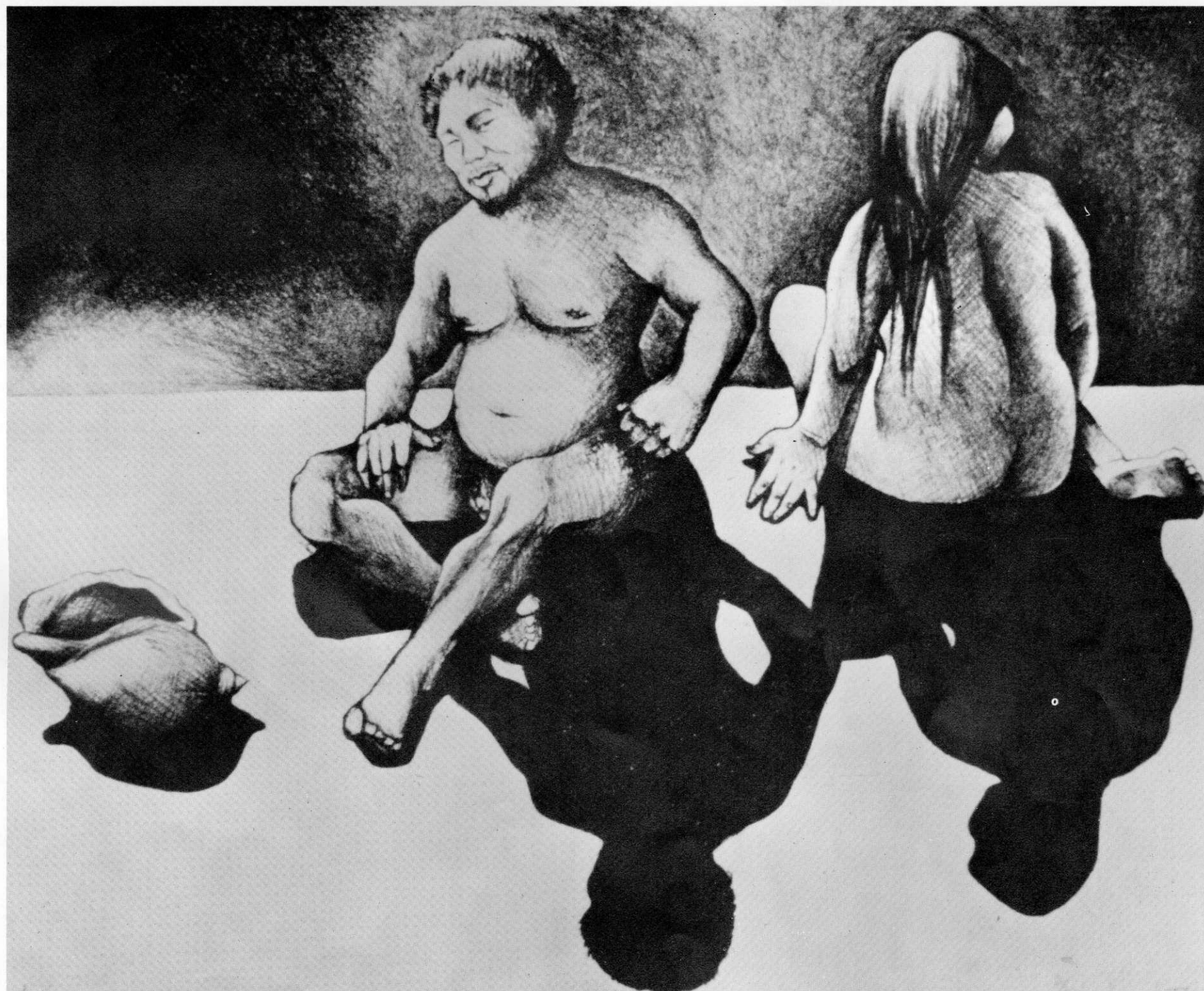
"Efren taught me this poem. It's a Toltec poem written by the god-priest Quetzalcóatl when he tasted pulque."

"Me lleva la . . ." said Ramón. "If the gods like this stuff, what can be expected of us pelados." He called the bartender. "Another bottle Gonzalo, we'll drink to Quetzalcóatl."

Dr. Hernandez laughed his good, deep laugh and slapped Ramón vigorously on the back. Ramón felt his body relaxing. He sat on the backless stool straighter than he had for many months.

"It is in the shadows that momentous encounters take place." A. Fabre-Luce

Y. CERVANTEZ



THE LONG RECONCILIATION TOWARD THE HEARTLAND

by Helen Maria Viramontes

Blowing, with the passion of a trumpet player, Chato wipes the hairs of his nose clean. His favorite handkerchief with embroidered initials is soiled, ragged, now moist, but he folds it with the care of a mother diapering her first born. He thinks, Age is a Vampress, feeling the pin pains inside him and his chest gently tremors with stubborn phlegm while he puts the handkerchief in his right back pocket. Another cough suppressed, bones settling, he resumes his motionless position.

He nests on a crate with his hands resting on a flyswatter which lies across his lap. The flies, buzzing wildly, fail to disturb him because the carousel is about to begin. He feels the bells, the colors. The music pulsates his fingers into galloping horses. Sitting erect on his horse, he stops to survey the newly bought land. The dust reaches him and he covers his nose with a handkerchief until it settles and clears, and he sees himself carefully inspecting the land. Sporadic bushes and defiant spines of yucca are all he sees; survivors of a ravenous land. So this is home, is all he thinks to himself, home within him, his heart mirrored the pulsating kitchen of his home where she freely dwelled, uniting his blood; within her, a seed, his love, their child, became undone, within the eggplant womb; secretly crawling down one thigh, voiceless, like a mute; returning home, now, like his son, to the heartland and Chato loses himself in the abysmal jar, reaching for his child's unborn face.

Son? Have you arrived or is it that you have yet to leave? Sprout your ear and listen to the carousel music bounce like bubbles in the air. Circle, turn, whirl and whirlpool dizzy with sticky hairs was my birth, but now the pool is a vacuum—my legs dangle, my fingers tire of gripping the edge. The veins in my arms escape as thick hospital tubes. Child?

Chato?

My son?

Your wife.

Go to hell.

Chato.

Let me be.

Do you know what it is like to die? I died long before you were buried.

Then we die differently, you and I?

What do you want from me? You have already destroyed what I loved more than you.

And you, Chato?

