

COLA20 Salon Conversation #5

Moderated By: Gloria Enedina Alvarez, Harry Gamboa Jr. and Claudia Rodriguez
With Judithe Hernández

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay, well, since I came up with the questions, why don't we just remind everybody of what the question was. Right? (Good idea.) Which was, pardon me a second, it says, "What are the past and potential impa-- impacts of Latin-based cultural traditions, politics and multiple -- multiplicities stemming from Los Angeles?"

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: So the first thing, I guess, is for us to figure out what does that question mean to you when you hear that? You know, the idea of like Latin culture and the -- and the impacts it has on cultural trad-- traditions, specifically around LA.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, this is kind of an interesting question to ask in Los Angeles because this has always been a very Latino city. And there were moments when it was less Latino, back, you know, when I was a teenager. It was always that way in East LA, but with the Westside didn't show the influence much. I think when I -- when I read the question I thought, you know, what -- that was an interesting question to ask given what's happening in 2017 with PSTLALA and what I would like to hear from, you know, my compadres over here, what they think that means. How that -- how that wave of recognition will move eastward to the east coast.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Last time there was a PSTLALA, the -- the first story that hit a magazine in -- in -- in New York, I think it was Art in America, they wrote about the PSTs in the January issue, but it was about the African American show at the Hammer and the Chicano show at the Fowler, and I thought that was tremendously interesting that, you know, that that was that eye-opening, you know, for people on the east coast.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I -- I had actually about two months ago I had the curator of contemporary art at the Art Institute of Chicago and the assistant curator of contemporary art at the MOMA in my studio and, you know, at my age you have nothing to lose, right? So I asked him [LAUGHS] why didn't you guys ever show living, breathing, American Latino artists? I said I never see --

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And when I lived in Chicago for 25 years, there were a lot of, you know, Latin American -- there weren't a lot. There were some Latin American artists who were born in Latin America, from Latin America who were showing occasionally there. But nobody who was an American Latino ever made their way into their galleries. And I'm hoping that one of the things that will result from the profile of, you know, PSTLALA is the very fact that this really interesting and very exciting, you know, art and group of artists who have been here forever producing work that's not like mainstream art, will get the recognition it deserves. The exposure it deserves.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Both of them told me off -- off the record, "We love what we see. It gets to be a hard sell when you move up the chain of command." Which I thought was pretty interesting.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: Yeah, and I think that kind of takes us to the next question. How -- How is it that we define the term Latin? Or Latinix. Which -- well, yeah. Because I guess at first, you know, when I -- when I saw the question, I felt somewhat removed from it. Because I think more of Europe than -- than American being all of the Americas, including Latin America. So, yeah. But I'm gonna let Harry take it.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: Well, I think one of the things about Latino influence and southern California is that it, irregardless of what the façade is, you know, we're so close to the Hollywood sign, you know, I think I've spent my entire life trying to poke holes in that thing. And what it is it's to allow people to see what might possible be on the actual real landscape.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: It's the Latino population is usually precluded from participating in terms of direct conversation on panels, in exhibitions, through academia, and of course economic and you'll have an entire cadre of people that make their careers serving as explainers as to why and why not.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And then they will redefine and then in the end the Latino voice is completely obliterated and -- and that's in English. Because if you watch English language TV you will get a particular version. And if you watch Spanish language television it's very complex, very intellectually inspired, you know, more true representation of what's going on. And those people that watch Spanish language TV watch English language TV, but those that watch English language TV do not watch Spanish language TV, which then means that what supplants reality are negative stereotypes.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: I think I just wanted to elaborate a little bit more on the point that Gloria made about Latin culture or, you know, past and present influences and how they reverberate, you know, nationwide. And for me I agree with you that I felt this kind of like alienation or separation from the idea of this Latin culture. I mean, I am Mexicana, Chicana and I don't claim or have tried to represent any other culture or experience other than the one I was born into.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: And I feel that, you know, when we used the umbrella term of like Latino I think it tends to -- it's a short cut that unfortunately doesn't do us service, right? Because we're -- we're, you know, so diverse even when we talk about the immigrant experience of someone from, you know, Mexico or Salvadorian, you know, or even the reasons at times, you know, that bring us here, you know, and then show up in our work are -- are very different. You know. But Harry, you had a comment or a reaction.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: Well, you know, I was born a hundred years after California became a state. And they were still in the process of de-Mexicanizing Los Angeles. And supplanting it with architecture that is an imaginary version of a Syrian architecture. And -- and anything that could point to Los Angeles having been started elsewhere and whenever you had a population that became kind of rather strong and visible, such as the Zoot suiters, or when you think about when they were building the Dodger Stadium.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And whenever you wind up having groups of people that achieve some level of critical mass and politics, such as the Chicano moratorium, it's always met with extreme official violence, then followed through with a narrative that will then point

