



Radical Localism:
Art, Video and Culture
from Pueblo Nuevo's
Mexicali Rose



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Image captions:

Front cover: Jose Miguel Salcido,
Sin Título (Nhsr), C-print, 2009

Back cover: Odette Barajas,
Pinta 4, C-print, 2010

Pg 25: Jose Miguel Salcido,
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Pg 28 & 29: Sergio Haro, *Family members of "the disappeared" barge into a local congress session before the State Attorney. The subject of forced disappearances has been constant for many years in the Mexicali region, without obtaining a concrete response from the authorities.*, 2007

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Radical Localism: Art, Video and Culture from Pueblo Nuevo's Mexicali Rose is a survey of work from Mexicali Rose, a community media center and gallery in the Mexican border city Mexicali. A nexus for cultural and personal exchange between artists, journalists, activists and filmmakers on both sides of the border, Mexicali Rose exemplifies the possibilities of 21st century hybridized culture through its pursuit of artistic expression grounded in *barrio* life.

Founded by Mexicali-born filmmaker Marco Vera in 2007 as an audio-visual workshop for neighborhood kids in border-adjacent Pueblo Nuevo, the workshop quickly expanded to include craft and trade classes, a community gallery exhibiting the work of local and international artists, a cinema club that showcases the work of Mexican and foreign filmmakers, and a radio station formed to provide a free and uncensored platform for local youth.

The exhibition features a wide range of work from this innovative space, including experimental and documentary films produced by the workshop; photographs, paintings and collages by Mexicali-based, international artists Pablo Castañeda, Carlos Coronado and Julio Torres; photographs by documentarians Rafael Veytia, Odette Barajas and *Zeta* journalist Sergio Haro; multimedia works by Victor Gonzalez, Alejandrina Nuñez, Luis Hernandez and Jose Miguel Salcido; and an original mural created by Fernando Corona.

Concurrent with the exhibition, Artists Space will present the symposium *The City Machine and Its Streets – Anomalous Ecologies*, featuring conversations between renowned Mexico City writer and journalist Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez, Los Angeles writer and journalist Ben Ehrenreich, *Zeta* journalist Sergio Haro and Marco Vera, hosted by writer Chris Kraus. The symposium will explore the existential and geo-political realities of life on the Mexican border and beyond.

Radical Localism

Chris Kraus

This exhibition presents a small selection from the enormous body of work shown, produced or affiliated with the community media center and gallery Mexicali Rose since its inception five years ago. In 2006, Marco Vera, an exceptionally gifted and driven cultural impresario and filmmaker moved back to the historic, border-adjacent working class neighborhood of Pueblo Nuevo where he'd grown up. Now a dual citizen of Mexico and the US, Vera had lived in LA's Echo Park for several years after studying film at San Diego State University. Uneasy with the Bush-era climate of hatred and fear that permeated the US at that time, he'd harbored a dream of returning to his hometown and founding an alternative media center for local kids who might not otherwise be artistically inclined. At the time, he was 28. Having worked at entry-level day jobs in the film and music industries while spending his free time at the Echo Park Film Center and artist-run bars, he had observed and participated in both ends of LA's cultural spectrum. Reclaiming his uncle's house on Avenida Colima in Mexicali from people smugglers, Vera used his savings to fix the place up and began teaching video production workshops to local youth. In Pueblo Nuevo, the phrase "local youth" can be used to describe both the kids who were born and raised in the neighborhood and effectively transient youths who spend their mid-to-late teens drifting between Mexican border towns. The Pueblo Nuevo kids were soon joined in the workshops by their parents and other family members, and Mexicali Rose's pedagogical regime expanded to workshops on barbering, crafts, clothing design and dance: "Anything," Vera said, "that was for real and could be useful."

Aware of a certain antagonism between Chicano/a art initiatives in California and the southwest US and their Mexican counterparts, Vera knew from the start the Mexicali Rose would not become a "community center" in the faintly-righteous, permanently-marginal

sense that, since the 1970s, has defined “community work” in the US.

Within the first year, local artists asked if they could exhibit their work at the space. Some, but not all, were involved with the state university's Fine Arts program. When Vera agreed, Mexicali Rose the community/international gallery was born. Soon he was joined by his friend Israel Ortega, an installer and curator at Mexicali's CEART, (*Centro Estatal de las Artes*, State Arts Center). At first, Ortega helped out by installing the shows but his expertise in Mexican and international art has made him a valued collaborator. Tellingly, Mexicali Rose has never been a collective or relied upon foundation or government grants. Despite the venture's success, Vera continues to support himself and the space with his day job as a government clerk on the US side of the border. Open six days a week, weekday activities at the gallery start around 4 p.m. and continue well into the night.

In 2010, the Mexicali Rose program expanded to include *Cine Club las Palmitas*, a cinema club that showcases the work of Mexican and foreign filmmakers and *Radio Pájaro Hombre*, a radio station formed to provide a free and uncensored platform for local youth. On the night that I visited – the same night I met the legendary journalist Sergio Haro, subject of Bernardo Ruiz's 2012 film *Reportero* who has, despite threats, covered political news in the city for more than three decades, 19-year old Ana Karen Cazares was hosting a show about political kidnappings on her program *La Radio Sin Nombre*. A breakaway organization of parents of disappeared people had recently formed and she was hoping to get kids to attend their demonstrations. As Cazares told me, twenty-five hundred people have disappeared in the city without any official investigation. The following week, the mayor of Mexicali arrived with his bodyguards at the gallery to be interviewed live on *Pájaro*.

While its cultural identity and physical premises are anchored in Pueblo Nuevo, Mexicali Rose's “community” has come to include an unusual mix of professional and amateur artists from isolate US border towns like El Centro, Calexico and Brawley; filmmakers and artists from Mexicali, LA, San Diego, Mexico City, northeastern

Mexico and Latin America, as well as regional journalists, activists, craftspeople, gang members, scholars, neighborhood teachers and passers-by. In its five-year life, Mexicali Rose has both strengthened existing ties among residents of the Pueblo Nuevo community and created a larger one of its own.

