Patron: Rivard, Courtney
PID: 720386016
User: Faculty
Dept: English
Email: crivard@email.unc.edu

Journal Title: Aztlán
Volume: 30
Issue: 1
Month/Year: 2005
Pages: 1-

Article Author: Noriega
Article Title: Preservation Matters

Notice: This material may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17 U.S. Code).
Preservation Matters

Chon A. Noriega

ISMANIAC: I, the conceptual artist, being of sound mind and lack of reason, hereby bequeath all of my personal charm and wit to the orphans of modernism. I leave my striped ties and checkered past to the cubist entrepreneurs who are direct descendants of spotted reptiles. Furthermore, I leave my entire fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties memorabilia to the Department of Disposable History and Archival Research.

He tosses the will.

Harry Gamboa Jr., Urban Exile

No scholar stands so tall as when he or she stoops to pick up a discarded document—such as the will in Gamboa's Ismania—for therein lies our history.

The passage above is from Gamboa's Ismania: A Conceptual Performance, which was originally presented at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) on March 28, 1987. Glugio Gronk Nicandro, better known as Gronk, performed the role of Ismaniac in this one-man play, providing cutting remarks on twenty-six keywords and related images projected side-by-side on a screen. The keywords are all "isms" that describe a doctrine, system, theory, quality, or condition. Some are neologisms; others are vernacular or slang words. Each keyword is presented on two slides with the "ism" part on the second slide; and the list runs from A-to-Z (fig. 1). Thus, in 1987, we had two artists—cofounders of both LACE and the Chicano art group Asco—presenting a conceptual alphabet for their times.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slide A</th>
<th>Slide B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract expression</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botul</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogmat</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egot</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatal</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedon</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jetter</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klass</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnet</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nihil</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optim</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodern</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quicksand</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rac</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separat</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumat</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voyeur</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfar</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes-man</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zombi</td>
<td>Ism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. From Ismania: A Conceptual Performance. © 1987 Harry Gamboa Jr.

Like other Gamboa and/or Asco performances, Ismania quickly entered into the realm of hearsay, fading memories, and tattered fliers. I first met Gamboa in 1991 and over the next several years tried to find out more from him about the conceptual movies, performances, and writings he was reputed to have produced. What I had found were the traces, the effects, but not the cause.

Gamboa did not make things any easier. Shortly after we met, he completed a story, “Where They Found Javier” (1992), that satirized both archival research and investigative journalism for their attempts to
reconstruct the “life” of a recently deceased artist. In 1993, when I com-
missoned Gamboa to write an essay on his photography and video pieces, he again confounded the historical method in “Past Imperfecto” (1994):
“Sometimes it is impossible to give an accurate account of my personal history since I have maintained extensive notes since 1972 (along with support documents and photographs).” You may need to read that sentence again. Gamboa asserts that an “accurate” personal history is distinct from his own extensive archive of that same history.

The truth is an elusive thing. But the cat was also out of the bag. Gamboa had finally admitted that he had an archive....

Throughout 1994, Harry and I met to look over these notes, support documents, and photographs. We were now friends and despite our different professional orientations, we shared a similar view of history, the archive, and writing (fig. 2). We both evinced a necessary skepticism about the archive, even the ones of our own making, since we believed that archives provide the raw materials for stories—that is, particular, limited, and partial histories—and not History—that is, a history that claims to be total. But this issue of the limits of the archive is not just a formal one about historical truth. By its very nature—or is it funding?—the archive is a political institution that excludes much more than it includes. Without a presence in the archive, excluded groups are less able to tell their stories within the marketplace of ideas. Thus, being skeptical about the archive and historical truth in no way contradicts the necessity of introducing new materials into the archive that can complicate the historical record.

And so, I appraised Harry’s papers for the Mexican American Collection at Stanford University Libraries, which then acquired them
in 1995. What I found was so extensive—even Harry was surprised—that it suggested the need for something in addition to archival preservation. Harry had ten essays, fifteen image-text works, sixteen performance scripts, twenty-three short stories, and twenty-one poems—all produced between 1974 and 1993. In appraising Harry’s papers, I had assembled nearly 700 manuscript pages of conceptual writings—many published in ephemeral outlets, others performed and filed away, still others never seeing the light of day—that represented an alternative vein within the canons of Chicano literature and the American avant-garde. Even more important, much of this writing constituted an alternative critical mode, as exemplified by Ismamia, and perhaps even a new system of thought about contemporary art itself, a system that did two seemingly contradictory things: one, it used language against itself and by extension against certitudes about historical truth; and, two, it insistently connected language, art, and the social in a way that produced political and historical claims.

