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Made You Look: Chicano Experience, Graphic Identity and Agency in Pilsen Murals

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MADE YOU LOOK:
CHICANO EXPERIENCE, GRAPHIC IDENTITY AND AGENCY
IN PILSEN MURALS

by

Nina Teubner

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ABSTRACT
MADE YOU LOOK: CHICANO EXPERIENCE, GRAPHIC IDENTITY AND AGENCY IN PILSEN MURALS

by

Nina Teubner

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Kenneth Bendiner

This paper examines three different types of Mexican-identified murals in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. Using three murals as a case-study, Francisco Mendoza and Gallery 37, 1710 West 18th Street, Chicago, 1998, Hector Duarte’s Gulliver in Wonderland, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, 2005 and Jeff Zimmerman Unbelievable the Things You See, South Ashland Ave & West 19th St Chicago completed 1998, this paper examines the artistic process, formal aspects and graphic identity, and function and continuing role of each mural.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Main Body ........................................................................................................... 1-32

List of Figures ................................................................................................. 33-51

Bibliography .................................................................................................... 52-55
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1A: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; view from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station platform facing West p. 34

Figure 1B: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Archival Chicago Transit Authority photo of Francisco Mendoza painting p. 34

Figure 1C: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; View of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance p. 35

Figure 1D: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance p. 35

Figure 1E: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance p. 36

Figure 1F: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance p. 36

Figure 1G: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of panel depicting Calaveras Catrina on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level p. 37

Figure 1H: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of panel of religious triptych on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level p. 37

Figure 1I: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of panel with Mexican/Spanish bull-fighters on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level p. 38

Figure 1J: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of Panel with male musicians and female singers on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level p. 38

Figure 2A: Hector Duarte, Gulliver in Wonderland, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; View from Cullerton Avenue p. 39

Figure 2B: Hector Duarte, Gulliver in Wonderland, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; View of migrant worker, right side of the house, from Wolcott Avenue p. 39

Figure 2C: Hector Duarte, Gulliver in Wonderland, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; Detail of hand p. 40
Figure 2D: Hector Duarte, *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; Detail of footprint p. 40

Figure 3A: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increíbles Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; View from corner Ashland Avenue p. 41

Figure 3B: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increíbles Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; Wall closest to street completed 1996 p. 41

Figure 3C: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increíbles Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; Middle wall, completed 2001 p. 42

Figure 3D: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increíbles Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; Wall farthest from Ashland Avenue, completed 2001 p. 42

Figure 4: Figure of Woodcutters; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969) p. 43

Figure 5: Figure of interior mural; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969) p. 43

Figure 6: Figure of exterior mural; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969) p. 43

Figure 7: Exterior mural; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969) p. 44

Figure 8: Diego Rivera *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park*, Mexico City 1947-1948 p. 44

Figure 9: Jose Clemente Orozco, *The Epic of American Civilization*, Dartmouth College 1932-1934 p. 44

Figure 10: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *The Torment of Cuauhtémoc*, Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City, Mexico, 1950 p. 45


Figure 15: Organization for Black American Culture, *Wall of Respect*, 43rd street and Langley Avenue, 1968-69 p. 47


Figure 17: Mario Castillo, *Metafisica (Peace)*, Halsted Urban Progress Center, Halsted Street and Cullerton, 1968 p. 47

Figure 18: Aztec Sun Stone, Aztec Calendar Stone, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, 15th century BCE p. 48

Figure 19: Aztec pictograms from Codex Magliabecchi p. 48

Figure 20: Temple complex of Teotihuacan, pyramids of the sun and the moon. Pyramid of the Sun, 200 A.D. p. 49

Figure 21: John Jota Leaños and Artemio Rodríguez, *El Muertorider*, 2012 p. 49

Figure 22: Jose Guadalupe Posada, *La Calaveras Catrina*, 1910, zinc etching p. 50

Figure 23: Marcos Raya, *Self Portrait with Friends and Models with Imaginary Machine*, 1999 p. 50
Public art projects, primarily murals, are socially defined artworks with social and political content intended as catalysts for action in the twentieth century. Murals are “designed to be seen in public situations, they describe collective aspects of experience and they are usually meant to influence collective behavior.” Chicano murals are monumental, highly visible and site-specific. An obsessive theme in Chicano murals is that “of alienation and the search for identity both at the subjective, social and national levels.” Since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, there has been a tenuous border relation between the United States and Mexico, which has contributed to the feelings of Chicano alienation in Anglo society. Compared to European immigrant groups, Mexicans and Chicanos have an atypical assimilation pattern characterized by racism, financial discrimination, residential exclusion, limited access to education and isolation. These experiences inform the construction of a mestizaje Chicano identity. Critical mestizaje race theory articulates a pluralist Chicano identity. It provides agency through the transformative concepts of multi-culturalism and historical subjectivity.

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3 Mexican refers to those born in Mexico, Chicano refers to those of Mexican descent born in America – second and third generation Mexican-Americans. The terms Chicano and Mexican-American are interchangeable; the “A Chicano is a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself”; Rubén Salazar, “Who is Chicano? And What Is It the Chicanos Want?”. *Los Angeles Times*. February 6, 1970. http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oew-rubenremembered22apr22,0,1707774,full.story#february06. November 1, 2012. Chicana is female, Chicano is male, however I will not be discussing gender differences in this paper and will use the term Chicano from here on out.
6 “Mestizaje…[is] more than a powerful metaphor signaling cultural hybridity. It roots cultural production and change in the physical memory of injustice and inhuman exploitation, of desire transforming love. This forms a critical mestizaje….mestizaje has been used within a critical framework as a means of understanding possibility and constraint in the development of new historical subjectives: Chicanos and Chicanas.” p. 4 Rafael Pérez-Torres. *Mestizaje: Critical uses of Race in Chicano Culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. 2006. p. 4
Chicano identity is expressed through depictions of race and land. This identity is mirrored in Chicano art. Visual modes of race and land encompass two aspects of identity, as defined by sociologists: Ethnic/National and Place identity. These components are constructed through the adoption and adaptation of both Mexican and American symbols, art and popular culture. Among references of ethnic/national identity are Pre-Columbian motifs, national and religious icons. Place identity in Chicano murals is simultaneously rural and urban. Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta explain the rural/urban tension: “migrants being physically present in urban localities while at the same time being part rooted, often psychologically to rural homes and family members left behind, so much that ‘home’ and ‘place’ become ambiguous and shifting notions, where multiple identities – both rural and urban – can be simultaneously embodied.” Visual motifs of romantic nationalism, rural Mexico and urban images serve to “construct a sense of ‘home’ through place identity and place affiliation.” Further Chicano murals are built on a rich history of muralism.

The Mexican practice of interior and exterior mural painting began in Pre-Columbian Maya culture and continued into democratic muralism of early twentieth century Mexico on the heels of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). Muralism expanded into the United States in the 1920’s with Mexican muralists Jose Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera. Influenced by the Mexican Muralists,

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7 Chicana/o art comes in many forms, but is typically characterized by public art projects including posters, political pamphlets, border documentaries and murals.
8 Shifra M Goldman defines ethnicity as “Ethnicity is not an individual construct but the residue of societal processes that may taken generations to evolve…we can define it as a set of activities, traits, customs, rituals, relationships, and other emblems of signification that are rooted in group histories and shared to differing degrees by the members or a given national/ethnic group” p. 169
9 The discussed murals rely most heavily on Aztec symbols and symbolism rather than Maya symbols. This is probably due to the connection Chicanos have with Aztlán.
10 Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, p. 27
American regionalist artists expanded this tradition during the New Deal Era with the Works Progress Administration murals (1935-1939). These foundational movements were the precursors to mural revival in the nineteen sixties. This revival was intensely political, stressed community collaboration, multiculturalism and provided an artistic outlet for social action. At this time, Chicano artists formulated a distinctive aesthetic expressing the structure of their bi-cultural identities. Chicano identity is molded through social experiences characterized by “living-on-the-edge, physical and emotional marginality, the Inside-Out position, and the internal borderline”. Graphic depictions of the aforementioned experiences provides agency through cultural maintenance and cultural affirmation. In recent years the need for a positive, self-ascribed identity has intensified because of assimilation patterns among young Chicanos. Nation-wide discrimination, degrading stereotypes, on-going immigration battles and the gentrification of Pilsen are seen as cultural threats. Mural painting is a reactive expression against these environmental factors. Murals demand action from the viewers. These artists see public walls within the city as canvases for political statements and self-expression. The walls become “substitutes for the gallery system”. Exterior murals in Pilsen, Chicago, express Chicano experience, identity and are influenced by the history of muralism as well as environmental factors in the United States and Chicago. Pilsen, a migrant enclave, is