Set on the Baja California desert directly across from Calexico, a small town in California's Imperial County, Mexicali is best known for its heat. For five months a year, temperatures climb as high as 120 degrees. The central city is a jagged collage of shady colonnades and quiet arcades, sex clubs and cheap pharmacies ringed to the north by the metal, cement and razor-wired wall dividing Mexico and the US. The poorest of California's 58 counties, in 2011 Imperial County reported an unemployment rate of more than 30 percent. Still, on any given day, Mexicali's population includes hundreds of transients arrived from the south who have recently failed, or are awaiting a chance to cross over the wall to the US. Windowless hole-in-the-wall bars stay open late and men in white straw cowboy hats line the streets. Six days a week, as Daniel Rosas' stunning 2011 documentary meditation *El Field* shows, squads of Mexican agricultural workers assemble to cross the border to busses that taken them to work in the fields of Imperial Valley's industrialized farms. The first impression Mexicali makes upon the casual visitor is, *Who could ever live here?* And yet the city inspires a fierce loyalty from its inhabitants, who affectionately refer to themselves *cachanillas*, a wild and virtually indestructible desert plant. As Mexicali writer and critic Gabriel Trujillo has noted, “What is surprising is that in spite of its hostile weather some may actually love it, appreciate it, there are people who may want to live in it with the desire to share its problems, its peculiarities, its delicious plagues and handicaps.”

Founded in 1903, Mexicali's history is sufficiently brief that it can be conveyed through an oral tradition. And even now, with its streets dotted with homes occupied by *narcotraficantes*, Pueblo Nuevo remains a classically Mexican working class *barrio*. Marco Vera recalls stories his grandmother told of people arriving at the border on horses that they left with the guards while they walked

across. As Odette Barajas's remarkable body of contemporary documentary and archival photographs suggest, historical stories are also family and neighborhood stories. *Dame la Flor* (1993), her black-and-white photograph of a young transsexual man putting on make-up and *Chicali PN* (1992), depicting the back of an ink-tattooed gang member's head, echo the mood of the archival photographs. *These people are known to us*, these photographs seem to suggest. Rafael Veytia's topographical portraits of ancient old men, gang members and transient residents and Pablo Castañeda's black-and-white painting *Nocturno 9: Su Hogar Frente al Muro* are intimate portraits of subjects that would seem sensational and sleazy if depicted by someone from outside. When I asked Rafael Veytia, a man in his 40s employed as a government cultural administrator, how he'd persuaded gangsters and elderly criminals in pool halls to allow him to photograph them, he explained that growing up in Sinaloa, most of the people



Odette Barajas, *Dame La Flor*, 1993

he knew were in gangs: "Part of my daily routine was to watch people fight. I know the street language, I know how to talk to these people." Arriving in Mexicali in the late 1990s for a job with an agricultural supplier, the company went out of business immediately, leaving him unemployed. Fascinated by the city, he decided to stay. He opened a restaurant and began taking photographs. As he explains: "The architecture here is different than in the rest of the country. There is no way to get an orientation, no reference point." Veytia spends a great deal of time walking around and riding the bus. When beginning a new series, he never arrives with his camera. He spends days, sometimes weeks, hanging out. "I become part of the landscape. By the time I start taking photos, nobody notices. But always, I tell them exactly what this is about." Lately, Veytia has taken to prowling the border at 3 a.m., the hour at which the US Border Patrol releases its stunned deportees onto Mexican ground, for no discernible reason other than spite.

In a provincial place, the gap between observed and observer is never so great that it cannot be bridged by shared memory. People and places in common ... the charm of the 19th century novel with its intermeshed social world surprisingly triggered by images captured in this 21st century border locale.

The Mexicali artists I've met through Marco Vera are, across generations, intensely identified with their city, their families and their regional history. *The romance of nationalism*. Given the opportunity to make movies about *whatever they want*, what subjects do the kids in Mexicali Rose's media workshop choose? The lives of their parents (Iván Alejandro Martínez Zazueta's *Pancho y Blanca*, 2012); a weekend swap meet where the filmmaker works with her family (Alex Ocampo's *Sobreruedas*, 2011); the halation of city lights as seen from the filmmaker's pizza delivery motorcycle (Edgar Moreno's *Sin Título*, 2009); a semi-pro wrestler named Iron Boy giving advice to young people while demonstrating his training regime and his moves (Paulo Aguayo's *Iron Boy: Luchador 100% Cachanilla*, 2008). A few miles away from the border, the concerns of these students are dramatically different from those of their US contemporaries. Enmeshed in their local culture, they approach

these traditionally documentary subjects with unselfconscious engagement. Old busses – the same kind depicted in the Moroyoki Brother's 2009 documentary *El Camión* – with silver horns and streamers still idle outside colonnades in downtown Mexicali. Everyone here is bi-national enough to know how different it is here, and that the difference won't last. Construction has already begun on a border checkpoint expansion that cuts through the heart of Pueblo Nuevo. Marco and his friends, most of them in their early 30s, are the bridge generation: bi-lingual, bi-national, they have returned to Mexicali after stays in American cities, aware of the intangible privilege their culture provides.

In October 2010, I traveled to Mexicali Rose for the second time to review a joint exhibition by Los Angeles artist Dino Dinco and Mexicali artist Julio Torres for *Artforum*. A graduate of UABC, Torres spent most his student years photographing the city's aspirational-but-tawdry club culture scene in *White Gold Youth* (2008). Periodically, Torres leaves Mexicali for Guadalajara but so far has always returned. The two met on Myspace and teamed up to produce a show titled *TODO SOMOS PUTOS* (We're All Fags), a provocative theme in this Catholic city where, despite a proliferation of gay and transgender bars, homosexuality remains strictly taboo. Like Morocco where, to paraphrase William S. Burroughs, "everything is permitted; nothing is allowed," social conduct in Mexicali revolves around a strict bifurcation between public and private behavior.

Mexicali's exotic adherence to traditional codes of behavior is both charm and curse. For better or worse, the city's largely intact local culture provides an inescapably local reality against which its artists are almost compelled to respond. Engagement with local politics or social mores in art cities like New York, Berlin, LA or London is an aesthetic choice through which contemporary artists choose to align themselves with certain strands of art critical discourse: public art; participatory performance; Nicholas Bourriard and his successors. In Mexicali, the impulsive is more reflexive, less conscious, whether manifested overtly or obliquely. Rafael Veytia's *El Compita de Acapulco* (2011) depicts a transient resident in

a shelter for migrants. In Pablo Castañeda's black-and-white painting *Diurno 54: Man with arm*, an assassin stands with his back to the viewer holding a gun. Even the incongruous figuration of Castañeda's *Laberinto 18: Arte Contemporaneo* collaged painting reflects a particularly local form of dislocation. In it, a black-coated man rows into deep space and vapor disperses onto the drapes of a staid-but-contemporary meeting room in what looks like a government art institution. The photos by Jose Miguel Salcido in Hector Herrera Lozano's 'zine *Aquí No Hay Nada* (There's Nothing Here) are street-grabbed spontaneous images: a car wreck, a woman's face hidden behind her hands, a boy's face captured in some kind of anguish as he looks down at something under the frame, a wide-eyed girl in a long skirt and sneakers looking up from the curb, holding a cigarette. The style and intent of the 'zine is clearly post-punk, but there's an emotional intimacy to these photos that sets them apart from the found-and-collaged image bank of that genre.