In 1998, I edited Harry’s collected writings into a book called Urban Exile, named after one of his most influential manifestos about Chicano art. That manifesto ends:

There is a social responsibility which the artist is confronted with: it is the responsibility for creating beauty, controversy, real and surreal visions, absurd versions of actual events, symbolic interpretations of his/her environment, and also to express the universality of our culture’s uniqueness and our culture’s interdependence on cross-cultural understanding.

And what of the social responsibility of the scholar and university towards this history?

As my story suggests, the process for answering such a question will often start with an intellectual pursuit. In my case, I wanted to know more about Harry’s artistic production. But what happened next moved me into the realm of social responsibility. In contacting Harry, I entered into a personal relationship that allowed each of us to understand the other’s framework. That relationship then became the basis and mechanism for identifying materials for preservation, establishing a special collection within an archive, and then finding a way to make alternative histories and critical modes available to a larger public—in this case, through book publication. For me, Harry’s writings represented a crucial missing link in the histories of the Chicano art movement and the post-1968 avant-garde. At the same time, these writings also constituted a critical mode that continues to inform my own work as a scholar. It is a critical mode that
produces a double take. Harry achieves this impact when he expounds on "the universality of our culture's uniqueness" or when he states that "it is impossible to give an accurate account of my personal history" because he has kept an extensive archive. When we do that double take, when we look back a second time and reconsider what he has written, we can gain a better sense of what Harry means by social responsibility: living in a complex and interdependent world that requires more than one framework, one approach, or one source.

Research that Makes a Difference

In July 2002, when I became Director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), I brought along with me several ongoing projects: an initiative for the preservation of Chicano cinema, preliminary research for a book series on Latino artists, a collaborative research group on race and independent media, and a new policy brief series. I had been heavily involved in media diversity, which included cofounding a national organization of Latino producers (now five years old), and contributing to media policy and related research. Since 1996, I had edited the CSRC journal, Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies, enhancing arts scholarship and adding an "artist communiqué" section wherein artists could address our multidisciplinary academic readership. As director, I also inherited from the previous director Guillermo E. Hernández the responsibility for a major project to preserve U.S. Spanish-language music recorded in the first half of the twentieth century as well as for the CSRC library with its extensive special collections holdings. In addition to the CSRC library, press, and research programs, the center holds six faculty positions that are placed on loan to departments across the campus.

My first challenge as director was how to structure the CSRC so that it could not only support these and other faculty members’ projects, but also grow in a coherent and coordinated way in the midst of severe cuts in state funding. In the first year, I set about expanding CSRC research capacity, affiliated faculty members, and professional staff, placing an emphasis on four areas: health, demographics, education, and the arts. The connective tissue across these research areas would be the CSRC Library and Press—that is, preservation and publications—drawing upon the expertise of our Librarian (Dr. Yolanda Retter Vargas) and Publications Coordinator (Wendy Belcher). In developing CSRC research capacity, I placed an emphasis on empowering the staff researchers and graduate
students involved in our projects, so that the idea of our “capacity” rested not generically with the center (or director) but with the individuals and the positions they occupied. Whenever possible, authorship would go to the research assistant who did the work, whereas typically it goes to the director who conceives the project, hires the researchers, and pays the salaries.

More important, I drew on a CSRC legacy since the 1960s in order to articulate and foreground a pre-existing intellectual framework: “Research that makes a difference.” This framework acknowledges research-quas-research—that is, the peers, methods, sources, and practices that define knowledge production within the social institution and professional culture of academia. The CSRC publication of Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies since 1970 is but one example of serving that legitimizing function through a double-blind peer review process (fig. 3). But the framework also speaks to the imperative emerging out of the Chicano civil rights movement that scholarship—and the university more generally—must contribute to the knowledge base, resources, and development of the Chicano community, too. Ironically, that imperative echoed the founding mission of the very universities then excluding or ignoring the Chicano community. In the United States, land grant universities such as the University of California were founded on the basis of precisely such dual missions to look inward within the profession in the pursuit of knowledge and outward in order to apply that knowledge in the service of society. In effect, the Chicano movement merely re-stated the same practical question that guided the public university: how can it serve the entire population and its various communities? I took this challenge as central to CSRC activities. How, exactly, does one create research that makes a difference?
What I would like to outline in the remainder of this commentary are the process, principles, and projects by which we developed CSRC work related to the Chicano and Latino arts. In doing so, I hope not only to provide a model for developing “research that makes a difference,” but to demonstrate the fundamental role of preservation and publication in fulfilling that dual mission. The same research can serve one function within the university and quite another in the community. The aim is to try to become aware of these differences early on in the process, so that the research can and will serve both functions effectively. In that way, scholars can establish and nurture an informed, substantive, and ongoing partnership between the university and community-based groups.

