In the summer of 1968, as the Democratic National Committee prepared to roll into Chicago, the city’s Museum of Contemporary Art was entering into an unusual partnership—an “experimental friendship”—with an organization called CVL, Inc. What’s remarkable about this organization was that it was the new incarnation of a notorious street gang known as the Vice Lords. The letters stood for “Conservative Vice Lords.” Called “Westside terrorists” by the Chicago Tribune, the Vice Lords—by their own description—had “ruled the streets” on the West Side.[1] “Cars were stocked with shotguns,” they wrote of their past exploits. “Young men were mauled in street battles, and many were arrested and sent to jail.”[2] How did such a friendship come to exist? The Vice Lords, like other street gangs in the city, had become interested in working on neighborhood problems in a constructive way; they had “gone conservative,” and reinvented themselves as the Conservative Vice Lords, opening several businesses and sponsoring youth programs. Meanwhile, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) was brand new, and its director, Jan van der Marck, was interested in how museums could make more of an impact in their communities—their entire communities. And so, ever so tentatively, this friendship formed, and produced an experimental art center called Art & Soul, at 3742 West Sixteenth Street in the neighborhood of North Lawndale on Chicago’s West Side.

What place can such a project have in the stories we tell of modern art of the 1960s? If the standard wisdom about that period is concerned, the answer is “not much.” To try a somewhat brutal exercise, let us take the table of contents of Art since 1900 as our guide to what’s considered important in the twentieth century by art history now—and try to imagine a place here for a story like this one. Looking at the chronological table of contents, we would think that African American artists were absent in the fifty years between 1943 and 1993, and that the one thing that happened in art in the entire twentieth century in Chicago is that László Moholy-Nagy died there.

A closer look reveals, as many reviewers have noted, that Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh could not or would not write about the Mexican mural movement or the Harlem Renaissance, so the publisher was forced to outsource those two entries.[3] The Black Arts Movement, perhaps the only postwar American art movement distinctly affiliated with anything resembling or calling itself a political vanguard, is entirely absent—undoubtedly because it is perceived (if perceived at all) as a premodernist rather than postmodernist formation. If some artists in Chicago (or elsewhere) were working in a different visual or political idiom than the New York avant-garde, it had to be—by the field’s still-current definitions—because they were behind. If those artists happened to be African American, the impression of belatedness chimes harmoniously, if unintentionally, with dominant white-supremacist narratives.[4] If they produced works that weren’t commercial, that haven’t survived (itself anything but happenstance), then there is, further, no financial and institutional compulsion backing them up. Whether the field has unconsciously accepted racist constructions or has rather shown its discomfort with them by looking the other way, art history has often failed to recognize the challenges black artists in the 1960s and 1970s directed not just at entrenched institutions but also at the presuppositions of the white avant-garde.[5] From this point of view, it was not just a matter of correcting biased aesthetic judgments and producing appropriate demographic representation. Rather, the critique addressed the central preoccupations with aesthetic autonomy and the avant-garde—preoccupations that, consciously or not, supported and supported (and support) a racist worldview. Art since 1900 is recognizably an extreme, but an extreme that forcefully shapes the landscape of what is possible to think and study about twentieth-century art. What kinds of questions could students whose engagement with the century starts with this book even begin to ask?

In 1950 Clement Greenberg wrote, in an essay on Paul Klee, that the School of Paris “opened our eyes to the virtues of oriental and barbaric art. It became possible to find valid art anywhere in history and geography.”[6] Leaving aside the term “barbaric” (coupled quaintly with “virtues”), Greenberg’s caveat to this point is notable: “In painting it was demanded of this exotic material only that it be controlled by the primary and still rather inflexible formal requirements of the easel picture, which remains always a most specifically Western and local art form.” Greenberg thus opens the 1950s with this admission of the ethnospecificity of the easel picture, an acknowledgement that is, to quote Charles Mills on the racial contract, “simultaneously quite obvious if you think about it … and nonobvious, since most whites don’t think about it.”[7]

Along with the Western easel picture, other basic suppositions within modernist art discourse are a
monocultural hierarchy of value and the ideology of an identifiable avant-garde: “advanced art,” a single vanguard thread that runs through (or perhaps alongside and stitching into) history. The avant-garde is reputed to be in rebellion against social conditions, yet is by now—indeed was by the 1960s—thoroughly the creature of consumer capitalism. These points may seem obvious, but they bear repeating, in a discipline that loves to critique modernist myths yet at the same time seems oddly addicted to them (or perhaps addicted to a market logic for which they provide cover).

I came to this work from two directions: one was the pedagogical imperative to see that my students, studying on the South Side of Chicago, became aware of the rich histories of the arts that exist in their neighborhood, often just outside the university walls. The other was the sense that contemporary practitioners of socially engaged art were missing out, because the histories of their practices have been occluded, on possibilities for solidarities and learning across race, history, and geography. A segregation of knowledge both mirrors and continually produces the persistent segregation of artist and activist communities. Writing on twentieth-century art remains overly dependent, perhaps because and not in spite of the premium it places on “aesthetic autonomy,” on art-market-based institutions. Let me pause here: the continued concern with autonomy, I am arguing, is a screen for a form of dependence. The study of twentieth-century art still seems tethered—or as I said earlier, addicted—to assumptions that are based in the dominant value judgments of the historical period it studies. Since the ideology of the avant-garde and aesthetic autonomy also often buttressed racial and gender hierarchies, they obscure the view of history and our perceptions of what research it might even be possible to undertake. From a phase-shifted point of view, the twentieth century might be seen as a century of reflection, consciously conducted by artists and critics, on the social commitments and responsibilities of art—not just as one of an ever-advancing line of superior competitive strategies.

A different example of the ways in which the boundaries of art are policed comes in a statement made by Claire Bishop about Tania Bruguera’s experimental art school in Havana, Arte de Conducata. Debating “the status of Arte de Conducata as a work of art,” Bishop writes, “My feeling is that everything will depend on how [Bruguera] documents five years of workshops—as a book, an exhibition, or through the students’ own work. As a live project it’s completely invigorating, but everything will depend on how [Bruguera] documents five years of workshops—as a book, an exhibition, or through the students’ own work. As a live project it’s completely invigorating, but...” Bishop seems here to be capitulating to external definitions rather than offering up her own—answering the question “Will this be understood as art?” rather than “Is this art?” But these (as Bishop is certainly aware) are two different questions. Indeed, the suggestion that they depend on the same process is somewhat unsettling. It implies that art becomes art—or becomes intelligible as art—only through its representation within specific institutions of art. I take Bishop’s remarks as symptomatic not of her own views but of a position in which she finds herself in dealing with Arte de Conducata. Following the logic of this position, either we must remit art in objects alone (ephemeral performance becomes art through its documentation in material objects) or imagine that the Cuban art students who are the primary actors and recipients of the project do not actually count as actors and recipients. If the latter is the case, the question is why: are they culturally, politically too far outside the institutions of the Euro-American art world? Or does a state that compels collectivity and collectivism frustrate the attempt to define a collective art project as a critical one? (In its own context, in other words, is education-as-art not enough of an intervention?) Perhaps it is Bishop’s response to the dawning suspicion that she has been othered—as a Euro-American critic, turned by the students into an object of slightly sad curiosity. Perhaps a more embracing way to think about the questions Bishop raises would be to suggest that if art is an intervention into a conversation, we need to have a sense of what that conversation is before evaluating the art. Art is a moment of newness, an event, but one that pushes back against something—whether we call that conversation, as I just did, or medium, institution, or frame. What Bishop reaches for and cannot find is the frame against which Arte de Conducata pushes, and her default is the world of Euro-American art institutions. The remark is an offhanded comment in an otherwise thoughtful body of writing. Yet in its very offhandedness it is symptomatic of more general assumptions and hints at a broader problem in the field: What is the ground against which as-yet-unimagined figures will define themselves? The institutions and discourses of modernist criticism and its postmodern aftermath have provided a convenient and often extremely productive ground for approaching a lot of twentieth-century art. But perhaps it is time to kick the habit.

Art & Soul was not entirely outside the mainstream art world. It was a point of intersection: between the new aspirations of late 1960s museums and forms of creativity born of the desperate conditions of an African American ghetto; between the young Black Arts Movement and older, established African American artists. At base it may have been just a fresh episode in the history of the periphery of mainstream art institutions. But it was a moment of optimism, coalition, and risk-taking that may have lessons for the future. Institutional politics sometimes produced conflicts; the approaches made by the various parties—the museum, the gang, the broader local community—were sometimes tense. Indeed, the risks taken by all sides were considerable. And though it has been largely forgotten, the project as a whole embodied many qualities now accepted not just as adjuncts to the creation of artworks but as

Art & Soul staff, November 1968, celebrate the opening of the space, in front of a wall of signatures. From left: Thurman Kelley, Daniel Hetherington, Ann Zelle, Jackie Hetherington, Jim Houlihan, and Peter Gilbert (photograph © Ann Zelle)
components of the work of art itself. Art & Soul and similar projects might indeed be seen as the precursors to more recent projects that go under the rubric of community art or collaboration or “new genre public art.” But it can be a struggle to see it in this light. It doesn’t fit the standard history of “contemporary” art for a few reasons. It wasn’t the project of a single famous artist or even a famous artist group. It doesn’t fit with the lingering critical notion of the avant-garde and the historicico-aesthetic preoccupations that attend it. Its politics were not revolutionary (though they were certainly risky, and that was part of their importance). It doesn’t sit comfortably with narratives of the history of identity politics. To account for stories like this one requires a more expansive notion of the history of the present than art history has yet shown willingness to undertake.[11]

The Experiment

Art & Soul served as a neighborhood art studio with classes for children, a library of books, freely available materials for artists, an artist residency, contests, readings, and exhibitions. Funding from the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission enabled two storefronts to be joined into a single space, their interiors painstakingly renovated, cleaned, and prepared, and the whole building painted and decorated inside and out. Ann Zelle, a young photographer from Springfield, Illinois, worked on the project with Lawndale artists—the brothers Jackie and Daniel Hetherington, and Peter Gilbert—along with a staffer from the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission, James Houlahan. Zelle kept copious notes and documented the project photographically. Children were involved from the beginning, painting the exterior walls as renovations began.

Lawndale was (and is) one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city, and the project sought to bridge the divide between the ghetto and downtown cultural institutions. It was not merely a white outpost; the Hetheringtons, who served as director and assistant director, were members of the CVL organization, and the advisory council included numerous black artists and community organizers. When Art & Soul opened on November 14, 1968, it was full of visitors. Robert Nolte wrote for the Chicago Tribune, “Two months ago, it was a dilapidated building, housing a hat cleaner on 16th Street. Today, it is the brightest spot on the block—Art & Soul, a library, gallery, light and music theater, and workshop for west side artists.”[12] Two vacant storefronts (one had been, as Nolte writes, a hat cleaner’s; the other a defunct burglar alarm company) had been painstakingly converted into a single space for youth programming, artist residencies, and exhibitions.

The Vice Lords, created as a coalition of several gangs in 1958 by young men incarcerated in the St. Charles Youth Prison, reinvented themselves in the mid-1960s as the Conservative Vice Lords. A turning point came one night when the older gang members were approached by a younger member: “He told us he wanted to take about fifty fellows later that night to make a fall. We asked him why and who he wanted to fall on; had anyone misused him. His reply was we the older lords including the fellows who are in jail had made a name and they wanted to keep it alive.”[13] Alarmed at their part in creating an image of violence that had become self-perpetuating—perhaps also anxious to shore up control—the older members decided to form CVL, Inc. They formed a relationship with David Dawley, who had come to Chicago as a Transcentury Corporation staffer to do a study on ghetto residents’ attitudes toward the provision of social services.[14] With his Dartmouth training and his personal contacts, Dawley helped the CVL members make contact with businesses and foundations. As spokesman Bobby Gore puts it, the Vice Lords “poured [their] hearts out to them.”[15] With Dawley’s help, the CVL submitted successful grant proposals to foundations, and these substantial funds enabled them to create several businesses. The West Side was in crisis; foundations and business owners and upstanding community members were taking a risk. But perhaps the alternative seemed a bigger risk. CVL received backing from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, the retailers Sears and Carson Pirie Scott, and other businesses and individuals.

At its high point, CVL, Inc. ran a diner, ice cream parlors, and a clothing shop—the African Lion, supported by Sammy Davis, Jr.—and promoted neighborhood cleanup programs and helped build playgrounds. The simple idea was that by establishing opportunities for training and jobs for kids, the gang might prevent violence among younger members and promote economic self-reliance for the community, keeping the community’s money in the community. It was a bid for economic autonomy for the neighborhood; it was also an attempt to convert illicit forms of power to licit ones, and to maintain a presence within the neighborhood that would be associated with positive, and not negative, effects on the community.

Jan van der Marck had arrived in Chicago in 1967 to direct the new Museum of Contemporary Art. He had originally traveled to the United States as a Rockefeller fellow to study American museums and their relationship to the public. First at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and then at the MCA, he started to put his ideas into practice. In early 1968 he met Zelle in New Orleans at the American Association of Museums meeting. He offered her a job, and she quickly packed up and moved to Chicago from New Jersey, where she had just finished an internship at the Newark Museum. The first written record of Art & Soul appears in the MCA timesheet, a set of ongoing records kept by van der...
Marck and Zelle. This meeting, held in May 1968, was itself the result of previous conversations. The record reads: “Meeting with Robert Stepto, Bernard Rogers, Allen Wardwell, Jan van der Marck to discuss what can be done in the way of art for the black community on the West Side. This meeting was prompted by previous discussions with Bernard Rogers, who for some time has been active with the Conservative Vice Lords, Inc., as well as by the Annual Museum Meeting in New Orleans where a session was devoted to the subject ‘How can museums be made more useful.’”[16] It was a high-powered meeting. Wardwell was the head of what was at the time called the Primitive Art Department at the Art Institute of Chicago. Stepto was a trustee of the MCA, an African American physician who was a faculty member at the University of Chicago Medical School. He had taken an interest in the West Side since serving as head of the obstetrics and gynecology department at Cook County Hospital. [17] Rogers was an insurance executive and a member of the Art Institute’s board of trustees. Early consultations also included David Dawley and the two Hetherington brothers. Daniel Hetherington was an especially talented artist; Jackie Hetherington had graduated from Crane Tech and Crane Junior College (later to become Malcolm X College), and had worked in a barber shop and in the display department at Compton’s Encyclopedia. He also had experience working on another CVL venture, Teen Town.[18]

The notes from an August meeting reveal further development of the project:

An art workshop-gallery, located in a remodeled store or several adjacent stores in an accessible area would be a center for all the arts from painting to sculpture to films and music, a place to work and a place in which to display, a meeting point for discussion and exposure to art. The center would be run by a neighborhood manager for the people of the neighborhood, and the role of the museum would be to provide ideas, counsel, contacts and technical advice.[19]

From the beginning, therefore, the museum saw its job as facilitation: it wasn’t setting up a branch location, or dispensing charity. On July 8, van der Marck approached Ralph Newman of the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission, the organization set up to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Illinois statehood.[20] Van der Marck hoped Newman would fund the project. Originally, van der Marck had proposed something quite different to the Sesquicentennial: *Hydroscape*, a floating sculpture garden on Lake Michigan, which would (according to van der Marck’s original proposal) have included works by a welter of famous names: Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Christo, Yayoi Kusama, Les Levine, Francois Dalleget, Tony Smith, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Hans Haacke, Billy Apple, and others.[21] Newman had been interested in this project, but it hadn’t panned out, apparently for lack of funds on the MCA’s side. Van der Marck would later say that “it turned out to be a sad case of my eyes being bigger than my stomach and trustees escorted me back from Delaware Riviera to Ontario Street.”[22]

When he heard of what was originally called the West Side Project, Newman also expressed immediate interest. He had funds available and was eager to enhance the representation of black Illinoisans in the Sesquicentennial festivities. But Newman was unwilling to use state funds to finance an operation run exclusively by a street gang, and emphasized that the project must involve other community partners and serve the community as a whole. Therefore, many different community groups were invited to initial meetings from which the advisory council developed. Community organizations that sent representatives or offered moral support of one kind or another included the Lawndale Youth Commission, West Side Federation, Lawndale Urban Progress Center, Better Boys Foundation, Boys Brotherhood Republic, the Lawndale People’s Planning Conference, the A.B.C. Youth Center, the Chicago Public Library, and the Catholic Church—a very different list from the first Sesquicentennial proposal van der Marck had drawn up.

Early meetings with community members were not overwhelmingly promising. Two women from Concerned Parents criticized the use of storefronts: van der Marck noted, “The point was driven home rather sharply that black people associate storefronts with churches, neighborhood clubs and in general poorly financed, faltering operations.” He went on to remark that “neither of the 2 ladies were thinking into the news?”[22]

The mothers’ doubts about gang involvement were shared by Lew Kreinberg of the Westside Federation, who proposed a location, a vacant bank building, outside the CVL’s territory. Van der Marck was excited by the scale of the building, as well as that of a vacant Oldsmobile dealership proposed by a development company, Greenleigh Associates. But these ideas quietly died—perhaps because they were too expensive or, in the case of the bank building, because it would have been...
difficult to get the project off the ground without the CVL. Van der Marck’s introduction to the concept had come through Rogers, who was the linchpin between Lawndale and the white cultural institutions downtown, and who had formed a specific connection with the CVL. Perhaps more important, the various social services and funding organizations had to reckon with the Vice Lords because they held the power in Lawndale. The CVL had the capacity to make things happen in a way that other organizations couldn’t.

That neighborhood programs required Vice Lord support is well illustrated by the experiences of architects who came there to build playgrounds for the Chicago Committee on Urban Opportunity’s Model Cities Programs. Raymond Broady, an African American architect who would provide the initial designs for Art & Soul’s building, first came back to the neighborhood he’d grown up in to work with the CCUO. As a young, recently licensed architect, having grown bored with his job with the General Services Administration, he moved to the job in Lawndale as the third architect-in-residence brought in within the space of a year to build vest-pocket parks along Sixteenth Street. The first man hired had been white; the second had been black; but neither was able to connect with the Vice Lords to get their support. Whenever they built a playground, kids would trash it the next day.

Broady had grown up on the West Side too, and was lucky enough to have gone to high school with Bobby Gore, one of the leaders of the CVL and a driving force behind the organization’s new approach to community involvement. Back then he had had Gore’s respect as a younger, studious kid with a shot at professional success outside the ghetto. When he returned to the neighborhood Gore helped smooth the transition with the younger Lords. With this “umbrella,” Broady asked if he could collaborate with the kids in the neighborhood to figure out what they could do to avoid having the playgrounds trashed.

“You’re just going to build whatever you want to build.”

“No, you tell us what you want, and that’s what we’ll build.”

“You’ll bring white guys in to build it.”

“No, the kids will get to build it themselves.”

“But they’ll have white foremen.”

“No, we’ll teach older Vice Lords all they need to know to be able to supervise the work themselves.”[24]

With this more collaborative approach and the support of the gang organization, Broady was able to proceed in his work.