I killed for honor.

Then I killed for life. It's the same thing isn't it? Which is worse? You killed because something said "you

must kill to remain a man" and not for this honor. For me, things are as different as our bodies. I killed, as you say, because it would have been unbearable to watch a child slowly rot. But you couldn't understand that, because something said "you must have sons to remain a man."

Amanda. I am poor. This earth bore me to live, to have children, to die, and it is not for me to change it. But you, you changed it and closed the door to my sunlight. Now, I die with pain knowing that all I will have left as a sign of my life is a stonemark without a name. I die alone.

The bells of music stab the temples of his head and he feels the gravel, rough like sandpaper on his cheek. Chato has fallen off the crate. He feels footsteps around him, muffled voices and he opens his eyes to see them hovering like shadows of birds, and he faintly hears his bones clattering as they lift him. A dead fly is impressed on his cheek and a hand wipes it away. The blanket's cold; he knows they have taken his trousers off. He will die alone.

Touch my hand, Chato. Forgive and die with me.

Chato sees himself get off his horse and grab a handful of land. Grainy dust. Home. The priest had told him to save every penny. Land is valuable and you can at least grow a livelihood for you and your family, it is a hope, Chato remembers the priest saying. And he did save every penny except for the gifts he bought Amanda. The carousel, so expensive. That day he tells Amanda of the land he has not seen yet. This is the first time he has spoken to his wife in a long, long time, and he sees her surprise when he mentions the name Joaquin. Or perhaps, she is surprised about the land? Chato sees himself, excited—trying to hide the excitement, and for a moment he feels like touching her, his wife. Perhaps, after he builds the house they will begin another life together. Before, Amanda would touch him and try to make him love her again. Each time she touched him, he saw his child's face, and would jerk away from her grasp. He remembers even crying once, behind the house in the dark. Perhaps later, but now he has promised himself and he walks away, his spurs loud on the wooden porch. Grainy dust. He sees Don Joaquin approaching, his horse trotting confidently.

You acted like God, Amanda. I acted like a man should.

"Chato! How do you like the land? Practically given to you! Look, just to the south of here, you can set up irrigation ditches and—"

"It's desert."

"Excuse my laughter, but what did you expect for the few pennies you've given me?"

"I've given you everything I'm worth—without being castrated."

"And I've given you what you're worth, my friend. Desert!"

Chato sees himself surrounded by people who thicken like nervous ants as he brings Don Joaquin in. Mouths first murmur sentences, now shout words, while the cool breeze bursts gently dry the drooling saliva from the dying man. The voices follow them to Chato's porch. After the doctor leaves, Amanda Marquez prays near Don Joaquin. Chato has surrendered his bed and his wife to this man and he sits quietly on a crate viewing the mountains from the next room. He turns to his wife who holds a heavy rosary then returns to the mountains, where into a blissful sleep, he can see his heart smiling.

He remembers his heart smiling.

He remembers his mother's crumbling voice calling for him "Chato" almost cursed, her son the runt boy who learned to hoe the land at three and could sing passionate corridos about men impoverished by love, men scorned or continuously intoxicated, like the clown who was the proprietor of the yearly event in the village, the carousel with its bells and bings enticing all the filthy children to steal, beg, hunt for centavos to hop on the painted wooden horses going nowhere but making little ragged puffed-cheeked children cheer and laugh for three minutes like they were kings, landowners, savoring every morsel of the carousel's delight, proud of their majestic selves for three minutes until the carousel slowed to a stop and then the children cherished the memory beneath their fast pacing hearts-hungrier.

And "Chato" was the soft breath of Amanda Marquez at the tender age of fourteen whispering penetration and the moon was her first gift to him gleaming raw that night when he presented himself to her family telling them that his love would make up for her lack of it and hearing her father laugh at him with a laugh that comes from deep inside saying "She's a jewel," grabbing her by the arm and laughing out loud knowing how ugly she was to her family; but because Chato loved

her so much that he bought her a small carousel for her to keep in the new house he would build for her, and he also promised her father (while she looked on in amazement at the carousel he held in one hand, and the two red apples he held in the other) that he, Chato, would be as virile as the land he would buy: but all her father did was laugh at him, his virility, his dream, with a laugh that locked itself somewhere inside Chato; laughed that same, heavy boisterous laugh Don Joaquin laughed just before he, Chato, struck him with a knife, cutting him like butter, he was so soft, this man who Amanda hated for no reason at all except she kept saying to the dying man, you told him, you told him, and Chato watched her as she prayed for him and when she lifted herself up from kneeling, he watched her float into the next room where he, Chato, sat, going outside with an empty jar to where the heat has transformed the garbage into tireless maggots and Chato wanted to stop her, wanted to ask Why are you doing this, watching her come inside the house, like an apparition, going over to where Don Joaquin is breathing heavily, and with her filthy hands Chato watched her force open the newly mended wound and he can almost hear the delicate tearing of each stitch plucking one by one, seeing her, his wife, Amanda crazy with hate, put the bigger worms in his body to let him rot before his death, watching her replace the gauze neatly, then kneeling to pray once again for this man Don Joaquin, and the carousel is quiet in his heart.

II

"The cock will pluck the hen tonight."

"Ah, Chato, my friend, how many sons will you sire? 5? 6? Can you even father one, you son of a bitch!"

"She is big-hipped. She will carry many children."

"Always stand up. That way you won't get pregnant. Look at me, only 7!!"

"Full moon children are born with horns."

"Let's see you kiss the bride."

"...then I took off my pants and I told her 'Now you put them on,' and she did. Then I said 'See! The pants fit me, not you. Don't forget that it's me who wears them...!'"

Only with an escaping nervous laugh did she open her mouth to reveal slightly enlarged gums—and Amanda was

Photos by Kay Torres



nervous. And excited. And frightened by the new arrangement, this idea of marriage. Her family called her wild, like the jackrabbits, timid, not strong, but strong-willed, and none expected her to marry. But married she was to a stranger nearly twice her age.

In one breath she drifted from the priest with his matrimonial rosary chains linking them together until death, to the reception where the neighborhood men with their ribboned guitars playing music that jumped with dance steps and where she smeared her dress with chile, to finally her husband's crusty rooms.