to the false causations of these events. And in the end it's all erased because the next generation never gets to read about it in public school. Or never gets to talk about it.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And so it's been the artists primarily who are deal with the local history, sometimes it's documentary, but sometimes it's interp-- interpreted, and sometimes completely imaginary. But yet, it's kind of based on the kinds of things that have actually taken place. And, you know, it is an interesting thing to try to tell the entire story, because so much effort has been put to make sure no one ever hears any part of the story.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's interesting. I took a little bit of shade from the -- these young women muralists not too long ago when I did an interview for NPR about the station that I did in Santa Monica. And they were asking me about how I felt, you know, about public art in particular in LA. And I said something to the effect that -- that I -- as much as I admired some of the things I see, they're very handsome, they don't seem to be wanting to educate, to inform, to, you know, even incite some kind of political, social response, you know, from -- from the people who see that, you know, this work of public art every day.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They seem sort of, I don't know, I mean they're attractive, but they didn't grab me emotionally, intellectually. And I remember listening to the rest of the interview and they asked these other young women who were, you know, current public artists. Not Latinas. Who, you know, kind of didn't disagree with my assessment of, you know, the work that it was -- I'm not sure, you know, that we would ever agree on the -- on how the content was more profound than I was, you know, than I was implying.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But -- I don't know, I mean, you know, my career began at a time where all of the work that we did had a very strong political agenda that had to do with the Chicano movement. And over time, you know, hopefully my work has matured, but it's continued to talk about who I am as a -- as a -- as a Latina, as a woman. But one who is, you know, Mexican. And I don't know, that, you know, that's -- and I hear from more and more young Mexican American artists for lack of better term who are still struggling with the idea of how they define themselves, whether or not, you know, they want people to think of their work as "Mexican" or "Chicano."

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And -- and what impact that will have on their future. And their ability to have an impact on audiences besides, you know, the ones who understand what they're saying, I guess. I don't know, it's -- it's -- Gilbert Luján used -- used to be the standard bearer for, you know, national, you know, Chicano art, you know, by one definition forever. But I don't know. I mean, how -- how has it changed in -- in the world, you know, among writers and -- and, you know, other kinds of artists who, besides the vision -- us visual artists?

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: Oh god, that's like, I mean, we're so many things. All at once. I think. And, well, I was thinking about, you know, the identity and I guess I was thinking about different conversations that we've had and some with Harry and in the past, I guess now maybe 30 years ago or more than that, and then again maybe 20 years ago. And then we're here. And actually I think we were here. The last time was like in '90 and some after that.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: You know, and -- and still -- I'm still thinking about, you know, how I see my experience as, you know, being part of -- still being in this what some call "in between zone," you know. Nepantla. Claudia Saldias term. But way back, you know, after we were colonized. You know, and the -- the -- the internal exile that we live.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: And as you were talking, Harry, I was thinking about my own family's experience of being U.S. citizens for three generations, coming, helping to build the railroad. And then in -- in the mid-30s being sent back to Mexico. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, it's been maybe the last 15 years or so that I've been working -- well, some of the work that I've been doing has had to do with that. You know, just going back within my own family's history and finding -- finding out more about that.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: So, yeah, I was thinking about that and how, you know, this in between, you know, being neither here nor there, but being both here and there. And I guess some parallels with some of what you talk about, the phantom culture in LA.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So how do we -- how -- how do young artists struggle with that? I mean, they -- they're not that many generations away and we're constantly reminded by the current administration that some of us don't belong here. So I mean, history has -- has repeated itself on the other side. You know, the influence that -- that impacts our ability to live, work, grow, you know, contribute to society in the United States. How do -- how do young Mexican Americans, Salvadorians, how do Latinos figure that out?