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12 “Chicano’s are themselves collages – an amalgam of Indian, Spanish, Mexican and Anglo elements – their cultural products are also mixtures of fragments of diverse traditions” Dick Hebdige quoted in Curtis Marez “Brown: The Politics of Working-Class Chicano Style”, Social Text, No. 48 Autumn 1996 pp. 109-132


located on Chicago’s south side with a large Mexican and Chicano community. Murals, mosaics and street art saturate the neighborhood. Contemporary Pilsen murals stem from Mexican and American traditions in muralism. Pilsen murals interpret and use an established canon of Hispanic/Chicano aesthetic, literary and musical tradition, and border-existence discourse to create, maintain and teach a Chicano identity. After a brief discussion on the history of muralism in Mexico and the United States, I will address the history of muralism in Chicago and Pilsen.

Using three archetypal murals as case studies, I will examine the artists’, style, visual models of experience and identity, as well as the process, funding and function of their art. The first of these murals is Francisco Mendoza’s and Gallery 37’s 18th Street, 1710 West 18th Street, Chicago, 1998 (figures 1A-J), representing artist-directed youth murals. Embodying private/personal murals is Hector Duarte’s Gulliver in Wonderland, 1900 West Cullerton Avenue, Chicago, 2005 (figures 2A-C). Lastly, there are several Chicano-themed murals by non-Chicano artists. Exemplary of this type is Jeff Zimmerman’s Increíbles Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven17, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/200118 (Figures 3A-D). For Mexican immigrants and Chicanos the Pilsen neighborhood is “a metaphorical or discursive space of belonging and identification”19. Therefore Pilsen, and its residents become a “cohesive space of collective experience” which creates a “native region”20. Chicano mural clusters are the visual manifestation of this and create a cohesive Chicano community and identity.

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17 Translates as “Oh the things you’ll see” or “Unbelievable the things you see” or “Amazing things you see”
18 The first mural was painted in 1996, and the second two were painted in 2001
20 Juan Armando Epple, p. 339
dominant Anglo-American social group created derogatory Mexican and Chicano stereotypes. Pervasive stereotypes include the machismo Chicano male and the exoticized Chicano female. These pervasive cultural images inhabit all aspects of Chicano identity; therefore the need to produce and celebrate an ethnically Chicano image is paramount.

Graphic constructs of Chicano identity are bi-cultural and bi-conceptual interacting “between two different landscapes of symbols, values, structures and styles and/or operate within a ‘third landscape’ that encompasses both”\(^{21}\). In order to understand these constructs it is important to examine historical mural movements in Mexico, the United States and Chicago specifically.

By the nineteenth century there was an established popular and fine art mural practice in Mexico. Notably, Juan Cordero completed several iconic murals in Mexican churches and other establishments. Church ex-voto painting and muralism were prolific: “popular mural painting by self-taught artists, artisans or anonymous painters, in the interior of the country…went on without a break”\(^{22}\). Interior and exterior murals were generally frescos, or painted directly on a dry surface with tempera paint. Subject matter included “depictions of simple scenes of everyday life”\(^{23}\), landscapes, animals and religious scenes; see for example (figures 4-7). This folk practice became a normal part of daily life in Mexican barrios\(^{24}\) in the nineteenth and twentieth century. According to Diego Rivera “there was not a single tavern, eating house, dairy, wine shop, public bath, hotel, circus, or chapel to any saint whatsoever, which had not been covered with

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\(^{21}\) Guillermo Goméz-Peña, p. 113  
\(^{22}\) Antonio Rodriguez, “Mural Painting in Popular Art” in *A History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1969). p. 128; when discussing legacy of muralism in Mexico, Rodriguez implies popular muralism began in Pre-Columbian Maya/Aztec culture and has lasted until today.  
\(^{24}\) Barrio is a term for neighborhood, primarily in an urban setting
paintings by painters from the people.” Thus, the tradition of painting on public and private buildings in Mexico, established prior to the Mexican Revolution, influenced the early twentieth-century Mexican Muralists.

Mexican Muralists in the early twentieth century were shaped by these customs as well as by the events of the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican Revolution (1910-17) was a pivotal moment in Mexican history, and the nationalist mural movement formed in its wake. Under General Álvaro Obregón the Secretary of Education, José Vasconcelos, commissioned local artists to paint public murals in urban barrios and around the countryside with the purpose to educate the people about revolutionary ideals, build communities and instigate agency among an impoverished and illiterate public. These government-funded murals have a strong social message, directed towards the average citizen to encourage action. Three major muralists emerged and flourished at this time. Termed Los Tres Grandes, Diego Rivera (figure 8), Jose Clemente Orozco (figure 9) and David Alfaro Siqueiros (figure 10) created many murals in Mexico and the United States. They transformed the established popular mural art into socio-political statements. Their work was a hybrid of pre-Columbian and modern motifs with intensely politicized meaning. Los Tres Grandes embraced “new political visions, by attracting new, non-elite viewers and by initiating new vehicles of visual expression.”

Los Tres Grandes immortalized the Mexican idols Pancho Villa, Emilio Zapata, Miguel Hildago and Jose Guadalupe Posada. These figures as well as Los Tres Grandes themselves became cultural icons and national symbols that are still prolific subjects in contemporary art.

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Chicano murals. In addition to creating prolific murals in Mexico, *Los Tres Grandes* received several commissions in the United States. Budding American artists now exposed to the Mexican Mural movement, “identified with the Mexican Muralists”²⁷ stylistically and conceptually, through the Works Progress Administration (hereafter WPA).

Most WPA²⁸ murals were oil or acrylic on canvas, but some were frescos or painted directly onto dry plaster²⁹. WPA mural themes had intensely nationalistic overtones shown as pictorial narratives of economic relief and pursuits of the American Dream. Although Chicago already had a long history of public art and muralism that began in the late nineteenth century³⁰, there are a myriad of interior WPA murals throughout the city. Prominent murals include, Ralph Christian Henricksen, *Americanization of Immigrants*, West Pullman School, 1940; Florian Durzynski, *American Youth*, Daniel S. Wentworth School, 1937; unsigned attributed to Gustaf Oscar Dalstrom, *History of Transportation*, NBC Building, Suite 360, 445 North Cityfront Plaza Drive, 1937; Edward Millman, *Women’s contribution to American Progress*, Lucy Flower High School, 1940 (figures 11-14). Muralism and public art stalled in the decades after the New Deal, but in the late nineteen sixties there was a nationwide mural revival. This revival led to murals painted as community expression.


Late twentieth and early twenty-first century community murals are a natural outgrowth of this nineteen sixties revival. Patrick T. Reardon explains that nationwide, “in a very urban; very modern way, they capture the spirit, the hope, the beliefs and the aspirations of a neighborhood”\textsuperscript{31}. Characterized by community involvement and activism, muralism thrived in the Southwest, California and the Midwest. Chicago was “a center for a multi-ethnic mural movement during the nineteen sixties”\textsuperscript{32} in the Midwest. The south side of Chicago experienced a renaissance fueled by the political turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement (1948-1962), the 1960’s Chicano Movement (La Causa), United Farm Workers Movement (1965), and student revolts and protests against the war in Vietnam. The explosion of public art was termed ‘the community mural movement’ in Chicago; these murals “reflect the racial and social inequalities experienced by residents of these neighborhoods, and are viewed with community pride by people traditionally excluded from mainstream cultural activities and institutions. They are often used moreover, as rallying points for social protests, neighborhood meetings and ethnic celebrations, an intended and logical consequences of political art in public spaces”\textsuperscript{33}.