But if the Vice Lords were needed to make the West Side Project go forward, they could not be the official recipients of Sesquicentennial funds. Newman made this clear. It had been a real priority for him to ensure African American representation in the Sesquicentennial events, and he was enthusiastic about the project in general, but he was wary of Vice Lord involvement. In a meeting at which the project seemed to be at an impasse, Newman proposed that, rather than disbursing funds to the project directly, the Sesquicentennial would hire an administrator who would have control over payments.[25]

This is how James Houlihan came into the picture. Later to become the Cook County Assessor, he was the Sesquicentennial Commission’s representative to Art & Soul. His role set him up for conflicts. He was there to ensure broader community participation and to keep control over the Sesquicentennial’s funds. As it was described in the August 12 meeting in which Newman proposed the administrator position, in addition to managing the budget, his role was to act “as a go-between among the Commission, the project, and the various elements of the community hopefully broadening community interest and support of the project.”[26] Newman saw Houlihan’s position as a way to maintain limits on how much the project would belong to the Vice Lords. By contrast, Zelle defended their role. Both believed in community leadership of the project, but different definitions of community were at work. To Newman, the Vice Lords were a potentially nettlesome segment of the community; to Zelle, the Vice Lords—with their particular representatives, the Hetherington brothers—were the community with which the MCA was partnering. In notes in the timesheet she describes telling Jackie that she would defend his role as director of Art & Soul.[27] Yet the requirement of a board drawn from different sectors of the community was, she says, a positive thing: “Art & Soul helped integrate the CVL into their community.”[28]

But a certain tension was indeed implicit in the institutional relationships. At times Houlihan and Jackie Hetherington found themselves at odds. The routine conflicts are illuminating. In one example, according to Houlihan, Jackie Hetherington asked to bill the Sesquicentennial for expenses that included Ripple, a (mildly) fortified wine produced by the Gallo winery that was popular at the time in the ghetto. As Houlihan put it, “He would say ‘Those executives downtown have their three martini lunches and put it on their expense accounts. Why can’t I have Ripple [and put it down as an expense]?’ I said,
‘Your logic is impeccable, but I’m still not going to do it.’” The interaction was jocular, but suggests how philanthropy with strings attached might rankle. A bigger issue in the use of funds was a conflict between spending on building renovation and spending on programs. As the head of the Sesquicentennial, a program of events commemorating Illinois’s 150th year of statehood, Newman obviously wanted the project to bear fruit—specifically through programming that could be reported to state government—in the year 1968. The project only got off the ground in the summer; spending too much time on renovations would slow the progress of the opening, and spending too much money would reduce program possibilities. Yet community members wanted to establish some permanence. Jackie Hetherington pushed for more extensive renovations. Once Broady saw the condition of the building, his cost estimates went up. The crumbling interior walls could not be redone without spending more money than Newman would allow. The questions of cost were emotionally and politically charged; recall the two mothers and their concerns about a storefront. If white money was coming into the neighborhood to build something, why couldn’t it be something magnificent? In a meeting on September 30, van der Marck, Zelle, and Rogers came to “agree with Jackie that enough money had to be spent to get the job done well and quickly.”[29] The next day van der Marck expressed frustration: “Where are we? No payrolls yet. Everything is done piecemeal and nothing is done properly. . . . Forget preliminary budget—do remodeling right with black architect and contractor.”[30] As Houlihan remembered it, Zelle had the idea to tack burlap over some of the interior walls and nail down a simple wood border rather than completely replacing the decayed plaster.[31] This had the added benefit of providing a good surface for hanging artwork. The written records don’t provide a clear final answer to questions about the renovation costs, but within a month the space was nearly ready to open: a pre-opening Halloween party was held and Zelle noted with relief that the CVL had come through with support for the event, that it was a “good introduction to Art & Soul as an active, swinging place.”[32] Two weeks later, it formally opened.

The Soul of Art

If anything, these tensions seem to have injected energy into the project. Eventually the collaborators became, as Houlihan put it, “trusted partners.” Although he recalls the project as misguided in certain ways, he also describes it as “a wonderful event.”[33] Zelle echoes this sentiment: it was “very positive and fun. People were excited and interested. Lots of neighborhood people would come by. It was exhilarating and full of hope. Such a rich, productive, creative time.”[34] Early on, Art & Soul hosted Ralph Arnold as artist-in-residence, displaying his collage paintings on its walls. The center held an art contest in which Jeff Donaldson of AFRICOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists, a group founded in 1968 by former members of the OBAC Visual Art Workshop) won first prize, and Peter Gilbert, a local sculptor who had been involved from the start and whose medium was animal bones, was second. Reggie Madison, who appears in several of Zelle’s photos touching up one of his entries at the last minute, won third place with an abstract kinetic sculpture he titled Black Madonna and Child.

Art & Soul also hosted a traveling exhibition of African sculpture from the Art Institute’s collections. Staff offered classes in papier-mâché, puppets, and screenprinting; the center also held informal studio hours, and sponsored visits to the MCA and a poetry reading there by black poets (Eugene Perkins, Sigmonde Wimberli, and Ebon). The photographer Roy Lewis created an experimental installation of his photographs on the outer wall of the building, joining with other black photographers in Chicago—Bobby Sengstacke and Bob Crawford—who were inspired by the Wall of Respect on Chicago’s South Side to create their own form of mural. These photographic street museums could also serve as political rallying points.[36] Lewis gave his installation the title West Wall with the subheading Proud of Being Black.[37] It was documented in a booklet of poems entitled West Wall by Eugene Perkins. West Wall was a doubly meaningful title: it was the west wall of the building and also a wall of images for the West Side, as opposed to the South Side locations of Crawford and Sengstacke’s projects.[38] West Wall: Proud of Being Black appears in Zelle’s photograph against the backdrop of rainbow stripes painted under the direction of the Japanese artist Sachio Yamashita, newly arrived from art school in Tokyo. His rainbow stripes, a signature of his work in the late 1960s and early 1970s, adorn Zelle’s color image of the storefronts.[39]

Funds from the Sesquicentennial ran out at the end of 1968, and fundraising efforts occupied much of the next six months. By the summer, most of the original staff had moved on. The details of the transition remain unclear, but from mid-1969 youth programs continued with federal funds administered by the University of Illinois at Chicago. The black mural artist Don McIvaine, who was not a Vice Lord, took over as director and worked with children to paint powerful, aggressive, insistent murals throughout Lawndale. (His substantial oeuvre has now, tragically, been almost entirely demolished.) The project seems to have continued in a more limited way until 1972, when it was likely the victim of President Nixon’s dismantling of the Johnson-era Office of Economic Opportunity.[40] Interviewed in late 1968 by Steven Pratt of the Chicago Tribune, Houlihan said that the work done by “artists here is a different type of art than that you see hanging in the north side galleries. That’s why the museum is so interested.”[41] In shifting his attention from a project like the proposed Hydroscape to the West Side project that was to become Art & Soul, van der Marck had not abandoned the world of
contemporary art as it was then understood. The language contained in a February 1969 funding proposal written was carefully modulated to draw on the rhetoric of contemporary art: “Art & Soul’ began as a six-month art happening in Lawndale, an experimental friendship between a street group and a museum.” The project was often described as a Happening and was directly inspired by the free stores of the Diggers, a San Francisco radical street theater group. Along with its commitment to children’s programming, Art & Soul was a way to be involved in the creation of new forms of art through dialogue between the contemporary white art world and the styles and concerns of black artists. The proposal also suggested that part of the project’s innovation was its responsiveness to African American cultural forms: “By providing the opportunity for the application of contemporary art techniques to black moods, the concept of ‘Art & Soul’ becomes a medium for new forms and styles in art.” “Black moods” was an interesting word choice. Other CVL grant proposals refer to overwhelming hopelessness as the “mood” of Lawndale, but here “black moods” seems instead to represent a more expansive and creative feeling. It also suggests the idea of creating, or maintaining, a distinctively African American style of art, something that Jackie Hetherington, too, emphasized in conversations with Zelle. An exhibition of African art was offered by the Art Institute, but Hetherington hesitated to stress African art at the expense of developing contemporary African American artists. He also rejected the MCA’s offer of Red Grooms’s Chicago billboard, which contained a caricatured African American boy.

Van der Marck and Zelle, both relative newcomers to Chicago, had entered into a moment of political ferment that was also a moment of intense artistic ferment among African American artists in Chicago. The notion of a “Black Aesthetic” was being vigorously discussed and debated within the African American arts community of the period, much of it in the pages of Negro Digest (which changed its name to Black World in 1970), published in Chicago and edited by Hoyt Fuller. Black artists and writers voiced multiple and sometimes conflicting views on the importance of art and the specific aesthetic qualities it should possess, but one of the primary points was the insistence that art be connected to life: that art play a social and political role, that it be in the streets and among the people. This entailed a revolt against prevailing (white) institutional standards for art in which abstraction was still dominant. As James C. Hall has written, not only did “African-American art in the 1960s [claim] for itself an expansive social capacity” but the challenges it posed to modernist criticism “have been too often ignored as rhetorical or ceremonial.” Hall is speaking largely about literature, but his critique holds true for art history and criticism as well. The point was not a turn from art to a purely political form of blackness, but a redefinition of the relationship between art and politics accompanied by a sustained critique of the collusion of notions of aesthetic autonomy and universalism with racist ideologies.

Black artists had experienced—and generated—a powerful public confrontation between the white art world and their own ambitions when, in August 1967, artists on the South Side of Chicago created the Wall of Respect mural in response to the unveiling of the “Chicago Picasso.” One of the biggest mainstream public art events in Chicago in the 1960s was the arrival of Pablo Picasso’s monumental,Untitled public sculpture in downtown Chicago. The African American poet Gwendolyn Brooks was commissioned to pronounce a poetic dedication at the opening. She began: “Does man love Art? Man visits Art, but squirms. Art hurts.” Brooks articulates a set of modernist aspirations for a kind of art that challenges its viewers. By the end of her dedicatory poem the Picasso is tamed: the hurt has changed its character, and the sculpture is no longer aggressive, but mutely autistic. She concludes: “Observe the tall cold of a Flower/which is as innocent and as guilty,/as meaningful and as meaningless as any/other flower in the western field.” Here, art is not so much challenging as standoffish; one views it clinically (“Observe”). “The western field,” on one level the American West, here is the Midwest; the western field is the prairie, and the hard art is naturalized, becomes part of the landscape. But the western field is also Western civilization, a field of flowers—and this bloom of COR-TEN steel—that are both “meaningful and meaningless.”

The respectful but ironic feeling contrasts sharply with her poem for the Wall of Respect, the collectively created mural completed at Forty-third Street and Langley Avenue just twelve days later. The juxtaposition was obvious: Don L. Lee, a younger black poet later to take the name Haki Madhubuti, wrote in his own poem about the wall that “Picasso ain’t got shit on us, send him back to art school.” Eugene Perkins—who, as director of the Better Boys Foundation, was to be a member of the advisory council of Art & Soul—wrote

Let Picasso’s enigma of steel
fester in the backyard of the
city fathers’ cretaceous sanctuary

It has no meaning for black people,
The Wall of Respect was painted by the Visual Art Workshop of OBAC, formed in May of 1967. It was everything the Picasso was not: it was avowedly made by Chicago artists in Chicago; it was the product of overt collaboration; it was done without the consent of the owner of the building, hence more or less destined for destruction and entirely without monetary value; and it had a political goal—to create a form of public art that represented black heroes and heroines.

To the US government, it was (according to witnesses) controversial enough that government snipers were positioned on surrounding rooftops at the opening ceremony. It was a major intervention into an urban visual culture that at the time had precious few representations of African American faces. To Lee, the government’s view was, in a sense, not incorrect: for him the wall was “a weapon.” He writes that “whi-te people . . . run from the mighty black wall”; it “kill[s] their eyes.”

Brooks’s rhetoric about the Wall of Respect is not as aggressive as Lee’s or Perkins’s. But contrast it with the meaningful/meaningless “flower in the western field.” For this dedication, she ends with these words:

No child has defiled
the Heroes of this Wall this serious Appointment
this still Wing
to Scald this flute this heavy Light this Hinge.

An emphasis is paroled.
The old decapitations are revised,
the disposessions beakless.

And we sing.

Brooks points to the fact that the wall had not been “defiled” with graffiti—a mark of its approval in the community. The wall is not a simple thing, but a “still Wing” and a “heavy Light.” It is both “Scald”—a sudden, violent image—and “flute”—a delicate flicker of sound. Its doubleness, strong and beautiful, and its presentness—its position between past and future—make it a “Hinge.” The wall is all these things—the paratactic succession of nouns articulated by the repetition of “this” also suggests the visual composition of the wall as a series of portraits that made up a collectivity. Taken as a whole, the wall is a bulwark against historical trauma, and a new form of history.

I linger over Brooks’s dedications to help establish the fact that a significant critical consciousness surrounded works like the Wall of Respect; that it was attuned to tensions between the demands of art and politics; and that it also consciously responded to the white mainstream art world and white critics. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of tireless publishing by presses like Detroit’s Broadside Press and Chicago’s Third World Press, as well as magazines like Negro Digest/Black World. Much of the best writing on black visual arts in this period was done by visual artists and poets. (Donaldson wrote that AFRICOBRA created “art for people and not for [white] critics whose peopleness is questionable.”) For example, the poet Carolyn Rodgers addresses all the arts in her essay “Feelings Are Sense: The Literature of Black.” Switching back and forth between prose and poetry, she writes of painting:

…Colors are to be used freely.
going against all techniques that are european. all colors
go on canvas together or rather create new families of colors
define what color is the body of a Black man must be viewed
beneath or beyond oppression . . .

Rodgers’s words do what she asks colors to do, going together and creating “new families”—sentences that form backward and forward, meanings that work more than one way in her unpunctuated lines. Her
phrase “define what color is the body of a Black man” doesn’t merely ask what color a black man’s body is, but defines color as the body of a black man.[57]

the canvas must be viewed as something other than what european art dictates. Perhaps the canvas itself is european and needs to be thrown away.

Rodgers brings out the conceptual rhyme between color painted on canvas and the color of skin. She also identifies, from a different point of view, the Westernness of the easel picture acknowledged by Greenberg. She doesn’t ask black artists to stop painting, but to paint differently. Shifting from painting to sculpture, she also shifts seamlessly between maker and object:

paint on anything everything. the hands the fingers
of the sculptor are the many tongues
the fingers and what they make must become
the man, Black.

With the word “become,” she suggests the sense “to be becoming” in the sense of flattering, appropriate, beautiful. The sculpture made by the hands-fingers-tongues must be suitable: black art for black people. But it also suggests transformation, an act of making an artwork that is also the act of making a man. Addison Gayle writes in his introduction to The Black Aesthetic (1971) that, in contrast to white academic literary criticism and its various schools, black critics should evaluate works “in terms of the transformation . . . that the work of art demands from its audience.” He asks, “How far has the work gone in transforming an American Negro into an African-American or black man?”[58] The work of art of the Black Arts Movement is not just the object; it is the person. The Wall of Respect was a beautiful thing. But it might not be so impressive if it were not for all the work that surrounded it.

We must have a sufficiently capacious framing of the project to encompass not only the painting but also the planning and community negotiation and physical courage that it took to carry it out, and the performances, readings, music, and other events through which it temporarily transformed public space, and the project of remaking consciousness, of remaking people, that such projects undertook. This kind of frame is the best one for understanding Art & Soul.

OTHER IDleness

In May 1969, when Art & Soul had been open for six months, the Cook County State’s Attorney, Edward Hanrahan, along with Mayor Richard J. Daley, declared a “War on Gangs.” Together, they argued: ‘Gang claims that they are traditional boys’ clubs or community organizations ignore the violence and destruction of social values in the neighborhoods they terrorize.’[59] Leaders of the CVL were harassed, arrested, and imprisoned, often with obviously flawed or manipulated judicial processes. And at the indictment of Bobby Gore, one of the Vice Lord leaders, on murder charges that many argued at the time and since were trumped up, Hanrahan pointedly excoriated granting organizations for giving money to gangs: “We think these brutal acts should cause foundations and others to intensify their scrutiny of persons seeking money from them to make certain their funds are not used to arm street gangsters or for other idleness.”[60] Why was this war declared? Did Daley and Hanrahan not see the potential the “reformed” gangs offered? Several observers at the time, and historians more recently, have suggested that Daley saw their potential all too well. He knew this from personal experience. As a young leader of the Hamburg Athletic Association, he was a probable participant in the major race riot of 1919 in Chicago; throughout his life he refused to answer questions about his involvement.[61] He knew exactly what could happen when gangs began to legitimize themselves and claim political power, because he had lived through this very experience. By this reading, the Conservative Vice Lords were not the exception to the rule, a force for good unfortunately swept up in an overly indiscriminate but ultimately necessary police operation provoked by the violence of other gangs. They were the provocation.

Hanrahan’s choice of words is quite striking. What did he mean by idleness—worthlessness, folly, inactivity; the nonfunctional, the nonproductive, the trivial, the fantastical? Did he mean, specifically, crime? Daley and Hanrahan made it clear that the funding offered by foundations was itself part of the provocation to the authorities. “Idleness” seems to roll off the tongue here as a general term for bad things: no matter what, the money is used for purposes not intended by the foundations.

On the other hand, from the point of view of dumbfounded Chicagans who watched the erection of the Picasso in 1967 and wondered if it was a baboon, it might be art itself that constituted “idleness.” In a
way, this isn’t so far from the art world’s own critical discourses. Idleness might be a beneficial condition, when it is understood as freedom from compulsion, or the ability of the imagination to roam. Children making papier-mâché masks in an open-ended art class might, too, be perceived to be idle. For Greenberg in his 1959 essay “The Case for Abstract Art,” the virtue of abstract art is that it encourages a meditative form of viewing. He argues that this is necessitated particularly in America as antidote to society’s devotion to profit-making, goal-oriented, instrumental activity (otherwise known as capitalism). By this definition, art as idleness—in its Kantian nonpurposive purposiveness—might indeed be salutary.

Yet if an “idle” form of art may be an antidote to profit-making, goal-oriented, instrumental activity, it is less clear how it could be an antidote to the situation of enforced idleness found in Lawndale, where the unemployment rate was three times the city average (and where the youth unemployment rate was 25 to 50 percent). This situation expresses a fundamental divide for modern art in its impulses toward reduction, asceticism, and negation. Where these modernist operations of self-sacrifice require a self to be sacrificed—they require self-possession—black artists were, and needed to be, engaged in a process of self-creation. At the same time, the necessity of construction and creation (that is, affirmative rather than negative operations) transcended race. When artists joined in the Richard J. Daley exhibition at the Feigen Gallery to protest the police attacks on protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Robert Motherwell sent two already completed canvases that were, he stated, without political content. “There is a certain kind of art which I belong to. It can no more make a direct political comment than chamber music can.” But the problematic status of this position, in 1968, is palpable, for he also glossed this parti pris a bit by suggesting that context made the works political: “The significance is to participate,” he said, and elsewhere, “This show represents the politics of feeling, not the politics of ideology.” It might be argued that perhaps the gesture itself—the participation, as performance—was part of the art. The art, as well as “the [political] significance,” was to participate—not to stand idly by.

Today, postindustrial shifts in national and global economies to a situation characterized by unemployment and precarity might prompt us to redirect our ideas not only about how art engages with social and political issues but also how it engages with work. Indeed, what kind of “work” can count as the “work” of art? There were art objects made and displayed at Art & Soul. In a way, though, these objects were only the documents of the real work: the building, cleaning, organizing, educating, befriending, negotiating, managing, risk-taking, material gathering, directing, grant-writing, learning, dreaming, schmoozing, protecting, collaborating, remembering, and contributing of cultural knowledge. Many of these tasks would in the coming years be signaled as art and not just adjuncts to it—by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Andrea Fraser, and others. During this historical period artists and critics began to view the avant-garde as co-opted by capitalism, and a range of practices (performance, feminism, conceptualism) began, in various ways, to challenge modernist assumptions and to herald what would be called postmodernism. As Julia Bryan-Wilson deftly shows in Art Workers, the Art Workers Coalition’s 1970 Art Strike presents a tension between the desire to recast art as labor, in a gesture of working-class solidarity—and the impulse of refusal, the withdrawal of meaning-making activity, that is both an attempt at political statement and an unintentional rhyme with quietist tropes of mid-century American modernism.

Art & Soul was a bargain struck between two groups—each individually comprising complex interests—that knew, at the outset, very little about one another. For their own separate reasons, each agreed to construct this space both to foster creativity in Lawndale from the ground up and to celebrate African American art and artists in Chicago. If the creation of subjectivity and consciousness were “the work of art”—the productive activity of art—and not just effects of artworks, this means the art itself may be difficult to fasten in our sights, but it also may make this a historical reference point that can reciprocally frame and be framed by later projects such as Havana’s Arte de Conducta.

“And we sing.” Art & Soul was not a black revolutionary project like the Wall of Respect. It was a pragmatic bargain among organizations with rather different interests. It borrowed, and was sometimes a vehicle for, the Black Arts Movement’s aspirations, and in making do with limited resources and challenging presuppositions, it also made an art of the labor required to create such a space. One cannot claim any precedence for Art & Soul in relation to the South Side collective black projects (Wall of Respect, OBAC and AFRICOBRA, the Museum of African History, the Afro-Arts Theatre). These groups and projects deserve much more attention in their own right, as part of the history of art of the twentieth century. What is most important about Art & Soul is the remarkable fact of the engagement of the MCA and other white institutions, in an aesthetic project, with a street gang, whose members engaged in the project as essential partners and not merely recipients of charity. The multiple kinds of labor that went into allowing this risky, fragile experiment to happen even for a short time express the content of the project as need, crisis, poverty, danger, and power—as well as optimism and creativity. “Other idleness”: next to “arming street gangsters” it sounds like an understatement. But then, it is a capacious phrase. It could mean violence, it could mean loitering. It could mean art. If the reported presence of FBI snipers at the unveiling of the Wall of Respect in Chicago in 1967 is any indication, it
some of the “authorities,” anyway, believed that black people making art was itself violence.

Both sides ran risks in engaging in the collaboration called Art & Soul, and some of those risks and their effects lie beyond the scope of this essay. From the point of view of the writing of art history, theory, and criticism, to write about elements of work that might seem mundane poses a smaller, but definite risk: the potential loss of the currency we hope to find in aesthetic exquisiteness. But perhaps we might lose it only to find it reinvented in another form. As an experimental friendship, Art & Soul can help us pose questions about the kinds of aesthetic and political risk we are or aren’t taking today.

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2. Conservative Vice Lords, Inc., Proposal to Rockefeller Foundation (signed Alfonso Alford, to Joseph Black, Director, Humanities and Social Sciences), December 20, 1967, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Record group: 01.0002, Series 200, Box 113, folder 997.

3. In “Interventions Reviews,” Art Bulletin 88, no. 2 (June 2006), many reviewers make this and related points about problematic authorship of these two entries as well as the absence of political art and questions of race and ethnicity; see Nancy Troy (374), Geoffrey Batchen (376), Amelia Jones (377–79), Romy Golan (382), and Robert Storr (384–85). A note appears on the copyright page of Art since 1900 to credit the otherwise mysterious “AD” who authored the two entries: “The publishers would like to thank Amy Dempsey for her assistance in the preparation of the book.”


7. Charles Mills, The Racial Contract (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 30. Later critics writing in Greenberg’s wake have insisted even more on the specificity of the medium and on evaluation by comparison with the (European) history of the medium. For Michael Fried, it is a “basic modernist tenet” that new paintings must “sustain comparison” with older works whose quality is not in doubt.” Fried, “An Introduction to My Art Criticism,” in Art and Objecthood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1–74; 74, n81—a sentiment repeated several times in essays in the collection (38, 165, 169). The structure of beginning with certainty (or rather absence-of-doubt) recovers time by mapping the Cartesian cogito onto history just as the “modernist reduction” maps it in space.

9. See for instance the now nearly forgotten journal Arts in Society published by the University of Wisconsin Extension Division from 1958 to 1976.


11. I am inspired in this research by Greg Sholette’s notion of the “dark matter” of the art world. Yet in this context in particular, the phrase makes me uneasy. He does not use it in a racially specific way, and yet it describes the invisibility of the Black Arts Movement all too well. Gregory Sholette, “Dark Matter: Activist Art and the Counter-public Sphere,” Journal of Aesthetics and Protest 1, no. 3 (2004): 13–24. On exclusions see also Francis Frascina, Art, Politics, and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999).


16. MCA Art & Soul Timesheet, May 29, 1968. All references to the MCA Timesheet refer to a file kept by Ann Zelle and now filed with Jan van der Marck’s papers at the MCA in Chicago.

17. Personal communication, Robert Stepto, Jr.

18. MCA Timesheet, West Side Progress Report (Trustees’ Meeting), October 8, 1968.


20. MCA Timesheet, July 8, 1968.


22. Meeting of Leadership Group at Sears YMCA. MCA Timesheet, August 8, 1968.

23. Meeting of Leadership Group at Sears YMCA. MCA Timesheet, August 8, 1968.


26. Ibid.

27. MCA Timesheet, October 2, 1968.


30. MCA Timesheet, October 1, 1968.


32. MCA Timesheet, October 31, 1968.


34. Zelle interview, November 24, 2010.

36. Funding was provided to the South Side Community Art Center by the Illinois Arts Council, the Chicago Committee on Urban Opportunity, and the National Endowment for the Arts for three photographic murals. Bob Crawford’s was at the Umoja Black Student Center in the Oakland neighborhood, and Robert Sengstacke’s was in Englewood at Sixty-second and Halsted Streets. “New Walls for City,” Chicago Defender, October 22, 1968, 14–15. Roy Lewis’s mural also appears in Catalysts Cultural Committee, Black Cultural Directory Chicago ’69 (Chicago: Catalysts, 1969), 29. Crawford’s wall is visible in a photograph of the Umoja Center that accompanied an article on a student boycott in Jet: “Chicago Pupils Boycott; Board Member Agrees,” October 31, 1968, 28.


42. Although the idea of a free bookstore—based on the Diggers’ free stores—had been nixed in an early meeting with area pastors, it resurfaced in the description of Art & Soul as “A Community Art/Book Center for All Ages” in its opening program. Program in van der Marck papers; Timesheet, July 10, 1968.

43. CVL, Inc. “A Unique Friendship between the Street and a Museum: Art & Soul,” grant proposal, 1969. MCA, Van der Marck papers.

44. MCA Timesheet, October 2, 1968.

45. Ibid.


55. Donaldson, 83.

57. While in this essay she makes masculinist assumptions that obscure the place of African American women (and thus her own place) in the movement, elsewhere she critiques the gender ideology of black nationalist and revolutionary culture.

58. Gayle, introduction, *The Black Aesthetic*, xxii. Obviously, there are also questions of gender to be addressed here.


Interviews
Robert Cozzolino: Dominick, you were heavily involved in the antiwar movement in Chicago during the 1960s as an organizer and artist. I’d like to talk to you about your experiences protesting the Vietnam War and recollections of the events surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention. When did you first become involved in anti-war activities? I think you told me that you started getting involved in things as early as 1964?

Dominick Di Meo: Actually it was earlier but not in Chicago. When I was still in Italy, Kennedy was increasing advisors in Vietnam and I stood in front of the American consulate in Florence holding a sign in English that said, “hands off Vietnam.”

RC: What happened when you returned to Chicago?

DD: When I came back in 1964, there were demonstrations. The earliest I remember was either late spring or early winter at the Water Tower. It was a mild day but snow had fallen—the sun was out but there was slush everywhere, everything was melting. There were only thirty of us in the demonstration. It was led by a young Presbyterian minister and there were two artists involved: myself and Don Main. The police forced us to take a circuitous route where there was no activity like industrial areas and by the Congress Street expressway. We were passing a Navy recruiting station and we were attacked by the Navy personnel who made ice balls out of the slush and pelted us—they were hard as rock. Then another recruit put a stop to it, said that we had a right to demonstrate. While the ones who had attacked us went back into the station, he stayed out and he smiled at us, and I thought that if guys in the service were sympathetic, or at least not hostile, then the war wouldn’t go too far. Little did I realize it would take twelve years before the war ended!

RC: Gradually you began making prints, posters, propaganda, right?

DD: It was a loose thing, mainly Don Main, Tom Brand and I. I had a two-floor loft on Kinzie Street near downtown, just by the river, kitty-corner to Marina Towers. I had a studio on one floor that became the epicenter for making silkscreens, papier-maché skulls [fig. 16], and other projects like the Artist’s Banner. The Banner was painted there in my loft. We invited different artists to do two-by-two-foot panels, antiwar messages, which we made into a long banner that we carried in one of the late demonstrations [fig. 17]. That’s where we did the Protest Papers [cat. no. 42]. We also did the LBJ butcher aprons there.

RC: Did you live there with other artists, or was it just your place?

DD: I lived there with my wife, Judith. It was a three-story building and most of the buildings next to us were derelict or empty, so it was very quiet at night. The second floor was my studio; we lived on the top floor. We used to have film showings, underground stuff. There were other cultural things going on that were not necessarily political—it all sort of came together.

RC: When you did the LBJ aprons and the Banner, did you do them for a particular demonstration?
DD: Yeah, that was a later demonstration that we filmed. Chuck Reynolds, Tom Palazzolo, and John Heinz had 16mm cameras—some were filming in black and white but most were in color. We were documenting because we had done the banner and a bunch of LBJ aprons and were using them in the demonstration.

RC: Can you recall what was on the Banner’s panels? What was the imagery?

DD: We let the artists do what they wanted. Most of it was specifically antiwar but some artists just did their own thing. As I recall we referred to the banner as “the Thing” because we carried it in a way that made it seem snakelike.

RC: Like a Chinese dragon.

DD: Right.

RC: Your loft was also the Midwest collection point for work contributed to the LA Peace Tower?

DD: Right. We crated them and we shipped them out of my house.

RC: Could you talk a bit about the Protest Papers, describe how they came up, what they were intended for?

DD: It was meant to be kind of a fundraiser, to raise money for our other antiwar activities like the Banner and exhibitions we organized outside the gallery situation. We deliberately wanted to make something stark, black and white, Posada-esque [cat. no. 42]. Very simple, nothing special aesthetically. As I recall Donley did most of the work, the silkscreening. And we invited some non-activist artists, although most of the artist community was heavily antiwar. So there was a core of us that were heavily activist and people like Richard Hunt, who was not necessarily committed [to activist causes]. Donley had it bound at the office where he worked at the time. You know, there were many people in surprising places who were sympathetic—antiwar. A lot of our propaganda—our leafleting—was printed at a place in Marina Towers run by a guy who wouldn’t take any money. He would just give it to us. I went in the first time and I was flabbergasted, because I assumed he was going to give us a hard time. We didn’t sell many Protest Papers. They were crude—not something you would hang on your wall. When I moved to New York we had a little money from it and we gave it to the Chicago Eight defense—maybe a couple hundred dollars.

RC: You were very active—integral to the antiwar movement, and it sounds like you were willing to take risks.

DD: I always separated my painting from political stuff; I tended not to merge the two. I was always willing to go out for demonstrations, especially in the streets because I feel that’s important to move things; things don’t come from the top—any change—social, political, comes from the bottom. So I tend to keep those things separate. Bob Donley and I attended a RESIST demonstration once with Benjamin Spock in Grant Park. These were people who refused to register for the draft, went AWOL, underground, or fled to Canada. And they were burning their draft cards—I remember Bob and I were out there burning things as a symbolic gesture. Dennis Kowalski also
participated in a lot of these demonstrations. We got teargassed, had things thrown at us, especially during the DNC.

**RC:** Could you talk about making and distributing the “Landscape Beautification Johnson Style” leaflet? That remains a powerful image [fig. 18].

**DD:** That was totally my thing, something I had to do because all these young counterculture people were saying don’t trust anyone over thirty. And yet there were more mature people out there who were active on the scene, sympathetic and turning on too. So my principal motive was to communicate to young artists that there was something else going on besides their own attitudes towards the war and the U.S. The image of the skulls came from a postcard from Guanajuato, Mexico and I made a collage with Johnson’s head to imply that he was puking death. It was a parody on his wife’s American “beautification” because you know she used to plant flowers along American highways and yet Johnson was destroying all these lives. I first distributed them at the student entrance at the back of the Art Institute. It was at lunch hour and I was out there distributing them to a few people trickling in. Before I knew it all these students poured out to get them. Then I started passing them out in front of the building to people coming in and out of the museum.

**RC:** Did you get resistance on the street from anyone; did anyone get angry at you?

**DD:** Not really, I didn’t get much hostility.

**RC:** Did you or anyone in your groups have contact with DNC protest organizers like Rennie Davis, Tom Hayden or any of the Yippies who were planning to attend?

**DD:** We had no real contact with any of these people until the convention. During the convention we were chaperoning some of the protesters because there was a bus strike at the time and Chicago was militarized, really heavy stuff. We’d see protesters with knapsacks and we’d pick them up and bring them to Lincoln Park for instance. After clashes we’d drive the wounded who had been brutalized by the cops to churches or to Second City, which was being used as an aid station. We had contact with Abbie Hoffman but he was very suspicious of us because I was wearing a golfing jacket. It was very funny. The Yippies brought a pig that they were going to nominate for president—Pigasus for President. There was a group of them sitting in a circle doing martial arts, and they offered me a joint. We offered Abbie Hoffman a ride one night and he was very suspicious because there was a lot of undercover activity going on. In the period leading up to the convention, the police were already harassing people with their tricycles, they were running people down, women with carriages, who were just out there to see what’s happening. Not necessarily radicals or anything. I remember passing a bench with two old men and an old lady and I overheard one man say to the other “why are you here?” with heavy German accents and the other man said “I’m here for the revolution.” People were expecting something to happen. During the MC5 concert the cops were running their tricycles around knocking the people down. So they were instilling the violence and the fear of violence would culminate. It was mainly police violence, it wasn’t demonstrators attacking police.
RC: Can you think of another instance in which you connected with a national protest effort?

DD: A week or two before the convention, I was contacted by someone from the national mobilization committee, they wanted to have an antiwar exhibit at the Coliseum in the South side, which was MOBE headquarters. So I called up the nucleus of our group and we put together a big show, good-sized paintings—we had to use work we’d already done. I met Dave Dellinger in the gallery and he thanked me for getting it together. I also remember that Irving Petlin, who as you know was heavily involved with the Peace Tower in LA, was circulating a petition to convince Picasso to remove Guernica from the Museum of Modern Art in protest of the war. I remember circulating that petition at the Arts Club at some opening. Richard Hunt got angry about the idea, but everyone else I approached signed it, including nonartists.

RC: Petlin was the principal designer of that famous poster that uses the text from Mike Wallace's interview with Paul Meadlo about the My Lai Massacre, “Q: And Babies? A: And Babies.”

DD: Yeah, he did a lot of heavy work and still does. You know, Donley visited me in New York recently. We had breakfast and we talked about whether we had any influence, what all our activity meant.

RC: What do you think about that?

DD: Well, like I say, it was twelve years, from my first demonstration until the war ended. I pooped out at the end with the big national mobilizations when everyone had turned against the war. I figured, it’s out of my hands now, it’s got its own momentum. But I went to Washington a couple times after I moved to New York, not as a member of a group or as an important figure in a nucleus of any kind but just as a foot soldier. I feel like we did influence the GI movement; people at home slowly attained momentum, an organic momentum. So in that sense I feel that we had some effect because the war could have been going another twenty years if the GI's weren’t revolting in Vietnam, shooting their officers. Whole platoons were refusing to fight. Officers would command a platoon to go do some action and they would say "no, fuck you, if you want it you go" so they’d call another platoon and they would say we’re not going either. I guess in a sense we were partially responsible for that in a small way, like all the other antiwar groups. We had some effect but it was such a long arduous process, it was very frustrating. Twelve years: I would have never envisioned that it would have taken that long to end the war.

Dominick Di Meo was an early member of the Chicago artists’ group known as the Monster Roster and works in a variety of media. He has lived in New York for many years.

Robert Cozzolino is Curator of Modern Art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. A specialist in American art, he has written extensively on Chicago artists.
Christopher Mack: Tell me a little bit about what the art world was like in Chicago when you first opened your gallery.

Richard Gray: There were a small number of serious galleries, perhaps eight, in operation. I knew most of them, that’s because of my own history, having been married into a collector family; although I certainly didn’t think of myself as a collector at that time.

CM: The first location for your gallery was on Ontario Street, right?

RG: Yes, it was 155 East Ontario Street, the same building as Bud Holland’s Gallery, but it was upstairs in a small single room. I bought an airline ticket for myself and a friend—Harry Bouras, an artist and WFMT radio commentator, who had encouraged me to open the gallery. We went to New York, where he took me around. I knew one dealer there, Noah Goldowski, a guy who used to be in Chicago and was Bud Holland’s partner for many years. I decided I was devoting a certain amount of money to the gallery—I had a plan for how it was going to operate, and I bought a few things that fit into my plan and went in business. I had the first gallery opening on November 4th, 1963, so it was only two months after this first conversation with Bouras that I opened the gallery. I don’t remember exactly what the show was but it consisted of the few works of art I had bought in New York by known artists. I was unknown as a dealer and I had to make an impression. I also had works of art by two or three younger artists that I got interested in, and two or three works by Gorky, De Kooning and Leger—I don’t know who the other ones were.

CM: I was thinking about your operation in relation to some of the other commercial galleries of the time, and it seems to me the strategy you devised was to represent some of the “name” artists from New York, as well as some artists who worked in Chicago and may not have had the recognition that they deserved.

RG: It came out of a very quickly conceived business plan. I could tell immediately that I was going to have a very tough uphill battle, coming out of nowhere. I had never been seriously involved, I had no track record, and I had to establish an identity as quickly as I possibly could. So I thought the best way was to identify with artists people knew about and it seemed to work.

CM: So in 1966 the gallery moved from the Ontario location, right around the corner to 620 North Michigan Avenue.

RG: Yes, the gallery then moved to 620 North Michigan. After almost three years I was doing well enough to feel confident that I could move to more space. I think at about that point Phyllis Kind and her husband had opened their gallery in the same building.

CM: Could you situate the niche your gallery occupied in the late 1960s, especially in relation to some of the other major players on the scene like Richard Feigen?
RG: Richard Feigen, Bud Holland, Allan Frumkin, and Fairweather-Hardin, and Joe Faulconer’s Main Street Gallery on Michigan Avenue, on the second level of his bookstore—those were the most established galleries in town. It didn’t take me too long to join up with them in starting the Michigan-Ontario Gallery group, which was the precursor to the Chicago Art Dealers Association. When I went into business I had this vague idea that I would handle mainly works on paper which were affordable and had a certain appeal to me. But I soon realized that it was no way to get ahead in the art world. There was very little interest in works on paper and the pieces I had were by artists with reputations that were built around making sculpture or painting. So my focus shifted fairly quickly to a broader base including sculpture and painting and drawing.

CM: At that moment, in the mid to late 1960s, was there any sort of rivalry between artists who were active here in Chicago and those who were in New York? I know there was a lot of focus on the New York School at that point.

RG: Well there were two universes, I guess. In serious collecting much of the art world at the time was focused on artists who weren’t working in Chicago, with a few notable exceptions. For the most part collectors were looking to Paris and Europe and then New York; that’s what was being collected and shown by the serious dealers. The artists working locally and developing a following were the imagists including the “Hairy Who” group.

CM: So, before we get into 1968, I want to talk to you about an earlier exhibition you organized focused on works about Lyndon Johnson. Could you tell me how that show came about?

RG: First of all, my inclination, in terms of the political spectrum, was to the Left. I grew up with a proclivity for Democratic and Independent politics, although I was not very politically active. But it was a period of a lot of political unrest, and we were in the middle of a war.

CM: As I understand it, the idea for the LBJ show stemmed from the controversy surrounding Johnson’s portrait that Peter Hurd was commissioned to create, which the president disliked.

RG: That’s right, Peter Hurd did his portrait and the media was following it and I got this hare-brained idea that it would be interesting to do an exhibition that focused on that. We had a very short time period in which to pull this show together, just weeks. We decided to invite many of the active local artists to participate in the show.

CM: So were the works created specifically for that exhibition, or were some of the artists dealing with that theme already?

RG: They were done mainly as individual responses to the show theme; I don’t know that any of them already had specific pieces made.

CM: Many of the works from the show are quick jabs at the president. Was it supposed to be a kind of flippant gesture, or did you conceive it as serious political critique?
RG: I’m certain I didn’t impose any guidelines at all, except maybe for size.

CM: So you gave them the idea, and just let them run with it.

RG: It’s what I would have done even now. I’m not in the habit of telling artists what to do.

CM: There were some threatening letters and phone calls during the exhibition.

RG: We got our share, which was great because it brought a lot of attention to the show. So we had a lot of traffic.

CM: And I read in one of the articles that there was a Chicago police officer stationed at the gallery during the opening. Do you remember that?

RG: That’s right, I got a little panicked and I asked the local police to put someone there.

CM: So the threats were serious enough to make you concerned.

RG: Well, we were not used to that type of thing. We didn’t want to take any chances, besides it added to the mystique.

CM: Richard Feigen put together a Richard J. Daley show following the Democratic National Convention and he commented later that he was trying to use the exhibition to bring some of the outrage about the violence into the mainstream, so that it couldn’t be dismissed as hippie rhetoric. Did you see the 1967 LBJ show in similar terms?

RG: I think I’d have to speculate. Maybe I had partially a commercial instinct there, thinking it was something that would draw attention to the Gallery. But I think, more importantly, it was an expression of my own political orientation, which was somewhat activist at that point. I was definitely anti-war.

CM: Let’s talk about the 1968 convention week. Were you in Chicago at the time?

RG: Yes; towards the middle of the week I left the gallery one afternoon to join the demonstrations and climbed the hill to where the center of the activity was in Grant Park, near the Hilton Hotel, where someone was making a speech, and I then marched with the crowd down south Michigan Avenue and ended up on the front line where the barbed wire and the jeeps were. Just north of where the jeeps were lined up was the railroad overpass. I was there, taking pictures and getting gassed. I wound up running up the street trying to get out of the gas. The next day I went up to Michigan to the old resort that was my family’s business. There was a big barn I had turned into a theater. We used to have movies and chamber music and plays and all kinds of art activities. And that particular night I got up on the stage and made remarks about the convention and the demonstration. There was a huge audience, mostly from Chicago and Detroit, and people still talk to me now about that night I came back from the
convention and told them what was going on. Of course it was also all over television at the same time, so everyone was aware of what was going on and extremely interested in a first-hand report.

CM: I can’t even imagine what that must have been like, not only in the moment but also wondering how things would go on from that point forward.

RG: Just remembering it I get this rush of feeling right now—there was so much emotion, people were so worked up and moving in a solid, solid mass, all the way down Michigan Avenue. And all the noise and the smoke and the gas and the police and the loudspeakers whipping up the crowd. The cops were going wild because they were emotional and worked up and scared too, I am sure.

CM: A charged moment.

RG: Oh, highly charged.

CM: How would you connect that history with contemporary situations—a war with no end, a presidential administration unpopular across party lines, and another contentious election? Do you see artists today tackling political issues with the same level of frankness that some artists did in the ’60s, or is it unfashionable for contemporary artists to engage in direct political statements?

RG: Whether or not it’s fashionable I don’t know, there’s no question that this generation of artists, this generation period, is not as emotionally revved up and charged as activists were then. Plenty of people are worked up about this Iraq war situation and this presidential administration, but it’s nothing like it was then. It seems now that reactions and responses tend to be more measured. Artists as well as others don’t seem to have the urge to be as confrontational. Just observe the present political campaign, it all seems so civilized. Where are the marches and the demonstrations, the bombastic oratory of the ‘60s? Have we become so complacent? Time will tell.

Richard Gray has been a distinguished dealer in Chicago and New York for forty-five years. He is a board member of the Chicago Humanities Festival, The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, and The Art Institute of Chicago.

Christopher Mack is Assistant Curator at the DePaul University Art Museum.
Joanna Gardner-Huggett: Tell me about the work you were doing around 1968.

Ellen Lanyon: By the late ’60s I had turned to what you could call still life but was really based on magic and ideas about transformation and illusion. My son brought an early twentieth-century book home from school called *Magical Experiments or Science in Play*, with a lot of engravings by a Frenchman named Louis Poyet. He has become an influence through my entire body of work…even to this day I’m still harking back to Poyet as inspiration. They were illustrations for magic stunts, and also a way of teaching children chemistry and physics. A lot of the images were domestic objects; teacups and knives and forks. Then people gave me other magic books and I started getting interested in actual prestidigitation, stage productions.

Lucy Lippard came to town, and at a party we got to talking and she asked if I’d like to form a Chicago branch of WEB [West East Bag, an International Network of Women Artists, founded in 1971]. She came over to my studio and saw a big screen called “The Goddess and Reptile Illusion,” and she said, “Fantastic! What a wonderful image to portray feminism.” I guess I’d been doing this all along and I wasn’t really thinking about that but obviously it’s all there. Lucy asked if I’d like to work on WEB, and I said sure. I sent letters out to 50 women artists in the area and I invited them to a meeting. I was teaching at the School of the Art Institute so I was allowed to use space. At least 300 women showed up, everybody brought artist friends.

Marcia Tucker [a writer and critic from New York] held a meeting at Sara Canwright’s loft, which was out west on Chicago or Division. Marcia talked about consciousness raising and then many groups were formed in the city. Johnnie Johnson and I participated in the WEB newsletter—sometimes 4 pages, sometimes 8 pages, typed and mimeographed and then we’d send it out four times a year for a couple of years. Then Johnnie and I organized two conferences at Oxbow [a summer artists’ colony in Saugatuck, Michigan]. That’s where I met Joyce Kozloff [a feminist art activist] and so many women from different places. We slept on floors, we rented a whole bunch of cots; Oxbow was very rugged in those days. From that, the first gallery started. I was exhibiting with Richard Gray Gallery and I did not participate in the formation of the galleries but I was around and connected to a lot of people.

JGH: So you were supportive of Artemisia and the ARC [Artists, Residents, Chicago], did you exhibit with them or do programming with them?

EL: I think I did, I was in a couple of theme shows but I didn’t have a show there because that wasn’t my place. I was already exhibiting, but I could do other things for them.

JGH: I noticed that you did a panel with Johnnie Johnson on “Economic Structures of the Art World,” I think in 1973 and maybe at Artemisia as well. Was it to help women artists with practical concerns?

EL: We had several of those conferences, and I still have the transcripts from them I felt it was important for women to be able to manage their life as well as their art.

JGH: Did that happen after you were active with Lucy Lippard and with WEB?
**EL:** I think it must have been. A little bit after that some women started leaving home and going to New York, which I didn’t do. I was at the first meeting in 1975 in New York at Joyce Kozloff’s when the original Heresies [a feminist publication of art and politics 1977-92] was formed, and since I didn’t live there I couldn’t be part of it. But I sat at the table listening to the argument between Miriam [Shapiro], who wanted to start a school and Lucy [Lippard] who wanted to start a magazine, which we did. Then I worked on the Heresies collective.

**JGH:** It seems from various historical accounts that feminism came later to Chicago than New York and L.A. Do you have any thoughts about why that was the case?

**EL:** Chicago was a place where women were not discriminated against. Margot Hoff, Eleanor Cohen, Martyl, Lillian Florsheim, Claire Zeisler—the older generation, all of whom were my friends, we respected each other, we thought of each other as professional artists. We were never separated out; in fact we all won prizes, exhibited. I never even thought about not being a part of the art world. And I was married to an artist, and it was never a problem there, everybody did things together. I think coming around to the actual realization of what we should be about was slower.

**JGH:** There does seem to be a strong history of women being supported in Chicago. I know in the ’30s and ’40s Gertrude Abercrombie and Julia Thecla were written about.

**EL:** The whole Tree Studio group. I think that is the only reason I could think of. Although I had gone to New York earlier than the ’60s, and then started exhibiting in 1960 with Zabriskie, I was never there for very long. I would see Miriam but she might not have even been there yet. I knew Judy Chicago later on, but not earlier.

**JGH:** Lucy Lippard was your first contact with the feminist art world then. How did you meet her?

**EL:** She came to lecture at the Art Institute; Lew Manilow, a Chicago collector, had a party, and I remember standing in the corner by a book case and this famous conversation took place. Later the women’s caucus started up in the College Art Association. We all were concerned about women in the school situation…underpaid, not really given a chance for advancement. I had been hired at Cooper Union and then fired because the male teachers didn’t approve of the way I was teaching—I wasn’t teaching in a pedantic, draw-the-figure sort of way. There was a little jealousy there and they complained and so I was let go. When a woman became dean of the art school at Cooper she immediately hired three women, and I was one of them: one in painting, one in graphic design, and one in photography. So the caucus was a very, very, very important movement.

**JGH:** Did similar protests took place at other art schools (say, the Art Institute, the University of Illinois, and University of Chicago)?

**EL:** There was a strike at the Art Institute but it wasn’t the women. Again there were a lot of women teaching there. Women were often thought of as equal to men.
JGH: At The Art Institute there was some discussion that women were not awarded fellowships in proportion to their numbers.

EL: I don’t know the figures on that. It used to be that there were a lot of women in art school, because at that time it wasn’t considered to be a real profession. Earlier, so many GI’s came back to school, that was already 1948. So women had been in the war effort and they had learned that they could have a job and do things. People started getting married and having kids, but the art business didn’t change that much, women were still privileged here anyway. I know New York was terrible. Chicago hasn’t been the most active art community; they used to call it the second city or the third city. A lot of people felt there was more action in New York and moved east, and a few of them had some notoriety, not all.

JGH: You belonged to a consciousness raising group; how many women participated?

EL: We tried to keep the groups at about eight, so it wasn’t too many.

JGH: What kind of topics seemed to dominate your discussions?

EL: Mostly it had to do with people’s experiences with men and—you know—compromise. By that time there were a lot of younger women who were just waking up to the idea of inequality. I’m from a generation that didn’t feel discriminated against in the art world. But younger women had more of a problem than I did. Certainly today it’s still the same though in Chicago. There’s as many women recognized as men here.

JGH: Judy Chicago wrote to you that she felt the cooperatives ARC and Artemisia were starting to overtake the work being done by WEB.

EL: They did because we just sort of faded out. Most women joined one of the co-ops; not all because they didn’t have that many artists, but a lot of them did. They would exhibit and then have the chance to be in a commercial gallery and they would move on, and more women would join. Besides that WEB was really more of an organization of Miriam Shapiro and Lucy rather than Judy. At that time she and Judy were on the outs, so maybe there was a little tension there.

JGH: Let’s talk a little bit more about the conferences and workshops from WEB.

EL: There were technical presentations, readings, creative writing—a perpetual round of women making presentations, either demonstrating something or lecturing on some subject.

JGH: I’ve also read that Harmony Hammond [an artist active in the feminist and gay liberation movements] showed a video about AIR [Artists in Residence, a women artist’s cooperative found in 1972 in New York], and that this was a real catalyst for the founding of Artemisia, were you part of those conversations at that moment?
EL: Not really, but I knew most of the women and encouraged their efforts to form Artemisia. Some women rebelled against Marcia Tucker after her visit, like Lillian Florsheim and Claire Zeisler. They said “we’re too old for this kind of thing. We do what we want, we don’t have to join a group,” and they didn’t, although they should have. Both of them had a certain amount of wealth and they probably could feel more independent. Whereas I think a lot of women felt dependent on family or whatever. At the time there was a lot going on, and I just did my part of it. Johnnie then came in right after the first wave and did a lot of the work.

JGH: I’ve read she was very interested in teaching women to handle their finances, to learn how to pay taxes as an independent artist. I wonder how important that was because it seemed like that was part of the workshop you’ve done with her.

EL: Very important.

JGH: Did WEB collaborate with other feminist groups in the city—Chicago Women’s Liberation Union [1969-77], their liberation school [1970-76]

EL: Not to my knowledge. It was pretty much kept within the realm of the art world, but people belonged to other things independently.

JGH: Did you become involved in other modes of political protests in the ‘60s and ‘70s?

EL: Yes, I was a founder of Momentum and a member of the artists collective PAC and there was always something happening. I remember striking against the Hearst newspapers back in the 40s because we got bullied by deliverymen. We were active now and then with protesting racism and anti-Semitism: housing restrictions in Saugatuck, whites-only restaurants in Galena.

JGH: Were you part of the artist-led protests in 1968 with the convention?

EL: That’s what we did—we had these shows. In 1968 Sally Shorey and Nora Smith, who were political activists, people of moderate wealth, and connected in the art world, started the exhibition RESPONSE in the fall, and Feigen did one at the same time.

JGH: Was there a split between women artists who wanted visibility and conventional success and those who had a more political and feminist agenda in the ‘70s?

EL: There were people like myself who said: “I am an activist, but I am not making activist art. I think through my art, I’m expressing certain things that are very much a part of the feminist movement; however, I don’t do that as a protest in any way. But do you know the Joy Poe story?
JGH: I’ve heard about it.

EL: There was a double opening at Artemisia Gallery in 1979, in one room geometric pieces by Barbara
Housekeeper and on the other very political collages by Joy Poe, who came in the afternoon of the opening
and started shooting up the walls to add bullet holes, but Barbara’s work also got damaged. Then at the opening
itself a man came in and threw Joy to the floor and raped her; she was doing a performance but it was the real
thing. People were shocked, there were children there, the whole thing was very difficult. There were other women
who thought she had done a great thing. I was torn: I didn’t mind so much what she had done—I thought it was
very courageous because there was a lot of talk then about women being raped. But she didn’t think about
Barbara, and what it would mean to this other woman who was also a serious artist. That was my problem.

JGH: Did that episode have long-term effects regarding the state of art, women and feminism in Chicago?

EL: I think it made Chicago women much stronger. New York always had its bars and meeting places, and people
had cliques, but there were places for people to be together. Chicago never had that. The women should have
started a center where you could go and meet your friends, but there was never a place; you had to create everything.

Ellen Lanyon is primarily known as a painter. Her work has been shown widely in solo and group exhibitions,
and she has taught in Chicago and New York.

Joanna Gardner-Huggett is Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture at DePaul University.
Amor Kohli: Bobby, the first question I wanted to ask you is what drew you to photography?

Robert Sengstacke: As early as I can remember I was drawing and painting and my mother always had photography books at home. I saw a copy of The Sweet Flypaper of Life, by Langston Hughes and Roy DeCarava, at a friend’s home in 1956 and I’d go by even when she wasn’t home and ask if I could look at that book: other than the Black press it was the first positive photography of African Americans that I had seen because most of the images of Blacks in the White press were going to jail or something negative. When I was 14, I got my first camera.

AK: And you’d been publishing photos in the Defender since you were 14, but freelancing seriously in the mid-60s?

RS: When I was 24, I had ten years of experience. I would get up in the morning and listen to John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy for two or three hours, and I’d go out with my camera and say to myself, if John Coltrane can do it with music I can do it with a camera. During that time there was a renaissance taking place in Black art in Chicago. A buddy of mine from Hyde Park High School who was a musician reconnected with me and we started checking out Black events at a time when Afros were just catching on here. I was the first one in the Black bourgeoisie to sport an Afro, the only other Blacks who wore them were musicians and a few artists, and they were getting arrested, mainly by Black cops who would say things like “what the hell are you doing with that helmet on your head?” When the cops would stop me I had a press card and as soon as I said “Sengstacke” they disappeared.

AK: Was this prior to the AACM [Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians] being born?

RS: Yes, this was in 1964. I had shot Muhal Richard Abrams’s experimental band before the AACM was formed in 1965 with all the cats who emerged from the AACM. Kalparusha Maurice McIntyre, Anthony Braxton, Joe Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell, Lester Bowie, Malachi Favors, Thurman Barker, Christopher Gaddy, many more. There was a group of photographers around and as we got to know each other we developed a sense of responsibility to counteract negative images in the White press of African Americans. At that time there were no Black History Month celebrations or Black museums to exhibit our work; we just documented our people because we felt that in the future somebody would want to see what the Black photographer had to say about his people.

AK: So it was your way of giving back to the community?

RS: Not giving back, there was nothing to give back for, it was about love for who we were, although I had the Defender. That’s where my work took on a sense of direction. Also, it was a period of Black consciousness because in my day the worst thing you could call somebody was black. But when Stokely introduced Black Power, all of a sudden everybody was saying “Say it loud: I’m Black and I’m proud.” Things were happening—the AACM was performing at Lincoln Center and the University of Chicago, and the Afro-Arts Theater had opened.

AK: So were you one of the founding members of OBAC [Organization of Black American Culture]?
RS: Yeah, I was one of the original participants in the Visual Arts Workshop. The AACM was a collaborating organization. I remember one time Joe Jarman had a concert at Lincoln Center, now Northeastern Illinois University’s Center for Inner City Studies, and I showed up unrehearsed with a slide projector and projected images from the balcony. We didn’t know how it was going to be received by the audience. After the concert people said, “how did you and Joseph plan your slides with his music?” We didn’t—we just put Black art with Black art and blew peoples’ minds—with street scenes, stop signs, Black people doing their thing, these kinds of creative things were beginning to happen.

AK: So you were involved with OBAC, did you also get involved with COBRA [Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists] and AfriCobra [African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists]?

RS: No, because I’ve never really been a joiner—partly because my father taught me that in the newspaper business, it’s better to be independent. I got a t-shirt with this [points to a picture of him with Barack Obama] but that’s different. I rarely wear buttons or anything like that because regardless of my personal beliefs I did not want to alienate myself from other Black movements or organizations.

AK: Was there any kind of a Black gallery scene at the time?

RS: At the time back then? No, no.

AK: Were White galleries interested in Black art?

RS: No, but both Black and White museums and universities were beginning to be. Black people weren’t even that interested in Black art, although I had began collecting African art while I was still in grammar school. A few cities like Washington D.C. and New York have always been good for Black art. D.C. was really at the forefront. The boom in collecting got going in the ’80s and today you have sophisticated art galleries and collectors both Black and White. When we were documenting Black people and lifestyle there was virtually nothing going on except what I mentioned. Earl Calloway and I founded the first major observance of Black History Month in the United States with “Black Aesthetics” at the Museum of Science and Industry, now known as “Black Creativity.” Before that you had the Black history club here in Chicago, founded in the Wabash Y.M.C.A. by Carter G. Woodson. Then came Black history week, and we used to run stories on the Black History Club in the Defender but it was only one week until we extended it to two and then a month at the Museum. Black newspapers started marketing Black History Month special editions and once the White press saw there was money in it they followed suit.

AK: Was there consensus in the African American artistic community about how to present Black history—say in the Wall of Respect [a mural painted by OBAC artists in 1967 at 47th Street and Langley Avenue in South Chicago].

RS: Bill Walker was the one who proposed the Wall to the OBAC’s Visual Arts Workshop. After the wall was completed, he and these two women—I don’t remember their names—started a lot of dissension. The workshop
had done the most positive thing in Chicago for unity that summer. Anyway, Bill Walker and Billy Abernathy were standing in front of the Wall of Respect one night—about to go to blows. All this negative shit. Walker wanted control, and he finally got it, it broke my heart. Bill didn’t like Norman Parish’s work—so a few years later he painted it over it! I wasn’t that crazy about the work either, to be honest with you, it was a little too abstract for me, but we would never have painted it out! Walker tried to get me to come back, I didn’t want anything to do with any organization after what he had done. He apologized later, publicly. Jeff Donaldson was really angry with me for not joining AfriCobra, because not only did they want me as an artist but they wanted the Sengstacke name, they knew I was the one who kept the police off when we were doing the Original Wall of Respect, but I just didn’t want to go through anything like that again, although AfriCobra never had that kind of crap and they are still together today. It was too close, too hurtful so, to some regret today, I refused AfriCobra.

AK: I wanted to ask about photography and the Wall of Respect, because when you think about public murals you don’t think so much about photography as being a part of them.

RS: Yeah, but you see our pursuit was a different kind of photography because we were part of what the greatest poet of our generation Amus Mor termed the Hip Generation. We were documenting everything. The Wall of Respect became the biggest thing that summer and later the world. The neighborhood protected us. I kept the police off because Daley and the police looked at everything that Black people were doing, especially Black artists, as threatening, and police came by and attempted to intimidate the artists. As soon as I saw this I ran a photo of the Wall in progress on the front page of the Defender and they backed off.

AK: Were you at the dedication for the Wall of Respect? What was the mood like?

RS: Well, it was jubilant and militant. There were some police there. But there was no violence. It was too positive. Joe Jarman played music. I mean why would we build a wall just to burn it down, it wasn’t about that. The little kids from the ‘hood knew every figure painted on the wall, and they acted as guides for the people who came to see the wall for money, “that’s Miles Davis, this is so and so, there’s Malcolm X.” Black consciousness was something that Black people were exploring, and that’s why the Wall was so important, people would drive by in a slow line of traffic to view the Wall. The Wall was about our heroes. Malcolm X was on there—it’s interesting that King was not. But see, that was the militant attitude of the times.

AK: What was the climate like for Black artists in Chicago?

RS: Mayor Daley did not want a bunch of free-thinking artists, Black or White, stretching out the minds of the city. He wanted control. He dried up the record and the film industry. Other than Haskell Wexler, who snuck off that film Medium Cool during the convention in ’68, no movies were made in Chicago for years. Daley was even negotiating to bring Stax [Records] here from Memphis. He was so slick even Republicans stopped opposing him. He was too good for everybody, he knew how to spread the money around the neighborhoods. He had Polish folk, Lithuanian, German aldermen and then the poor Blacks on the west side and the middle class and upper-middle class Blacks...
on the south side. That’s the way Chicago was designed politically to deal with economic and ethnic populations. Shortly before his death he was beginning to open the city back up to the arts. When I came up, as an artist Chicago was no place to be somebody. The concept about art was if you can’t put it in your bank account, it ain’t shit. The positive side is that Chicago and Midwest artists do well in New York because the more difficult it is to get recognition, the more creative the artists are. When Black New York wants the real fine art, it’s Midwest artists that shine.

AK: You were in Miami for the Republican convention but a lot of focus here is on the ’68 Democratic Convention, and what happened in Lincoln Park and Grant Park. Were you around for that?

RS: I was only in Grant Park briefly. I was assigned to cover the convention hall. I did go to Grant Park once or twice but I didn’t get any of the beatings during the police riots.

AK: What were your impressions of what was going on, even in the Convention Hall?

RS: The Democrats were embarrassed; Daley wasn’t going to let anybody push him around. He was not popular with my generation, especially when he issued the shoot-to-kill order during the riots. But Daley never forgot how he got there. It was my father and Congressman Dawson who put him in office through Black votes, and kept him there his first two terms. After that even the Republicans stopped opposing him. They’re the reason Blacks switched over from Republican to Democrat; Dawson and my father had a deal with Franklin Roosevelt to open civil service at the U.S. Post Office to Blacks if they could get Blacks nationally to switch parties and they were successful. Today in any major city with a sizable Black population if you go into the post office, you’re not going to see anything but Black faces. Go to New York, travel around Manhattan all day you might see three black police; compare that to Chicago. Look at who has had the jobs on the sanitation trucks in Chicago, in most major cities those are White jobs, because the pay is good. And you can compare how Blacks fared in Chicago to other cities with White mayors back in the day. Blacks have always fared better in Chicago. That was John Sengstacke and Congressman William L. Dawson who saw what needed to be done, did it, and kept their mouths shut. Daley was two-faced in ways but he never forgot how he came to power. Black people in Chicago don’t realize there was this other side to Daley—he paid off and that’s what kept him in power all those years. One time the federal government foolishly got on Daley’s case about affirmative action and he said: “look, I’ll match my numbers to anything you got in any federal agency.” The Feds backed off and shut up.

AK: Given all that, what was the response in the community of Black artists to what had happened at the convention?

RS: By harassing and arresting so many people, the Daley administration was not popular with artists. It was part of an overall dislike of Daley and his policies and the police. But Blacks had been going through this long before 1968. We were the ones who kept the police in shape. So to us, White people were just getting a taste of what we’d had for years.

AK: Were there just more pressing issues for the Black community? Police brutality, for instance.
RS: Black people were talking about revolution. The Panthers were highly respected because they stood up. I was invited to the first organizational meeting for the Black Panthers in Chicago, in Madison Park, in a plush apartment. They were talking about printing newsletters, things that were going to cost money, and I said, “We need to figure out a way to raise some funds.” “Funds? What’s with all this capitalist shit you’re talking?” I said, “what you are talking about costs money, that’s all I’m saying.” As I said before I was not a joiner—not the Panthers or anybody else, especially after the experience with OBAC. They wanted to blow up water mains and stuff. I said, “if I was going to do that I wouldn’t put on a Panther uniform and mark myself, why not put on a suit and tie and go downtown and do what you are talking about, to me that makes more sense.” At that point I said, “you all know Mayor Daley and he isn’t going to put up with no Panthers in Chicago. You guys put on a Panther uniform, you got about a year and a half.” And it was about a year and a half to the day when they murdered Fred Hampton. So I left the meeting. They didn’t want to hear me, but I’m a realist.

AK: So you weren’t surprised by what happened?

RS: Now Fred [Hampton] and that younger group, I don’t know what they might have done but [Cook County State’s Attorney Edward] Hanrahan just busted in and eliminated them. What was it, hundred bullets all going one way and not one bullet hole on the other side of the room? My cousin was shooting for the Defender and he went by and photographed the apartment and the blood-stained mattresses with one of Malcolm X’s books on the floor.

AK: Talking about 1968, did you ever think that forty years later a Black Chicago political figure would be this close to being President?

RS: I wasn’t hoping or wishing for it, but I figured eventually we’re going to have everything, woman, Chinese, Mexican president someday. I don’t think that when Barack Obama made that great speech at the Democratic convention that he was thinking about being president either. What I am most impressed with is how civil rights has impacted this younger generation in such a short period of time.

AK: As a photographer are you mainly concerned with producing positive images?

RS: Black people need to be spoken to in a positive way; there’s too much negative shit in the world today. I have always wanted my work to have a positive universal message. I want to speak to my people in an uplifting way, but I also want to speak to all people. My work carries a universal message from a people who are looked upon as being on the bottom of society.

Robert Sengstacke is a distinguished photographer and journalist from Chicago. His family founded and published the Chicago Defender, one of the largest and most influential African American newspapers in the country.

Amor Kohli is Assistant Professor in African and Black Diaspora Studies at DePaul University.
EARTH MUSIC: THE A ACM
(ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF CREATIVE MUSICIANS)

TH AT THE WEST IS IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR is now undebat-

able. We must redefine every aspect of what we now call art.
Steps should be taken to show that all art is one (whether it be
painting, writing, or running).

If I were to talk about my life (the part which the people of Earth
call music) I would say the essence of what I am doing is re-creating
life. I would talk about how amazed I am. All I know is that every
day I wake up in this body and from then on everything is in a con-
stant state of flux. I have been told this is called life. Since I really
don’t remember me before I was born, I find that something is hap-
pening that I don’t know about, and this is what I play and write
about.

At this point in my music I find little use for harmony, time, develop-
ment, ideas, form, notes, technique, and sometimes sound—although
some of the nicest people I know feel differently.

A ACM: Never could I have imagined creativity on such a large
scale. I am indeed fortunate to be able to work and exchange ideas in
what must be another important link in what will likely be called
Earth Music. The fact that we’re being suppressed only gives us more
time to explore and perfect (walls are falling down, truths are emerg-
ing).

The music happening here in Chicago is the end-product of years
of trying to cooperate, help, and love each other, as well as an honest
desire to participate in the cosmos.

Obviously, what is needed on this planet is some kind of under-
standing of our lives. What people call art is, in fact, life.

There seems to be an unplanned movement in the air among the
young people with consciousness (I’ll call them artists) toward unity.
In Chicago, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians,
the Afro-Arts Theater, and COBRA are living proof that something
is happening. In the last five years the music here has advanced farther
than I had ever dared to dream, and we are only beginning.

There is a universal creative vibration in the air. The creativity
here will undoubtedly play an important part when we gain more
exposure (and when we do more exposing). More important, we are
taking steps toward securing the development and understanding
of art by teaching young people, and by becoming closer to our

communities (knowing the self).

In the end, the destruction of art will lead to the rebirth of creativity,
which is what is happening now.

Anthony BRAXTON

(excerpted from the A ACM’s mimeo’d journal, 1968)

HISTORY AS HALLUCINATION

T HE COLLAPSE OF BOURGEOIS CIVILIZATION is foreseen by
everyone. But the institutions of that civilization are fast in
developing means of controlling, rewriting and reshaping his-
tory. Instead of history, we have a series of defined concretions, dates,
lists of casualties, names, etc., and instead of memory, we have only
the sense of shock.

The press, particularly, and the other mass media contribute to
this enforced amnesia concerning events which reflect the disinte-
gration around us, which may be defined as crises, skirmishes in the
class war, or confrontations with the machinery of power.

The events of one year ago, the uprisings in the northern ghettos
and the acceleration of activity, are overshadowed by the Establishment
by a cloud of confused feelings, fear, guilt, and suspicion. The mass
media portrays the ever-recurring full-page photographs of persons
weeping—the actual emotional posture of the American bourgeoisie.

Harlem has happened. Events of revolutionary significance, blurred
over by the official historians and the mass media, are permanently
recorded in the consciousness of the persons who lived them, and a
number of people who have also been prone to the official amnesia
save for the fact that they were part of the radical movement.

In this age all history expresses revolutionary change. This is the
basis for the existence of radicalism, its growth in America, and the
great value of the radical press. The weeklies, monthlies and quarter-
lies, the mimeo’d, offset and printed journals of the left are above all
attempts to chronicle, and to give poetry and purpose to the passage
of time. And all this in an era when the passage of time has come to
I left Notre Dame in 1971, and in 1972 I gave birth to the Movimiento Artístico Chicano (MARCH). I'd like to tell the story of what happened as I went quickly along a path that led to MARCH.

First, I went back to Hammond because that's where I lived with my mother, and it was in Hammond that I began to get involved with some local Latino organizations. There's no question that leaving Notre Dame meant a long period of confusion and disorientation for me. I supported myself by taking on part-time freelance work in Chicago. I was literally bouncing between Indiana and Chicago. I had a car in those days, whipping around back and forth. But I was very depressed, and I felt that if I kept on being depressed, I was going be unproductive. So that's when I became the opposite—I became super-involved in Hammond and East Chicago, Indiana, working in different organizations try-
ing to find myself and get over the pain of Notre Dame. First, I became very active in Northwest Indiana Chicano politics—with anything Latino that seemed to be worth fighting for.

I don’t remember exactly how I got involved in so many Indiana organizations. Almost as soon as I moved to Hammond, I joined the United Farm Workers (UFW) and became the Northwest Indiana coordinator for three years, working as a volunteer. The UFW had started forming picket lines, and I joined some of them and stayed involved with them even as I participated in other organizations and developed MARCH in the years to come. I helped form the Calumet Boycott Committee as the local UFW support group involved in grape and lettuce boycotts (fig. 42). I later cofounded the Concerned Latinos of Lake Country (CLLC); later I broke away from that group to form the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO); and still later I got involved with the local Brown Berets, who liked a few of the murals I was doing in the early 1970s.

I was inspired by César Chávez and the Farm Workers movement, but there was another person who came to have a direct influence on me, a community organizer named Ernie Cortez. Ernie was from San Antonio, where he went to college and then worked for the Mexican American Unity Council. In 1972, he went to the Industrial Areas Foundation training center in Chicago, where he learned community-development techniques worked out by Saul Alinsky, a famous professional organizer whose methods influenced Chávez and the UFW. Graduating in June 1972, Ernie started organizing Mexicans in Wisconsin and then moved on to Northwest Indiana, where the Bishop’s Commission gave him his startup monies to organize full-time among Chicago-area Indiana Latinos.

The first time I met Ernie, I sensed right off that he was very astute (he later won a Mc-
Arthur Genius Award, so I guess I know how to pick them). He pretended to let it slip that he didn’t meet me by accident, but he was a real recruiter. When he came to the Harbor area, he went to the local library and spent hours there looking at a lot of articles from the East Chicago newspaper, the Latin Times, to see who had appeared in the past few issues and who could be potential members and leaders. I was in the Latin Times a lot because of my boycott work. And that’s how he found me and some of the others he convinced to join him—at local meetings, at dances, and of course in the steelmill neighborhoods. And that’s how he went about founding the CLLC as an Alinsky-style organization, and he convinced me and others to be cofounders and members. The CLLC was involved in attacking the administrations in three cities, Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago, for different things related to jobs, housing, safety, schooling—you name it. We would go to city hall meetings in East Chicago, and we would sit down in protest. For some reason, we never got arrested. But we did get a fair amount of news coverage in the local newspaper.

In all my Indiana political work, and even in my work as an arts activist in Chicago, Ernie was a great inspiration to me. He was a gifted organizer and an excellent mentor. He not only taught me how to spot talented coworkers but how to work with the community, Alinsky-style, by relating to their core values in religion, community, and art. He helped me to learn how to organize to do what we had to do. He taught me to think strategically and relate strategy to tactics—to understand where people were and convince them to reach for more. But in spite of all I learned, I also learned that Ernie and Alinsky methods could sometimes go too far.

All my artwork was now at the service of my political involvements. But even as I was involved in it all, I was thinking, How can I bring together this political work with the artistic work that I wanted to do? It was a very political time, but I was also an artist, and somehow some of this activity for the UFW, for CLLC, and still other groups crystallized my new orientation toward my artwork as I developed during this period. I did the logo and posters for the CLLC (figs. 43, 44, and 49); I was designing and passing out flyers for the UFW boycott (figs. 45 and 46). I did artwork in relation to other Latino groups and causes. But somehow that wasn’t enough. I needed to develop the organization I had been thinking about the most—an organization that linked artistic and political work. And I sensed that Northwest Indiana could not be the base for the new arts project I was thinking about.

I was talking a lot about my ideas on the phone with David Torres in Saginaw, Michigan. And one day he called me up and said, “There’s a guy named Gilberto Martínez who’s very interested in talking to you, so I told him we should come and see you.” Gilberto and David drove all the way down to Hammond, and when they got there it was already night. But we
Fig. 43. José Gamaliel González, Logo design for Concerned Latins of Indiana, 1972. Pen and ink.

Fig. 44. José Gamaliel González, Poster, Concerned Latins Convention, December 1972. Pen and ink.
Fig. 45. José Gamaliel González, Poster/flyer design, modeled on UFW California poster for Calumet Boycott Committee, for an event at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle campus on February 15, 1973. In black and red.

Fig. 46. José Gamaliel González, UFW poster, March 1975. An indication of José’s continued UFW work in Indiana even after he had launched MARCH in Chicago.
stayed up and talked for hours. And that's when we decided that no matter how midwestern the arts organization we dreamed up might be, we would eventually have to center that organization in Chicago—preferably in the emerging center of Mexican cultural life, the Pilsen barrio in and around Eighteenth Street.

MARCH came about because at Notre Dame and then in my community work in the early 1970s, I recognized that we had to start to do our own thing to promote Chicano art. Even though I lived in Hammond and would do lots of things in Northwest Indiana even after MARCH was formed, I was constantly going to Chicago to pick up freelance artwork. That's when I began to think about art shows and art exhibits, and I also began to produce some art. And then I thought of the name MARCH because it was springtime after my long winter without Notre Dame and MECHA; and I thought of a militant kind of spirit for the group I could develop—something like, well, "soldiery"—kind of MARCH, with MARCH-ing feet. I thought of MARCH that way, and I thought of Movimiento. So that is one of the things I could imply by the MARCH anagram. Jessie Jackson had formed Operation PUSH, and so I thought of Operation MARCH. To cap it off, I designed a button with a logo that was red with a man's black hand and yellow lettering. The image maybe had too much red, and I was involved with many picket lines, so maybe that's why I was called a red by a lot of people who thought I was a Communist. But I never was, even though some Communist party members might have tried to join or "infiltrate" all the organizations I was involved in, including MARCH. So that was why I decided that MARCH needed a special logo—in black and white and without the red (fig. 47).

Even then people asked what community I was signaling by our anagram and logo—always suggesting that the red was still really there. At first, I'd have to admit, I wasn't really sure who or what my real base would be—Indiana and Chicago Mexicanos/Chicanos/Latinos and then anyone who supported them, I guess. It's true, some of the initial members were political friends from Gary, East Chicago, and the Harbor, who became a part of the cabinet committee I had founded to help out-of-funds workers. But none of them were artists, and none of them lasted with us for long. Even Torres and Martinez were never going to be that much involved—though Martinez would play a role in three of our major projects. There were also some people from the Calumet Boycott Committee and also, later, some Northwest Indiana Brown Berets who became very excited about our project. The fact is, I still lived in Hammond and only moved MARCH to Chicago in 1974, even as I began to expand MARCH's agenda.

By the early 1970s, there was a cultural renaissance under way in the Mexican and Latino communities of Northwest Indiana and Chicago. Maybe not everybody was fully aware of it, and MARCH would become one of the biggest indicators. But there were other things happening in Chicano arts. In 1968, Carlos Cortez had made it to Chicago and was producing artwork, but not as a Chicano till he hooked up with MARCH. Other Mexican-style and Chicano artists began to emerge in the early seventies—some people I'd known earlier, like Ray Patlán, Mario Castillo, Ricardo Alonso, and other Mexican artists like Alejandro Romero, Aurelio Díaz, Marcos Raya, and Salvador Vega. Then there were Chicano poets like Carlos Morton and Ana Castillo. There were also Puerto Rican poets like David Hernández and Salima Rivera and artists like Gamaliel Ramirez, who developed in the same period and formed the group El Taller and later another group called ALBA (Association of Latino Brotherhood of
Artists). At that time, also, two young professors, Luis Dávila and Nicolás Kanellos, a Nuyorican graduate from the University of Texas now teaching at Indiana University Northwest, founded a nationally recognized literary journal, *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*. Then too there was the theater group, *Teatro del desenganio del pueblo*, which Nick founded and acted in along with his first wife.

I only became fully involved with this Latino arts renaissance when I moved MARCH to Chicago in 1974. However, the involvement began in Northwest Indiana earlier in the seventies through the work I took on for Nick and his fledgling *Revista*. I first met him in 1971, when the first two or three issues of *Revista* came out, and some of my work appears in an early issue. But Nick knew those first issues were not designed very well, and he asked me to help out by redesigning the logo for the next issues and by staying on as his art editor. This was more of an individual thing. I did it not as a member of MARCH, but Nick did ask me sometimes to find artwork for given issues, and so I began doing something MARCH would be known for: finding Latino artists and artwork for given projects. I should say that Nick was never a regular member of MARCH, even though he joined us in spirit and was our translator for MARCH’s *Abrazo* publications in 1976 and 1979.

As far as MARCH itself is concerned, I kind of launched the organization by doing a mural with some kids at Washington Park in Indiana Harbor in 1972. The city didn’t pay me, but I told a Mexican guy at the Park Commission that I’d volunteer my labor if they provided the paint. I figured that the commission might help me get this project going, and it did. I started the mural with my nephews and nieces, all smart kids between eight and twelve years old. The mural itself wasn’t very big—it was about seven or eight feet high, I think. I don’t remember all of it, but it dealt with the four elements—fire, water, air, and earth—and there were animals and fish. That’s why the kids could paint it, because it was very simple. The forms were easy to fill in. The colors that I had chosen for them to paint were all primaries—except for the Aztec sun, which I painted myself and made much brighter than the rest, so that it just shined out beyond everything else in the mural.

In those days, maybe it was common to paint an Aztec sun in a Chicano mural in Los Angeles, but not in Northwest Indiana. There was a Brown Beret group starting up in the area, and when two of the members, Gary and Roberto, saw the MARCH button and our mural project, they got excited about joining MARCH and bringing some Berets with them. I supported the Berets, but I never joined them. The Berets said they wanted to add an artistic and cultural dimension to their work through collaboration with MARCH, so some ten Berets joined. None

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Fig. 47. José Gamaliel González, MARCH logo, hand dated 1972, but probably a work of 1973. Pen and ink.
of them were artists, but they just enjoyed helping out on some of MARCH's first art and culture projects. I guess that made MARCH look like a militant organization.

In 1973, MARCH did an Independence Day float with a big image of el Padre Hidalgo (fig. 48), based on Orozco's famous image of him that you can see at the Guadalajara government palace. Pictures of the float still survive in some archives; one made the front page of the Hammond Times. In 1984, the Northwest Extra, a Chicago newspaper published on North Avenue between Pulaski and Cicero, reproduced the float image as the cover for a special Mexican Independence Day edition. But the best picture is reproduced in the MARCH calendar of 1977.

In 1974, the Brown Berets participated in another MARCH float that I designed for September 15—this one centering on the UFW, with images of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta. But a lot of the Berets were frightened because they were being hounded, and some of them were getting killed off by the FBI. After that they broke away from MARCH. But our militant image stuck, so MARCH and I personally would always be harassed by the police and the FBI. People were saying that I was a Communist because of my involvements; people were saying MARCH was Communist. It wasn't true, but the rumors followed us, and so did the harassment.

By the early 1970s, Concerned Latinos began making strides when it grew to about fifty active members representing our three core cities. We would meet in East Chicago, mostly in Indiana Harbor. We picketed the police stations, the civic centers. We got lots of Mexicans and other Latinos involved in our organization. We joined farm- and steel-worker boycotts and picket lines; we spread leaflets and allied with different groups in making waves in all we undertook, attempting to build a popular base.

Fig. 48. Float with image of Hidalgo, with Brown Berets, designed by José Gamaliel González. Photo: unknown, printed in Hammond Times, 1973; reproduced in 1977 MARCH calendar. Courtesy of José Gamaliel González collection.
that could fight against the established politics in the region. But somehow I became unhappy with certain things Ernie and the CLLC did. They seemed to be all for boycotting everything without considering who might get hurt. Once they picketed the house of East Chicago Mayor Robert Pastrick at a time when he wasn't even home, and the only ones to get intimidated were his kids. When I complained about this, I was told that the publicity was too important to miss. I guess they were saying, “You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs.” But I and some others came to feel the need to leave the organization. We came to feel that in the name of community, Concerned Latinos sometimes imposed its will on the people. On the other hand, we still believed in the struggle for Latino rights. So I led them in forming a new organization, the United Neighborhood Organization.

As part of my work with UNO, I produced a huge mural projecting the role and vision of UNO in relation to the history of East Chicago, and I did it with the help of only one other artist, Frank Alfaro, an East Chicago Mexican who'd served some time for smoking marijuana.

The mural has disappeared, but I still have my color sketches for each panel. Overall, it represented many aspects of the local history: the plight and struggles of railroad, steel-mill, and farm workers; breadlines in the Depression; airborne paratroopers fighting in World War II. Featured to the far left of the mural was the figure of Cuauhtémoc, leader of the Aztec resistance against the Spanish. Almost right next to him, but in the distance, is an image of Pancho Villa riding on horseback, followed by an image of Mexican farm workers picking lettuce with the symbol of Mexican eagle on a banner. Later comes the image of a big fat butcher straight out of Carl Sandburg. Then there was a tribute to the East Chicago Washington Senators basketball team (working-class heroes, all of them). Then the last part of the mural in sequence was an image of two boys and two girls huddled hugging and praying, all four wearing t-shirts bearing the name of Jesus. But what I remember maybe the most was my portrait of two local Mexican Vietnam War heroes on tombstones (fig. 50). José Núñez, driving a cab while on furlough from the army, saved a boy by jumping from his car and pushing the boy away, only to be hit himself by a train and dying in his heroic effort. Emilio de la Garza, a Marine in Vietnam, received the Medal of Honor for falling on a hand grenade.

Fig. 49. José Gamaliel González, Poster for Concerned Latinos of Indiana, 1973.
to save the lives of three soldiers as he gave his own. Finally, at the far right of the mural is a large image of the sponsoring organization's name and its anagram, UNO.

But that was my last major activity with UNO and in Indiana, an activity that showed me once again that my future was combining arts and community—but that future I would now pursue with MARCH and in Chicago.