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, in terms of their -- of the output of their creative work, you know, do they -- do they launder themselves so they fit into mainstream, or do they fight the fight and hold on to their identity and have it show up in their work? I mean, I don't know.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Well, you know what, that's an interesting question which was, you know, leads to what I was going to ask. You know. This idea of -- and I'm just being a devil's advocate. Right? Because one of the things that, you know, Harry said was this notion of -- of it's almost like we're constantly having to build and rebuild because it's, you know, neglected, invalidated. But I mean build, it's our work, our art.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: And so I was thinking about this idea of like creating art. You know, and there's this like lofty concept when we think about art. Right? And it's almost this idea of -- of are we as, you know, underrepresented communities, do we have the burden of constantly having to, you know, burden entre comedias, of constantly trying to be political with our work. You know, constantly using our work, our artistic expression as a -- as a means of resistance?

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Do we not have the luxury to just create, you know, for the sake of aesthetics? Which I think is kind of like what was happening between the younger generations and -- and the -- and yourself. You know, in that radio conversation. And -- and, you know, and going back to your point, how do younger people or -- or generations of artists, how do they do it? I feel it's in the same way. I feel that because of the -- the

effects of current policies that are happening that young artists are -- never have stopped responding to, you know, the -- the policies that affect our communities.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Anyway, I felt like I said a lot, so any thoughts about any of those ideas?

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: Well, it's been a really long time since I was a young artist. But the one thing that I kind of came -- came as a way of life and as a way of my practice. It kind of pre-dated my practice actually. Was to always have a good time. To have a good time in the face of adversity, which in a way is very Mexican to be celebrating. And I have found that maybe early on that became almost a necessity to, without really announcing it in some level or another, celebrate the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] every day of the week.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And because of the kind of life that I witnessed growing up in East LA where life had almost zero value for the people that were in control. And, you know, you -- one -- one has the option of -- of becoming very optimistic, or of falling into despair. And if you fall into despair you've actually lost. And if you have sort of a positive point of view, and you are making things and showing people that even though you might be under duress as it were, and you're still producing, in a way that is a rather revolutionary act also.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And -- and so -- and also the idea you were talking about, being recognized on the east coast or whatever, I mean it's extremely obvious the relationship with Latinos and Chicanos and the art world, you know, if you go on the website to either

Christie's or Sotheby's and you type in the word "Chicano" it just shows you a zero.

[LAUGHTER] And if you type in anything else there's usually seven zeros with a number in front.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And so it's kind of a very real process in which certain forms of art are meant to not be rewarded as it were. Again, I started off long ago and I was very surprised a couple years ago when I showed in Princeton art gallery and they used one of my works on the -- on their little postcard. And they listed me as an American artist. And so I kept thinking I might as well use that as a passport. [LAUGHTER]

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I -- I get what you're saying. One of the things that I think is hard for young artists, I mean, and you must have struggled I think. I know Almira struggled with it. So did I. Frank, not so much. There is something about making art, you know, that -- that in -- in the United States I guess for some of us has come with a label that have -- that has inhibited our ability to share that with the whitest audience possible.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I -- I personally think we should fight against that. I mean, there -- there is African American artists have made a little more inroads in that area. And we have not. And, you know, whether -- whether, you know, white Europeans in this country like it or not, half of this by -- by mid-century, half of the population will not be white. They will be people of color. And I mean, how much longer do you lock the door, you know, to the -- to the -- to the symphony, the ballet, the -- the museum and not -- and not see the cultural and ethnic representation of all the people who live in this country. Who've made this country.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I guess that's why I -- I -- I applaud young artists who hang onto to that identity and don't give in to the pressure to -- to, you know, it's like the new kid at school, you sort of want to fit in so you give up some of the things that made you different. I don't want to see us do that. I don't think there's any reason. Every -- everything about, you know, our culture is -- is something that we should be willing to share, and -- and we have been open, you know, to the -- to the majority culture and absorbed a lot of what they've had to offer that is good.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But it's -- it isn't reciprocal. It hasn't been reciprocated and I guess I think that's where artists should stand the line personally. I mean, my opinion, but.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: You know, I'm thinking also, I just did an interview a couple of days ago for an archive, the Women's Building Archive, (Oh, yeah.) and they asked me to choose someone that I had worked with so the person was Ofelia Esparza. You know, who is this gem, this treasure that we have in the community. Right? You know, who just really knows the community, knows the history, and, you know, has -- has offered so much.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: So, it was kind of, I mean, to talk about the feminist art movement and the -- the Chicana art movement. And, you know, but it's -- it was for me again, I guess, hard to, you know, how do you separate those? I mean, like one was -- they -- they were both happening at the same time. You know. And we were working like -- although I didn't have a chance to work there, at the Women's Building, I went there, you know, right around the time that it started.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: And then I had some -- some issues with class and race and how that was being addressed and how I was addressing it myself. And in my -- in -- in the community. And -- and then again, you know, later I -- I went back and -- and I did a residency there and did some -- worked at some projects. Actually before that when I first got there, worked on a -- a PSA, a video, about what was going on, the forced sterilizations that -- at county that (What year was that?) Antonia Hernandez --

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: Late 70s? (The late 70s? Wow.) Yeah. Late 70s. So, you know, which was like really important. And that's come back around now. You know, with the film. Yeah. So -- so anyway, but -- but it was just like, well, you know, there's this two-way thing, you know, cause they're like, well, mentor/mentee. And I'm like, you know, Ofelia is -- has -- is -- has taught me -- is teaching me, will teach many. You know. 00:23:49

GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: Yeah. And, you know, part of it, like, I mean, I think, you know, we were all -- I guess I wanted to address also, you know, women's involvement in the -- in the arts. You know, in our communities. And from, you know, our -- our, you know, from your time, my time, your time. Yeah.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: I think one of the other things going back to our early generation a while back was that we were under the possibility of, the males in particular, of being dragged into the Vietnam War. Which was halfway around the world. But which forced us to think about the other side of the world. But we also were part of the first television generation in which we were exposed to international events and -- and this pre-dated the -- the Internet.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: The group that I was with, we were very interested in reaching everyone in different continents. And so back then there was a movement called as Mail Art, where you just send things out to people. And it involved a little bit of research. You send it out. And started making contact with people under different kinds of conditions. And, of course some of the people we were in -- communicating with were like from Chile, Argentina. Some actually didn't survive that kind of oppression there. And I'm from the same generation as the people that were -- there [UNINTELLIGIBLE] loco.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: So this idea that maybe your lives were really at risk, and they really were. And so when you have your life at risk, you -- you're kind of forced into a condition where you can either succumb or you're gonna fight really hard and -- but it was also the age of rock and roll. And a lot of different types of things. So, you know, if you're gonna fight you do it with style. And -- and you make sure that because you've been -- you understand the imagery, for me I was very early on. That's exactly the way I kind of worked it was to utilize imagery that in some way might use tech-- techniques that were produced by multi-million dollar companies.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: But of course I could only afford one -- one frame of negative. And tried to put it all into one picture, of which sometimes actually worked. But then took, you know, an entire generation for people to become scholars and for, you know, just to build up on it, for them to finally even look at it and kind of recognize something that was taking place back then. And of course it's all been, as we were talking about Judithe, how scholars have sort of a particular agenda and point of view, and so it's still requires the artist to have some input to kind of express what the intent was.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And whether there's a connection between that moment and the current moment and whether you've been sort of on a -- on a sort of a particular trajectory. And of course we live in this era now, where it's, you know, I could just say that Mexicans are completely targeted at the national level. And so I believe that Chicano artists have to respond very exquisitely and astutely and creatively on an international level simply just to get people to understand that we deserve at least sort of an equal ranking with other people because our culture has the capacity to produce as do other cultures. It's neither better nor worse.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: But if you're -- have a president and other people announcing that you are someone to be hunted down, one has to figure out how to respond to that.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That kind of begs the question then, you know, what are, you know, artists across generations, you know. I mean, they -- they face the same choice that we did. And you and I opted to be, you know, political artists for, you know, most of our career if not all of our careers. Not what I intended. Not what Almaras intended either, but that's what happened. So, given, you know, the -- the environment that we live in, you know, how much pressure does that -- does that put?