The rooms were humid until she started the fire. With a stove, table, two chairs, shelves and the bed she sat on, it was house not yet a home and her duty was made clear by the light of the fire burning. Amanda heard the hooves of his horse, then the creak from the saddle seating a man heavy with drink. She heard his spurs reach the wooden porch; an unsteady pace. The pace receded and became cushioned with distance as he reached the end of the porch, louder as he approached the door, then receded again. Finally the pacing stopped and she heard him strike a match, imagining him lighting his cigar. She jumped from the bed when the door swung open. He stood there, immobile. To the back of him lay the dry, cold flatlands, thin with hunger. In front of him stood Amanda, frightened, pure, her skin brown and rich like the fertile soil, like the fruitful earth should be, his heartland, only

hope, now his wife, amidst the warmth of the fire.

His hand was like ice on her budding breasts and he pinched her nipples gently. Amanda was terrified. Unable to move, mesmerized by the sensation of his fingers, she closed her eyes and tried to imagine death. The pain was too great, her mother said, she must bear it, clench your teeth, children are made by pain, her mother said, children are born by pain, but she felt the softness of lips touch the sides of her body, as soft as a cat's walk. That night he said her name a thousand times without sounds, probing her until his fingers were lost somewhere in maiden hair. The storm came as a surprise, the tropical rainfall between her legs, then he came hard and wet, with a grunt close to her ear.

Amanda lay there thinking of the moistness, the itch. He finally turned away to sleep and she thought, so this is love, reaching down to contact her undiscovered island which Chato had just claimed his own. She brought her moistened fingers up to her nose. So this, she thought, was the smell of love. Raising the same hand up to the moonlight, she spotted red fingers. The moon was red. She woke Chato.

"Chato," she said. "I'm no longer a child. Look." She held her hand for him to see.

"You're still a child," he said, "but one that can bear children."

God didn't listen to me, and neither did you, Chato. You are as guilty as I am.

"Anita, the young couple, they have been married for three months with no word of children."

"Comadre, the first three months of a child are quiet ones. She is probably on her fourth month now."

"If that is so Anita, then tell me why she is visiting Don Serafin, God help him? She is dry, that's why! What sadness. So young, so useless."

"What's this? Visits with the devil himself? May God in heaven save us all, when did you hear of this?"

"I...well...the curtains are thin in the confessional booths."

"God save us, you heard Amanda's sins, Comadre?"

"How could I help it Anita, I was next in line?"

"May God forgive you for listening. What did the jackrabbit say? Comes to church only when she needs God's help."

"Only this: something about problems, something about corn silk tea, something about Don Serafin. Then, Senora Ramirez enters carrying her youngest, and for no reason the child begins screaming like a soul in hell. I couldn't hear another word."

"So young, so useless. And to think your daughter would have been just right for Chato."

"So young. But she doesn't have half the problems Senora Ramirez has, you know, married to the drunk and all..."

Amanda saw the two women crackling on the front steps of the church. She had lit two candles for the Holy

Virgin when she came out just in time to see the two stop and stare at her. She bowed out of custom to them and began her half mile walk towards her house to get there before the deep dark. She walked quickly, recognizing the different houses and paths. When she passed the great white house, she saw Don Joaquin sitting on the porch with bare feet. Were he not living alone at the time, the barking of the dogs would have awakened the household. He saw her small image and waved for her to come in. Amanda, wrapped in her rebozo, quickly walked away, disappearing—like the dreams he often had of her. As he lay down, Don Joaquin promised himself he would have to see her again.

She remembered. It is so hard being female, Amanda, and you must understand that that is the way it was meant to be, *said the priest in the confessional*. But this is pain, Father, to sprout a child that we can't feed or care for. Pray, pray, pray, *said the priest*, but what is a poor Amanda to do? The moon has hidden its face many times and I still have yet to bleed. Dried orange peels, and even corn silk tea, will stir the blood to flow, *said Don Serafin*. Each morning I wait. Just drink the tea, drink it.

Each morning is drearier than the last. To awaken and feel something inside draining you. Lying on my back, I can almost see where all my energy is going, below my navel, where my hair stops. It will be soon, *he said*. I stroke it to calm its vulgar hunger, but



it won't be satisfied until it gets all of me. Then he wants me. Amanda, Amanda, I love to hold you, to love you," said Chato. He likes mornings. I lie there rubbing my belly while he kneads my breasts. I know what he wants and I hide the sickness from him. But Father, wasn't He supposed to take care of us, His poor? When you lie together, it is for creating children, said the priest, you have sinned, pray. Sex is the only free pleasure we have. It makes us feel like clouds for the minutes that not even you can prevent. You ask us not to lie together, but we are not made of you, we are not gods. You God, eating and drinking as you like, you, there, not feeling the sweat or the pests that feed on the skin, you sitting with a kingly lust for comfort, tell us that we will be paid later on in death. Amanda, Amanda, I love you, said Chato. Listen to me, condemn me to hell, to the life, to anything, but please, please, let me not be pregnant. It will be soon.

"You make me crazy. Get up! Look at your dress. Howling like a coyote!"

She trembled with misery as he led her into the house. The kitchen was dark except for one candle on the table which flickered their phantom images on the walls. She sat, staring into the candle while he prepared some herbs and water. Numbly, she opened her mouth slowly with each teaspoon he fed her.

"The moon's face is hidden again," she said between teaspoons, still looking at the candle as her tears rolled down like the melted wax along the candlestick. Beads of sweat formed on his face. Why is it that he could never understand her? The moon's face is hidden? She sees it. I see it, but I find her howling like a coyote, fighting in the dirt. At what? The faceless moon? What the devil is happening to you? What is causing you so much pain?

He watched her turn into a hurricane in the darkness. She threw up the meal she could not accord to, shattered dishes, and overturned the small kitchen table. Winded, she collapsed on the floor sobbing until her eyes were swollen.

As confused and afraid as he was when he first held a rabbit, he held her. She was carried into the next room where she was gently laid on the bed, strands of hair removed from her face, and a blanket thrown over her trembling body. She heard him fumbling through some boxes in the closet and she turned to find him holding the carousel.

"Children die like crops here," she said, but he could not hear her for the bells of carousel music came forth sounding like an orchestra in the silence of the night.

III

He watched her breasts quiver each time she wiped the small creaky tables around him, and he viewed them with slow admiration. Don Joaquin was alone, except for her, in the one room cantina where the wooden floor planks were covered with dust, and drank mescal from a clay mug, swallowing the stinging clear liquid fast. He pounded his empty mug on the table startling her, he enjoying her fright, her breasts quivering as she scrambled over to the bar and returned to his table, flicking her long hair over her shoulder.