**MARCH IN CHICAGO (1974–79)**

It was only in the late fall of '74 that I finally moved MARCH to Chicago and began to recruit Chicago MARCH members. Really building MARCH was all like Robin Hood gathering up his merry men—and merry women, too, I should add. I got to know Carlos Heredia in those first days. He was a young community organizer with some interest in the arts, and he found us a meeting space in Centro de la Causa on Seventeenth Street in Pilsen. Here-di went to some of the meetings, but he never joined MARCH, though he remained a friend and tried his hand at a Latino literary/cultural journal called *Imágenes*, in 1976, I think. Gilberto Martínez never really joined, but he always worked with us and brought in his brother, Efrain, who worked in the Justice Department and had lots of contacts in the Latino community. Efrain became one of the most active of the initial members. He became our first president and began to bring many others with him. One day, Gilberto called me to say he was off to Mexico and that he'd be happy to serve as a MARCH liaison to facilitate bringing works and exhibits to and from Mexico. The idea was an exchange program that would bring Mexican art to the city and help send *mexicano* and other Latino artwork and artists to Mexico. The first works Gilberto helped us get were examples of El Taller de Gráfica Popular, including outstanding woodcuts by Leopoldo Méndez. We exhibited the work first at Lorraine Valley
Community College, and then at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. That exhibit brought us some attention and brought some members to MARCH, especially when we took it to Northeastern Illinois.

Organizing the exhibit brought new people to our Centro de la Causa meetings. We all were supposed to bring people in to make our group function as an organization. Efrain had lots of University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) connections; and from there he recruited two anthropology students, Santiago Bolton from Belize and his wife, Susan Stechmeci. In addition, he brought in a major artist, Ray Patlán (fig. 52). I’d known Ray in San Miguel, but now he was back from Vietnam and doing mural work and acrylics out of the Casa Atzlan neighborhood house in Pilsen. Ray brought in his teacher, Victor Sorell, a Chicago State University art historian with a keen interest in Latin American, Mexican, Chicano, and Latino art. At Chicago State, Sorell had a program called the University without Walls, where you did murals or other art projects in the city or anywhere outside the university. Ray had problems at the School of the Art Institute, and so he decided to get his bachelor’s at Chicago State in Victor’s program. When Ray connected with MARCH, he invited Victor to join in.

From the first, I was the leader of MARCH, even though my official role was secretary—Victor made a joke of it, saying I was “secretary general.” And I guess I became a key recruiter after Efrain’s initial work, because I brought in Mario Castillo. He and Ray Patlán had done the main outdoor Mexican murals in Chicago up to that time—Mario at Lakewood High School, Ray at Casa Atzlan. Ray moved on to San Francisco after a few years. But Mario is a major Chicago Mexican artist to this day. He is the one who got the academic education that I was trying to get, and I guess he was the first one to get it right, painting the first outdoor Latino community mural in 1968. Muralism was a very important part of what I wanted to do and also public exhibitions involving the community. And Mario helped us find our way.

Mario was maybe my biggest recruit for MARCH. But when the Méndez exhibit moved to Northeastern Illinois University, lots of Chicago Latino artists saw it and began trying to join us. So our first woman artist, Marguerite Ortega, a student at UIC, joined and brought in her cousin, Salvador Domínguez, a grade-school art teacher. Frank Sánchez, a commercial artist, came in on his own after seeing the Northeastern Illinois University exhibit, and he brought in Rey Vásquez, an indigenista painter (fig 53). And then another artist joined. Carlos

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**Fig. 51.** José Gamaliel González, Zapata, 1974. Photostatic copy of pen and ink drawing.

The MARCH Years (1971–79) 61
Cortez (fig. 54) also saw the Méndez exhibit at Northeastern, and he got interested in what MARCH was all about and whether he could join. He came up to me and said, very humbly, “I am Mexican, but I’m not a Chicano or even a Mexican artist.” His art was to become more Mexican as a member of MARCH, especially through the influence of José Guadalupe Posada. But at first he came with a background in art from the International Workers of the World, or the “Wobblies,” as they were called—basically an anarchist group fighting for workers’ rights and socialism but from an anti-Communist point of view. He was Mexican.
on his father's side and German on his mother's. He was brought up in a German community in Milwaukee, and even though he wrote early poems that dealt with Mexican and even Puerto Rican themes, those were things that he did as a political person working with the Wobblies; he could have been Chinese writing those things.

Still others came in, like Larry Hurlburt, an art historian from Wisconsin who joined, I think, through Victor. Then I brought in José Narrio and Francisco Blasco from Gary. I met Francisco catching the train to Chicago because he had a portfolio that he was carrying, and I approached him, and he said he was a student at the School of the Art Institute; so I told him about MARCH, and he joined up. Then in 1975, Aurelio Díaz (fig. 55), a Chicago Mexican painter, joined, and then Sal Vega (fig. 56), a young painter who would work at Casa Aztlán in the 1980s and do fine work, somehow mainly in the shadow of an artist who never joined us but was a kind of fellow traveler: Marcos Raya.

Aurelio came from an Indian village in Mexico. He got to California and then went to Texas. He came to Chicago, and I discovered him, I think in 1975. He had done some painting at a local restaurant, and I asked who did the work, and they told me, and I said, "Can I leave my phone number and tell him to call me?" And he did—he called me and showed me his work, with all his bright colors and Indian symbols; and he joined MARCH. We worked on many projects together, and in fact he made me an award of appreciation for my work with MARCH.

In 1975 and '76, MARCH was really on its way. Many of us were involved in arts projects of our own, with only some indirect ties to MARCH. So in 1975, Ricardo Alonso, who was coordinating community mural projects, asked me to produce a mural of eight panels depicting different pre-Colombian indigenous tribes on a wall between Sagamond and Hubbard Streets (see figs. 57 and 58 for two of the eight panels) and other ones depicting animals on the sides of trucks (fig. 59)—we called those portable paintings "moving murals." I hired Oscar Moya, a young Chicago Mexican artist friend of mine, to help me do the Hubbard Street murals. But they ran out of funds, and in the end, I didn't get paid a thing for any of the wall mural, which is a half a block long. The whole project was called La raza de oro, but for me, it was La raza de nada—at least financially. People now say it's my best mural work.

Anyway, Ricardo and I next teamed up to do the first Mexican American exhibit at the

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Fig. 55. Aurelio Díaz, MARCH member, with portfolio, 1975.

Fig. 56. Salvador Vega, 1975
Museum of Science and Industry (fig. 60)—we were to do successive exhibits for them for about three or four years. So ’75 was very busy for me because I was also working as a freelancer in Chicago. But also in that same year, Gilberto Martinez helped MARCH line up two exhibits from Mexico that we ended up doing at the Montgomery Ward gallery at UIC. First, we exhibited twenty-five paintings by the Mexican masters Orozco, Diego, Morado, Dr. Atl, Tamayo, and others—it was the first time a show of their work came to Chicago. For this show, we brought two artists from Mexico, Gilberto Ramirez and Jaime Mejia Servin, along with the show’s curator and writer of the twenty-five-page introduction to the exhibit catalog, Adrian Villagomez. The show involved lots of packing and security measures (fig. 61). El Palacio de Bellas Artes de Mexico stipulated that in order to have the paintings of the country’s greatest artists, we had to have a special alarm system installed in the gallery. Arranging that wasn’t easy, first because none of us knew how to price the insurance for the artworks we had, though we knew the value was in the millions—I mean, just about every major modern Mexican painter was represented except Siqueiros, because he had just died, and they withdrew his painting to use for a special Siqueiros homenaje at the Bellas Artes in Mexico City. But in spite of all the problems and disappointments, the show was a huge success, as we brought all kinds of people to it and even got some attention from the Chicago arts community.

The show put MARCH on the map in a big way. It established us a major player in the Chicago Latino arts scene. Efraín invented a great subtitle for the show: Mexposición—a word he took from the Chicago Expo shows that hardly had any Mexican art, then we added the number 1, because we’d already lined up Mexposición 2—a show of Agustín Casasola’s photographs.
of the Mexican Revolution that we put together in 1976 (fig. 63). Gilberto went on his own to Mexico, and he met the great grandson of Casasola, and he brought personal photographs from him. He shipped them to his brother Efrain, who went with us to a place called U-Frame-It. You pay for the frame, but you do the framing yourself to save money. So we did an assembly job. And then we had to run complex security measures for this second show, too.

Maybe these two shows were the biggest exhibits of Mexican art in Chicago up to that time. The Montgomery gallery space was tiny, but we used every inch of it with panels so it was

Fig. 59. José Camaliel González, “Save Our Animals,” truck mural (portable part of Raza de Oro Hubbard Street mural), 1975. Photo: Efrain Martínez.

Fig. 60. José as curator of the Mexican American exhibit of Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry, 1975, showing parts of his Raza de Oro mural design to Victor Danilow of the museum. Photo: Gini Sorrentini.
Fig. 61. Unwrapping the paintings from Bellas Artes of Mexico City, with Efrén Martínez, Victor Sorell, Francisco Blasco, and Sandy X, 1975. Photo: José Gamaliel González.

Fig. 62. Poster for Mexposición 1: Twentieth-Century Mexican Painting, May 9, 1975. Ray Patlán, poster art. Printed by the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Art Department.
kind of a maze. And the shows got a big turn-
out, with us bussing in kids from the schools—
especially Mexican kids who learned as they
walked around. UIC's Latin American studies
program got deeply involved with the second
show, with the chair, Otto Pikaza, giving us his
blessing, and then professors Renato Barahona
and Mary Kay Vaughan helping out. Their goal
was to make the Casasola event significant in
relation to Mexican history and I guess to show
that their program was a center of Chicago
Mexican studies. I was providing them with the
vehicle to relate to community, I guess. Pikaza,
Barahona, and other UIC professors helped us
get together some of the elders from the com-
munity to talk about the Mexican Revolution. It
was the part of the Casasola program we called
"Los Ancianos," or "The Old Ones," and it was
very moving—older people who might soon
be gone, recounting before an audience and on
tape their memories and impressions. As for
Mary Kay, she was a historian of Mexico, so she
wrote up all the notes on the revolution for the
first issue of Abrazo, a publication I created to
go with the exhibit (fig. 64). Mary Kay and I got
really involved, as MARCH just marched on.

Those days were among the best I ever had.
I was still freelancing and doing design work
for Revista Chicano-Riqueña. I put together a
collage of Chicago Latino mural images for an
issue on the city's muralists (fig. 65), with a key
article by Victor Sorell; and Nick Kanellos even
got me a mural-painting class, which I taught
at Indiana University Northeast. But my main
energies were for MARCH, and I even got Nick
involved with us by getting him to be the trans-
lator for the 1976 issue of Abrazo. The issue has
a picture of a scene with Nick performing in the
Teatro del desenganño del pueblo. It also has
an image of Captain Chico with the graphic
artist David Torres; and there's a drawing by
Aurelio Díaz of Zapata. There's a staff list for the
issue, including Nick as the Spanish translator.
The issue's editors are Victor Sorell and Santiago
Boitón; the associate editor is Susan Stechnicj;
and I'm listed as art and design director. There's
an editorial by Boitón and Stechnicj pointing
out that in spite of the wealth of the country,
Mexican, Latino, and Latin American artists
were not doing well. There's a note on Compa-
nía Trucha, one of the local theater groups, in
an article called "Nuestra Gente," and there are
images of Marguerite Ortega. It has a descrip-
tion of a Mexican Independence Day event in
Michigan that was organized by David Torres
from Michigan.

There's a discussion of an art-show boycott
and the demand for "equal representation
for Chicano Art"; and it lists a lot of different

Fig. 63. Poster for Mexposición 2: Imágenes
de la Revolución, Nov. 8–24, 1976. Designed by
Carlos Cortez for MARCH in conjunction with the
University of Illinois at Chicago and the estate
of Augustín V. Casasola, Montgomery Ward
Gallery.
also a notice about the new issue of Revista Chico-Riqueña and the Revista's forthcoming Nosotros anthology, which would appear in 1977 and stand as the first nationally produced issue about Chicago Latino poetry (more Puerto Rican than Mexican or Chicano) and arts, with several pictures by the Rican painter Gamaliel Ramirez, including a cover image of Gamaliel in a garbage pail, with the Chicago skyline behind him. (I designed the cover.)

In 1977 we did a show at Truman College, a community college on Chicago's North Side with a significant Native American student population. We called the show Anishinabe Waki-Aztlan (fig. 66), which was a Chicano-Native American art exhibit with performance, poetry, music, and visual arts. Carlos Cortez helped come up with the concept, but I think it was Lonnie Poco, an American Indian poet, visual artist, and leader of the local Indian guild, who first suggested the name, which is Native American for "Aztlan survivor." Lonnie worked with Carlos, Aurelio Diaz, and several others from MARCH to realize this project. I designed the poster, and Sal Vega did the poster art, featuring a framed Toltec warrior. We did a really strong and colorful show. The president of Truman College loved it very much, and at the end he was very proud that he could pronounce the show's name.

Then, too, 1977 was the year we produced the MARCH calendar, which tells you more about MARCH than anything I can narrate here. You just have to look at it, and it tells almost all you need to know about MARCH. First the calendario features the cover I designed (fig. 67) and provides pictures of our thirteen artist members and four others who were not artists: Victor Sorell; Susan Stechnicj; her husband, Santiago Boiton; and Larry Hurlburt, our Wisconsin-based historian of Mexican art. There's a photo by Francisco Blasco, the Gary photographer I

Fig. 64. Abrazo 1.1 (Fall 1976). Cover photo of Zapata.

Latino-centered or Latino-involved arts and cultural organizations in Chicago: the ACI, ALBA, Casa Aztlan, the Chicago Mural Group, the Public Art Workshop, the artists' coalition of mujeres latinas. There is poetry by Carlos Cortez, Anna Castillo, and Carlos Cumplán. There's work by Mario Castillo, featuring his beautiful image of birds; and there's Mary Kay's article, translated by Josefina Cortez de Kramer—a long piece on Casasola's "Photography from the Mexican Revolution," with examples of his work. I did the photographs for the issue, showing the crowd of Mexposicion 2 visitors looking at the pictures (some of them "old-timers" who cried when they saw those pictures of the revolution).

The issue also includes El macheteazo by Carlos Cortez and an illustration by David Schwartz, influenced by Posada. It has information about different local events, and there's
met on a train. And there’s Efrain Martinez, an amateur photographer but a key MARCH member and our first president. The biographies give some really good details about the people, and the whole thing is something I’ve always been proud of. There are biographies and photos of Ray Patlán, José Nario, Frank Sánchez, Salvador Domínguez, Salvador Vega, Marguerite Ortega, Aurelio Díaz, Carlos Cortez, and Francisco Blasco. There’s a wild picture of Mario Castillo, who did some very extreme things in school, like shaving off all his hair—and I mean even his pubic hair, his head, and everything—when he was going to California for his M.A. And here’s me, José González: “Whether he is organizing Latino art exhibitions serving as art director of Revista Chicano-Riqueña or teaching a mural class at Indiana University Northwest or working as a freelance graphic artist, José González always utilizes his art originating projects that aim to show the importance of art and its role in life.” And then there’s some images of our artwork. Next to the photo, you can see my charcoal, “The Cycle of Man: Birth, Death, and Regeneration,” one of the best pieces I produced during my School of the Art Institute days (see fig. 35 in chapter 2). There’s photography by Efrain Martinez, Rey Vásquez, and Francisco Blasco, and there’s a picture by Mario Castillo. Carlos Cortez has a very simple sketch of Mariana, his wife, with a dove. There’s also a poem by Salima Rivera, “Indio.”

In the calendar, there’s also the common statement I wrote up for MARCH. You can read it all, but the main thing is that we were an arts group coming from, relating to, and working for our community, which we saw as oppressed, marginalized, and alienated from art. Our goal was to give expression to our concerns and needs and our history. It was to preserve history and project history from the standpoint of our people, including the peoples of Mexico and, more broadly, Latin America. These are some of the things I mention in MARCH’s common statement, and it also had a Chicano ideology as part of it. I mean the ideology was Chicano and pre-Colombian indigenous as best as we could express it. In taking on these Indian identifications, we were trying to deal with the question of Aztlan. We were taking in West Coast and border Chicano experience and myths and extending them to Mexican Chicago. Not everyone in the group shared the same perspective, but it put some pressure on our group, if only at an unconscious level. Some of us also had a perspective on Chicano and Mexican concerns. We knew that in Daley’s Chicago, the best chance for Mexicans was to unite with other Latinos.

Fig. 65. José Gamaliel González, Collage of Chicago Latino Murals, designed and used as cover for bicentennial mural issue of Revista Chicano-Riqueña 4.4 (Autumn 1976).
Fig. 66. Anishinabe Waki-Aztlan, Poster. Design: José Gamalíel González; drawing: Aztec Warrior, Sal Vega, 1977.

Fig. 67. Cover of MARCH Calendario 1977, designed by José Gamalíel González with reproduction of pen and ink images.
and also African Americans. Many of us participated in broader causes. But MARCH stuck to art, even though some members wanted more politics, and nonmembers might’ve thought we were all politics.

Another thing about us was our debate over using models. Ray Patlán didn’t use models in his work—he pulled them out from his head. Cortez did a lot of that, too. The importance of not using models was that it meant we had to use our own inspiration, so it was more like poetic expressionism than any effort to render a copy of something seen or arranged. For myself, I worked with models for some of my pieces. But for something like “The Cycle of Man,” I tried to be freer, to go from something out of or even beyond my head—from memory and emotion. But I always tried to combine some pictorial accuracy with vision. I always went beyond models, and maybe that was part of MARCH’s code, too: to project Chicano experience but also imagine other options, other worlds.

THE BENITO JUÁREZ HIGH SCHOOL MURALS

One of the many exciting and controversial things that MARCH did in its few years as an art group was to meet with city officials and architects to work on the new Benito Juárez High School that was being built. The city called for input from the community and formed a committee to work with the contractors and architects.

At the beginning, they hired the famous Mexican architect Pedro Ramírez Vásquez to design the building. However, Fidel López, a Chicago Mexican architect, complained that it should be designed by a Chicago Mexican architect. You can be sure there weren’t too many in those days, so we can pretty much guess who he wanted. Meetings were held with both architects, but in different rooms. They never met in the same room. The city couldn’t work it out with either of them, and in time they were both dismissed. They then turned to a new firm that had three architects, and the firm chose Adrián Lozano, another Chicago Mexican architect, to design the school. From the beginning, MARCH wanted the building to be designed with walls that could house both inside and outside murals. When the final blueprints were done, we were given a set to work with to design murals for given walls. I was one of the members, along with Aurelio Díaz and Efraín Martínez, that had approached the city. I went to Urbana, where Mario Castillo was living, and helped him a little in putting together a presentation board where we could post some of the mural designs.

Mario had photographed the work, and I pasted it on the presentation board. For me, the most impressive designs of stone were done by Mario of the four elements—fire, water, air, and earth. But I never pushed the idea that those chosen to do the murals had to be MARCH members. To me, it was just important that the murals were done to enhance the building.

Finally, after some years, Casa Aztlán was chosen to organize a community committee and held a competition. The final design chosen for the outside wall of the gymnasium was by two people who were not muralists, Jaime Longoria, a painter from Los Angeles, and Malu Alberro, a Mexico City–born, Chicago-based photographer who studied at the School of the Art Institute. Their designs were for the Benito Juárez High School gym mural outside wall (fig. 68).

Since neither of them had ever done murals, they got Marcos Raya, Sal Vega, and Oscar Moya to do the painting. Aurelio Díaz was one of the youngest MARCH members and was very ambitious about painting murals throughout Chicago; you can see all of his murals throughout Pilsen. Many of them were done with young people, and some are on the viaduct on Eigh-
teenth Street. Aurelio, Marcos, Sal, and one other artist did an earlier mural in Dvorak Park, which has now been painted over by the summer program held each year by the city. Maybe all this explains why Aurelio was so upset with the outsiders’ mural and its execution by some of his friends. But whatever the reason, before Marcos, Sal, and Oscar finished their work. Aurelio showed up one day with a group of young people and threw paint on the mural. Marcos claims that he took a photo of Aurelio in the act. All that created a scandal that tarnished Aurelio’s reputation and maybe hurt MARCH as well. But it’s also true that Marcos, Sal, and Oscar repaired the damage and completed their work; Marcos and Sal restored it in the 1990s.

**A MAGICAL TIME: MEXPOSICIÓN 3 AND ABRazo 2 (1978–79)**

During and after our work on the calendar, things were happening fast and furious. In 1978, we did another exhibit, Mexposición 3, dedicated to la mujer and featuring work by and about Mexican women from Mexico and from Mexican Chicago, at the city’s Cultural Center (fig. 69). Two older Chicago women in the exhibit were María Almontes and María Enríquez de Allen, mother of Mario Castillo. There were also two women artists from California, Linda Vallejo and Barbara Carranza.

Next we did Abrazo 2 in 1979 (fig. 70). And the issue turned out just fine. The Spanish translator continued to be Nick Kanellos, even as he was getting ready to move to Houston. The editorial was by Victor Sorell, who takes on the art world for not dealing with ethnic and Chicano arts. Then there’s Aurelio Díaz, with an image of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. And the issue even has a picture of the mural that I did in Indiana for UNO.

In this issue, we had a poetry editor, Carlos Cumpián, a young Chicano writer, so there’s lots of poems: one by Rina García Rocha, a
good piece dealing with her uncle Joe, a working-class Chicago *mexicano*; one by Rubén Sánchez, who published some work before leaving Chicago for California; one by Joyce Sato, a poet Cumpián found or maybe invented; one by Carlos Cortez, "This is the Land"—a long poem probably not written for this edition, but reprinted from his big body of Wobbly writings. There is also a poem by the Puerto Rican poet Alfredo Matías; and there’s still another poem by Carmelo Romero, who, along with Matías, was a member of Taller, a Chicago poetry group mainly composed of Puerto Ricans (but also including the Chicana poet Yolanda Galván) and led by David Hernández, which developed on the North Side roughly at the same time as MARCH and came to include visual artists like Gamaliel Ramirez. The poems by Matías and Romero in *Abrazo* 2 would also appear in *Revista Chicano-Riqueña’s Nosotros* anthology, the collection of Taller poetry and images edited anonymously by Hernández in 1977.

In his poem, Matías asks, “Where are the Latin poets?” And the poem by Romero is about the Puerto Rican trombonist with Duke Ellington, Juan Tizol. So while we identified as Chicanos, we always reached out to others. I guess it’s interesting and significant that early in the history of MARCH, we get into so much Puerto Rican poetry, and it just shows that you can’t keep things segregated in Chicago for very long—at least not in Latino Chicago. That was to become a significant part of MIRA in the 1980s: to promote all Latinos. It wasn’t just Chicanos and *mexicanos*. I felt we should reach out to other Latinos, perhaps bring them at least as guest artists and writers. But then, too, from the beginning MARCH never was all Chicano, because we had Santiago Boiton, Susan Stechnicj, Larry Hurlburt, and Victor Sorell, none of them Chicanos.

Meanwhile, with all this MARCH work in the 1970s, I continued my design work for *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* and its offspring, Arte

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*Fig. 70.* *Abrazo* 2, cover, Teatro de desengancho del pueblo, South Chicago, (1979)
Público Press. I got appointed to a national Latino arts commission, and MARCH even got CETA funding. And during all of this, Mary Kay and I dated and finally got married, and then we had our baby, Alicia, in 1977. It seemed like a magical time. But then even as MARCH and life seemed to be going so well, things were beginning to fall apart—at least for me.


I know I’ve mentioned Mary Kay, but I don’t really get into enough detail about what Mary Kay meant to me, about marrying Mary Kay, and how that may have affected my work and my vision, and then how our daughter Alicia herself affected me from the very last years of my association with MARCH and down to this very day. So I think this is something I should talk about some more, even though I don’t want to say too much.

First, I think I should mention my sense that I’m talking about a very special moment in the mid to late 1970s. For the first time perhaps, there was a Chicano consciousness in Chicago’s Mexican community, and I was very much part of that. I was on the cutting edge of the artists who were trying to create a sense of identity in a time when mexicanos felt oppressed; and this consciousness was coming into Chicago, the largest U.S. city with a population that was more Mexican than Chicano and that had in general rejected the Chicano label. Only now, this more militant Chicano consciousness was coming to the fore in our lives—at a time when there was a national concern for Chicano and Latino community economic and cultural development. All this was going to lead to a new set of community leaders that would seek allegiances with other Latinos and Afro-Americans. It would lead to changes in Mexican Chicago and its artistic expressions.

I guess this is the story of how my local arts and community agenda got tossed around by both personal and national developments. As I’ve said, I’d met Mary Kay as we worked on Meso- posición 2, the Casasola show of November 1976. She came to have a big role in the exhibit because she wrote about Casasola in the 1976 Abrázol. But she also took her turn just like the rest of us, watching over the exhibit, serving as a security guard, protecting the photos, welcoming people, and registering them for the visitor list. I appreciated very much what she did because she worked very hard, so I asked her if she’d let me take her out to dinner to thank her for everything. And we agreed to go after 6:00 P.M. if she could find someone to take her shift. And sure enough, she worked it out, and we met at Little Joe’s, a little restaurant on Taylor Street, just walking distance from the UIC Montgomery Ward Gallery.

I got there about a half hour after she did, and she had already started on some drinks. So she was feeling very good when I got there. We had a couple of rounds and then dinner,
and she said she wanted to invite me over to her apartment for dinner at a later date. And I said, "Well, that would be fine," and I realized I wanted to see her again. So about a month later, she cooked me a dinner at her place. And that was our second date. After that, we dated pretty often. We were seeing each other a lot—and before I knew it, we were going together.

It was a winter, cold-weather romance. And I remember we went to an art exhibit, and I was wearing a warm turtleneck sweater that one of the Mexposición artists, Jaime Mejia Servín, had given me as a token of thanks for that show. And, sure enough, a photographer who was taking shots of the people as they arrived approached us, asking if he could take a photograph. "I could make a portrait of both of you," he said. And I couldn't resist, so Mary Kay and I posed together in our sweaters, both of us smoking cigarettes and kind of expressing our relationship at a time when it was blooming (fig. 72).

So we dated, and we were going pretty steady once or twice a week. I still didn't have an apartment in Chicago; I still was driving back and forth to Indiana. But then finally, in January 1977, I got a basement apartment in a building owned by Santiago Bolton and Susan Stechnicz. And from then on, I was to live in Chicago, even though I would drive back to Indiana on most weekends to stay with my mother.

While I was in Indiana I was always thinking of Mary Kay. She had my mother's home phone number, so she would call me to make plans about seeing each other during the week. We were going steady all of wintertime '76-'77, and then I told her that I wanted to marry her. This was all in the beginning of 1977—it wasn't quite spring yet.

During all this period, I took on all kinds of freelance jobs trying to make ends meet during our courtship and upcoming marriage. Finally, my experience as a volunteer worker for César Chávez in Indiana helped get me a steady full-time job with the community organizers Kathy Devine and Steve Salzburg working on the North Side at Hull-House as a counselor for people who couldn't afford housing. It was a good program and good work, but of course it interfered with my nonpaying job as the full-time head of MARCH. I took the Hull-House job for the sake of my marriage, though I personally preferred to be poor and fully committed to MARCH. But I was very much in love with Mary Kay. And she was in love with me—I'm sure of it. And so I tried to accept my new working situation.

The wedding took place on June 30, 1977. It was an outdoor affair at the home of her friend, Fanny Rushing, on the South Side. Mary Kay's sister Nancy came to town for quite a while so she could help plan and organize the wedding. Then, too, her father came to support her—which was an honor, really, with him cleaning.

Fig. 72. José and Mary Kay Vaughan: a smoking couple, 1977.
up a dog-dirtied backyard for the ceremony. I’m the one who got the priest from Pilsen’s Providence of God church. I also designed a pre-Colombian-style wedding invitation. It was printed by a small Mexican printing shop in Pilsen, and the invitations featured a tree with two indigenous people—a woman and a man—on each side.

Of course, lots of my family members were present at the ceremony, and a lot of MARCH members came. Frank Blasco and Santiago Boiton were the photographers. Carlos Cortez, Victor Sorell, Efrain Martinez, and other MARCH members came too. And I think the MARCH people saw the wedding as a kind of organizational event: the marriage between the Mexican artist and promoter and the professor of Mexican history. And that seemed to be a good thing at the time. But the relationship and the marriage didn’t last very long—something like two years, 1976–78—that was about it.

Without doubt, this period was a major time in my life. Mary Kay meant a lot to me. I was very much in love with her and then with Alicia when she was born on Christmas Day, 1977. The Christmas date is why I wanted to call her Luz, “God’s guiding light.” But Mary Kay was afraid people would call her Lucy, so she added Alicia to her name. Luz Alicia: that’s her baptismal and civic name. As it turned out, we always called her Alicia. She was like heaven-sent for me, the brightest star of my life then and now. And I was madly in love with both of them at once because Alicia was a part of Mary Kay and Mary Kay was a part of Alicia.

By this time, we had an apartment together on the North Side, and the monthly rent was pretty steep. Mary Kay was making pretty good wages as a professor. And while I didn’t make as much as she did, I made enough between my Hull-House job and freelancing to pay maybe half of our expenses. But it wasn’t that easy, because I was still running MARCH, and the Hull-House job was getting to be too much. On top of that, I was freelancing on keyline-assembly graphic designs. I got paid very well for that work, and that’s why I could afford not to work full-time at a regular job before. But now, with added expenses, I was trying to do everything at once, and I was running myself ragged. Of course, I was torn between doing the other jobs, doing work for the organization that I so much believed in, and also making a living as a new husband, I guess.

At the same time that I worked for Hull-House, I was super-active with MARCH; and the MARCH work became even more demanding when we became recipients of a grant from the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). Efrain Martinez somehow got MARCH lined up with the CETA grant, which provided funding for four full-time workers who could help us in any way we dreamed up. With this new framework, Efrain and most of us thought that MARCH could really reach a new level. But the CETA experiment had some unforeseen negative consequences. With our CETA contract, MARCH had a real address for the first time, a rent-free office space of our own that Albert Vázquez gave us and that took up the whole fourth floor of the Little Village Community Mental Health Center, which Albert directed. It was unusual for an artist organization to get CETA workers. But it was the first time that they had a new program reaching out to arts organizations—and that was the ticket for us getting a contract. So we were fortunate to be offered four full-time federal workers and the office space, and we were also fortunate in that the city provided us with a very good full-time bookkeeper, who helped us with our taxes and kept the books for the workers and our projects. The only problem was that the whole CETA-driven operation required a full-time director.
to guide these people, develop the projects, and coordinate everything. That person was me as MARCH executive director, but the only problem was that I wasn't getting paid. They paid the workers, but not me. Part of my nonpaying job was to look for matching funds that would provide me with a salary, but that was easier said than done. People and corporations might want to fund projects, but they rarely wanted to provide salary for a director. I thought I'd still get something even as I tried to raise more. But it wasn't working out, and I found myself at a terrible crossroads.

Here I was married to a very intelligent, fiery professor who was very much fascinated with Mexican history and was taken also with the development of Mexicans in the community of Chicago. Mexican Chicago was late to the Chicano political movement, and late to the Chicano art movement. But now, as leader of MARCH, I was spearheading Chicago Chicano development in and through the arts. Mary Kay understood my ambitions for MARCH—she had become part of that. But then we came up against some limits, because I started choosing MARCH over what would bring me a direct income, I began to take a gamble, as my inner voice began to call out: I want to make MARCH happen—this is my time. It happens now, or it doesn't happen.

One thing leads to another, something gives, and before you know it, what is giving is the marriage itself—which blossomed in relation to MARCH but was now beginning to feel the pressure of my choices. There she was, saying things that were totally logical to say: We have a new baby, she says. You've got to take care of this baby. First of all, the baby needs attention. I'm a professor; I need to do my research. We need you to spend more time dealing with family; I can't have you running off to a meeting every five minutes. There has to be some order in this situation, so that the baby gets dealt with. I loved the baby, but I was also fully caught up in my projects and aspirations.

Then, just to make things even more complicated, along came another opportunity I just couldn't resist—another option that would make it all the more difficult to keep my head above water. I got a call from Jacinto Quiarte, a professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He had been going around the country recruiting a group of twenty-five key Latino arts people to represent given areas in a new Hispanic Arts Task Force that he had been appointed to direct by the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C. And he asked me if I would be one of the twenty-five. Sure enough, he and his assistant came to Chicago to meet with me, and then they confirmed me as their choice to represent Chicago and the Midwest. Well, I talked it over with Mary Kay, and we both agreed that this would put me and MARCH on the national stage, and that it was just too important to turn down. But the unfortunate thing for me was that taking on the Task Force would be like taking on still another full-time job. Because we would have national meetings every two months in different locations—Texas, California, New York, Colorado, Washington, Miami, and even Puerto Rico—but in between these meetings, we had to cover our areas to assess needs and concerns. I had nine states—the largest area—to cover. And the problem was, they weren't going to pay a salary for this work, either—just travel expenses plus two hundred dollars per out-of-area trip. To make things even worse, the reimbursements would come every two months, based on my credit-card payments. Luckily, I had two credit cards to keep things rolling, but I'd probably incur credit-card debt while awaiting payment. Still, it was an opportunity to be center stage in the national and regional development of
Latino arts. How could I say no? And so I said yes, somehow knowing that this might be the straw that broke the camel’s back.

It was impossible for me to handle MARCH’s CETA program, serve on the Task Force, and still hold on to the Hull-House job. Faced with all this, I decided finally that I couldn’t turn away from the opportunity to build MARCH, so I decided to leave Hull-House.

It’s not exactly clear to me, the exact day of the cutoff point, but I do remember that when I told Mary Kay of my decision, I sensed immediately that we had reached a limit. It wasn’t so much that she was angry and disturbed—she was, without a doubt. She was upset because I wasn’t going to have a full-time salary, and her was mad because I was going to depend on freelance work for my part. But she also knew that the CETA and Task Force assignments would chew up all my time and energy. She asked why I was quitting, why I was leaving the only steady and sure income-producing position when I should be more focused on supporting my family. And why hadn’t I consulted her more clearly and consistently before taking such a big step? I guess the answer to everything was that I could not trade my dreams for a salary, and I hadn’t discussed my decision with her because I knew what I was doing would make no economic or family sense. She was so upset. She and I realized, I guess, that we had drawn a line that would end us. I hate to recall this—it was a heartbreaking moment for me. She said, “Get out of my house. I don’t want you anymore.” That was in May 1978.

THE NATIONAL HISPANIC TASK FORCE AND MARCH (1978–79)

Of course, the marriage didn’t end that smoothly. I tried to get back together. But I was under a lot of pressure. The pressure was so great that I began to drink pretty heavily, and maybe my mental health suffered too—that’s what Mary Kay, and even some other people, said or thought: that maybe I was losing it. But at the time I think I was all right, even with the tension, because I had a lot of energy and lots of commitment to my work.

California had four members to cover their state. New York had the same. Margo Albert, an old-time movie star who had made her fame in Shangri-La with Ronald Coleman and was married to the actor Eddie Albert, was the co-founder of Plaza de La Raza. She and a male co-founder were chosen for the Task Force. The other members from California were Judy Baca, a well-known Chicana muralist and director of SPARC, an arts group based in Santa Monica; and José Montoya from Sacramento, the cofounder of the Royal Chicano Air Force art group. From Manhattan’s Spanish Harlem, Marta Vega, who founded a Hispanic arts organization, was the most dynamic member from her area; then there was a founding member of a theater group who only made one meeting in three years. There were two other male members—both of them photographers, one representing a large gallery, the other representing a very active organization. Carmen Lomas Garza was originally from Texas. So she represented that state, even though she lived in San Francisco. The other Texan was José “Joe” Rodríguez of Houston. There was also Luís Jiménez, who was originally from Texas but by then did his huge sculptures out of his studio in New Mexico. There were twenty-five members in total. I was the only one who covered more than one state—nine Midwest states overall.

I got really close with some other Task Force members, like Rodríguez, Jiménez, and Montoya. I also got to see the great fund-raising work Margo Albert was doing for Chicano Arts in the Los Angeles area. There were national meetings throughout the country. And once,
when we decided to have a small, local meeting in Denver, we faced a demonstration against us, especially attacking Jacinto Quirarte for not including a Colorado artist in his book of national Mexican American artists. They also were not represented on the Task Force and wanted a member from their group to sit on the Hispanic Task Force. We agreed and chose Carlos Estebáns, who was a sculptor and the most vocal of the group.

Our national meetings were held every two months, and it was our task to reach out and gather names from our areas that had needs and concerns in the arts during the time between national meetings. I managed to travel and locate artists in five of the nine states. Those with the highest number of artists and arts organizations were Michigan, Minnesota, Indiana, and of course Illinois.

Each area was responsible for written reports to be included in the report to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Only nine Task Force members were kept on to serve another year to bring together the total report. We were able to get the NEA to hire Joe Rodriguez for a three-year intern position as our “watchdog.” I was also responsible for recommending Victor Sorell to be hired by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Victor stayed for about two years at the NEH on leave from Chicago State.

Through the Task Force, I was getting to know artists and arts promoters all over our region and all over the United States, and I thought that would lead to great things for MARCH and Chicago. So I did research with my CETA worker Salima Rivera on the Illinois Arts Council to find out how many Latino artists and Latino organizations had been funded. We found a very poor record with our community. With my presence there, I was able to get Latinos to sit on panels to review the proposals, and I then helped get Eliud Hernandez hired for a full-time position with the council. He is still there.

In fact, that was only one of many good things we did with our MARCH CETA program. But some people said we could do more; some people felt MARCH was suffering and not gaining anything from my Task Force work. A series of events took place, which, in the midst of the pain of my marriage breakup, led to another terrible break—this time with the very organization I had founded and helped to develop, and which was such a source of pride for me.

THE BREAK WITH MARCH (1979)

It all started with CETA but ended with MARCH itself. The workers I chose for the CETA jobs were Carlos Cumpián, a young Chicano poet originally from Texas; Marta Ayala, his sister-in-law, who was a great outreach person and became our secretary; and Salima Rivera, a Puerto Rican poet who'd been brought up by a Mexican family and who related to all things Latino (at the time, she was a leading figure in ALBA, the mainly Puerto Rican arts group I've already mentioned). Finally, there was a woman named Carol Keating, who was the youngest of the group and helped us out with some of our projects.

These four workers helped with some of our key projects—developing our calendario, the Anishnabe Waki-Aztlan exhibit at Truman College, the Mujer exhibit at the Chicago Cultural Center, and Abrazo 2. But here came the negative consequences. All the support we received and every success we had was killing me. We were so good with our bookkeeping, cost control, and accountability that CETA officials considered us a model organization. And that was the worst thing that could happen to us, because then they wanted to give me another four CETA
workers. And I thought, I'm getting killed here. How can I handle all this and everything else? I just couldn't see how. Now, with my marriage behind me, but with expenses before me, I was having to take on more and more freelance work just to keep afloat. By December 1978, I'd reached my limit. That's when I told Efrain, "Efrain, I just can't supervise eight people. In fact, I can't supervise four people anymore, and I'm going to transfer the workers to another CETA site." Efrain had fought so hard for us to get the positions, he complained to me, "José, what are you doing? It's Christmastime, and you're going to leave them out in the cold. It's a bad time to be out of a job," he said. And I told him, "Efrain, they're going to have jobs because they'll be transferred; and they're going to want to stay in the new jobs because they'll be on full-time salaries. But I don't have a regular job, and I can't support eight people without wiping myself out." The transfer was to Morning, an avant-garde Chicago dance group on the North Side. Salima decided not to go and dropped out of the program, but the other CETA workers made the jump. Later they were transferred to a Latino theater group that the Victory Garden Theater was trying to form; and one of them, Marta Ayala, actually joined the group and stayed with it when it broke from the Victory Garden Theater to form what would become the Chicago Latino Theater, or Teatro Latino Chicago. But I think some of the people, especially Efrain and Carlos Cumpian, were unhappy with the CETA cutback, feeling that I'd let my own agenda curtail a program that they felt would lead to a bigger and better MARCH. Above all, I think they felt my national Task Force agenda, as well as fears of problems with government contracts, had gotten in the way and that I was in the process of liquidating MARCH. But that was not my intent at all—I was trying to keep MARCH small enough to maintain its focus and development, including its linkages with the larger network of Latino arts organizations that I was getting to know and help develop through my work on the Task Force.

Efrain was transferred to Texas at this time, and that was the end of his work with MARCH—I hardly ever heard from him again. But I began to have serious problems with Carlos Cumpian, which eventually led to my leaving MARCH. At first things seemed fine. Even after his transfer from the MARCH CETA job, he decided to join MARCH and serve as the poetry editor of the new Abrazo issue we were working on in 1979. He did a good job on that issue, but he was giving me a lot of trouble. He criticized everything I did, and maybe I criticized everything he did. The fact is, we just couldn't click together, and we finally had a falling out.

He was very young—much younger than me. And he was belligerent. I mean, he was a hothead with everybody, not only with me. It was difficult to keep him in check, and since he was in a position under me, that made him rebel against me. I think he felt I was too much the lord and master. "Caesar is too ambitious; Caesar is going too far. He is now building this national thing, and we want this local thing to work. It is time to get rid of Caesar." Maybe he thought it was time to assassinate Caesar. Even when the CETA program was on, he complained I was too much focused on money and bookkeeping and not on Chicano resistance. Then, when I joined the Task Force, he said I was showboating and not focusing on local concerns. When I warned him that we were being watched for being too radical, he said we were too conservative. When I warned that our Brown Beret connections and other activities might get us in trouble, he said I was paranoid, and we should be more political. When I pushed for more political kinds of activity, he said it was the wrong politics. To me, it was a question of
control over the organization. He said that what I was doing to the organization was wrong, that I controlled and limited the organization too much. He said I wasn't open-minded and that I kept him and MARCH on a leash when he wanted a bigger role for himself and MARCH. He wanted to be the director. To put it frankly, he wanted to be me or a better version of me, maybe—at least that's how I saw it.

Part of Cumpián's job as a CETA worker had been to pick up the mail at our downtown post-office box. Even when the CETA job ended, he kept the keys, and he also had our master mailing list. In a way, that gave him some control of MARCH. I didn't understand what was happening, but suddenly I realized that he was communicating with MARCH members behind my back and even calling a MARCH meeting on his own, with the purpose being to oust me as the head of MARCH or, as I saw it and see it, to take the organization away from me.

I was depressed from the marriage breakup. And now I had this growing problem with Cumpián and MARCH. And he was right in saying the Task Force was crucial to me because I didn't want to be a poor example in the Task Force. We were supposed to solve problems in Latino arts communities, not make them worse. To create a mess over MARCH's internal problems would make me look like a bad representative. So yes, it was true; it was more important for me to be a figure in the Task Force doing this valuable national work on Latino art than to struggle for the control of our own local organization. I didn't fight Cumpián at all because, I felt, here I am, chosen to represent Latinos across the country, and if I had a fight with my own organization and caused a split, that would be the worst thing I could do locally and nationally.

I didn't even go to the meeting Cumpián called. But I understand he brought people with him, to side with him—and I never called on people to side with me. People who attended said Cumpián made it seem like it was his own organization, and I guess the majority agreed with Cumpián that MARCH should move on without José González. And I didn't fight Cumpián. I didn't fight at all, because I didn't think I could or should. I just sat back as he took MARCH over. As MARCH director, I guess I could have rallied my supporters. I could have said, “If you don't like the way things are going, you can resist. But you can't take over our organization.” I had to make a major choice: I would either fight this breakup of my own organization, or I'd be kicked out. What founder of an organization would simply step aside and allow himself to be pushed out? People usually put up a huge fight to prevent that from happening. Maybe I could have gotten MARCH back by going through a lawyer. But I decided not to fight. And I made that decision mainly because of the Task Force. I guess I just felt that I was being hypocritical if I was having a fight with my own organization, with my own community of artists, for the sake of controlling an organization at least some of them identified with. I felt I could not both represent Chicago Latino artists and fight against those artists to hold onto the organization. So I just accepted the fact that Cumpián and his supporters had "released me" from MARCH, even as they stranded me from my own base in the community.

It was a terrible blow for me when Carlos Cortez went with Cumpián—I felt the virtual breakdown of my world. The break with MARCH involved some of my major friendships. These weren't just people I worked with—these were friends, and some of them were close friends, like Cortez (fig. 73). I might not have seen him seven days a week, but I had a kinship with him—the man was virtually my generation. I was at least one of the artists who made
him aware that he was a Mexican artist, and not just any artist. He had his own political agenda. He was formed in wild and romantic Wobbly beliefs, and I couldn’t share his politics per se, except to agree that Mexicans were underrepresented and oppressed, and something should be done about it. That was my point of contact with his politics, I think. I didn’t care about his ideology, but we were friends, we were co-board members, and this young guy comes along and says, You’ve got to choose to be with José González or be with me. And it wasn’t so much that Cumpián took Carlos away from me. Cumpián went to Carlos for support, and he got it. Cortez was a very calm person. And he was Cumpián’s refuge, more or less. He was the one that Cumpián could talk to.

Why would Carlos Cortez support Cumpián, who was so young and always hyped up? Because Carlos was a graphic artist, of course, but he was also a poet. And so they had more in common on this score. Also they shared one core belief that I found difficult to accept, which was the idea that a Chicano arts organization should try to survive and thrive without trying to get institutional grant money that would compromise the group’s values and projects. That MARCH shouldn’t go chasing after grants was one of the first principles in Cumpián’s agenda. So he said to me, “Well, we don’t really want grants.” And I said, “Sometimes we need them for special projects.” And he said, “Okay, for a special project thing we might do it, but we want to be as independent from grant life as possible, because we don’t want to be tied down by Reaganite grant requirements and commitments.” Well, we did get some grants from the city, but we hadn’t gotten national grants for the arts—and my hope was that my Task Force connections would help us get some. I was opposed to Cumpián’s view, which I saw as an attack on my role in the Task Force and what I thought would be important to MARCH in the future—its ability to get funding for collaborative projects with other arts organizations.

This was an important difference that surfaced at the end. However, above all this, Cortez was like a father to Cumpián. And I was not a father to Cumpián. Here he was looking for a mentor or a father figure, and he chose Cortez, not me. And
Cortez was more political than I was in the broad sense because he believed in worldwide anarchist revolution—that’s another thing. My politics were more local and Chicano-driven—they were all about Mexican empowerment and art. I was too religious and mystical for Cumpián. I must have struck him as weird. Part of my work with the Farm Workers was out of my feelings for the Virgen de Guadalupe and the whole question of social justice. The fact that I went to Notre Dame had to do with my background. I fought at Notre Dame, but I was still part of Notre Dame—with a view of Catholicism that was related to liberation theology and Paolo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed that was so popular among Chicago Latino activists in those days.

Looking back, I see now in fact that most of the artists and other people did not go with MARCH. Victor Sorell stayed a bit on the sideline during the breakup, leaving it to the core artists. But Victor didn’t go to the breakup meeting. He just said, “Okay, let’s say that they’re now MARCH. Now what do we do?” In the long run, he went with me.

Really, from that point on, MARCH was mainly an organization of writers promoting Latino poetry. The only artist who stayed with MARCH in any significant way was also a poet. And he was one of my closest friends. Losing Carlos Cortez was almost like a second divorce on top of my divorce to Mary Kay. But of course, for me, the divorce from MARCH was a calamity on top of the other divorces I was already facing. I was deeply depressed. I guess my mental health problems started there—though some friends say that the problems had started and helped create the other breakdowns.

What can I say was my major achievement as the head of MARCH? Well, I’d say the exhibits and publications we did helped establish Mexican arts as significant in the city. And that is why I think that what I did was to open all these doors. I put Mexican and Chicano art on the Chicago map and put Chicago on the Chicano and Mexican maps as a center of Mexican art, along with Los Angeles and a few other cities. I was able to do that with MARCH, along with my Task Force connections.

But after all my successes, the need to leave MARCH so depressed me that I actually felt I was losing my way. The only thing that would save me, at least in the early 1980s, was developing MIRA, a new organization with many new artists but also with many of the same ones I’d worked with in MARCH who decided—some sooner, some later—that they couldn’t continue with the older organization in its new form. But that’s a story for the next chapter.
The video art of the 1970s anticipated many specific new media art theory practices. I trace these histories through the lens of experimental media art projects made in Chicago during the decade of the 1970s by a group of artists and academics whose collaborative artistic research and development led to the establishment of new technologies, approaches, organizations, and media art projects.

In Chicago, in the 1970s, Phil Morton (founder of the Video Area and the Video Data Bank at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Dan Sandin (founder of the Electronic Visualization Lab at the University of Illinois at Chicago), and Jane Veeder collaborated on real-time audio-video projects that anticipated current new media art theory practices, as well as open-source software and free culture. Artist-developers such as Phil Morton, Dan Sandin, Jane Veeder, Jamie Fenton, Larry Cuba, Ted Nelson, Tom DeFanti, Kate Horsfield, Lyn Blumenthal, Gene Youngblood, Steina and Woody Vasulka connected in Chicago during this time.

1. In 2007 I initiated the Phil Morton Memorial Research Archive in the Film, Video, New Media and Animation department at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago to archive and freely distribute the Media Art work of Phil Morton and associated research. The Archive was made possible through a generous donation from Morton’s surviving partner, the late Barb Abramo.
In 1971 Dan Sandin developed the Sandin Image Processor, a patch-programmable analog computer optimized for video processing and synthesis. Morton asked Sandin, his friend and studio neighbor if he could build the first copy of the original Sandin Image Processor. Sandin and Morton then began to work together creating the schematic plans for the Sandin Image Processor from 1971 to 1973. They named the document, that contained the schematic plans for copying image processors, *The Distribution Religion*. *The Distribution Religion* was the first example of a document being released under Morton’s COPY-IT-RIGHT license. *The Distribution Religion* was given away freely to anyone who was interested in building his or her own copy of the Image Processor.

In 1973, Phil Morton wrote in his introduction to *The Distribution Religion*:

“First, it’s okay to copy! Believe in the process of copying as much as you can; with all your heart is a good place to start – get into it as straight and honestly as possible. Copying is as good (I think better from this vector-view) as any other way of getting, ‘there.’” ²

Morton’s position, as articulated in *The Distribution Religion*, constitutes an important aspect of his COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic, namely, that copying is right, morally correct and good. In fact, for Sandin and Morton, copying is not only good it is necessary for their process, for their project, because it was conceived of (conceptually and technically) as expandable. The Sandin Image Processor itself is a modular system for real-time audio-video, an analog computer that is extensible because it is proto-open source.

COPY-IT-RIGHT encouraged people to make faithful copies, caring for and distributing media artworks as widely as possible. A close-knit community of collaborators worked together in Chicago on the new media of their time, incorporating digital and analog computing with real-time audio and video synthesis, processing, computer programming and experimental improvised performance.

Diane Kirkpatrick is one of the few people prior to myself to have written on the collaborative work of Phil Morton. Kirkpatrick emphasized collaboration in her exhibition catalogue for the exhibition *Chicago: The City and Its Artists 1945–1978*, which she curated at the University of Michigan in 1978. She details the social aspects of the media art histories of the collaborative real-time audio-video performances created using the Sandin Image Processor by artists such as Phil Morton, Dan Sandin, Tom DeFanti and Bob Snyder. Her discussion of these origins documents the roles played by each artist in the development of their collaborative projects. As Kirkpatrick recounts, individual artists from the Chicago community presented projects that were both carefully pre-planned as well as improvised. They were inspired to continue to work together in this improvisational manner, jamming together on what Morton has referred to as their adventures in real-time audio-video.

I am especially compelled by the regular collaborations of Phil Morton and Jane Veeder as I find that these project parallel and are antecedents to contemporary new media art. Veeder has explained to me that Morton’s COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic came from an “early counterculture... sense that information should be free.” Veeder links Morton’s position to current digital art and new media as well as free and open-source software development. As Veeder details, COPY-IT-RIGHT means making faithful copies, caring for and sharing work. As such, COPY-IT-RIGHT is an ethic, an ethical position. Lucinda Furlong wrote in her 1985 essay on the video art subgenre of image processing, that Sandin “got involved in video in 1970 during the student protests that resulted from the Kent State killings” and so, importantly, like Morton, he understood the medium of

4 Lucinda Furlong, Tracking Video Art: “Image Processing” as a Genre.”, 1985, Art Journal, Fall Vol. 45 No. 3, College Art Association of America
video and real-time media art to be always already sociopolitical rather than neutral. They regarded their work not only in terms of being personally and culturally transformative through technologies, but also importantly in the context of sociopolitical and economic struggle. As Michael Century describes it, this community in Chicago was "a distinctly counter-cultural unit exploring the "phenomenology" of interactive imagery for use in experimental art and scientific visualization." 5 6

The term ‘source code’ refers to the preferred human-readable and human-modifiable form of a software program, as opposed to object code, which is the derived, compiled binary executable form of a program. Software and therefore source codes themselves come in two basic forms: open or closed. Closed-source software are proprietary and commercial products which cannot be altered or changed at their core. Open-source software such as the Linux operating system is fundamentally always open to revision, modification and change.

Eric S. Raymond, founded the Open Source Initiative in 1998 and began using the term “open source”. Raymond writes in various texts that the prehistories of Open Source also connect to countercultural computer cultures, i.e. hacker cultures. 7 Prior to this, the concept of free software was developed and put forward by Richard Stallman in 1983. Free software licenses such as the GPL or General Public License, as Nicolas Malevé states, “unambiguously guarantees the right to use a computer programme free from any restriction (the program may be used for any purpose), the right to study (we can learn how the programme works), the right to copy, modify and distribute copies free of charge or commercially.” 8 The phrase “free and open source” combines these approaches and insures that the software’s source code stay freely available for modification and open to collaboration. As such, free and open source as a cultural position is also an ethical position.

Jane Veeder links Morton’s COPY-IT-RIGHT as a prehistorical antecedent to open source. With her intimate first hand knowledge of the meaning of COPY-IT-RIGHT, it is clear that COPY-IT-RIGHT is an anti-copyright approach coming from a counter-cultural position and that it preceded and anticipated cultural projects, such as free and open-source software. Still, Veeder, purposefully

6 It is from this same ethical position and commitment to free distribution and open sharing of resources that I both archive and release Morton’s individual and collaborative projects.
7 Eric Steven Raymond, A Brief History of Hackerdom, 2000, Thyrsus Enterprises
makes clear that in addition to being similar to free and open source software, COPY-IT-RIGHT could also be called a pro-piracy position on Morton’s part because he felt “justified making a copy of anything.” The ethic of COPY-IT-RIGHT thereby emphasizes a multivalenced moral imperative to freely copy and openly distribute creative works as widely as possible, especially in the hostile environment of copyright and intellectual property regimes which would make such activities illegal.

As Janice T Pilch states in her essay “Collision or Coexistence? Copyright Law in the Digital Environment”, intellectual property regimes are most often associated with efforts to prevent piracy in terms of file sharing and copying of digital files online or in peer-to-peer networks. Morton's COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic and his formation of the Video Data Bank (initially as a collection of copied and copyable analog media art resources) were conceived for the purpose of exactly this kind of digital sharing and distribution of media arts, thirty years before the possibility existed for video materials to be easily exchanged in, on or through online networks and personal computing devices.

The globalized intellectual property regimes effecting the development, distribution and exchange of digital media today, have been defined in the United States and filtered through a great deal of transnational corporate interest. These laws began to be revised and firmly established in their current forms during the 1980s through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and in the 1990s through the formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the WTO’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (the TRIPS Agreement), and most recently the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). The development of these laws, legal systems and organizations are generally understood to have been landmark events in the process of globalization. The DMCA is the most digitally specific, wide-reaching and expansive of these laws and has been widely criticized for its severity, scope and enforcement.

Various forms of resistance to copyright have been identified by scholars such as Debora Jean Halbert. Halbert seeks to find and highlight the strengths of “alternatives to protecting knowledge resources that don’t translate them into private property” and has investigated a number of areas of the legal expansion of copyright with a focus on the ways in which intellectual property regimes limit creativity while increasing suspicion. These limits and suspicions result from the assumption that “creation stems from the chance of monetary rewards.” Morton and his Chicago-based group of collaborators and students

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11 In 2010, Jennifer Granick, the Electronic Frontier Foundation’s Civil Liberties Director referred to the DMCA’s “overbroad reach” when commenting on the success of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) in winning “critical exemptions” to the DMCA. The critical legal exemptions that the EFF has fought for and won created new legal protections for “artists who remix videos” (among others) as the EFF explained in their announcement of the ruling of The Librarian of Congress (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, Copyright Office, 37 CFR Part 201, [Docket No. RM 20068]). This announcement, EFF Wins New Legal Protections for Video Artists, Cell Phone Jailbreakers, and Unlockers (from July 26, 2010), and many other writings critical of the scope and application of the DMCA can be found on the EFF’s website: https://www.eff.org/issues/dmca
13 Ibid.
resisted this assumption and considered their creative work to be for the (moral, artistic, personal and political) good of their communities. As such, Halbert's search for alternatives and resistance to, as well as critiques of, copyright law and intellectual property regimes hold particular importance, underlining that the experimental work undertaken by these artist-developers in the 1970s is echoed in critical and scholarly analysis thirty years later. Over the course of these years, the issues of copyright and intellectual property in media arts have become even more pressing as the digital forms that Morton and his collaborators developed and experimented with eventually became the basis by which almost all media are rendered, distributed and exchanged.

Halbert explains that as “solutions become increasingly draconian with each new lobbying round by major intellectual property interests” 14 and the conceptual framework of property is the main way in which creative work is enframed or understood more suspicion is produced. This suspicion has a destructive effect, causing people to worry about “how their work will be misused instead of used”. 15 Rather than promoting a culture in which the creative arts are valued in frameworks other than property and artists are encouraged to freely exchange and share ideas, the United States Congress has enacted laws that further expand the definitions of copyright and intellectual property in favor of industries rather than individuals and in order to further protect corporate rather than public interests. Halbert plainly states that these laws are “not a neutral body of abstract principles, but is instead the codified will of those with economic and political power.” 16

Matteo Pasquinelli has written, in “The Ideology of Free Culture and the Grammar of Sabotage”, that the Creative Commons initiative faces “a growing criticism that comes especially from the European media culture.” 17 Critics cited by Pasquinelli include Florian Cramer, Anna Nimus, Martin Hardie and Geert Lovink. Among the critiques, Pasquinelli defines two main positions. The first focuses on the fact that the producer-centered ethic of Creative Commons does not recognize or include a critical rethinking of the uses of media produced under a Creative Commons license (and therefore continues to contribute to a sociopolitical imbalance in the technosocial creation/construction of “producers” and “consumers”). The second position highlights the related fact that Creative Commons is consistent with existing copyright laws and therefore does not provide a real alternative. Pasquinelli advocates instead for “a tactical notion of autonomous commons can be imagined to include new projects and tendencies

14 Ibid. p. 3
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
against the hyper-celebrated Creative Commons.” To imagine an autonomous commons Pasquinelli refers to the concept of ‘Copyfarleft’ by Dmytri Kleiner. Copyfarleft opposes systems of private control over the means of publication, distribution, promotion and media production. This opposition takes the form of a critique of ownership of material assets, recognizing class issues and allowing workers to reclaim production. Copyfarleft ensures that products such as media art works that are made under its license remain free and, as Pasquinelli states, “can be used to make money only by those who do not exploit wage labour (like other workers or co-ops).” This explicitly ethical sociopolitical position connects back to COPY-IT-RIGHT as Morton’s position was also an ‘ethic’ that opposed private property, ownership and economic exploitation on the basis of new technologies.

Florian Cramer has also addressed the ways in which current copyright and intellectual property laws are not neutral, as Halbert also directly states in her analysis, and has suggested that any alternatives need to be explicitly articulated in ethical terms. Cramer has consistently addressed these concerns to new media art communities through his writings and presentations at festivals such as Ars Electronica and Wizards of OS and his posts to lists such as nettime. Cramer advocates for new media artists to critically analyze the context of current copyright laws as they relate to creative and computational works. Cramer has detailed how the General Public License (GPL) and Free and Open Source Software movement’s strategies can be applied to more that simply software and how these and other alternatives to copyright relate to media art.

Cramer similarly references art historical trajectories and motivations for present day interest in and commitment to resisting copyright, and is particularly concerned with the cultural implications of code and new media art as forms of anti-copyright activism. When Cramer compares options for openness in media art he questions the Creative Commons options on the basis that they “lack an underlying ethical code, political constitution or philosophical manifesto such as the Free Software Foundation’s Free Software Definition or Debian’s Social Contract and the Open Source Initiative’s Open Source Definition”. As he states this lack of a fundamentally ethical, political or philosophical basis has undermined the effectiveness of Creative Commons from the onset. As has been previously established in this study, Morton’s COPY-IT-RIGHT concept is primarily an ethical, political and philosophical position and as such remains on a firm basis if placed into the continuum of Cramer’s comparative analysis of forms of openness in media art.

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid. p. 7
Before definitions for the terms open source, free culture or new media art were used, circulated or understood, Phil Morton playfully experimented with remixological processes and projects that sprawled across these boundaries and borders. Morton's projects were transgressive not only in these terms, but also because they resisted commodification, copyright and intellectual property. Morton and his individual and collaborative works defend an ethic of openness shared by the Chicago-based group of collaborators. Alternative media art histories can provide parallel historical accounts of forms of resistance to copyright in media art cultures and communities. At a time when transnational corporations have increasingly sought and received legal support for expanding the definition of copyright, Morton's COPY-IT-RIGHT makes clear that other worlds are possible. Or as Halbert writes, “we do have a choice in how the future develops.” 21 This future, in which these alternatives to copyright can exist and flourish relies on a recognition and critical inclusion of under-represented, repressed, lost or forgotten histories (such as the subject of this study) in order to establish the past upon which the future Halbert defends, a viable future of ideas, can be based.