Julio Torres, *En Este Pueblo Ya No Caben los Jotos*, 2010

As Rafael Veytia wrote in his statement for an exhibition at CEART:

“It's in the street, the flux of people, where we can see traces of a visual identity. In a border town, identity transmutes daily with sociocultural, economic, political and historical relations. It's in the adornments, the body, the clothes that we find the desire to blend into the gigantic mix between people and asphalt, and at the same time, stand out: the battle to be, survive and live between two worlds, territories, thoughts, tongues and life itself.”

As part of the exhibition, Dinco and Torres produced two hand-painted banners – reproduced for the exhibition at Artists Space – that were hung from bridges over Blvd. Benito Juárez and Blvd. Lázaro Cárdenas:

En Este Pueblo Ya No Caben los Jotos
(There is No Room for Faggots in this Town)

and

En Este Pueblo Ya No Cabemos los Jotos
(There is No Room for Us Faggots in this Town)

With a slight change in verb conjugation, the artists reclaim the derogatory, turning the slur into a declaration. *TODOS SOMOS PUTOS* set out to assert queer identity without assimilation. As the artists wrote in their statement, “Shattering the construction of a ‘gay community’ allows for queerness to remain queer and not subsumed by the global plague of rainbow flags and middle-class gay marriage.” One wall of the gallery featured Torres' 2010 *Resultados de la Búsqueda: Borrachos Bésandose* (Search Results: Drunks Kissing), an arresting assortment of YouTube video grabs of straight Mexican men kissing each other on dares.

Like the first show I saw at the space, *Puro Personaje* (June, 2010), a wildly inventive collage of found-and-invented personal works by professional artists and amateurs from both sides of

the border, *TODOS SOMOS PUTOS* offered a seductive mix of engagement with international discourse within a defiantly regional context. By then, I was hooked. All of my subsequent “research” on the space has been conducted during short weekend trips, where Marco Vera, Israel Ortega, artists Fernando Corona, Juan Jose Cardoza, Rafael Veytia and I pile into Vera's silver Toyota Camry and drive around town. The group is never smaller than four. Sometimes, there's a Friday night opening. Openings at Mexicali Rose are never targeted networking stops on a 6-8 p.m. gallery crawl. They're more like a block party, Mexicali's Friday night out, with sangria punch and plates of food, music blasting from the PA until 3 or 4.

Born in Mexicali in 1977, Fernando Corona attended technical high school and then received a scholarship to study painting at Bellas Artes. After graduation, he was offered a faculty job but instead moved to Seattle, where he continued to study and paint. In 2001, he returned to Mexicali and set up a studio, producing hundreds of canvases, ranging in style from literal figuration to hieroglyphics departures, looping back to a warped figuration again. Viewing his work two years ago, I thought of Henry Taylor, Basquiat, Schnabel and Alex Katz. But after losing his studio, Corona began rethinking his work: “Before I started in art, I was really into doing murals and graffiti. I liked the buzz, it was more of a rush. It has something to do with the possibilities I see ... I began going back to doing outside work.”

Since then, Corona has produced more than twenty murals in Mexicali, alone and with other artists. During my last trip to the city, Corona and friends took me to see *Mexicali*, an extravagant mosaic mural spanning more than six hundred feet on what was an old cement wall around a former bull-fighting ring. Divided into sixteen panels, *Mexicali* depicts familiar, though partly abstracted, desert iconography: a coyote's body formed from burnished industrial refuse and ceramic glass. The mural is literally dazzling. All its materials are reflective. They were salvaged for free, awaiting container shipment to China, from an industrial recycling yard. Commissioned by the Municipal Office of Cultural Affairs, the mural was created in ten days by a team of artists, and 36 public

employees assigned to the job. Artists Ismael and Heriberto Castro, who have spent years researching and refining both high-art and artisanal mosaic techniques, instructed and guided the work's technical implementation. As Corona explained, "About half the mural was planned. But there were all these pockets of improvisation that got filled in while we worked."

Standing in front of the wall, it was impossible to miss the lift *Mexicali* gives to its stretch of bland, four-lane arterial road. Pedestrians turn to catch a glimpse of the work, and themselves as they pass by. Two or three miles away in the Plaza de Centenario, Carlos Coronado Ortega's magnificent 2003 *Un Siglo Fértil* spans almost two hundred feet of 20-foot high curved wall. The work is protected by 24-hour guard.

And in once-distressed plaza Pasaje Celaya, a suite of fifteen murals painted by Corona and other artists have jump-started the neighborhood's reclamation, as new tenants move in and landlords repaint their building's facades in lemons and azures to offset the art on the walls. Hostal, an alternative gallery loosely associated with Mexicali Rose, is located in one of the plaza's arcades. Determined to make its presence known, the recently elected municipal PRI Office of Cultural Affairs has commissioned dozens of such works in vacant, distressed neighborhoods all over town. As Institute director Fernando Félix explains, "It's one of our decentralized art initiatives. We want the artists to be more recognized, and for the public to know the artist's names." Eventually they hope to get around to putting art on the Mexican side of the border wall.

The murals I saw have an unmistakable glamour. Clearly, Mexicali has a civic mural tradition that does not translate well to the US. The murals are nothing like the pious attempts at representational public art one sees in downtown LA, tagged over within days.

In the last decade, dozens of international contemporary artists like Rikrit Tirvanija, Michael Rakowitz, Fiona Conner and Yourgos Sapountzis have produced public, participatory works from a genuine impulse to connect in real-time with viewers and place. Of course these works cannot exist by themselves. Dependent upon documentation, they beg the ontological chicken-and-egg question

as to what actually constitutes the "work." The Greek-born artist Yourgos Sapountzis erects temporary sculptures in the shadow of monuments with his friends, but it's the *videotape* of this event that we see. As he said in an interview with Francesa Boenzi for *Mousse*, "When I first moved to Berlin, I didn't know who the public sculptures depicted, I just knew they were important for somebody. But on the other hand, I loved to visit them and wonder: Why are they here, will they always be here?"