The woman felt his blurry red eyes burn holes into her skin and she thought You lonely, lonely coward; if you need a woman, marry a local,

share your money. She noticed his beard speckled with gray and thought, Or drink your nights and what's left of your youth away.

At first he pictured himself feeling her bare hips, suckling those delicious breasts, but now, while she stood there pouring the mescal, he hated the woman because she was dull like worn bronze. Her hair, her face, especially her eyes, reflected the sameness of everyday, the waste—and he hated. Before, he was comforted with books, but here, people were puzzled with his words, his knowledge. Later, he turned to women. Now he was content to drink.

Don Joaquin puffed on his second cigar while playing with a splinter from a table which bit into his finger and caused blood beads. I'll be damned, he muttered, bringing his finger closer, and he wedged out the splinter with the point of his knife. With one last gulp he finished the mescal and listened, his hand still cupping the mug, to the cushioned sounds of dogs barking at the men walking home from the fields. Don't you get tired of eating the dust that belongs to someone else's land? he thought. The glow burn of the evening sun created a slab of light on the table where he sat watching the men proceed home, their shadow passing the window. His finger bled. Of going home to dull-eyed wives and filthy, ignorant children that look just like you?

"Senor," the woman said, "your finger. It bleeds. Put this, like this, around it." She handed him a handkerchief with her initials and he recognized the design, touching the embroidery lightly. "Senora Marquez. She makes beautiful, the handkerchiefs, pillow cases, scarfs, just you ask her," the woman said, watching him, he silent. The clang of a single bell signaled the beginning of evening mass and soon the light slab on the table melted into the approaching night. His legs were outstretched and crossed at the ankles, his cigar burning a dark spot on the edge of the table. The woman still watched him, from the bar now, as he gazed into the graying horizon. He is not here, she thought, perhaps he is in the rich valleys of Zacateca running through the green fields as a boy. Or is this rich son in colleges up north, states united? This man, he can return to those places anytime, but why always return here, to drink and burn my tables?

As Don Joaquin got up to leave he asked the woman her name.

"Does it matter?" she asked.

"No. I guess not," he replied. Don Joaquin staggered to his horse, burping the liquor. The mass was over and he saw two women on the church steps talking as he heaved onto the saddle. When he reached the porch of his home, he fell. The dogs licked his face while he sat on the steps, his hands slipping several times before he was able to remove his boots. He thought he had first imagined her, but when the dogs began barking, he knew it was her and he waved for her to come. Amanda, wrapped in her rebozo, quickly walked away, disappearing—like the dreams he often had of her. As he lay down, Don Joaquin promised himself he would have to see her again.

Mouths first murmur sentences, now shout words. Liberator, they call him as he brings Don Joaquin in while the cool breeze bursts gently dry the drooling saliva from the dying man.

Right before the dawning, the kitchen fires glowed from the window across the village. The women woke first to

prepare tacos of tortillas and beans wrapped in cloth for lunch. Then the men woke, groggy, achy, quietly eating their tortilla and salt, with or without chile. With their lunch in one hand, their tools in the other, they walked to the fields, the older ones with their skin of leather and maps of age on their faces; the younger ones, like Chato, hopeful still, not yet resigned. And they talked, these vague images of men at dawn. They talked in low voices about a thing going on beyond their village, a revolution. There was a plan, a young one said, by some indio, to divide the land and give it to landless people. Does that mean the death of the likes of Don Joaquin? asked an older one, his voice crumbling. Talk, all talk, Chato thought. He had finally saved enough to down pay on a piece of land, and he saved every penny because he did not believe in talk, or the revolution, or for that matter, God.

The voices follow them to Chato's porch. The revolutionary, they say, the honorable liberator of the village. The mountains will be your home now.

At mid day, Don Joaquin inspected the progression of work from a hill overlooking the fields. He could barely see the workers gathered together under a tree eating. He remembered the woman in the cantina. No. It really didn't matter that he know her name, and it really didn't matter that he knew the workers' names. They were all the same. He signalled to the foreman with a whistle. Nothing really mattered much. After giving instructions, he rode off to the cantina, the foreman watching the clouds of dust carried away by the breeze.

You told him, you told him, she kept telling the dying man, holding the heavy rosary and praying for his death.

The woman swore at having the misfortune of him coming through her doors of the cantina, and she handed him the mugful of mescal before he went to his usual table near the window. "Senor," she said, "you took it, my handkerchief," and she held out her hand.

"Senorita," he said. "where does this Senora Marquez live?"

Chato has surrendered his bed and his wife to this dying man and he sits quietly on a crate viewing the mountains from the next room, where into a blissful sleep, he can see his heart smiling.

For months, Don Joaquin came from the backside after Chato left to work the fields, ready with comfort, eager to please, rusting her soul with sadness a little more each time. It numbed Amanda, this sadness and she knew she was dying inside for her sins. She had resisted his advances at first, even refusing big sums of money for her embroidery until one day, right before the full heat of the noon day sun she remembered, he ceased his elaborate romantics, the offerings, and guided her hand to his loins, hard like a stone, and he rubbed her hand against it until he eased away, and she realized she was rubbing of her own free will, without his hand and she began to die.

When Don Joaquin pulled up her skirt, she heard the music of the carousel. Chato, she sang to herself, over and over, my lovely Chato, I miss you, your warmth, your scent, you loved. Damn you, damn you, forgive and get on with our life, she thought over and over; but it was over, her marriage was over; now her affair with Don Joaquin would soon be over because guilt had grown into a cancer.

Her cheeks were sunken, he noticed, her hands trembled, when she told him goodbye. "As you wish," he replied without looking at her eyes. "But remember," pausing, the shock so great, "a dog is meaner when his paw is crushed." He rode off, without stopping to see the progression of the workers, riding straight to the cantina where the woman waited with a mugful of mescal, the dust making his eyes water with misery as he rode, his handkerchief crumbled up in his pocket, thinking Adios, Amanda mia.