**Process**

One of the first things I did as director was to organize and host a series of community forums around the center’s key program areas: health, public policy, education, and the arts. This proved to be an invaluable tool. The idea was to let community leaders know about our ongoing efforts and upcoming plans and to get their input about the state of the field and their sense of what UCLA and the CSRC could do—or had not been doing!—to support their efforts. These dialogues provided a reality check about the relationship between the university and the community. They also established good will, provided invaluable feedback on existing projects, and presented the CSRC with solid new ideas about how to proceed.

For the arts forum, we brought together about a dozen community leaders, including curators, arts administrators, collectors, critics, and artists. After meeting for over two hours, we continued the discussion over dinner at the UCLA Faculty Center, gaining a detailed sense of the issues facing the Latino arts community in Los Angeles. With the forum as a starting point, we continued to involve the participants in subsequent arts activities, strengthened our relationship by developing collaborations and partnerships, and used the event to identify and engage other individuals and organizations.

In February 2004, the CSRC convened a Latino arts summit with fifteen Los Angeles-based Latino arts organizations (and three national ones) in order to get a better sense of the field as well as to address the need for immediate preservation efforts (fig. 4). When it became apparent that these groups had never met before, the CSRC agreed to sponsor regular meetings as a way of providing an ongoing forum for these groups to develop
an advocacy voice and arts agenda that could serve their diverse missions and programs. Interest was so great that a second meeting was held in June 2004 to continue this discussion; and other meetings are planned during 2004–05. The forum and summits allowed for productive exchanges between the CSRC and the community, which continue to inform our research program.

During this same time period, the CSRC undertook a complete overhaul and upgrading of its library facilities, establishing an archival program in order to process existing collections, develop finding aids, and create a pipeline for new acquisitions. The CSRC also continued to develop working relations with UCLA's Film and Television Archive, Music Library, Oral History Program, and Young Research Library. In an effort to address larger issues facing the field, the CSRC co-sponsored *Memoria, voz y patrimonio: The First Conference on Latino/Hispanic Film, Print and Sound Archives* held at UCLA in August 2003. This conference, spearheaded by Professor Clara Chu in the UCLA Department of Information Studies, brought together one hundred participants from across the United States. These various efforts were then followed by the CSRC decision to help fund the hiring of a Chicano/Latino studies faculty member in the UCLA Department of Information Studies (which is now in progress).

**Principles**

So what did we learn through this process? First, we learned that we needed to know even more about the Latino arts community and its potential interface with scholarship. Toward that end, the CSRC conducted surveys on arts resources that were released in two reports: *Archiving the Latino Arts Before It Is Too Late* (González 2003a) and *An Undocumented History: A Survey of Index Citations for Latino and Latina Artists* (González 2003b). Written by Rita González, CSRC Arts Project Coordinator, both reports underscore the need to take immediate action in order to recover and...
safeguard the history of Chicano and Latino participation in the arts. This history is fragile, ephemeral and—in terms of the archive—largely neglected, making the Latino arts something on the order of what Gamboa calls the “orphans of modernism.”

Preserving and documenting this history is vital, not just for the academy, but for the Chicano and Latino arts community itself. One of the things we kept hearing—during the forum and in our surveys—was that community-based arts organizations were losing their “institutional memory” as documents disappeared and cultural workers retired or died. These documents and memories can tell us about artistic production, exhibition practices, critical reception, and funding patterns for cultural organizations, as well as the interconnections of Latino arts to national and international spheres. Such materials also allow scholars to assess the role of artists in identity- and rights-based social movements. However, this is only possible if they are preserved and made accessible.