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, you must know artists who are from your generation who don't want to be labeled, who don't want, you know, that -- to carry that. They want to be able to move across, you know, the, you know, mainstream.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Well, honestly I can't say that I do. (You don't?) I don't. I don't. I mean, if they are, I haven't engaged in those kind of conversations with individuals. I mean, the kind of folks visual and literary artists that I happen to engage with are very in touch and aware of the -- of art as self-realization and self-preservation.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: you know, I, you know, I see the works of undocumented artists, you know, visual and literary artists that are putting themselves out there and saying, "We're not hiding, you know, who we are." You know, queer Latinas and Latinos that are out there, the same thing, creating their work that is about, "We're not hiding." You know, "This is our experience." And -- and I the process, you know, going back to what Harry was saying is that, you know, pushing back against, you know, the -- the attacks, you know, that we continue to have.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: And, you know, so going back to by point, I don't think that as long about whether we have the -- the privilege, you know, so to speak, to just create art for aesthetic sake, you know, as (Selfish?) [LAUGHS] -- I mean, as long as, you know, the -- the establishment, you know, keeps on being what it is, you know, I, you know, people are going to continue to have the feelings and the reactions that they have.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: And, you know, going back to the question about how does, you know, our Latino cultural experience -- cultural experience influence politics is that we influence politics by pushing back against those politics. And by, you know, challenging those outdated, you know, sometimes normalized ideas about, you know, peoples, communities, and -- and experiences. You know, and really challenging.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: So it's not just about, you know, making work, or being in a -- in a gallery or being in the Smithsonian, or whatnot. I think those recognitions are -- are definitely, you know, important. You know, and -- and they shouldn't be trivialized because they do speak to, you know, the work that we create and how it is for what it's worth, embraced by the American institutions of which we are a part of. You know. I mean, that's what it comes down to, right?

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: I was thinking about how a lot of us, you know, from, oh, way back in the day, I was thinking about how Yreina Cervantez who I just went to see her solo show last week, and who I met and then I met Barbara Carrasco right after that. And -- and so many -- I'm thinking of, you know, generations after that.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: You know, I -- we came together, we created these different organizations. Artist organizations. We, you know, and so did both of you. And, you know, but I guess, you know, thinking really about wanting to -- to have a voice as -- as women, you know, in particular. And -- and we created the Eastside Artistas and others. Yeah, it was Yreina and Frances SOUNDS LIKE: Alome Espana, filmmaker. And some others and myself.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: And I -- I see that, you know, still happening and then also the -- what we've been talking about, you know, the -- the erased hist-- the invisible histories, you know, that like I was talking about my own personal, you know, and how to deal with that on a personal level, speaking about not having the luxury to just, you know,

create. So I think -- I guess, you know, when -- when I'm doing work or within my practice I, I mean, I'm, you know, I'm doing what I do.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: I guess I don't see it as this burden. Although I -- although I, I mean, I feel responsible for it. But like it's just, you know, that's part of it. That's part of -- of what I do. It's part of who I am. It's part of where I come from. You know. It's part of, you know, how the past is part of the present. And whatever is coming after that.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Do you feel the -- the burden of -- of representing, you know, a race of people?