Locally, most scholars see the beginning of this movement as the creation of the OBAC\textsuperscript{34}-directed \textit{Wall of Respect}, 1968-9 (figure 15). After this first mural, a group of African- and Anglo-American artists established the Chicago Mural Group (now the Chicago Public Art Group)\textsuperscript{35} and released a collaborative Artists Statement in 1971:

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\textsuperscript{31} Patrick T. Reardon, “Group portraits: A New Mural Guide Will Present the Calling Cards of Communities”. \textit{Chicago Tribune Magazine}. 1998. pp. 18-20

\textsuperscript{32} Eva Cockcroft and John Pitman Weber. \textit{Towards a People’s Art: The Community Mural Movement}. (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), p. 28

\textsuperscript{33} Paul Von Blum, p. 463

\textsuperscript{34} Organization for Black American Culture “it is pronounced like \textit{obasi} the Yoruba word for chiefton” qtd. Victor A. Sorell “From the Studio to the Street”, \textit{Art Journal}, Vol. 39, No. 4 Command Performance Summer (1980) p. 286

\textsuperscript{35} William Walker and John Pitman Weber established the Chicago Mural Group
“Our murals will continue to speak of the liberation struggles of black and third world peoples; they will record history, speak of today and project toward the future. They will speak of an end to war, racism and repression; of love, of beauty, of life. We want to restore an image of full humanity to the people, to place art into its true context – into life”\textsuperscript{36}

Mexican Artists, such as Mario Castillo and Marcos Raya, were not formally included in the Artists Statement. While not officially part of the movement, there were collaborations, such as John Pitman Weber’s and Jose Guerrero’s, \textit{Solidarity Murals}, United Electrical Workers Hall, 37 South Ashland Avenue, 1974\textsuperscript{37} (figure 16).

Collaborations such as this, suggested that instead of assimilating with the white middle-class, Chicanos integrated with the African-American underclass. The suggested segmented assimilation\textsuperscript{38} between these two groups is attributed to having similar social concerns, collaborating on art projects, and combining both Mexican/Chicano and African-American political heroes\textsuperscript{39}. But despite collaborations and social and political concerns similar to those of African-Americans, Mexican and Chicano artists developed


\textsuperscript{38} “segmented assimilation theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding the process by which the new second generation – the children of contemporary immigrants – becomes incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society and the different outcomes of this process”; there are “three possible patterns of adaptation most likely to occur among contemporary immigrants and their offspring: ‘One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle class; a second leads straight into the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation to the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberation preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity”. Min Zhou. “Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation”. \textit{International Migration Review}. Vol. 31 No. 4, Special Issue: Immigrant Adaptation and Native-Born Responses in the Making of Americans (Winter 1997) p. 975 - 1008

\textsuperscript{39} Many murals at this time portray, Martine Luther King Jr., JFK and Robert Kennedy, Caesar Chavez, Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, and other figures from the Mexican Revolution, United Farmers Movement, Indigenous movement, and the Civil Rights Movement.
an independent aesthetic and school of thought. These artists visually combined Mexican history with the sixties Chicano Movement\textsuperscript{40}.

Chicano muralists were influenced by socio-political environmental factors nationally and locally. Daniel D. Arreola points out “Chicano mural art emerged in the wake of the La Raza militancy of the 1960s and was concerned with the expressions of ethnic identity and political activism. The ethnic consciousness of that decade was instrumental in linking young Chicano artists with their cultural heritage”\textsuperscript{41}. Artists stressed community collaboration; “they involve others in the art process and strive for unity and cohesion in visual expression”\textsuperscript{42}. The nineteen sixties mural movement is overtly political and tied to the Chicano literature, musical and intellectual discourse of the 1960’s era. Within this discourse, the concept of Aztlán\textsuperscript{43} became integral to the construction of Chicano identity, aesthetic and philosophical scholarship.

Locally, Chicanos were influenced by Chicago politics and economics. Mexicans and Latinos have been present in Chicago since the turn of the nineteenth century. However their “settlement process is deeply colored by discrimination” which has “translated into exclusion, economic immobility, and manipulation”\textsuperscript{44}. Discrimination against Mexicans “extends to middle-class and US-born”\textsuperscript{45} Chicanos. In the nineteen sixties the Mexican population on the south side of Chicago was displaced by the construction of the University of Illinois at Chicago. Many of the Mexicans and Chicanos

\textsuperscript{42} David Conrad, p. 102
\textsuperscript{43} Aztlán, or the mythical homeland of the Aztecs, is now considered most of the Southwest.
\textsuperscript{45} John J. Betancur, p. 1317
resettled into the nearby then Slavic-identified Pilsen community. Pilsen gradually became a Mexican/Chicano-identified neighborhood. Street art flourished in Pilsen beginning with Mario Castillo’s mural *Metafísica* (Peace), 1968 (figure 17). Influential artist Marcos Raya explains Pilsen’s art scene in the late nineteen sixties:

“It was like a mini-Mexican Revolution on the street. Culture is one of the ways of changing the status quo, and the movement injected a consciousness of culture into a working-class neighborhood... We fought the bad condition of the neighborhood. We fought for immigration and workers’ rights, housing, building the Benito Juarez High School. We painted the streets as a way of showing our anger and confusion – so close to the Loop and so goddamn fucked up”

From this explosion of artwork in Pilsen and the political turmoil, local organizations emerged. Artists, individuals and philanthropists united to create a network of non-profit organizations in Pilsen. These institutions became “influential support and distribution systems”. For example, foundations such as the Casa Aztlán (1970), Movimiento Artístico Chicano (MARCH), Chicago Mural Group (now the Chicago Public Art Group) the Latino Institute, and the Mexican Center of Fine Arts (now the National Museum of Mexican Art) were formed. These organizations originated in the wake of the 1967 Chicago Riots and other urban uprisings. Over the past three decades, the movement has endured and evolved. It has continued to build solidarity between local neighborhoods and serve as social tools. Today's murals are a product of these early

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organizations and distribution systems. Like the nineteen sixties murals, contemporary projects “deal with issues of cultural identity, cultural heritage, and cultural critique; the role of artists in society, particularly as political activists; and the nature of public art”\textsuperscript{49}. Present-day murals engage with these concepts and apply them to current political and social issues.

Francisco Mendoza’s and Gallery 37’s, 18\textsuperscript{th} street, 1710 West 18\textsuperscript{th} Street, Chicago, 1998, is the best-known Pilsen mural. Until his death in 2012, Francisco Mendoza was an important community figure, popular Chicano artist, activist and educator. He earned the moniker ‘Pilsen Picasso’ for his prolific murals and mosaics that decorate the neighborhood. Since the nineteen eighties, Mendoza kept the momentum of the sixties community mural movement thriving and remains the primary model for up-and-coming Pilsen artists. While studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and abroad in Spain, Mendoza found inspiration in Picasso, Miro, Gaudi and Los Tres Grandes. After earning a BA in fine arts and art education in 1984, he began teaching in Pilsen in 1985\textsuperscript{50}. Mendoza was “involved in community art projects with youth in South Chicago in the mid-1980’s”\textsuperscript{51}. As an educator, Mendoza’s projects are saturated with Mexican motifs to teach young Chicano’s their heritage. Through an amalgamation of symbols, Mendoza bridges Mexican and American cultures in his public art projects. His iconic projects include mosaics and murals in the Jose Clemente Orozco Community

\textsuperscript{49} Warren and Boris, p. 90-91
Academy, a mural at the South Chicago YMCA, another at Pilsen Resurrection church and the 18th street (figure 1A) elevated train stop (hereafter el).