While preservation quickly emerged as an area where the needs of the university and the community converged, we had to acknowledge and work through the community’s considerable skepticism about the university. Latino arts organizations and ethnic museums, faced with severe budget shortages, often cannot afford the costs of documenting their own history. But, as one respondent to our survey on Latino arts preservation observed, “many organizations would like to institute a formal archive or designate a recipient of archival materials; however, they refrain from doing so due to financial constraints and negative experiences in collaborative ventures.” Indeed, the skepticism about collaborative ventures with universities is based on experience: universities have a well-earned reputation for dropping into communities to extract what they need—for research, for their libraries—but then do little to benefit the community and its institutions in a way that is immediate and transparent. The moving van that shows up and takes the artifacts of a community’s heritage back to the university archive may indeed serve the commonweal and preserve the historical record, but it can also weaken the community in that very same moment by removing those artifacts from its day-to-day life. Thus, we realized the need to pose a new kind of question about our projects: how can doing what we do as academics also strengthen community-based organizations? One answer would be to develop long-term collaborations that not only serve our needs as a research university, but that also bring real, tangible benefits to our community-based partner. There is no template or cookie cutter approach that works in all instances. For the collaboration to work each side must
be very precise and particular about its needs from the start.

Perhaps the most important lesson we learned from this process had to do with the need to make room for other contexts than the one that informs the academy, especially with respect to collections development. After all, as art collector Armando Durón stated at our first Latino art summit, no one can tell what the "historical cut" will be 100 years from now—that is, what or who will be seen as important or forgotten (fig. 5). Along these lines, in our surveys and meetings everyone stressed the need for incorporating the community's own contexts and perceptions into archival holdings and research. The artists and their communities sustain a vibrant and vital context within which the arts make sense, and it is incumbent upon the university to take that into account as part of the collection process. After all, that context is itself an essential, if ephemeral, part of the history that the archive is attempting to preserve.

Oral history provides one way to "capture" that context, and should be done whenever possible. But it is even more important to take a partnership approach in establishing an archival holding in the first place. Such an approach begins by ensuring community access to the collections and the research. Why? Because for many in the Latino arts community, access means that they have been taken into account as part of the university's activities. In other words, access is fundamental to context. The practical implications for the university are clear: if community members do not feel that they will be allowed access to the documents and artifacts that used to reside in the community, there will be little incentive to place these objects in an archive. But the concern for access actually goes beyond the objects per se. Instead, it's about what those objects represent—a mission, a history, a philosophy, a way of being—and the hope that the university can give greater voice to these ideas buried within documents, artifacts, ephemera, and lived experience. This hope actually dovetails with the research mission of the university.
itself, provided the university accepts the community as part of the audience for its publications, web sites, DVDs, and academic presentations (e.g., lectures, symposia, conferences).

In addition to archival preservation, there is a need to facilitate and support research efforts that integrate Latinos into the art historical record, and thereby also provide the documentation that the community-based arts groups need in order to survive and remain relevant. This research must be rigorous, critical, and expansive, thereby connecting the Latino arts to the community, the nation, the art world, and beyond. In the end, such research must question, challenge, and not just praise, otherwise it will fail to meet both academic standards and community needs.

We see this research as crucial on two fronts: the institutional and the individual. Thus, we have focused on the community-based arts institutions that have supported, exhibited, and otherwise circulated the Latino arts. But we have also grounded this history in individual artists, curators, collectors, and arts administrators. This approach is substantially different from starting with cultural formations—or with cultural precepts, aesthetics, and practices—that can predetermine what gets taken into account. Instead, we cast the net widely, so that the historical record can include the inevitable contradictions, exceptions, and complications that challenge any categorical system or interpretive paradigm. There is, for example, both historiographic irony and insight in the fact that the founders of at least two U.S. Latino museums were artists whose work—because it was abstract or associated with non-Latino avant-garde movements—fell outside the category of "Latino art" that these museums helped define.1

PROJECTS
The CSRC currently has six major projects that exemplify our approach to community-based research and engagement, as well as promote our commitment to Chicano and Latino scholarship in a variety of artistic media.