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: Well, like I'm saying, I don't feel it as a burden. I -- I feel it as an honor, really. I mean, because to be in touch with (So you sense the responsibility?) my ancestors. Yes. Yes. I mean, and then I guess part of it is like also part of the, you know, the -- the artist's way, the artist, you know, the role that, you know, we -- to be in touch, to be in conversation with our own heart. And, you know, in that balance between this interior life and this -- and the exterior.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: And then, you know, what I mentioned before. The -- the internal exile that we -- that is imposed upon us, not that we choose. Some people say we choose that, but you know, it -- it's imposed. [LAUGHS]

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Personally I'm grateful. I mean, when I was a young art student, you know, taking like, you know, courses at Otis on the -- on weekends as a special -- I was in high school. You know, I had this lofty idea of, you know, wanting to be, you know, like Michelangelo or, you know. And then the Chicano movement happened. And, you know, everything that followed. And it totally changed the trajectory of my thinking and my career. I -- I never would have done the kind of work I do now and have done for the last 50 years if that hadn't happened.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know what I'd be doing. To tell you the truth. I mean, I -- it kind of -- I -- sometimes go that -- that -- what for? Time is -- is gone. But I'm very thankful. And I think that, you know, that most of us who have spent our time, you know, thinking and working to reflect who we are and in a sense who we represent, I think I've had more satisfying careers in some ways than other artists that I know who manufacture, you know, I don't know, philosophical statements about, you know, art in life in color and I don't know what.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But it doesn't have, I don't know, for me it doesn't -- it doesn't resonate the way that what we do, what African American artists have done. And interestingly enough I've had -- I've had people who've seen my work and who come to me who are not Latino at all who absolutely embrace it because of its, you know, it -- the -- the cultural and emotional impact that is -- they see as universal. They don't have to be Mexican to get it. They get it. Women especially get it. And they feel, you know, they -- you know, it's wonderful to see work that wants to touch me in this way.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Not to simply give me an intellectual experience in the gallery. But grabs my heart and soul and asks me a question. As a woman, as a human being. How do I feel about this?

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: You know, going back to the COLA, when I received the COLA I was one of the original people that got the COLA, I was working on my ongoing project was -- which was a photography project known as Chicano Male Unbonded and -- and so I have photographed Chicano men standing -- they simply stand at night illuminated by available light. I photographed them. They look very assertive. They don't look violent. They look just like they're just standing there. But I do play a little bit of a trick. I make it look kind of like a film noir image.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: But I've -- I've only photographed people who I know and kind of admire. People who have kind of influenced me on some level. Some are much younger than me. Some are older. People I've worked with. And there -- there have been times when I've exhibited the works. And all the different men know me. They don't know each other actually. I put them up five or six or ten up on a wall and depending on what city I'm in they will ask me what gang it is. [LAUGHTER]

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And so -- and what it is, of course, is I'm playing with the preconceived notions and negative stereotypes, but it's also for them to reflect on the fact that, boy, you know, there's so many millions of Chicanos that are fully integrated into society. Many things wouldn't work even regarding policy, wouldn't work involving the environment, transit, you name it. At all levels. You really need these people to participate.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And -- and so for me it's always been this kind of -- a way of playing with the imagery to draw a little bit of attention to even pose that question. And so -- because most often people will not really think about, you know, where does this -- the stereotype come from. And, you know, I've actually -- I'm -- I travel a lot and it doesn't happen anymore, but when I was a little bit younger I might wind up somewhere and I'd be the invited guest and first question they would ask me is what gang am I in?