IV

The burden lies in carrying the mountain. Whether I travel paths on foot, my callouses as thick as leather, or ride on paved streets in a dirty bus, I have never seen myself moving. Because the mountain is too big for too little hands, one closed heart, too immovable, and so finally after the long, long, journey, keeping a pocket radio close, the static of the mountain sizzling in my ear, my lone companion except for the handkerchief, I must listen finally to the mountain's songs and sorrows, before the gravel hits my face again. I face the mountain only to realize—such blindness in me—that the mountain was no bigger than a stone I could have thrown to the distance where the earth and sky meet, thrown it away at twenty-four but instead waited fifty-eight years later when Amanda returned still damned, still grieving, still loving you, on the Day of the Dead, that day when all the veins of memories are plumped with blood to resurrect

so that finally Amanda, you have returned more superior than I and helped me to cast the stone, to bury it and we will be reconciled for eternity: you and I, our children welcoming us at the entrance of the heartland.

It was a lie; the mountain was a stone, the carousel horse with a glossy silver saddle moving but going nowhere was just wood. Myself as a liberator was also a lie. Shortly after I left you standing on the porch when we both knew I was never returning; you stood there anyway without a word, immovable as the mountain watching me ride off on a borrowed cloud. Shortly after that I loved you more than when I first saw you standing in my room by the fire, and we both knew then all we ever needed to know; but our neighbors didn't. They waved me like a flag of liberation, they watching me as you stood nailing my insides with your eyes, they saying to me "if not for Pancha and the niños, I'd go fight with you." Me riding off to a different war, a different journey that was not to end for the rest of my life, to end here in an American city with tubes in my nose and arms, up north Texas, California, where the federales wouldn't kill me for murder, maybe. Maybe to escape not from them but from you and your adultery. And yet I could never forget you; and never forgive you, Amanda. After I left you, after I left the village, I lived for fifty-eight years but never saw life again. It began when I cheated you, drained you; you, in turn, cheated Don Joaquin; he cheated me and so I killed him. Maybe we were all born cheated. There is no justice, only honor in that little world out in the desert where our house sits like decayed bones. All that can be done is what you have done Amanda; sit on the porch and weave your threads into time.

La Mujer; OBRAS INICIALES

BLUE ROSE



Illustration by CHATA PEREZ

Chepito was sitting in the park; he was looking real fine in his plaids and tank top. His muscles looked even bigger with his nice tan. He smelled so good, like he'd taken a bath in a tub full of clean-smelling soap. You could hear music all around and everyone was in a happy mood. Some people were dancing, some drinking, some smoking, others just talking. Chepito was looking around for Celeste who was supposed to meet him at the park. Celeste was a real pretty girl with long silky hair which had been dyed by the sun and was now full of different colors.

Chepito had been waiting now an hour and was sort of mad. Finally Celeste showed up. Her eyes looked small and swollen: she had been crying. She was wearing some straight leg jeans and a shirt with a drawing of a nice, lowriding bomb that read "Mission Knights." Even though she had put her makeup on nicely, she still looked sad. She came to Chepito and said, "Hi babe," and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Chepito was going to ask her what took her so long, but after he saw her face he knew something was wrong. Celeste burst out in tears; she just couldn't hold it in any longer.

"What's the matter Celeste, is something wrong? Did somebody tell you something about me? I didn't do nothing Celeste, you know I love you."

"No babe, it's not that. It's my dad, he's moving back to Chicago and I don't want to go, I want to stay here with you!"

"Don't worry about it, everything's gonna be all right. Come on, let's go kick back in the car."

You could see a big smile on Celeste's face. Her teeth were white as pearls and very straight. Everything was so easy with Chepito; he always made her feel good no matter what was happening.

He had a very nice car, a Riviera custom-painted with lifts all around. Chepito called it the "Blue Rose." They had talked things over and decided that the best way to stay together would be for them to get married. Chepito went to Celeste's father. Chepito thought things were going to be so easy, but it turned out the other way. Celeste's father didn't want her to be married because she was too young and anyway, he didn't like Chepito.

"Look, you can't choose for Celeste all her life. This is a choice she has to make for herself whether you like me or not," Chepito insisted.

"Now you look Chepito, I don't want to hear anything from you so get out of here and don't come back!" her father answered while Celeste burst out into tears again.

"Don't worry babe, pack up your things and I'll pick you up tonight," Chepito told her as he walked out the door. "We'll get married in Reno, all right?"

Suddenly Celeste was happy again.

That night Celeste and Chepito were on their way, happier than they had ever been, listening to Oldies and planning their future. They were on a long bridge and they could see a full moon shining on the ocean. "I love you Chepito, and I'll never love anyone like I do you."

"I love you too Celeste."

A truck was passing by when it suddenly lost control and crashed towards them, knocking them towards their side of the bridge. The car was all smashed up. Struggling, Chepito lifted his head and said, "Celeste, are you O.K.?"

It took a while for Celeste to answer. When she was finally able to, all she said was, "I love you Chepito." Those were her last words as she died in his arms.

by Crisela Montero

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD FROM THIS DAY FORWARD

I escape through my writing,
Instead of all the yelling and fighting.
What are you trying to do, rip me apart?
Aren't you satisfied with having broken my heart?
It's been a long time since I shed some tears,
Been through too many changes, so many years.
I remember when you were my every breath,
And when you came with the hickey, that was my death!
But I'm getting "together" my "stuff,"
And life without you is less rough.
You think you're so "cool,"
I know what you're doing, I ain't no fool.
You're running around,
Here, there, all over town.
It hasn't been easy with the baby,
You in my shoes?—not even maybe!
When you left I couldn't sleep or eat,
I'd just lay around all day and weep.
Now I feel stronger, less torn,
So good, like reborn.
You threatened to hit me and take the baby away,
How can I forget? In my heart that'll always stay.
The memories are the ones that used to drive me crazy,
And now, they just all seem so hazy.
I remember I hit her when I was mad,
And after I wanted to die, it hurt so bad.
It wasn't her fault her momma and daddy were apart,
If she were older, it would break her heart.
Anger! Hurt! Pain!
No, no it could never be the same.
I begged you to come back time after time,
And all you did was feed me line after line.
I'm going to therapy, and I'm "at the controls,"
Coping, understanding and growing, are my ultimate goals.
I don't feel bitter, resentful or mad,
Just kinda empty, mostly sad.

Thinking about how it used to be,
Two crazy kids, running free.
I remember when I cut off my rings,
Then dying the next morning, packing all your things.
I pled with you to tell me what I was doing wrong,
Why telling me, did it take you so long.
I told you I needed help, that I didn't feel like "me."
All you said was "You'll be okay babe, you'll see."
Then when you moved in with your new "roommate,"
I thought "how could he" I could have killed you, such hate!
I used to pray to the "Biggy" up there,
"Bring him back to me, don't be so unfair."
But I guess He knew what He was doing, you know?
'Cause going to my sessions, has helped me grow.
Welfare's a bummer, money's so tight.
Sometimes, I try to forget, with all my might.
But I can't, when I see the baby doesn't have one decent t-shirt,
And I have to use the 6-month lay-away plan, that really hurts.
But you know, I really am wealthy,
I'm becoming alive; I'm getting healthy.
I've hated all the times you've "crashed,"
Because every time you've come, you're always "smashed."
I used to ask myself, "Why do I let him in and let him make love to me?"
"Dummy, you still love him—can't you see?"
Sometimes I don't know you; what you feel,
You're somebody else, so "un-for real."
You think you're so "slick,"
Acting like a bachelor, with your new chick!
If you even suspect I'm with somebody new,
You have a fit, you don't know what to do.
If you're going "nuts" wondering if I'm seeing other guys
How do you think I felt, finding out all your lies?
You tell me all this stuff you "really regret,"
Are you sure or is it that I'm changing that's a threat?
You said you know you've scarred me "for life,"
You're right, you hurt me—me, your wife.

by Gloria Cardona Saucedo



February 1979. Left to right: Alicia Arredondo, Nora Gonzales Dodson, Mary Ann Anguiano, Modesta Barbina Treviño and Santa Barraza.

WOMEN ARTISTS OF TEXAS

MAS = More + Artists + Women = MAS

by Shifra M. Goldman

MAS (Mujeres Artistas del Suroeste) is the acronym of an active group of Chicana artists functioning in Austin who are very aware of the multiple meanings implicit in their three-letter name. Even their exhibits capitalize on a play of words: "MAS y más," (San Antonio, March 1978); Bésame Más (Mission, December 1978), etc. Co-founded in 1977 by Santa Barraza and Nora González Dodson, who is no longer active due to personal responsibilities, MAS has been sustained through the energy, dedication, and cooperative spirit of women like Barraza, Dodson, Alicia Arredondo, María Flores, Sylvia Orozco, who is presently studying at San Carlos Academy in Mexico City, and Modesta Treviño, wife of painter/teacher Jose Treviño. It has been a vehicle for the exhibition of their work as well as many other Chicana and Latina women from Austin, San Antonio, Laredo, and other cities in central and southern Texas.**

MAS did not flower in a vacuum. Its most immediate framework was that of the burgeoning feminist art movement. Its larger and more central context was the Chicano political, economic and educational struggle in Texas whose contemporary phase was activated in the mid sixties.

MAS AND FEMINISM

From October to December 1977, Women and Their Work, a feminist art organization founded a year earlier by three non-Latina artists, sponsored and funded a six week multi-media festival of the arts involving 600 women from Austin, Dallas and Houston. It attracted an audience of 20,000 people. Fifteen Chicanas and Latinas participated in the festival, presenting a literary symposium, musical, dramatic and dance performances, and exhibitions

of visual arts. Dodson, Barraza, and Orozco exhibited drawings and paintings during the festival, while María Flores and Teresina Guerra showed photography. Climaxing the Chicana/ Latina events was the "Encuentro Artístico Femenil" held in November at the Juárez-Lincoln Institute in Austin.

In this nurturing climate, the idea of MAS was born. In succeeding years, the Women and their Work organization formed alliances with artists' associations like MAS, the Houston and San Antonio members of the Women's Caucus for Art (a national feminist art association which has sought and procured visibility for women artists in major art institutions), and the DW co-op Gallery in Dallas. Its purpose was to form a Texas network of women artists which would seek "mutual support, recognition, professional skill enhancement, and information sharing...(as) part of the expanding national women's network." These goals underlined the determination of Chicanas to provide a voice and a space for Latina women artists within a discipline that is male dominated. Since 1977, therefore, MAS has maintained an active profile in Austin and surrounding areas with a series of exhibitions and activities.

ART AND CHICANO POLITICS

The history of Texan Chicano artistic participation in the larger political struggle has not yet been written, and it is urgently to be hoped that the artists themselves will document their experiences. Along with participation in farmworkers' strikes, student educational demands and walkouts, electoral campaigns, struggles against police brutality and immigration abuse,

artists waged their own battles for recognition of Chicano artistic expression. It must have been evident from the start that their right to create their own idiom, exhibit their work, and develop as artists, depended on organizing together. And indeed, the number of artists' organizations that have flourished in Texas testify to this need.

Two universities; and one college/ university network, proved to be incubators for Chicano artists in Texas. Chicano-controlled Jacinto Treviño College was established in 1970 and accredited by the Antioch Graduate School of Education. It later gave birth to Juárez-Lincoln University in Austin, and branches in other cities. Despite many internal contradictions and problems, Juárez-Lincoln has employed Chicano artists, was used as the site of the Encuentro Artístico Femenil, and presently houses MAS and its umbrella organization LUCHA (League of United Chicano Artists) and the Tonantzin Gallery.

Texas A & I University in Kingsville brought together Carmen Lomas Garza, Amado M. Peña, Jr., Santos Martínez, José Rivera, César A. Martínez, George Truán, Ray Chávez, and Santa Barraza—many of whom today are major figures in Chicano art expression. Xavier Gorena and Enrique Flores, who met at Pan American University, Edinburgh, now run the important Xochil Art Center in Mission, Texas. Pedro Rodríguez (now in Pullman, Washington), taught at both Texas A & I University and Jacinto Treviño College, and has been an important activist figure for the younger generation.

Graduate artists from Texas A & I University moved north to the big cities with more opportunities for artists where many became organizers or members of active artists' organizations. Austin, San Antonio, and Houston form the links in a chain of central Texas cities that have been home to a number of artists groups such as El Grupo (San Antonio, 1967); Los Pintores de la Nueva Raza (S.A., c. 1969); Instituto Chicano de Artes y Aresanias (S.A., 1972); C/S (Con Safo); Pintores Chicanos de San Antonio (1971); Los Quemados (S.A./Austin, 1975); Tejano Artists (Houston, 1975); Leo and various muralists (Houston, c. 1970); CASA: Chicanos Artistas Sirviendo a Aztlán (Austin, c. 1977); LUCHA and MAS (Austin), and Ladrones de la Luz (S.A., 1979), a photography group. However, most artists' organizations had few or no women members. Of the few of this network was printmaker Carmen Lomas Garza whose studies and activities carried her to many of the Texas cities where her work has been exhibited and published throughout the Southwest.

Photographer Kathy Vargas and painter Mary Lou Ureste of Crystal City were also members of Con Safo. Vargas is active in the Ladrones today, while Garza was part of the Instituto. The short-lived Quemados included Garza, Santa Barraza, and painter/photographer Carolina Flores. By 1977, it was evident to Chicana artists that if they did not organize and feature their own work, they would remain unrecognized and ill-represented in the Chicano art movement, and in the predominantly male Texas art structure in general. The outcome of their growing awareness resulted in the creation of MAS which organized eight exhibits in Austin, Seguin, San Antonio, Temple and Mission in the first year and a half of its existence. The group was dedicated to "promoting the image and the professional status of the Chicana/Latina artist, thereby helping the individual artists themselves and serving their community directly, through exhibits, education and special events." Its most recent activity (July 1980) has been a statewide photo-documentary show, "Un Encuentro Sin Palabras: A Photographic Perspective of Chicano Life in Texas." Open to any photographer representing this theme, the show was judged by photographers Alan Pogue of Austin, and Isabel Castro of Los Angeles.

Perhaps the most ambitious activity MAS has undertaken since its organization has been the "Conferencia Plástica Chicana" held in Austin on September 13 through the 16th, 1979, at the Universities of Texas and St. Edwards. Supported by LUCHA, the conference brought together an international assemblage of painters, sculptors, printmakers, muralists, filmmakers, photographers, art historians and critics from the United States and Mexico. It was an attempt to evaluate the first decade of Chicano art, its ties to Mexico, and its prognosis for the future. The program included several round table discussions and presentations. The presentation on pre-Columbian art was made by Mexican archeologist Marcia Castro Leal; that on contemporary Chicano art by Shifra Goldman; and on the future of Chicano art by Jose Montoya of Sacramento. Lectures on Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were given by Mexican critic Raquel Tibol. Other panels included: folk art by Pío Pulido of Mexico; the history of the Taller de Gráfica Popular by Adolfo Mexiac of Mexico; muralism by Ray Patlán of Berkeley; politics in art by Pedro Rodríguez of Pullman, Washington; Mexican and Chicano art-exchange by Jaime Mejía of Mexico; and the photography market by Pedro Meyer of Mexico. Artists' workshops were conducted. The one on silkscreen was headed by Amado M. Peña of Austin, etching and lithography by Carmen Lomas Garza, San Francisco, Chicano filmmaking by Adan Medrano of San Antonio, and painting by the self taught artist Jose Treviño of Austin.

An exhibit called "Espejo del Pueblo" was held at the Tonantzin Gallery; an evening of music was presented by the Conjunto Aztlán; and a film festival featured works by Jesus Treviño, Susana Racho, SPARC of Los Angeles, etc. The organizing committee, composed of Modesta Treviño, Santa Barraza, Sylvia Orozco, Juan Pablo Gutiérrez and Pedro Rodríguez, was assisted by a dedicated group of volunteers; however the scope of the Conference and its limited budget taxed their fledgling abilities to the utmost. Despite the number of organizational problems and an attendance much lower than anticipated, those who were present agreed that the event reflected the richness and multiplicity of the Chicano art movement, its growing sophistication, and its interaction and rapport with the international Latino community.

THE ARTISTS OF MAS

As an artists' organization, MAS appears almost unique in its spirit of collectivity concerning responsibilities, its lack of internal competitiveness,

and its genuine friendliness and cohesion as a group. These qualities were particularly apparent under the demanding activities surrounding the 1979 Conferencia. A small group of about 8 to 10 women, supported by the male artists of LUCHA, not only planned and executed the complex arrangements for the Conferencia, but hosted the numerous speakers and artists from out-of-town. The women displayed the ability and willingness to temporarily submerge the individual self/ego in order to achieve a common goal. Such an attitude runs counter to the general mythification in our society about the necessary individualism and anti-communal stance of the artist—a mythification that has caused problems even among communally oriented street muralists.

If the women of MAS are communal in regard to group concerns, their work, on the other hand, shows individuality and personal trajectories of development. They do not claim to be "finished" artists; indeed, some are working on advanced art degrees as part of continued skills training. They are, however, fairly clear on what they wish to express. Says Nora González Dodson, "The actual experience of creating is very important to me, but I am realizing that it is not enough to just paint. The work has to say something more—although it does not have to be obvious; it may be a hidden message at certain times."

Dodson is equally at home with pencil, woodcut, and all painting in both realism and abstraction. Her abstract works, like the realist ones, center on some element of the feminine and/or the organic. They suggest parts of bodies, internal organs, fruit, plants, trees. Her woodcuts are strongly graphic with an exciting use of negative and positive space.

Santa Barraza, at her best with large, realistic, meticulously-rendered pencil drawings taken from photographs, has a quality of monumentality even in small scale works. Presently working toward a Master's degree at the University of Texas, Barraza sees herself as a graphic artist specializing in drawing and printmaking rather than as a painter. In recent years she has been exploring the history of her family; "I was brought up in the barrios and all those associations are reflected in my art work. My family lost their land several years ago to the gigantic King Ranch; we were very poor and life was very hard." There are five generations of Mexican/Indian Texans in her family, and she has been deriving her drawings from family photographs. The women of her family (herself, her daughter, mother, and grandmother) are important motifs in her work. There is emphasis on strength, endurance, and generational continuity, especially from mothers to their children.