One of our first efforts in the arts was to establish a community partnership with Self-Help Graphics and Art, Inc. through a new "UCLA in LA" initiative established by the Office of the Chancellor. Now in its second year, this partnership provides a model for our other efforts, especially in how we attempt to define products or outcomes that serve both the university and the community.
Self-Help Graphics is a visual arts center in East Los Angeles that emerged alongside the cultural and political foment of the Chicano movement (fig. 6). Thirty years later, it has managed to sustain a relationship with the Los Angeles community while at the same time establishing a noticeable national profile among arts organizations. But, like all small arts centers with modest means, it has had to struggle for survival. With the bulk of resources going toward maintaining its organizational infrastructure and consistent programming, monies and staff for documentation and preservation have been scarce if altogether nonexistent. Consequently, the on-site Self-Help Graphics print collection—approximately four hundred and fifty singular editions constituting a significant history of multi-ethnic artistic production in East Los Angeles—was in jeopardy of deterioration, damage, and even destruction. In fact, during the summer of 2001, a short circuit in the air conditioning system caused a fire on the roof that might have destroyed the building. Fortunately, the fire was contained promptly and losses were minimal. But the event provided a harsh reminder about the fragility of the historical building and its contents.

To its credit, Self-Help Graphics had years earlier archived its prints and institutional papers at the California Multicultural and Ethnic Archives (CEMA) in the Department of Special Collections at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Indeed, under Director Salvador Guereña, CEMA had taken the lead in the preservation of Chicano graphic arts across the entire state of California. So, preservation of the prints and papers was not the issue; rather it had to do with strengthening the organization’s infrastructure and on-site holdings through preservation and publication efforts. Thus, our partnership focused on an overhaul of their on-site storage facility that included: (1) providing necessary flat file cabinets and archival supplies to upgrade on-site storage, (2) improving the on-site cataloguing system, and (3) a methodical sorting and inventory of all prints and objects. For us, the project allowed our CSRC Library to train graduate students and
thereby improve our ability to work with special collections. We also used the project to establish an internship program with the UCLA Department of Information Studies so that we can continue to provide on-site support to Self-Help Graphics, as well as training opportunities for UCLA graduate students. In exchange, our CSRC Library received a select suite of prints from Self-Help Graphics that provide an immediate research resource for students and faculty at UCLA and the Los Angeles area.

The final component of our community partnership with Self-Help Graphics is one that we now apply to all major special collections: the publication of a “Collection in Context” resource guide. This book on Self-Help Graphics will include an original historical essay that draws from the CEMA special collection as well as interviews with people associated with Self-Help Graphics (that will be archived at the CSRC Library). It will also include reproductions of key documents and prints, a bibliography, and the CEMA finding aid for the collection. UCLA doctoral candidate Kristen Guzman (History) will write the historical essay (as a precursor to her own dissertation on Self-Help Graphics) and UCLA doctoral student Colin Gunckle (Critical Studies), the primary student who worked with the on-site collection, will serve as editor. This publication will function as a reference tool for libraries, a potential classroom text (given the original scholarship), and a marketing and development tool for Self-Help Graphics. Equally important, the publication involves doctoral students already working on these collections in order to lead a new generation of scholars back to the university-based archival collections (primarily at CEMA, but also UCLA). Finally, it deepens our collaboration with CEMA through the creation of shared resources. (A similar project is now underway with Stanford University’s Mexican American Collection.) In this way, the publication serves not just the needs of university-based archives and academic programs, but also the community that contributed the archival holdings.

Web-Based Access: The Frontera Collection
The Arhoolie Foundation’s Strachwitz Frontera Collection is the largest repository of Mexican and Mexican American popular and vernacular recordings in existence, one that covers most musical forms as well as spoken word performances related to historical events and commercial cinema. To preserve this unique heritage, the CSRC is collaborating with the UCLA Music Library and the Digital Library Program in order to digitize the first section of the collection, consisting of approximately 30,000 recordings, primarily in Spanish and recorded on 78 rpm during the
first half of the twentieth century in the United States and Mexico (fig. 7). The digitized
recordings and high-resolution images of the labels are being uploaded to a searchable bilingual database available through the web at digital.library.ucla. edu/frontera. This phase of the project—which has been funded by the Los Tigres del Norte Foundation—will be completed by late spring 2005. By digitizing these rare and very fragile recordings together in an easily accessible form, and providing direct and full access to these primary source materials, the archive will enable wide-ranging research and teaching in an otherwise inaccessible and overlooked part of American musical heritage. The CSRC is also developing a "Collection in Context" publication on the Frontera Collection.3

DVDs as Archive: Chicano Cinema Recovery Project

The CSRC has launched an ongoing initiative in collaboration with the UCLA Film and Television Archive to identify, preserve, and make accessible the independent productions of Chicano and Latino filmmakers. The project is currently completing restoration on six films and trailers by pioneer Tejano filmmaker Efraín Gutiérrez (fig. 8). The CSRC will also publish a "Collection in Context" book on the filmmaker's life and work that draws from archival holdings at Stanford University (papers) and UCLA.