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: Even though I'm -- and -- and I've never been in a gang and I grew up in -- in East LA, actually when gangs were an extremely small percentage of the population. Except it was fanned by the media to make it seem as though it was an extremely broad phenomenon. And which it wasn't. And it still isn't.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Because I find parallels in -- in the work that I do as well. You know, when I travel or go places I don't get asked if I belong to a gang, but because I, you know, my address doesn't -- on my license doesn't say Compton anymore. It has my current East LA address. But people would be really surprised if they looked on the license and like, "Wait, you're from Compton? Is it -- is it that bad?" And, you know, "Do you have a gun?" [LAUGHS]

00:39:29

CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: And I was like, "No, I'm not a member of the NRA. You know, if that's what you're asking?" And for me, like the -- the COLA award also helped me to create performance, poetry as I like to call it, that was focused around growing up like a thousand feet away from the railroad tracks. You know, the city of Compton. And how,

you know, as much as we think about Compton, we don't -- we don't recognize how it's plugged into the economy. You know.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: the trains carrying all the goods from the -- from the docks, you know, to be distributed all across the -- all across the nation. Like passed through my street. You know. And so it was interesting to -- to think about that. How we think about the other ways we really allow ourselves to think about the other ways that we contribute to the society, right? I mean, it goes without saying but that people don't, you know, don't recognize, you know.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: Harry mentioned, you know, environmental, you know, politics and other fields where our motto [UNINTELLIGIBLE] our, you know, intellect are -- are required to continue to keep things, you know, running. And, you know, in terms of like how our -- our experiences, you know, shape or influence, you know, the multiplicities, it makes me think because I am a literary artist, it makes me think of the most recent anthology that Luis Rodriguez who used to be the poet laureate, you know, of the city.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: He was able to edit and put together, it's an anthology of -- of poet -- of poems, not necessarily about Los Angeles, but, you know, that are about LA poets. And that collection is so diverse. It's so diverse. It has African American, Indian, Native American, Middle Eastern, Jewish, it has so many voices in there and I think it's great because, you know, here you have this Latino creating a platform of -- of -- of something that I think truly represents Los Angeles. You know.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: And it's, you know, many, many, many communities that exist within, you know, within the city limits. Or even the county itself.

00:41:52

GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: You know, the literary arts were not represented from the beginning when you started. And I think Wanda Coleman was one of the -- one of the first to receive it as a writer. So I'm like thinking how, you know, we've had those, you know, we're all allies here.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: You know, I was just a recipient last year and so I -- it feels like, you know, I don't know if there's supposed to be any tangible changes other than I was able to do more of what I love, which is do collaborative work. You know, and I was able to work with my brother to do some of the -- some of the photography that was featured in my performance. I was able to work with directors. I was able to work with, you know, DJs to create like a soundscape for the -- the piece.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: You know, so it allowed me to -- to learn, you know, from other -- other -- from artists that -- that work in other mediums. And you know, allowed me to access a space, Grand Performances in downtown, you know, Los Angeles. It felt like a -- a christening of sorts. You know, to be able to perform in -- in the outdoors in such a great space. And to be in conversation I guess with the history of -- of the award itself. You know.

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CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ: It's great. Because of it I've been able to meet all of you. I think I've ran across you and seen you read, but, you know, as far as the other folks in, you know, I haven't had the opportunity to meet you in person. Definitely know about your work. You know, so for me it -- it is very humbling, you know, to -- to be in -- in such great company. And -- and to continue to grow and learn. And it's like a -- an affirmation that's like, I am where I'm supposed to be.

00:44:02

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The -- the COLA came at an interesting time in my career because I had just moved back to LA the year before after 25 years in Chicago. And my practice was -- was at a point that it needed a jump start that -- that wasn't anything that was currently working on and -- and the COLA, not only did -- did it surprise me to be, you know, my age and -- and receive, you know, a fellowship like this but it allowed me to -- to -- the time and the resources to do -- begin a body of work that is -- that I have followed since in my practice.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That I hadn't -- I never had the time to do. And so I appreciated that enormously because it's something that, interestingly enough, people have asked me, you know, through -- throughout my career, "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" And I was never really able to answer that question because it was very complicated. Mainstream feminism in the 1970s wasn't something that appealed to me like probably a lot of other Latinas at the time, which is why we didn't participate.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But over the course of my career I've certainly turned my -- my focus on what it, you know, the -- the -- the lives of women and the -- the place of women

in society and in thought. I have a daughter, so I'm very invested in that idea and what will happen to her. So this was -- this was a chance to do that. And over the last, what, three or four years since the COLA award, I've pursued that. And I've had such a wonderful reaction from women who see the work and say, "Whoa. You know, this speaks to me." Not only as a Latina, but as, you know, as -- as a woman who is a human being, who is a mother.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: All of which, you know, these things, you know, ask me questions, validate some things I've thought about myself and that's very gratifying. You know, when you get that kind of feedback. So I really, really appreciate that.

00:46:19

GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: When I received the -- the COLA award there were several things going on in my life. I was teaching. And I was -- I was doing caregiving. It came right before both my parents, my -- that raised me. Both my parents passed away. So it was great that my father was able to go to the performance and see, because it -- and had to do with -- I was hearing all the stories and I was -- I was able to look at the photographs to find, you know, to do some research. Find photographs. And put together a multi-media performance.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: So that -- that was really good for me because I had been exploring that already. And then to do it downtown, which I thought, you know, it's, I mean, right -- the four directions there. And that my -- that was, you know, one of the last things that my dad got to see to actually, you know, hear his story and to -- for people to see -- to see it. You know, and hear it.

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GLORIA ENEDINA ALVAREZ: Yeah, and then, you know, I mean, there's practically no funding left for artists, so to be able to do that project and then began working on a memoir also. Which I want to go back to. Yeah.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: I believe I got the COLA award about 20 years ago. And at that time of course had been doing a lot of work for a long time. And had already started working on my series "A Chicano Male Unbonded." I decided that I would do a few images for that project. I remember that I wanted to be fairly practical and take care of some photographic needs, which is always very expensive. And maybe I used a portion of that to cover those expenses.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: But I -- I found that what I really needed was maybe sort of an extended period of time to think and maybe to read and I remember that I probably spent half of the grant on reading materials. And found myself really invested and doing some very concentrated study. And -- and by doing that also allowed me just to kind of hang around the city and kind of consider what my role was now that I was being recognized by the city.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: and I was born two miles from here and the way I grew up was I was quite the opposite. That you're not in -- involved in the city. You're not welcomed in the city. And all of a sudden you become a representative of the city. You know, and I took that quite seriously. It's like how can I then reach out to people to present point of view that's indicative of being Los Angeles, but also being Chicano. Of kind of cutting across both the 20th and 21st century. And -- and about communicating, basically, is was it was.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: So, for me it was very helpful. And, you know, it's a -- it's helped me continue on the trajectory that -- that I've been on ever since.

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JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Why don't you wrap it up, Harry? [LAUGHS] Bring it home.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: Well, I think one of the things that I'm kind of inspired about, you know, many of the people here I've known for -- since they're all young. I have the opportunity, cause I teach, to constantly encounter very young people and -- and I still have a -- a new troupe in which maybe half the population of that troupe is Chicano. I have like a hundred people that I work with. But the other half are from Europe, Asia, Africa, different parts of the United States.

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HARRY GAMBOA JR.: And -- and what's -- what happens is it's kind of sort of a visible relationship as -- as does exist here in Los Angeles. I mean, it's, you know, primarily Latino. But everyone has to get along. And everyone recognizes that -- that not only do you need to get along, you have to make sure that everyone around you becomes even more eloquent, becomes more educated, you share your practice so that other people can become more cre-- creative, and to -- to generate cultural wealth so that we can all find ourselves jointly interested in each other and we can call this city our own.

00:51:17

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Viva l'arte. [LAUGHTER]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]