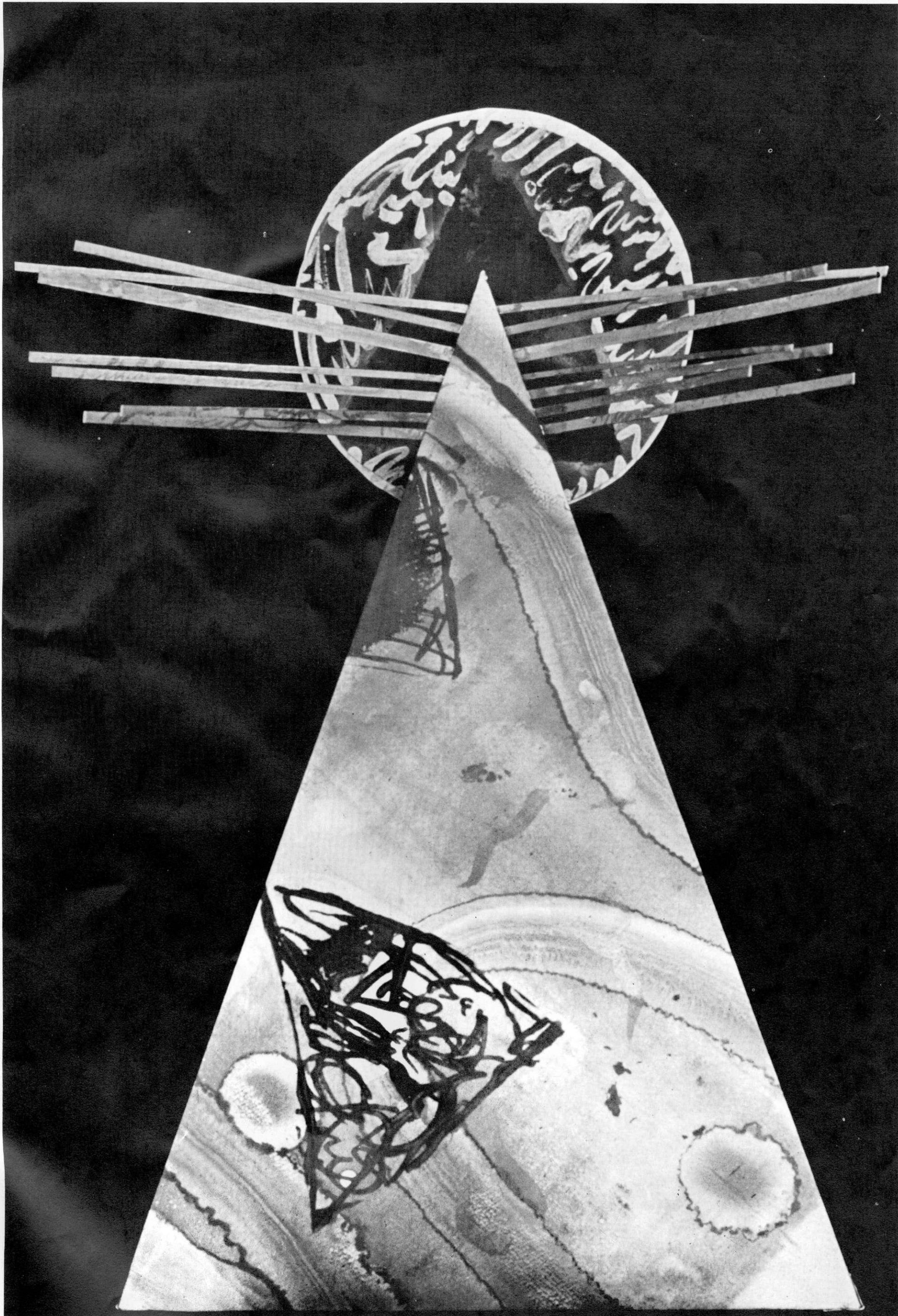
"En el ser india se funda mi orgullo... Este sentimiento antiguo se encuentra enterrado en mi alma y se refleja en mis trabajos." Alicia Arredondo is known for her *tejidos en nudos*, creative macrame weavings in natural and colored fibers. Only a few of her works function like traditional weavings; most are three dimensional fiber sculptures in which she often combines jute, wool, cotton and synthetic wools. Some are masks, some are full figures 20 inches long or more. Many are pouches that can be worn, carried, or hung on the wall. "Pouches," says Arredondo, "are bags in which something personal is carried." They can be seen as metaphors for the womb, or the mind (another kind of womb) in which an original idea (like a child) germinates, undergoes metamorphosis, and emerges as a formed creation which still contains a hollowed space as its matrix.

Modesta Treviño has, like Alicia Arredondo, turned to an art form that emphasizes ties to the indigenist weaving tradition of Mexico and the southwest; however their weavings are not traditional. Treviño states, "My art was mainly influenced from my trips to Mexico where I saw much of the weaving and pottery de los indios, and from my husband who is also a Chicano artist...I want my work to be free and to look handmade and natural like the Indians of Mexico that create beautiful tejidos without ever using a fancy bought loom." As Texans, both Arredondo and Treviño are not heirs to the centuries of family-taught loom weaving found among the shepherders of New Mexico and southern Colorado. Instead their interests are validated as art by the crafts resurgence of the 1970's with its new attitudes toward fiber (and ceramic) sculpture, and the Indian revivalism within the Chicano movement which brought into focus *artesania*: the feather arts of pre-Columbian Mexico, modern yarn "paintings" by the Yaquis of northern Mexico, handloomings from Guatemala, and the integration of non-traditional materials like feathers and hides of the Southwest Indian peoples into collaged easel paintings. It should be noted that in Texas weaving and stitchery have not been limited to women artists. Male artists of this, and older generations, have not only been inspired by Indian and Mexican blankets for their paintings, but have added real tassels to a flat painting, have created abstract works with rug yarns and hooking needles, and have made stitchery "paintings."

María Flores is a documentary photographer who frequently focuses on a single figure within an everyday setting to make her statement: "My photography is primarily documentary. The people and the situations in my pictures reflect the Mexican culture and the socio-economic problems that confront them here in Texas e.g. the struggles of the Texas farmworkers. Being Chicano, I am concerned about my people—and I want to communicate nuestra lucha, cultura, y nuestra gente to others." Middle-aged men and women, Chicano and Black, seated on the porches of their modest homes; a child in a desolate landscape—these are often the subjects of her photographs. Their effectiveness lies in the carefully planned composition and a telling use of dark and light contrast. Her earlier "socio-cultural" work included extensive documentation of the Texas farmworkers.

MAS has provided an important framework for women of Texas to produce their art, exhibit it, work collectively, and take on new responsibilities that permit them to grow as full human beings.

MAS has also exhibited the work of Carolina Flores, Maria Ramos Holmes, Tina Flores Morales, Yolanda Erigia Guerrero, Nanci de los Santos, Anna Laura Martinez Rubin, Mickey Ramirez, Janice Palma, Teresina Guerra, Mary Ann Anguiano, Mary Ann Ambray Gonzalez, and Irma Cabarrero.



Linda Vallejo

The pyramid in ancient cultures was seen as a symbol of the universe, of life. Each one of us is a pyramid, emitting energy and force, exploding with creativity. Linda Vallejo is currently at Self-Help Graphics and Art, Inc.

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