Fig. 8. Publicity still from Please, Don't Bury Me Alive! (1976)
Preservation Matters

Fig. 9. First DVD in the Chicano Cinema and Media Art Series (2004).

The CSRC has acquired and archived a number of other film/video collections. In addition to restoring and preserving these works, the CSRC is also bringing out DVD versions and providing the media artists with royalties (fig 9). In this way, we establish a collaborative arrangement with filmmakers and video artists in order to ensure that their works are restored, but also made available for both home and classroom use. The sales revenue received by the CSRC goes back into the initiative, thereby ensuring a funding base for future preservation efforts.

Book Series and Oral Histories: A Ver: Revisioning Art History

A Ver: Revisioning Art History is a long-term research project and monograph series on the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Cuban American, Puerto Rican, and other U.S.-based Latino artists. Since at least the 1950s, these artists and their bodies of work have challenged and engaged the art world, promoting changes in historiography, participating in contemporary debates, and validating new practices. In addition to their art, these artists have made historically significant contributions to the development of cultural centers and museums, other community-based organizations, and arts education. Yet these artists remain largely excluded from the archive, the (films), as well as audiotaped and videotaped interviews conducted over the last six years.

Fig. 10. One of the first ten books in the A Ver: Revisioning Art History series.
museum, and the historical record. A Ver is an attempt to remedy this absence (fig. 10). The project starts with ten books on individual Latino artists for publication by 2008—these books have already been commissioned, secondary research completed, and oral histories conducted and transcribed.

This project is foundational in several ways: it brings together the leading scholars and curators from across the United States working on Latino art and artists; it will produce the first extended scholarly work on key Latino artists (to be peer reviewed and distributed by a university press); it establishes a network of fifteen museums, arts organizations, and research centers committed to promoting and distributing the books; it is being undertaken in cooperation with a related project focused on Latin American and Latino art historical documents at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and it will generate oral histories and gather other archival resources for scholars, critics, teachers, and curators. The A Ver monographs are structured to have a broad impact within the humanities. Each book covers three registers: biography, historical context (artistic, social, and cultural), and visual analysis of representative works spanning the artist's career. In addition to the scholarly text, each book will have extensive color illustrations, a comprehensive bibliography, exhibition history, and index. Our overall goal is to establish the fundamental scholarly building blocks for this emerging area of study.

These books will not be the endpoint of the project but rather the beginning of a new movement in scholarship. The monograph series aims to support and advance the careers of a number of junior scholars, as well as a select group of longtime curators returning to academia for doctoral degrees. It also provides an important validation mechanism for Latino artists, a resource for museum curators, and a useful teaching and research tool for integrating the art curriculum. Proceeds from these books will be used to support the research and production of future monographs (to be drawn from a list of over 150 established Latino artists). The book series is designed to become a self-sustaining and ongoing component of the CSRC in order to have the greatest impact.

Archives and Context: Latino Arts Survey
The most recent CSRC arts research project, funded by the Getty Grant Program, involves a survey of Latino arts resources in Los Angeles. The CSRC has assembled a team that includes Terezita Romo—a highly respected curator and writer—as well as a manuscript processor and a student
intern. CSRC Librarian Retter Vargas provides oversight with respect to collections development (fig. 11).

The CSRC will identify and inventory materials related to Latino art groups and collectives, community-based arts organizations, alternative arts publications, and the individual artists and arts professionals associated with these efforts. This project addresses the necessity of surveying and archiving the Latino arts in Southern California—both the need to document this cultural and institutional history before it is too late and the need to incorporate these histories into a larger cultural and art historical tableau. Based on preliminary research, we have identified nearly twenty organizations (past and present), several key publications and exhibitions, and nearly seventy associated individuals, and we expect that number will increase as we get deeper into the necessary fieldwork. The groups identified thus far reveal various strands of experimentation that—once properly and extensively documented—promise to complicate current historiography of avant-garde movements, modernism, and post-modernism.