In 1998, Gallery 37, Gallery 18 and the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum (now the National Museum of Mexican Art) financed 18th Street through the Chicago Transit Authority (hereafter CTA) Adopt-A-Station program. The CTA has two programs supporting art projects along the el tracks; the Arts in Transit Program financed by the city of Chicago and Federal Arts Program, and the Adopt-A-Station program funded by individual or corporate contributors. Officially, the CTA Adopt-A-Station program states “the Chicago Transit Authority created the Adopt-A-Station program in 1990 to ensure a strong connection between stations, community organizations and surrounding neighborhoods”52. CTA public art projects aim to enhance the identity of each station through reflecting the communities they serve. The projects stated goal was to celebrate Chicano identity, neighborhood beautification and art education.

18th Street was designed and spearheaded by Francisco Mendoza and Joy Anderson, along with several budding Chicano artists. The project enlisted the aid of Gallery 37’s Gallery 18 students53. Participation was open to the entire neighborhood. In a local interview Mendoza says, “It was like having a jazz session…artists would come up and say, ‘I can paint, I have an idea,’ and I would give them the colors they needed”54. 18th Street “require[s] active participation”55 by the participants and viewers to complete the work. Mendoza engaged with all members of the community to show their creativity

53 Gallery 37 is a Chicago art organization aiding disadvantaged youth with their artistic careers; Gallery18 is a satellite program of this group.
and pride in their heritage. 18th Street showcases a Chicano youth that is ignored by the Chicago Public School system and art community. The extensive project uses muralism as an alternative to traditional Anglo-American education platforms. Like many artists in the community mural movement, Mendoza provided an outlet for disadvantaged youth to become visible to the hegemonic Anglo-community through the construction of a monumentally positive Chicano identity.

This extensive project is a collection of interrelated murals. The overall theme is an homage to Mexican history and a celebration of Pilsen’s cultural heritage. Each distinctive mural depicts different aspects of Mexican heritage through the frameworks of indigenismo Chicano, romantic nationalism and religious iconography. Recurring motifs in these frameworks include traditional and contemporary Mexican motifs, historical figures, national icons, Mexican revolution imagery and Pre-Columbian iconography. Pre-Columbian and Aztec iconography, or indigenismo Chicano (hereafter Chicano indigenism) is the primary visual mode of 18th Street. Chicano indigenism, or “the Chicano use of Meso-American iconography” is used to “(re) articulate the historical links between themselves and indigenous people[Sic]”

This sets-up “the values of Indian culture and civilization as an alternative to European values”

This method questions Chicano identity and engages in a critical debate on the status of the Chicano as both – and – neither Mexican and/or American. Chicano indigenism is also used to

56 indigenismo was a ‘movement toward sympathy with indigenous people’. and; “In the early seventies, many Chicano artists became involved with the American Indian Movement. In San Diego, some even travelled to the Hop Reservation and began designing alliances with their ‘red brothers,’ who became their pre-Hispanic avatars. These alliances included both an agenda for political unity and self-determination and a quest to revive and maintain pre-Hispanic art forms”. indigenismo Chicano was established, and related to resurrection of pre-Hispanic culture, and “had been a useful step to structure the cultural self”. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “A New Artistic Continent” in ed. Arlene Raven. Art in the Public Interest. (Boston: Da Cappo Press, 1993). pp. 109-110

57 Curtis Maréz, p. 126

correct what Chicanos identify as the American foundational myths of the Western Frontier/Manifest Destiny and that the United States is a nation of immigrants. Aztlán corrects these myths through acknowledging that the Southwest was legally part of Mexico. Aztlán is an integral component of Chicano identity. Juan Armando Epple explains the significance, “the creation of Aztlán is a symbolic ceremony of self-representation in which the myth appears as integrating and mobilizing force, an awakening of group consciousness”.

Creating a lineage to an indigenous culture gives Chicanos, who previously had no homeland, a value system and heritage. Extensive use of Pre-Columbian, Aztec motifs and national icons are used to educate and impact identity as well as mobilize Chicanos in Pilsen.

An outstanding Pre-Columbian feature is the colorful Aztec calendar. Attributed to Mendoza (figure 1B) are the two sizeable Aztec calendars. The two calendars are the xiuhpohualli (to the right) and the tonalpohualli (to the left). I will only be discussing the latter (figure 18). Stylistically, Mendoza uses “brilliant Chicano color” and boldly outlined geometric shapes. He artistically interprets and romanticizes Aztec forms. The Aztec calendar has a rich history and powerful implications in Mexican culture. Manuel Aguilar-Moreno notes that, “the Aztec devised a 260-day calendar that was used not only to organize time but to define space, identify important days, and guide daily existence”.

The central calendar element is the Aztec symbol of Ometeotl, the dual god Ometeuctli/Omecihuatl. According to ancient mythology, “Ometeotl – the dual divinity,
or Lord of Duality was the Aztec creator god and engendered both male and female qualities. The iconography of duality and regeneration is clear. In Aztec culture “the principle of duality, of joining oppositional forces together in a cohesive whole, permeated Aztec spirituality and society both of which were interconnected.” The duality of spirituality and society pervades contemporary Mexican culture, which claims ancestral lineage to the Aztecs. Chicanos have dual cultural and national allegiance to Mexico and the United States, which exemplifies the Inside-Out position mentioned earlier. Charles Ramirez Berg explains that Chicanos are “caught between two cultural worlds” and find themselves “navigating between cultures as a necessary life skill.”

Another major Pre-Columbian element in the project is the staircase. Each riser is decorated with a band of Aztec-esque motifs or is a component of a larger pictorial statement picture. The banded risers contain idiomatic Mexican imagery, including corn, snakes, cacti, and hawks (figure 1C-1F). Some images are copied from actual Aztec pictograms (figure 19) while most are artistic interpretations of them. The right side of the staircase displays a large Aztec pyramid, which may correspond to the Aztec pyramid complex at Teotihuacan; see the Pyramid of the Sun (figure 20). While Chicano Indigenism is the primary visual mode, romantic nationalism imagery is also prevalent. Motifs include revolutionary images, historical figures, national icons and rural scenes.

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62 Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, p. 138
63 Aztec mythology dictates “The Aztec began as a tribe of people known as the Mexica or Mexitin, their name derived from their Lord Mexi. They left their Chicomoztoc (the Seven Caves) located in the mythical land of Aztlan in 193 C.F. in search of their promise land” Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, p. 141. The Aztecs, or Mexica, lived in the Mexican region from the 12th century through 16th century A.D.
64 Charles Ramirez Berg, p. 70
65 In every Pre-Columbian culture, there are specific myths dealing with discovery of maize.
66 The pyramid complex was build around 200 A.D. and was later utilized as an Aztec capital, which was central to the Aztec culture.
Contemporary romantic nationalism idealizes the political ideology which embodied the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Politically, romantic nationalism is a system which derives its legitimacy from the people. Visually, Chicanos depict romanticized political and social imagery from the Mexican Revolution to rally contemporary viewers. Consequently, these “expressions of nostalgia are not always retreats into mythic time, but can instead serve to remobilize the past as a motivating force for action in the future”\(^6\). This is the case for murals with historical scenes, practices and national icons. For example, smaller murals depict caricatures from *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) “an annual cemetery ritual in rural Mexican communities”\(^6\). While in Mexico this practice declined due to urbanization and commercialization, “since the early 1970’s *Dia de Los Muertos* ceremonies have been celebrated increasingly in the Chicano barrios of large cities, sometimes with processions. Home altars associated with the *Dia de Los Muertos* were revived by Chicanos for gallery displays, using folk crafts and traditional formats but also introducing contemporary variations”\(^6\). *Dia de Los Muertos* imagery consists primarily of skeletons. modern version of *Dia de Los Muertos* mythology *calaveras. Calaveras* are mischievous skeletons, are a modern version of *Dia de Los Muertos* mythology that Chicanos and Latinos embrace is used in contemporary Chicano fine art. An example in contemporary art is John Jota Leaños and Artemio Rodríguez, *El Muertorider*, 2012 (figure 21)\(^7\).

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\(^6\) Curtis Marèz, p. 125  
\(^6\) Shifra M. Goldman p. 170 for more information see Nestor Garcia Canclini, “¿Fiestas populares o espectaculos para turistas?” in *Pural*, No. 116 (March 1982).  
\(^6\) Shifra M. Goldman, p. 170  
A smaller mural (figure 1G) by an anonymous artist copies *La Calavera Catrina* (figure 22), Jose Guadalupe Posada’s “famous calavera of a society belle”\(^{71}\). Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852-1912) worked in Mexico City 1888-1912 producing broadsheets for magazines with publisher Antonio Vanegas Arroyo\(^{72}\). *Calaveras* were initially created and developed by Jose Guadalupe Posada and Vanegas Arroyo as a tribute to *Dia de los Muertos*. However, Posada’s *Calaveras* took on a political meaning. Posada had a profound impact on the formation of a national identity. His *calaveras* “have become metaphors for his homeland: they are to Mexico what Uncle Sam is to the United States”\(^{73}\). The macabre skeleton engravings “embodied Mexico’s renaissance and his perception of the country as independent of Europe and in his desire to establish a national art with indigenous motifs and symbols”. Posada’s lithographs and “his political cartoons express concepts and themes later expounded in Mexican Murals”\(^{74}\). According to Jose Clemente Orozco, as a child he “used to stop for a few minutes on my way to school to gaze at the engraver”\(^{75}\). And Diego Rivera replicated *Calavera Catrina* “in his mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park*”\(^{76}\) (figure 8) in California. This contemporary interpretation of *La Calaveras Catrina* is an “attempt to codify the memory of post-revolutionary Mexico”\(^{77}\). It uses “the Mexican Revolution as a metaphor for… contemporaneous struggles”\(^{78}\) – Chicanos’ experience in Chicago and the United States. Located on the south side of Chicago, Pilsen is financially depressed. The neighborhood

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\(^{71}\) Ilan Stavans, p. 65


\(^{73}\) Ilan Stavans, p. 61-62

\(^{74}\) Ilan Stavans, p. 65


\(^{77}\) Warren, Boris, p. 90

\(^{78}\) Guisela Latorre, p. 9; full quote describes how nineteen sixties Chicano scholars viewed the Mexican Revolution. Contemporary Chicano muralists use this same technique.
receives little city funding, has a depressed housing market, poor educational standards and limited access to programs. The pink line\textsuperscript{79} el train route is reflective of this financial discrimination. Pink line stations are markedly under-maintained in comparison to CTA lines servicing wealthier communities such as the brown and purple line\textsuperscript{80}.

Several murals depict rural scenes. These images serve to recreate “a former sense of community” and implies “nostalgia for a lost period”\textsuperscript{81}. Rural scenes romanticize Mexican folk practices. Examples include bullfighters, traditional Mexican singers and dancers (figures 1I, 1J).

Other 18\textsuperscript{th} Street murals depict Chicano identity and experience through the use of religious imagery. Located in a niche on the el platform there is a triptych (figure 1H) of Temple Hill in the Tepeyac desert, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Christ’s resurrection above two murals with Pre-Columbian motifs. The religious imagery indicates the importance of religion to Mexicans and highlights the distinctiveness of Mexican Catholicism\textsuperscript{82}. Ethnographer Mary E. Odem explains the difference between American/Anglo Catholics and Mexican Catholics. Mexican Catholicism is characterized by “the intense devotions to local, regional and national patron saints; the processions, celebrations and other forms of religious expression that take place outside of the church in the streets and neighborhoods”\textsuperscript{83}. Further, Mexican Catholicism is a blend of ancient Aztec mythology and Western religious philosophy. For example, Our Lady of

\textsuperscript{79} Chicago Transit Authority elevated train lines organized by colors that designate the neighborhoods they serve. The pink line runs from 54\textsuperscript{th}/Cermak (Cicero and Berwyn) to the loop.
\textsuperscript{80} In addition the Red, Brown and Purple lines receive more Arts-In-Transit funding.
\textsuperscript{83} Mary E. Odem, p. 37
Guadalupe visually combines Aztec and Western religious iconography. Also known as the patron saint of Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Roman Catholic icon of the Virgin Mary “fused [with] attributes of the Aztec fertility goddess Tonantzin”\textsuperscript{84}. The combination of Mexican Catholic iconography and Aztec symbols graphically expresses the Chicano spiritual duality. The anonymous artists used the distinctive architecture of the el station to define the panels of the triptych. Throughout 18\textsuperscript{th} Street, artists integrate the architecture of the CTA el stop into compositional structure of the mural. On the platform, the el paneling is used to frame pictorial narratives. Through literally incorporating the iconic Chicago architectural feature into the mural, it ties Chicano visual identity to the city of Chicago. Between the site-specificity and Chicano theme, the project declares that Chicanos are simultaneously American and Mexican.

18\textsuperscript{th} Street primarily functions “as [a] platform for alternative educational experiences”\textsuperscript{85}, but the project also provides a platform for emerging Chicano artists to showcase their work outside of Chicago’s gallery system. In addition, the project is intended as an alternative to gentrification and modernization. Since the mural is an el stop, the location is highly visible to all of Chicago residents who ride the el and is the first part of Pilsen many visitors encounter. 18\textsuperscript{th} Street details artist-directed youth murals. This type of mural is prevalent in Pilsen and Chicago. The second archetypal mural type represents personal self-funded murals and street art.

Chicanos question identity through art. As a result private or personal artistic expressions are often introspective. This is the case in Hector Duarte’s *Gulliver in*


Wonderland, 1900 Cullerton Avenue, Chicago, 2005 (figures 2A). Duarte is a professional artist and his home/studio is covered in this famous, self-funded mural. The mural tells the story of a Mexican immigrant through Jonathan Swift’s allegory of Gulliver’s Travels. *Gulliver in Wonderland* is bi-cultural and bi-conceptual. It depicts Chicano identity with an obvious “social realist political direction”\(^86\). Hector Duarte is a Mexican-born artist who immigrated to Chicago in 1985. After apprenticing at David Siqueiros’ workshop in Cuernavaca in 1977\(^87\), Duarte “assisted in the creation of 50 murals”\(^88\) in Mexico and the United States. While known for his murals and mosaics, Duarte is also a renowned painter and printmaker\(^89\). He constantly experiments with new techniques and his work continually evolves.

Duarte’s style is expressionistic and frenetic. Bold black lines outline broad areas of mosaic-like patches of brilliant color. Despite the defined graphic forms, the thick sweeping brushstrokes are fluid and create an energized surface. Duarte typically uses acrylic or tempera paint, but has used oils as well. Some of his murals are painted on canvases, while most – including his home and studio – are painted directly onto a dry surface. For every project he begins with small sketches of a proposed mural, painting, or mosaic and later fully develops the concept\(^90\). Significantly, music plays an important role in Duarte’s artistic process. He listens to all different types of music while working on projects; and credits the energized quality of his painting style to music. Duarte’s “large-scale Chicago murals employ the traditional compositional methods of the

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\(^{87}\) Gude, Huebner, p. 224

\(^{88}\) Personal Interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\(^{th}\) 2012

\(^{89}\) Duarte continues to develop new printing techniques and founded Taller Mesitzarte (print workshops), one in Pilsen, Chicago and one in Michoachon, Mexico; Personal Interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\(^{th}\) 2012

\(^{90}\) Personal Interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\(^{th}\) 2012
Mexican Master [David Alfaro Siqueiros] as well as symbols recognizable to the large Latino community in order to address contemporary concerns of Latino life in the United States. By visually quoting Siqueiros through the use of dramatic foreshortening and polyangular perspective, Duarte connects his work to the great master, and becomes a contemporary extension of that legacy.

Duarte considers himself a global citizen and works with Mexican and American philosophies, concepts and symbols to create a contemporary conception of what citizenship, nationality and identity mean in the twenty-first century. Duarte strongly believes in a bi-cultural Chicano identity. Gulliver in Wonderland exemplifies the Chicano experience; it exudes a feeling of living-on-the-edge and a border existence. Its content is evocative of Charles Ramírez Bergs’ concept; “Mexican Americans resisting is one of the fundamental components of U.S. dominant ideology: the cultural homogenization demanded by assimilation”. Through syncretic use of Mexican and American symbols, Duarte adeptly “juxtaposed that [Mexican] heritage with their [Mexicans/Chicano’s] current U.S. existence”. The most identifiable feature is the gigantic migrant worker entangled in barbed wire. The worker is floating in a red psychological space, that Duarte terms fronteria. For Duarte, the fronteria is both a physical and metaphorical borderland experienced by the Mexican immigrant and Chicano. The migrant worker is a Mexican immigrant, who has crossed the border into the United States. He is the quintessential embodiment of the living-on-the-edge concept.

91 Warren, Boris, p. 91
93 Charles Ramírez Berg, p. 76
94 Charles Ramírez Berg, p. 76
95 Red symbolizes blood as a life force or spirit; Personal Interview with Hector Duarte, June 19th 2012.
Duarte is commenting on “the social dilemmas of migrant workers”\textsuperscript{96}. The figure retains his ethnic Mexican heritage while adopting and engaging with American objects. The stark white mask covering the upper portion of his face (figure 2B) is a \textit{Dia de los Muertos} mask\textsuperscript{97}. As previously discussed, \textit{Dia de los Muertos} is a ceremony that connects the living generations to their deceased relatives. It signifies the importance of family and oral history. Aside from alluding to this history, the mask is a critical statement on the realities of immigration, primarily the mortal dangers of traveling through Mexico and crossing the border\textsuperscript{98}. In addition to the mask, the migrant worker is also wearing an emblematic American baseball cap. The baseball cap signifies American life and “how different it is here”\textsuperscript{99}. Duarte uses place identifiers to represent Mexico and the United States. See for example the cornfield around the base of the mural. Corn was essential to development and sustainability of the Maya and Aztec cultures and is a popular Mexican motif. The cornfield motif graphically links present day Pilsen to both Mexico and the ancient Aztecs through rural attachment. However, to an American audience, corn and cornfields are iconic of midwestern roots and are prolific leitmotifs in American folk art. Corn iconography is bi-conceptual and creates commonalties between allegedly antagonistic cultures. Place identity is further depicted in the small midwestern-style house. The house not only signifies the midwestern but also represents the American dream. The framework of the midwestern-style house is incorporated into the structure of Duarte’s actual home. This visual device unites concepts of the American

\textsuperscript{96} Juan Armando Epple, p. 340
\textsuperscript{97} Human skull masks are made for use in the Day of the Dead festival, November 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd}. Most commonly practiced in Mexico, the Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos is a ceremony rooted in Aztec belief to respect deceased relatives. Further reading Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer. \textit{The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico}. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992)
\textsuperscript{98} Personal interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\textsuperscript{th} 2012
\textsuperscript{99} Personal interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\textsuperscript{th} 2012
dream to Duarte’s personal goals as well as collectively to Pilsen residents; and adds an additional dimension of site-specificity.

Chicago place identifiers include a barbed wire motif and the use of empty space. Barbed wire and chain-link fences are distinctly urban features prevalent in Chicago. They divide property lines and neighborhoods. For Duarte the barbed wire “represents division or war, a fence between properties”100. It critiques residential exclusion in Pilsen and the ‘border wall’ between the United States and Mexico. Metaphorically, the barbed wire keeps the immigrant from entering American society and Chicanos from assimilating. Since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, “Chicanos have had to arrange their lives, their thoughts, and their language by negotiating the legal boundary line between Mexico and the United States”101; Duarte’s barbed wire reflects the legal U.S./Mexico border and a metaphorical internal borderline. Chicanos are caught between two cultures and must navigate an internal borderline. Chicanos live “layered lives made up of overlapping parts of two adjacent nations, two languages, two cultural traditions, two sides of a common frontier, a shared geography, and an interwoven history”102. Another pictorial device used in the mural is the implied empty space, or fronteria. It represents empty spaces in Chicago where the homeless live, as well as a spiritual borderland. The migrant worker is suspended in the fronteria, caught between two philosophical and religious worlds. It simultaneously speaks to new immigrants and Chicanos. Duarte stresses that new immigrants should embrace and learn American culture and Chicanos should accept their heritage while assimilating. This reflects a

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100 Personal interview with Hector Duarte, June 19th 2012.
102 Charles Ramirez Berg, p. 195
recent trend in which assimilation for Chicanos “is no longer represented as the complete
disconnection from the cultural homeland, but disclosed as much more complex,
intertwining of traditions that indeed enables resolution of often hostile experiences in the
United States”\textsuperscript{103}. Duarte depicts this in the migrant figure through the allegory of
Gulliver’s Travels

As mentioned earlier, \textit{Gulliver in Wonderland} has a literary connection to
Gulliver’s Travels. According to Duarte, Gulliver’s journey not only mirrors his own
personal story, but also the larger narrative of the Mexican migrant worker. Gulliver
experiences two worlds, one as giant the other as miniature. As Duarte explains “We can
help him or we can keep him down, for me he is in an empty space in the city, he can see
the Chicago skyline, he is between the borders – the frontiers – the wall is the frontier
where he is, if no one helps him he feels small and insignificant. But when someone helps
him he feels likes a giant”\textsuperscript{104}, poignantly echoing what a Mexican immigrant coming to
the United States feels and the struggles Chicanos face in Pilsen.

The final mural element is a large footprint on the side of the garage (figure 2C).
Duarte interprets the immigrant’s footprint pattern as a barcode. The barcode motif
indicts the use of undocumented workers as cheap labor, which turns Mexicans into a
quantifiable commodity. Additionally it is meant to address the “question of
undocumented workers” in which “the flow is unregulated and, in times of depression or
recession, the workers are scapegoat in the media to divert unemployed U.S. workers
from recognizing the source of their own misery”\textsuperscript{105}. Alternatively, the barcode also
comments on the function of murals’ contemporary art market. It engages with ideas of

\textsuperscript{103} Yolanda C. Padilla, p. ix
\textsuperscript{104} Personal interview with Hector Duarte, June 19th 2012.
\textsuperscript{94} Shifra M. Goldman, 172
what art should/can be in the twenty-first century. Duarte makes the statement that art as commodity is inaccessible to the majority of people – and muralism continues to be a viable alternative.

Duarte’s primary audience is the Chicano youth in Pilsen. Like Mendoza’s 18th Street, Gulliver in Wonderland serves as an alternative educational platform. Duarte passionately “uses art to teach in new ways” and emphasizes that “you can learn about another culture but not forget your own”\textsuperscript{106}. Gulliver in Wonderland is a cultural warning, meant to “educate our culture to the new generation born here - they don’t know anything about their background”. In addition, Duarte addresses the romantic myth that the United States is a ‘nation of the immigrants’. He reminds Chicanos of their link to indigenous cultures and that the Americas were colonized by Europeans. Furthermore he reminds them that Mexicans and Chicanos have a long history in Chicago. Gulliver in Wonderland is an homage “to all the migrant people who built Chicago, the heart of Chicago are the neighborhoods”\textsuperscript{107}, addressing the myth that the United States nation of immigrants. Duarte aims to educate and activate the newest generation’s children of all ethnicities. “The mission for the new generation is to create a new world – or we won’t go far”\textsuperscript{108}. Increasingly, the need for multi-cultural collaboration and tolerance is seen in art. Evidenced by non-Hispanic artists taking on Chicano themes.

Jeff Zimmerman, an Anglo-American muralist, has created dozens of murals in the Chicago area and several in Pilsen. Like Mendoza and Duarte, Zimmerman engages with Chicano experience and graphically depicts Chicano identity. But rather than drawing from personal experience, he paints as a visual reporter. His mural, Increíbles

\textsuperscript{106} Personal interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\textsuperscript{th} 2012.
\textsuperscript{107} Interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\textsuperscript{th} 2012
\textsuperscript{108} Interview with Hector Duarte, June 19\textsuperscript{th} 2012
Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001 (figure 3A), is an urban triptych on the side of a Pilsen apartment building. Zimmerman began his career as a graphic designer, but turned to studio art and muralism in the late 1990’s. According to Zimmerman, one day “he was teaching Pilsen kids how to make popsicle-stick sculptures when a neighborhood priest asked him to paint Our Lady Guadalupe on a building at 19th and Ashland”\textsuperscript{10}. He recounts, “The priest said, ‘You’re an artist right? You know how to paint a mural, right?’ And I said ‘Yeah’… ‘But none of it was true’”\textsuperscript{11}. Without delay he enrolled in a mural painting course at Columbia College, kick-starting the Chicago native’s artistic career. For all of his murals, Zimmerman uses portraits of neighborhood residents. Before taking on a project, he canvases prospective neighborhoods and takes pictures of passer-bys. According to Zimmerman, he wants the portraits “to be someone who reflects the area where the work is located”\textsuperscript{12}. As a result he “find[s] these neighborhood eccentrics most people try to steer clear from…But when they’re up on the wall, you have to look them in the eye. You can’t ignore them anymore”\textsuperscript{13}. Normally, Zimmerman uses acrylic paints, scaffolding and a projection system to transfer images onto the walls. He used all these techniques for Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven, 1996/2001. Informed by his graphic design sensibilities, his trademark style mixes pops of color with interwoven text, graphic

\textsuperscript{10} The first mural closest to the street was painted and commissioned in 1996, the second two were painted and commissioned in 2001
\textsuperscript{12} Mark Konkol, p. 2
\textsuperscript{13} Rod O’Connor, “Appearing on a mural by Jeff Zimmerman can change your life, just a little”, Chicago Tribune, January 16, 2005.
elements and photorealist portraits “that capture a neighborhoods spirit”\textsuperscript{114}. *Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven* is a triptych in which each wall – or panel – is distinctive, but interrelated through color and narrative. The large-scale project is multifaceted and can be analyzed individually or collectively as chapters of a larger narrative\textsuperscript{115}. Some interpretations include stages of immigration, stages of assimilation, or it may simply be seen as three walls of Pilsen residents organized economically, generationally, or not at all.

From right to left, the first wall closest to the street (figure 3B), was commissioned in 1996 by the priest of St. Pius V Church\textsuperscript{116}. The mural combines Our Lady of Guadalupe, a man behind a chain-link fence, a group of migrants against a blue landscape with yellow text “*Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven*”. It is important to note that this mural was painted five years prior to the other two. Therefore, I will analyze it as a single mural before discussing its relation to the other two walls. Along the bottom of this first panel is a small procession led by a male figure followed by two women and children. This pattern may mirror the immigration pattern of Mexicans to the United States, in which the man of the household crosses the border first and is then followed by his family. The monochromatic portrait of a man behind the chain-link fence on the upper portion is a resident of Pilsen. The chain-link fence represents the same physical and social division as the barbed wire in Duarte’s *Gulliver in Wonderland*. Between the aforementioned pictorial elements is the phrase “*Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven*” which nearly translates to ‘Oh, the things you’ll see’ or ‘Amazing the things you’ll see’.

\textsuperscript{114} Cecilia Wong, “Beyond 18\textsuperscript{th} Street: Notable Spots off Pilsen’s beaten path”, *Time Out Chicago*, February 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2009.

\textsuperscript{115} I am analyzing the murals under the assumption that three murals are read as a narrative from left to right. However, the mural can be read in right to left, as three unrelated murals, or as a traditional triptych.

\textsuperscript{116} This is Jeff Zimmerman’s first mural. As this was his first mural, it is unclear whether all of the portraits are actual Pilsen residents.
The phrase describes the dangers of crossing the border, as well as the adversities and triumphs experienced once in the United States. The largest element is Our Lady of Guadalupe. Our Lady of Guadalupe visually and conceptually organizes the pictorial narrative. Her presence speaks to the importance in, and reliance on, faith when crossing the border and overcoming obstacles in the United States. The iconography of Our Lady Guadalupe is clear, and provides the same didactic function as in previously discussed murals. In this context, it grounds the mural to the corner of South Ashland Avenue and 19th Street. Located directly across the street is St. Pius V Church, a critical community center that aids immigrants and Pilsen residents and is the organization that commissioned the mural. This connection makes Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven into the visual narrative of Pilsen itself, as opposed to a national chronicle of immigration. In relation to the other two walls, this mural may also be read as the first chapter of Pilsen immigration, the first generation, or a narrative of the border crossing.

The second wall (figure 3C) may be seen as the second chapter of the project, the next step towards assimilation or first/second generation in the United States. Zimmerman illustrates the Pilsen residents he photographed prior to completing the project much like WPA artists who used ordinary people “as emblems of core cultural values”117. Their images are not meant to tell personal stories, but rather become a collaborative narrative of the neighborhood as a whole – they become icons of Pilsen and represent Chicano values and a cohesive community identity. The figures are clustered against broad planes of flat color or design, which push the portraits to the forefront of the pictorial plane. None of the singular figures or vignettes interact with each other.

They are disproportionate to each other and only one figure gazes directly out to the street. Among the portraits, from top to bottom and left to right, are two workers in green aprons and caps, a young man in a blue work shirt, an older man in a cowboy hat pushing a cart\footnote{Food carts are a common small business in Pilsen, especially ice cream and corn carts. This is presumably an ice cream cart - which is a symbol of self-employment and financial freedom. Hector Duarte has also used this imagery, as representative of Pilsen.}, a construction worker, and two commercial painters in green hats and shirts. On the very bottom against a stark black and white paisley pattern stands Marcos Raya (figure 23), a large full-figured bald man, bordered by a translucent sienna shadow, and three small men in contemporary clothing. All of the figures are blue-collar Pilsen residents. Some are Mexican, other are Chicano. All are symbolic of hard work, financial freedom and community pride. While the portraits are meant to be symbolic, the close-knit community inevitably knows or interacts with the people immortalized in the mural.

Ana Maria Diaz is one of the women in a green apron and paper cap; Zimmerman approached her at a soup kitchen where she volunteered. Diaz describes her thoughts on being part of the project:

“\textit{My friends say: ‘You must be important. You must be famous.’ For me, it’s beautiful and very spiritual. It represents hard work. When I first got here, my English was not so good. The mural says to me, ‘You can do it.’ it picks me up. And the community gets a nice piece of art.”}\footnote{Ana Maria Diaz quoted. in Rachael Turski, “The Heart and Soul of Pilsen: An Artist Stands up for Hard-working Latinos”, \textit{Chicago Talks}, December, 30, 2010 http://www.chicagotalks.org/2010/12/30/the-heart-and-soul-of-pilsen-an-artist-stands-up-for-hard-working-latinos/. August 10, 2012.}

Diaz identifies the core cultural values of Pilsen as hard work, family values and spirituality. Diaz touches on several important concepts – neighborhood beautification as an alternative to gentrification and the agency it provides, not only for those involved directly, but the viewers as well. Depicting community figures is intensely personal, and
makes portraits symbols of general identity. While all the figures are ethnically Mexican or Chicana/o, they are nationally both Mexican and American, and specifically Chicagoan. By using images of people from the community, the mural is inevitably linked to Chicago.

To end the narrative, the last wall (figure 3D) depicts a Chicano middle-class. Organized in three horizontal registers are national icons, graduates and successful professionals. The top row depicts a series of political figureheads, including Oscar Romero, Cesar Chavez, and Robert F. Kennedy. Ultimately these Civil Rights and Chicano Movement figures become a metaphor for the twenty-first century struggles of the Chicano. Their busts, painted in blue tones, are resting on clouds over-looking the bottom section of the mural. Beneath the political busts are two graduates and a doctor. Large planes of color create the background of the second horizontal register and push the figures to the forefront. One of the graduates, the girl in the white cap and gown is Karla Rivera. She remarks:

“I imagined only famous people or heroes [in murals]. But every time I look at it, I think maybe a younger person might be inspired...especially kids coming here from Mexico. I want to show my grandkids someday: ‘Here’s what I was like at 18’...”

The implied message is a rallying point for education among Mexicans and Chicanos. The bottom row contains three working professionals from the community interwoven with orange, yellow and teal geometric shapes. The most active figure is a Chicano teacher who looks down at the community and points with chalk in-hand to the phrase.

“*Si, se puede,*” which roughly translates to “Yes, it is possible” or “Yes, it can be done”. Significantly, “¡*Si, se puede!*” was coined by Cesar [Chavez] and…, Dolores Huerta when he was fasting for 25 days in Phoenix, Arizona in 1972. Since then it has become a rallying cry for both farm workers and millions of Latino Activists121. Today, the phrase is a positive affirmation of non-violent civil rights protests for equal rights in the Latino community. The positive message advocates non-violent protests and new avenues to challenge racism, discrimination and gentrification.

Overall, *Increíbles Las Cosas Que Se Ven* is political with a clear social agenda. Zimmerman maintains that the didacticism and meaning is derived from the community itself and the viewers. Pilsen High school student Jasmine Perez comments, “the murals represent how our faith and our artistic side mix with each other…it represents family and faith. A lot of people in our culture express their feelings and emotions through art”122. The mural is woven into the fabric of the Pilsen neighborhood, graphically depicting the Chicano identity and experience.

Francisco Mendoza and Gallery 37, *18th Street*, 1710 West 18th Street, Chicago, 1998 uses Chicano indigenism, romantic nationalism and religious imagery to create a graphic Chicano identity through connecting Chicanos to indigenous cultures. Hector Duarte’s *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton Avenue, Chicago, 2005, makes a political statement relating to twenty-first century discourse and Chicano experience. And Jeff Zimmerman’s *Increíbles Las Cosas Q’ Se Ven*123, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street, Chicago, 1996/2001 uses photo-realist portraits of Pilsen residents as

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123 Translates as “Oh the things you’ll see” or “Unbelievable the things you see”
symbolic of a cohesive Chicano identity. They serve as substitute educational platforms, alternatives to gentrification and graphically mirror the Chicano identity and experience in Pilsen as well as the United States. All of the murals engage with concepts of race and land through Ethnic/National and Place Identity. Mexican and American iconography and philosophy create a critical mestizaje Chicano identity and reflect experience. This visual manifestation provides agency for the Pilsen neighborhood. The murals “produce an art of place, where location is central to the representation of the self in many individual and collective guises”124. In the tradition of muralism, Pilsen murals build social and political unity among Chicanos in Chicago. Pilsen murals are built on a long history of Western and Mexican muralist traditions. Chicano murals carry on the traditions and Chicano discourse of the 1950’s and 1960’s. In Chicago and nationwide, Chicano public art projects continue to be catalysts for action, counter-hegemonic statements, and a symbolic Chicano/a community.

124 Ramón García qtd. in Guisela Latorre, p. 14
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1A-J: Francisco Mendoza and Gallery 37, 18th Street, 1710 West 18th Street, Chicago 1998

Figure 1A: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; view from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station platform facing West

Figure 1B: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Archival Chicago Transit Authority photo of Francisco Mendoza painting
Figure 1C: Francisco Mendoza, *18th Street*, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; View of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance

Figure 1D: Francisco Mendoza, *18th Street*, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance
Figure 1E: Francisco Mendoza, *18th Street*, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance

Figure 1F: Francisco Mendoza, *18th Street*, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of staircase from Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station entrance
Figure 1G: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of panel depicting Calaveras Catrina on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level

Figure 1H: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of panel of religious triptych on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level
Figure 1I: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of panel with Mexican/Spanish bull-fighters on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level

Figure 1J: Francisco Mendoza, 18th Street, 1710 18th Street, Chicago IL, 1998; Detail of Panel with male musicians and female singers on Chicago Transit Authority elevated train station upper level
Figures 2A – 2D: Hector Duarte, *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL, 2005

Figure 2A: Hector Duarte, *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; View from Cullerton Avenue

![Figure 2A](image)

Figure 2B: Hector Duarte, *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; View of migrant worker, right side of the house, from Wolcott Avenue

![Figure 2B](image)
Figure 2C: Hector Duarte, *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; Detail of hand

Figure 2D: Hector Duarte, *Gulliver in Wonderland*, 1900 West Cullerton, Chicago, IL 2005; Detail of footprint

Figure 3A: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increíbles Las Cosas Q' Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; View from corner Ashland Avenue

Figure 3B: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increíbles Las Cosas Q' Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; Wall closest to street completed 1996
Figure 3C: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increibles Las Cosas Q' Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; Central wall, completed 2001

Figure 3D: Jeff Zimmerman, *Increibles Las Cosas Q' Se Ven*, South Ashland Avenue and West 19th Street Chicago, 1996/2001; Wall farthest from Ashland Avenue, completed 2001
Figure 4: Figure of Woodcutters; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969)

Figure 5 and 6: Figure of interior mural; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969)
Figure 7: Exterior mural; from Antonio Rodriguez *History of Mexican Mural Painting.* (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1969)

Figure 8: Diego Rivera *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Almada Park,* Mexico City 1947-1948

Figure 9: Jose Clemente Orozco, *The Epic of American Civilization,* Dartmouth College 1932-1934
Figure 10: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *The Torment of Cuauhtémoc*, Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City, Mexico, 1950

Figure 11: Ralph Christian Henricksen, *Americanization of Immigrants*, West Pullman Street, 1940, Mary Lackritz-Gray p. 192-193
Figure 12: Florian Durzynski, *American Youth*, Daniel S. Wentworth School, fourth floor, 6950 South Sagamon Street, 1937. Mary Lackritz-Gray p. 169

Figure 13: unsigned, attributed to Gustaf Oscar Dalstrom, *History of Transportation*, 445 North Cityfront Plaza Drive, Suite 360, 1937. Mary Lackritz-Gray p. 50-51

Figure 14: Edward Millman, *Women's contribution to American Progress*, Lucy Flower High School, 1940. Mary Lackritz-Gray p. 120-121
Figure 15: Organization for Black American Culture, *Wall of Respect*, 43rd street and Langley Avenue, 1968-69

![Image of the Wall of Respect](image1)

Figure 16: John Pitman Weber and Jose Guerrero, *Solidarity Murals*, United Electrical Workers Hall, 37 South Ashland Avenue, 1974. Mary Lackrtiz-Gray p 127

![Image of the Solidarity Murals](image2)
Figure 17: Mario Castillo, *Metafisica (Peace)*, Halsted Urban Progress Center, Halsted Street and Cullerton, 1968

Figure 18: Aztec Sun Stone, Aztec Calendar Stone, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, 15th century BCE

Figure 19: Aztec pictograms from Codex Magliabecchi; Digital image from University of Utah
Figure 20: Temple complex of Teotihuacan, pyramids of the sun and the moon. Pyramid of the Sun, 200 A.D.

Figure 21: John Jota Leaños and Artemio Rodriguez, *El Muertorider*, 2012
Figure 22: Jose Guadalupe Posada, *La Calaveras Catrina*, 1910, zinc etching

Figure 23: Marcos Raya, *Self Portrait with Friends and Models with Imaginary Machine*, 1999
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