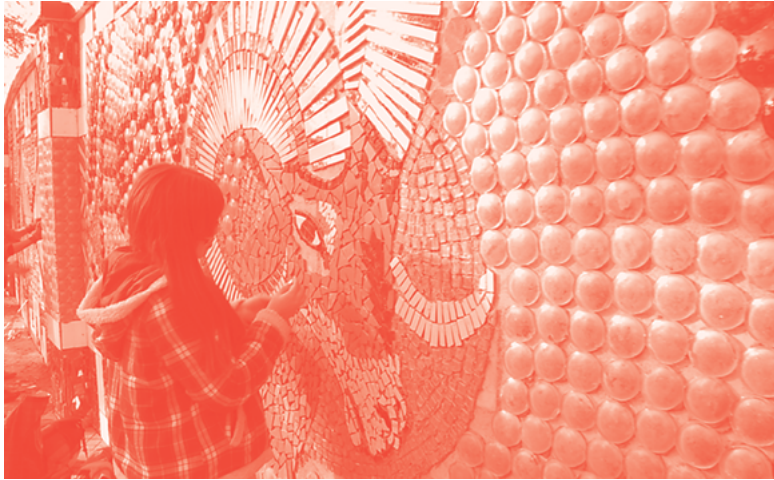
It is no longer accurate to refer to today's generation of young artists by nationality. Rather, they are Greek/Lithuanian/Australian/Mexican *born*, leaving those places for international centers to launch their careers in their early 20s, or even late teens. On a recent trip to New Zealand, I realized that none of the post-MFA artists whose work was on view at museums and the leading galleries were actually resident there.

No community, no community art. Vera has described his work with Mexicali Rose as "activities born out of the necessities and desire for cultural exchange latent not only in Mexico, but on both sides of the border, therefore establishing cultural and personal connections." There are no commercial galleries in Mexicali. Its artists rely on museum exhibitions and affiliations with galleries in the US and other Mexican cities in order to sell. Instead of leaving, they have chosen to practice a radical localism. Exiled from Mexico City, where artists are fully enmeshed in the international grid, the artists in Mexicali are aware of their opportunity to assert an alternative ethos within their own realm.

Chris Kraus is the author of four novels – including *I Love Dick* (Semiotexte, 1997) and *Torpor* (Semiotexte, 2006) – and two books about culture and visual art. A co-editor of Semiotexte since 1990, she is a Professor of Writing at European Graduate School.

Mexicali Art, Mexicali Rose, Mexicali Now Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz

Mexicali: The Mirage of a City in the Sand



Work in progress on the collaborative mural *Mexicali*, 2011

Of all the border towns, Mexicali would appear to be the least inviting to settlers. What is it about this place, then, that its inhabitants find so appealing? Probably, its plentiful and elemental nature – its earth, water, sun, and wind – but also its cultural resources: a society of expanding horizons that, curiously, has yet to raise barriers against newcomers or self-impose a pedigree of entitled families to be the framers of its community. Just as it was when it began to form in 1903, Mexicali continues to be a border town in all respects: its population is open to all ideas, no matter how outrageous they may seem; to all dreams, no matter how difficult they are to achieve; and to all behaviors, regardless of whether they end up becoming acts of torture or tests of sacrifice.

Then there is Mexicali's unique sense of collective self-reliance, rooted in various historical circumstances: its status as the capital of the state of Baja California, where political powers reside; and its being the principal city on both sides of the international border, and therefore an influence on the cities of southeast California, not vice versa. Moreover, the city has a predominantly working class history, with an egalitarian tradition. Mexicali people do not need to believe that they are the center of the universe to psychologically compensate for what their home lacks as a city. They know what they have and what they don't. They don't mind being told what their deficiencies are culturally or artistically. They know that acknowledging weakness is a way to begin correcting it. The people of Mexicali are not afraid of critique, as they themselves are their own first critics. What they do not like, however, is complaint for the sake of itself, or failure to act in solving one's own problems.

They are a practical people, willing to change to improve the world they live in. The same goes for Mexicali's artists: they are creators who view independence as a principal to live for, and who embrace life as a work in progress.

To add another condition to my list of Mexicali's idiosyncrasies: we in Mexicali like to laugh at ourselves. We don't believe in moral indignation, that form of social hypocrisy and pretense of the pedantic snob. We consider ourselves capable of accepting our problems without excuses, and of speaking our minds about everyone and everything. Mexicali continues to be a border town that doesn't ask itself to provide some proof of its own heroism, because it's always been heroic, and doesn't need to treat things that aren't work, the sweat on one's forehead, or egalitarianism under the heat of summer with some special privilege. To be presumptuous here is a form of suicide, especially when Mexicali citizens live on the verge of disaster – with regular seismic activity, with earthquakes said to be apocalyptic. But that's just another way to understand Mexicali: as a community that withstands all attacks, all challenges of nature or industrialized civilization.

Yet the question remains: how can we call ourselves practical if we've chosen to live in these sands, with no more incentive than the relentless rays of the sun or the dust clouds and tremors? Here another facet of being a person of Mexicali comes to light: our bond with the landscape as an existential reference, as an aesthetics of clarity – our confidence that behind material appearances is the light and nothing else. We like only what shines and takes form in the air. We are only passionate about the world as a revelation: a look that takes the landscape to fill it with life, with action, with forces in motion. The Mexicali native feels satisfied by life's bare necessities to keep fighting for a city like ours, because for its inhabitants Mexicali is a metropolis that should be built eternally: a paradise-like inferno that requires perpetual dedication, a mirage from dawn to dusk, working by the sweat of its brow, like that water that sparkles on the horizon, like that intense and peremptory light that shines in our dreams. Mexicali is not a state of mind; it is a multitudinous act, a collective effort, a will in action that has been the irrigation canal

and cultivation field, the cotton factory and Chinese restaurant, the *maquiladora*¹ and silicon border, the customs line and gateway city, the crack house and vacant lot, the opium den and luxury casino, the free zone and contraband goods, the traveling caravan and market on wheels, the old western town and cultural center. What each of us has put in this desert. What everyone has made for themselves and for all.

Mexicali Art: The Past and the Future

Mexicali has always been a border – a border that shares as much with Arizona as California. Once Westerners encountered our peninsula with its warlike tribes, this region was the border of the Spanish Empire. Later, after the war in 1847, the new boundary line between Mexico and the United States passed through here. The towns along this border became trading centers, and later, shopping and tourist destinations, especially with the creation of the Baja California free zone in 1933 that would last for over sixty years, until the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. Therefore, despite the mistaken assumptions of many contemporary academics that NAFTA impacted the arts in the state, the truth is much older and more profound: the border experience (in commerce, ideology, artistic styles and attitudes towards nature, progress, technology, and culture) has had a vital resonance for the artists who have lived here since the beginnings of the twentieth century. This influence, constant and permanent, has made the border – depending on each artist and on each period of our history – a creative springboard, a cause for protest, or a reality exposed in its own light and shadows.

Living on the border has been one of the decisive factors in the evolution of Mexicali's visual arts, promoting an open vision, without an inferiority complex, in the face of foreign artistic movements, and a borrowing, without prejudice, of all we've needed or seen fit. The border experience has allowed our artists to stay current with

¹ *maquiladora*: name for a factory run by a US or Asian company in Mexico to take advantage of cheap labor and lax regulations

the transformations of contemporary art, which has created unique blends here between what is native and what is foreign. Or rather: the border has allowed all foreign art to become its own art. The drive for modernization in a multicultural society like ours produces, paradoxically, an art without limitations or borders; an art that doesn't require permission from the national culture to cross over to the other side, to experiment on its own, to adapt itself to new times, to new technologies, to new concepts of art and simulation, of perception and virtuality. The Mexicali artist is, before anything else, a border artist. Even when he tries to negate the border's influence in his art, the border surfaces, if not necessarily in his theme, then in his natural appropriation of the swap-meet that is border life – in his liberty to cross borders with no more ID than his curiosity and his composure, his desire not to remain behind the times in materials and technologies, in vision and creation.

The first state school of professional visual arts was founded in Mexicali in 1955. La Escuela José Clemente Orozco produced Mexicali's first generations of pioneer artists, including Rubén García Benavides, Ruth Hernández, Salvador Romero, Manuel Aguilar, Francisco Arias, Rodrigo Muñoz, and many other artists who would come to define the arts of the northern border from that moment forward. In the following decades, places of education were combined with those of exhibition, such as la UABC-Difusión Cultural (founded 1961), la Escuela de Bellas Artes del Estado (1967), la Casa de la Cultura de Mexicali (1974), la Galería de la Ciudad (1978), la Galería Universitaria (1982), la Escuela de Artes de la UABC (2003), and el Centro Estatal de las Artes de Mexicali (2005). Given this background it is easy, almost sixty years later, to appreciate what's resulted: a felt need on the part of Mexicali artists, generation after generation, to address the realities of urban, border life, as well as the inhospitable desert environment. The necessity to respond to harsh and defiant nature with a creativity that reaches toward the universal in its conception and craftsmanship creates a dialogue with the mirages from the sands. Mexicali's geography – its remoteness and peculiarity, its unique isolation with respect to other regions of the country – still influences the artistic enterprises

of painters and writers, of playwrights and sculptors, of musicians and cultural promoters.

Mexicali's nature, like rocks and cacti, like sunlight in all its splendor, is always present in the face of proliferating urban horizons, of border walls, of the online blogosphere. What is virtual is fashionable, but the nature of Baja California continues to be a reality that is still there: true to itself, as vital now as it has been for thousands of years, as original as the cave paintings that are its origin and foundation; a world of constant change and mutation. Nonetheless, you learn at your own risk here – a social laboratory that mixes cave art and technology, the past and future, reality and fantasy, the peripheral and the center, the traditional and the avant-garde. It is from this melting pot that Mexicali border art was born.

Mexicali Rose: Border artists in New York

Since becoming aware of their craft and also of the obstacles they faced in terms of exposing and disseminating their work, Mexicali artists have elected to join together in groups, associations, and cooperatives in order to multiply their efforts. A number of groups emerged in the middle of the twentieth century and stand to this day as examples of this collective spirit: Símbolo, Círculo de Escultores y Pintores, Profesionales de las Artes Visuales, Lindero Norte, Cooperativa José García Arroyo and la Galería Fronteriza. Thanks to these collectives, the evolution of the arts in Baja California has been a team effort – and one that has achieved impressive results in the conquest of space and resources, while making learning a communal endeavor.

The search for exhibition spaces in Mexicali first led to artists presenting their works in commercial and private spaces: furniture stores, department stores, showrooms, and social clubs. Later the artists of Baja California began demanding that the government create public art spaces. The cultural palaces were the first step forward in this regard, but the city gallery in Mexicali, founded in 1978, was the first public space dedicated exclusively to the visual arts. Since then, the number of spaces created by the government

(at the municipal, state, and federal levels) has continued to grow. But it's important to note that the expansion of these government-sponsored spaces has been matched by a proliferation of independent sites throughout the state: spaces that maintain the spirit of liberty and confrontation that critical art demands, like la Casa de la Tía Tina in the historic center of Mexicali, or the Mexicali Rose cultural center, located in the rough neighborhood of Pueblo Nuevo (paradoxically, also the oldest neighborhood in Mexicali).

A view of art as a source of pleasure and knowledge, of liberation and wisdom, is held by today's generation of Mexicali artists. Since the pioneering generations, since 1977 when a statewide biennial exhibition was initiated, the artists of Mexicali have been first in line to defend artistic expression in all of its forms: to defend art that presented, in public spaces, nude bodies and social problems, ironic or mocking visions of its surroundings. Eroticism, irreverence, and transgression have always been a fundamental part of Mexicali art. Facing uncompromising and authoritarian social sectors, Mexicali art and artists have had to fight for their freedom of creative expression. Facing down anachronistic and restrictive concepts, which would see art limited by political correctness, blind patriotism, and religious dogmatism, local artists have been harassed with censorship for exercising their freedom.

But beyond the cultural and social processes that frame or define the development of art in Mexicali, the primary factor to understanding the arts of our city is the painters, illustrators, sculptors, performers, and conceptual artists themselves. Across generations, Mexicali's artists individually represent the most visible face of each period – the most accurate portrait of the evolution of our arts, of our conflicts and confrontations in relation to a transforming scene. Artists such as Ruth Hernández, Carlos Coronado, Eduardo Quintero, and Marco Vera have functioned not only as creators, but also as cultural promoters, teachers, gallery owners, curators, cultural reporters, and tireless supporters of local artistic life. Thus the individual creator is a fundamental factor, an essential catalyst, that must be attended to in properly interpreting Mexicali art as an individual process immersed

in a collective dynamic of change (and resistance to change) that is continual and permanent. Artists here, through personal initiative and will, assume multiple tasks necessary for the arts in Mexicali to maintain momentum, overcome obstacles, and reach toward new levels of quality, new creative territories, new audiences, and new spaces.

Mexicali Rose, an independent cultural center founded in 2007, is a sizzling, popular, and aggressive meeting grounds. The space provides living evidence that art is catalytic in neighborhoods where youth have never considered it, yet have an array of ideas and experiences that represent an ideal starting point for the making of art without concessions or limitations; an art that expresses what it lives without euphemisms or nonsense. Mexicali Rose – the name comes from a song that was a worldwide hit in 1923 – has always seen itself as a bridge between the California artists of Los Angeles and the Imperial Valley, and those in Baja California. Today this linkage has been solidified even further, with the exhibition *Radical Localism: Art, Video, and Culture from Pueblo Nuevo's Mexicali Rose*, so named by art writer Chris Kraus, and curated with Marco Vera and Richard Birkett at Artists Space in New York. *Radical Localism* represents a huge step for Mexicali art – particularly at this moment – on the national and international art scene. The exhibition responds to a community of artists who have burnt through boundaries at an astounding pace and have established a remarkable creative productivity in all the arts of our time – an output that has crossed borders in literature, music, dance, theater, and visual arts.

Radical Localism is proof of this assertion, and the artists participating in it exemplify the different forms of expression that define the face of Mexicali art in the present century. If we look at their work as a single collective mural, we are faced with a conglomerate of styles and techniques that range from traditional painting to conceptual work, from documentary photography to interventions that deconstruct reality and transform it into a unique object beyond its utilitarian function. We thus face a meeting of languages and themes that talk while giving testimony to border

lives, and break with naturalistic restrictions to explore dreamlike worlds and alternative visions; both works that dare to deny any connection to the environment, and ones which are based on the environment as a visible context.

Mexicali art is an amalgam of distinct materials and an auspicious collection of personal quests toward a horizon that's always misleading, where nothing is as it seems. On the one hand, Sergio Haro honors journalistic photography, which is able to capture a moment in time and give it specific meaning. His work interrogates the viewer with extreme situations, with events that strike us with their rawness, with their rough veracity. On the other hand, the photography of Odette Barajas and of Rafael Veytia reveals itself to us as portraits of familiar characters cast in vivid light, of known places, and of moments that exude the everyday with transcendent energy. If Veytia portrays bearded old men and uninhibited young girls, Barajas sets out to capture the old time residents of Pueblo Nuevo in their offices and at their daily tasks, to give an image to the characters and scenarios that Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez, the chronicler of the neighborhood, made known in his books – stories that tell of a place where life is an act of persistence, a permanent challenge, a greeting and a smile.

Fernando Corona and Pablo Castañeda take an imaginary leap from the reality of a city that seems like more than just another border town, one that hides mysteries and legends, fantastic beings and magical corners that few see or know about. The work of these artists was born from creating a new, autonomous reality while living on a side of the street with potholes and dive bars. Another world is made to emerge from a place where everything seems ordinary and insignificant: a different world made of dreams and illusions, tinged with dazzling colors, elevated like a mirage the viewer can never reach but which keeps its light in our eyes. Julio Torres pulls off something similar: behind the hard-working, square image of Mexicali, his melancholic words reveal frictions of language, insults, marginal prides. The other side of the coin of progress and globalization is the pain of those screwed over, slander as a shield, insult as identity.



Sergio Haro, In May of 2007, in favor of immigration reform thousands took to the streets of North American cities and towns, including at the border between Mexicali and Calexico, 2007

Radical Localism reveals the Mexicali identity as one that keeps up with the rhythm of images in motion – an identity documented through short films and videos, through experimental works, through narrative fiction and journalistic reportage. The exhibition covers urban as well as border themes, living spaces and their personalities. *Radical Localism* takes us on a voyage through swap-meets, demonstrations against violence and the militarization of Mexico, family stories and young lives; past the unique characters of local bars and Mexican wrestling; on bus and motorcycle rides

through Mexicali's urban landscape, complete with close-ups of iconic city sites like the historic center and the abandoned places that are plentiful along the border.

In all these vertiginous visions thrives the visual work of directors such as Ana Karen Cázares, Alejandra Ocampo, Gabriela Heinecke, Miguel Manjarrez, Edgar Moreno, Fernando Corona, Cecil Martínez, Ilse Dávila, Ana Inda, Kaleb Becerra, Iván Alejandro Martínez Zazueta, Paulo Aguayo, Alicia Carrillo and the Moroyoki brothers, among many other filmmakers and videographers that have worked with the support of Mexicali Rose. These videos parade dogs, mannequins, transvestites, wire fences, garbage, rubble, scavengers, bicycles, urban lights, masks, banners, costumes, and people who look you in the eye the moment they tell you what they feel or think, what they fear or yearn for, what they want to be and what they are. As one of them says, "This is my land." The rest is self evident, like a torment or an offering. Like a fate that is sung at the top of one's lungs, tearing the throat.

Meanwhile, Carlos Coronado, Luis Hernández, and José Miguel Salcido respond to the different stimuli they find in Mexicali: border life as a space of reflection, a zone of anxiety, and a theater of the absurd. A sense of humor as a permanent defense against the sense that there is nothing here, that here you can scream, shout yourself hoarse, and no one will hear you; human existence as a desert landscape and an accumulation of consumerist objects; art as an obsession, as insanity, as a heat stroke; the adoption of the comic, the fanzine, border ads, and video as documents, narrative fictions, or visual experiments. Their work reacts to this all with punk-like aplomb, and asserts that there is no more future here than what each person does for himself by himself. There remains no other option in Mexicali but to work by drawing sparks from the asphalt: with your back to the alienating routine of life, to art as decoration and ornament.

This dissenting attitude, this productive anarchism, explores the margins of the industrial city, sets itself the task of revealing the lives and scenarios that don't form part of the state's progressive dream. It gives, in any case, voice and visibility to those who represent the

reverse side of the coin in a society of zombie consumers, of conformists who believe they are part of the American Dream, of citizens who assume that Mexicali is just the private housing developments in which they live and coexist, the public and private offices they either staff or own. Mexicali, as these artists object, is a broader and stranger world that many do not care to recognize as part of the lively collective landscape of the state's capital. A world of people in passing, of outcasts, of forgotten presences that create their own customs and traditions, their own myths and legends of ostracism, of shared lives, of fierce existential autonomy.