Before this project started, we had the first Latino art summit, mentioned earlier. At the next meeting in June 2004, the grant award for the survey was announced, and we took this opportunity to ask the arts organizations, “What questions would you like us to add to the survey in order to serve your own needs?” To our surprise, everyone agreed that what they wanted to know about each other’s organizations was a detailed sense of the “philosophy” that guided their mission, programs, and related activities. Typically, archival surveys only take an inventory of documents that make up a collection—measuring linear feet, describing general holdings. But these groups also wanted us to gather and process information about the history of ideas behind the documents. That information, they argued, would be invaluable for them on two fronts: providing an intellectual basis for future cooperation (grounded in their philosophical orientations), and documenting for posterity these organization’s individual histories. We believe that this information will also make the eventual survey much more dynamic and comprehensive, and provide us with an opportunity
to develop archival collections that reflect the organizations’ contexts. Toward that end, the final report will be published and serve as a roadmap for collection development in this area.

Building Relationships: LACMA Partnership

In October 2004, the CSRC announced an ambitious five-year agreement with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to draw upon our various CSRC arts projects and our expertise in the area of Chicano and Latino art (fig. 12). The scope of the agreement includes the development of exhibitions, permanent collection acquisitions, publications, public programs, and community relations. Leading up to this announcement, in July 2004 I was appointed as adjunct curator of Chicano and Latino Art, perhaps the first such position at a major comprehensive art museum; and then, in September, Rita González was hired as assistant curator and special assistant to the director of the LACMA Center for Art of the Americas. Her first project involves facilitating relations between Mexican arts institutions and LACMA (as well as Latino arts organizations in Los Angeles). Rita and I will also co-curate a major exhibition focused on younger or emerging Chicano artists that echoes a similar exhibition at LACMA in 1975. While this agreement has an immediate impact in terms of LACMA personnel as well as an obvious synergy with CSRC major arts projects, it is also new and unfolding.

I want to stress here one significant aspect of the partnership—namely, that we spent eighteen months developing the basic framework and working relationships upon which its success will depend. Therefore, our approach has been no different in creating a partnership with a mainstream institution than the one we have taken with community-based institutions.
Conclusion

In the end, there is simply too much to be done and precious little time. Very few prominent institutions house the remnants of Latino artistic careers and cultural spaces; fewer chronicle their histories and struggles. But it is through archival collections that we will be able to substantiate the historical connections among myriad groups, cultures, and organizations. In short, preservation matters. In order to have the best chance of preserving Latino art history, we must undertake multi-institutional efforts that involve not just the universities, archives, museums, and libraries, but also community-based arts organizations and the artists themselves. Working together toward a shared goal—but also with a practical sense of our different needs—community leaders, artists, librarians, archivists, and other interested parties must address the potential loss of the documents that make up the history of Latino arts in the United States.

These various CSRC projects are not only concerned with archive building and scholarship but with developing long-term relationships with the Latino community that can result in a strengthened arts infrastructure. What value is there in preserving the artifacts of an arts institution, or developing academic publications about its past, without also assisting that institution to survive and to continue serving its community? That is the social responsibility with which the scholar and the university are confronted. The university can be a mausoleum or it can be a partner creating vital links between the past and present. What it cannot be is an innocent bystander. Instead, research projects related to the arts must serve not only the scholars who will utilize primary research materials, but also the larger public. That dual mission—nothing less than the founding mission of public universities—will only happen if we structure our activities in such a way as to facilitate both community partnerships and research that makes a difference.

Notes

Portions of this editor's commentary are taken from an earlier talk co-written with Rita González. I want to thank Kathleen McHugh for her editorial feedback and encouragement. Rita González, Terezita Romo, and Jennifer Serna Flores not only provided invaluable comments on an earlier draft, but they have been an essential part of CSRC arts projects. These CSRC projects have been made possible through
the generous support of the UCLA Center for Community Partnerships, UC Mexus, the UC Committee on Latino Research, Los Tigres del Norte Foundation, the Arhoolie Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Haynes Foundation, the Getty Grant Program, and the La Plaza de Cultura y Artes Foundation.

1. Unless noted otherwise, the Harry Gamboa writing referenced in this essay can be found in Gamboa 1998.

2. I'm thinking here of Raphael Montañez Ortiz, cofounder of El Museo del Barrio in New York, and Peter Rodríguez, founder of the Mexican Museum in San Francisco.

3. Isabel Castro-Meléndez, then at the CSRC, was instrumental in bringing together the various on and off-campus partners in this project.

4. In late August 2004, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston announced the appointment of Gilbert Vicario as assistant curator, Department of Latin American Art, and coordinator, International Center for the Art of the Americas. His responsibilities include helping to shape the museum's Latino art exhibitions and research programs.

Works Cited:

