

[LO-FI MUSIC]

Hello,. I'm Ruben Ochoa. I'm a COLA 2021 Visual Art Fellow. So even from elementary school, when I was drawing comics, I would draw about things I saw around me, about my neighborhood, my own family subjectivity, my own experience growing up as a Mexican-American, and things that would impact our community, whether it was gang violence, drug violence. My high school-- our teacher, who I've got to give a shout out to, George Papciak, we're still in touch. We have the same birthday.

And he really encouraged me, right when I was about to graduate, to pursue an art degree, to go to art school,. And I looked at him and I said, I can't afford that. Tuition is too expensive. And he's like, no, there's scholarships. And lo and behold, I applied, got scholarships, and then pursued my practice. The van is my family's 1985 Chevy that was a hand-me-down. My family sold tortillas in it, along with several other vans. And so when I got the van, I drove it around in high school. I came to school in LA. I didn't really have a vehicle then. But when I started grad school, it was the van I had.

And so I converted it both to a mobile art space with the working office, storage, and gallery, and would invite artists. And I always had this idea. I wouldn't show my work in there. The only time I showed my work is in the beginning when I busted out on the scene. And I always want to make bronze tortillas, make a set of tortillas. Because my family sold tortillas. I was like, I want to fill this van with tortillas, as much bronze tortillas as I can. Because we would have to pack tortillas. We would take them out of the boxes and stack them in the back of the van. And they would actually-- we'd stack them like bricks.

And so I always had this idea. I was like, how many can I fit in the gallery? Maybe it'd be so much that the van would way down. Why bronze? I mean the maize. It's yellow It has this golden tint to it. I mean if I could, I'd cast them in gold. Gold tortillas, maybe for the future,. But bronze is also-- think of how people refer to people of the sun, la maize de la gente. It's a bronze color. And so thinking of those connotations. And you know, of course flipping the art you taking an everyday object like a tortilla and now make that bronze.

I always saw it as a little bit of practice and form from the experience of-- from my family's experience. From vending on the street, by foot, by trunk of car, and then by van, and into brick and mortar restaurant. It's like, well, how do you keep pushing that. And it's like Darwinism. Or more like this evolution of vendors. And as an artist, you're small business, you're an entrepreneur, and you're a vendor. You're hustling out there, and maybe I can sell enough bronze tortillas now. And I'll retire my family from-- because there's still selling tortillas. They've been doing it for almost 44 years, about 44 years now.

So I can't retire them with my art, but maybe I could eventually retire them with my bronze tortillas. Growing up, you would see racism more at play. Of course, the older generations felt it more directly. But there was a moment, late 90s, early 2000s, that there was a lot of inclusion. And people were like, oh, yeah. Maybe racism isn't around anymore. But you know it when you see it. It's very subtle. Even as subtle as it could be, you know it you feel it. You understand that it's not gone away.

It's just the last four years has just allowed-- the former administration just allowed people to be more outspoken about it. But it's always been there for sure. It hasn't gone away. And they continue to be more outspoken about it. And they just start targeting different groups. And that's very unfortunate. But what I do-- what's occurring. now is that there are coalitions happening across the board. People are supporting each other.

It's no longer just one group of people, or one ethnicity supporting-- in fact, they are supporting each other. These coalitions are forming and that's happening across the board. Not just in the art world and in the artwork, but across the nation and across the world, which is quite amazing. And I think that impacts the work. Bronze tortillas may not say that, but bronze tortillas in a mobile gallery that's white cubed. The mobile gallery that used to be my family's tortillas delivery van that's being supported by the LAD-- LADAC. Did I get that right? The LA Cultural affairs Committee, and of course the LA Municipal Art Gallery to do work like this.

You know, you take the everyday object and the everyday object could signify much more than just a tortilla on the van. Just a bronze tortillas could signify people, culture, history, hope. History from Columbus creating the tortilla. The whole generations coming from the tortillas. This idea of barter. The staple of not just food, but of people. It's cross-cultural. Who doesn't love tacos? Who doesn't tortillas? So hopefully we'll be able to see that. And see the weight. It's almost like how much that phrase or poem-- sorry. that story.

What does the King say, how much do you love my daughter? And she says, I love you more than salt. And he gets upset, because he's like, how dare you just love me more than salt? And he bans her. And then, I think, I'm butchering the story. But pretty much, salt gets banned as well. Some fairy godmother, someone bans the salt. And then he realized how valuable salt is. And I think the same for the tortilla for old history, and for our whole culture. The tortilla is very valuable.