This is an art that combines personal style and community language, the studio as an experimental laboratory and the streets as a tapestry to be woven among all, subversive concepts with the pride of belonging to a community that makes itself. To live in Mexicali, to create in Mexicali, is to accept that there is no one way of approaching the artistic act – that each work created is part of a collective puzzle, of a sensibility that simultaneously incorporates rejection and rapprochement, affinity and frustration. Mexicali art defines itself by this dynamic. It creates its monsters, its fabulous creatures, its alternative universes. Yet it also struggles to make itself be heard: to be seen as a discourse that counters the prevailing taste, the established values. Being a Mexicali artist is like being a prophet in the desert: you announce the birth of new gods, you prophesize the end of the world for all. Such is its visionary force, its lasting mark, its historical heritage.

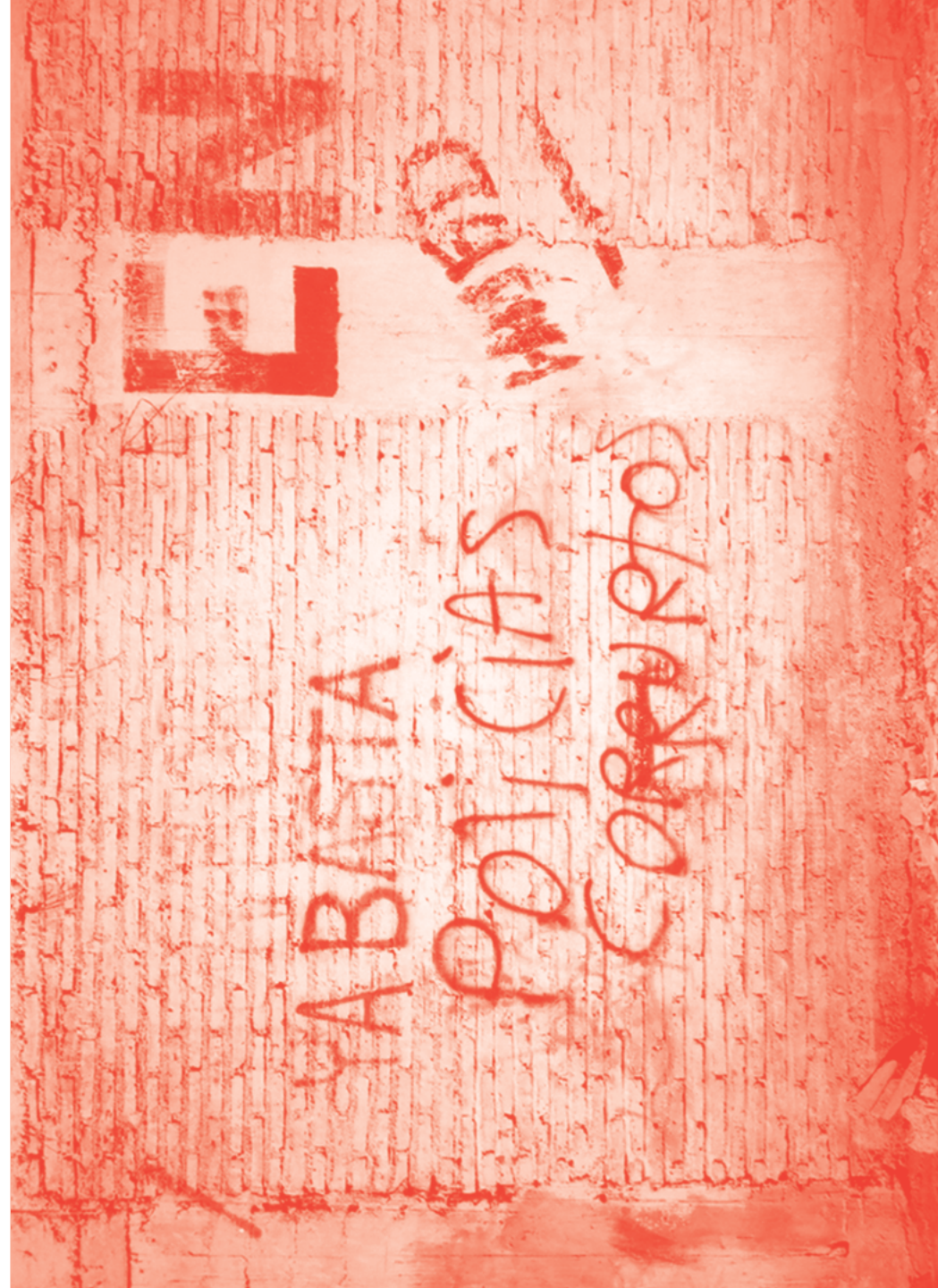
This exhibition of Mexicali artists at Artists Space, of creators that have worked with Mexicali Rose, is an occasion that recognizes the artistic life of this border town. As Marco Vera, founder and coordinator of Mexicali Rose, says: "For us, as an independent space, this recognition means a great deal: a progressive and respected exhibition space in New York hosting the first Mexicali group exhibition. It's a great achievement. We have noticed that this is what's missing from the city's cultural sphere, be it institutional or independent: us attempting to export ourselves, since the quality of the work is there. We have shown our co-curators different work, different generations of Mexicali artists during their visits. They

wanted to find a balance between work that represented the local scene and would also have resonance for a New York audience. The work of the artists in the exhibition grabbed us as the most during our discussions, from the biggest novice to the most experienced. I think what these selected artists have in common is that they don't wait or depend on anyone to do their job and carry out their projects. Mexicali Rose and these artists are united by the respect for what we do, independently, without waiting for someone to do things. The attitude that unites us is really the love of art, whatever discipline we may use, and the love we have for Mexicali." Vera concludes by affirming that: "For us, Mexicali represents a cultural/artistic passion, a border influence, and an urban potential surrounded by anarchy." It is precisely *this* that *Radical Localism* demonstrates: a heterogeneous ensemble of artworks and artists that don't perceive the reality of Mexicali as an obstacle, but rather as a creative springboard, as a space to fill with their objects, strokes, marks, words, and desires. Like a truth that is earthquake-proof: a truth of its own, of our own, by all for all.

Mexicali as an anomaly, that's already breaking off into the global artistic panorama.

Mexicali: it's only dust and fences, sun and heat, but we like it. We hope you do too.

Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz (born 1958, Mexicali, Baja California) is a poet, narrator and essay writer. He has published over a hundred works. His recent publications include *Los diablitos. Diez mil años de artes plásticas en Baja California* (2011) and *Moriremos como soles* (2011).





"Entre los individuos, como entre las naciones,
el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz"

Benito Juárez García

No
A LA IMPUNIDAD
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A LA IMPUNIDAD
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The Femicide Machine

Sergio González Rodríguez

To understand the use of the compound term *femicide machine* as it relates to Ciudad Juárez, one must go beyond the simple metaphor of an industrial city. The femicide machine is inscribed within a particular structure of the neo-Fordist economy. In other words, it is a parasite of this structure, just as the structure itself was encrusted upon the Mexican border. The structure is defined by mass economic regulation on an international, macroeconomic scale, and by an assembly line production that differentiates products via flexible, automated methods, information technology, and specially categorized labor. This economic set-up presents a new, complex, interconnected spectrum of procedures for exploiting material and human resources, while at the same time maintaining more traditional mechanisms of exploitation. These procedures are both tangible and intangible, and their ramifications are global.

The femicide machine has characteristics that differ from the structure that supports it, and it also remains distinct from the State it inhabits. It derives strength from this autonomy, which makes fighting it difficult, because the machine tends to multiply, or to transform in an expanded, specialized reproduction of itself.

Ciudad Juárez's femicide machine can be better understood in light of a generic description of the ultra-contemporary machine: "The machine is not limited to managing and striating entities closed off to one another, but opens up to other machines and, together with them, moves machinic assemblages. It consists of machines and penetrates several structures simultaneously. It depends on external elements in order to be able to exist at all."¹ It is a generator that creates and directs non-linear aspects, potential dimensions and unprecedented qualities.

This machinic integrity is complemented by the human (individual, group, or collective) element that devised it, keeps

¹ Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines* (Semiotext(e): Los Angeles, 2010), p. 33.

it running, and at some point, can destroy it. It also maintains differentiated links and exchanges with other machines, real and virtual: the war machine, the police machine, the criminal machine, or the machine of apolitical conformity.

Ciudad Juárez's femicide machine is composed of hatred and misogynistic violence, *machismo*, power and patriarchal reaffirmations that take place at the margins of the law or within a law of complicity between criminals, police, military, government officials, and citizens who constitute an a-legal old-boy network. Consequently, the machine enjoys discrete protection from individuals, groups, and institutions that in turn offer judicial and political impunity, as well as supremacy over the State and the law.

The femicide machine applies its force upon institutions via direct action, intimidation, ideological sympathy, inertia, and indifference. This prolongs its own dominance, and guarantees its own unending reproducibility. Traced over time, its effects recreate its *modus operandi*: In Ciudad Juárez, violence against women multiplied for more than ten years, while at the same time a veil of impunity was constructed. In subsequent years, disdain for and oblivion of the victims became more formalized through political institutions, the judicial system, and the mass media. The price of this misfortune was paid within the border territory more than anywhere else.

In the past half-century, Ciudad Juárez gave birth to four cities in one: the city as a northern Mexican Border town/United States' backyard; the city inscribed in the global economy; the city as a theater of operations for the war on drugs; and the femicide city. Extreme capitalism converges here: plutocratic, corporate, monopolistic, global, speculative, wealth-concentrating, and predatory, founded on military machinations and media control. Ciudad Juárez is the realization of planned speculation that practices on city-slums and on the people there who are considered of little value. The human cannon fodder suffer while trying to reverse the adverse situation of living in cities at constant risk or in continuous crisis, and facing community disintegration.

The femicide machine has affected the entire urban-territorial space of Ciudad Juárez. The criminals who operate it have made the

extent of their crimes so blatantly clear that they can only be read as a generalized attack on order and the rules of coexistence.

Originally, the land that comprised Ciudad Juárez was private: The city's growth has been achieved through government-sanctioned capitalist real-estate developments, squatting, and self-construction on behalf of inhabitants. Systematic actions against women bear the signs of a campaign: They smack of turf war, of the land's rape and subjugation. These acts imply a strategic reterritorialization, as real as it is symbolic, that includes capital property (contractors, shopping centers, industrial parks, basic services) and the possession of public space through ubiquitous occupation. Ultimately, what is expressed is the sovereign authority to determine urban life at the cost of the citizenry's slow and steady impoverishment.

The femicide machine has achieved its capacity for control, domination, vigilance, and espionage within Ciudad Juárez through institutional corruption and the rise of criminal industries. The US border itself has become vulnerable, and the menace against it grows day after day. This machine has left traces of its crimes on streets, crossroads, neighborhoods, industrial parks, and specific urban and suburban zones by throwing the bodies of dozens of victims there. Messages, wounds, marks, mutilation, and torture have been inscribed on these bodies: practices that reveal a shift from sociopathy to unlimited psychopathy, fed by institutional shortages and the fruits of impunity. The destructive impulse becomes automatic.

Authorities manipulated facts in order to avoid responsibilities; women were revictimized. The murdered women were accused of somehow having collaborated with their victimizers. The gravity of these events was minimized by attributing the murders to family dysfunctionality; as a standard, the victims were associated with organized crime. Members of the victims' family circles and other innocent parties were groundlessly accused of the murders. Every tossed, buried, and half-buried corpse offered a glimpse of the perimeter of an ominous totality-the grid of a vast and expansive power. Media and trans-media space channeled these messages

to the entire world. It is possible that other femicide machines are now gestating in other Mexican cities and elsewhere on the planet.

Excerpt from Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2012, pp 9-14

A Lucrative War

Ben Ehrenreich

The dead [...] can reveal quite a bit if one pays attention. Through a careful analysis of homicide statistics, Fernando Escalante [a sociologist at the Colegio de Mexico] has come up with a compelling if distressing account of the roots of the current violence. What happened, he says, was globalization. Nationally, Mexico's murder rate fell steadily from 1990 to 2008, though the distribution of violent death shifted remarkably over those years. Homicide in Mexico used to be a largely rural phenomenon, and one that rarely made the papers. Salinas' termination of the land reform in 1992 changed that, Escalante says. If peasants could no longer hope to own their land, there was little reason to fight over it. Extremes of violence shifted to three demographically unique regions: first of all to cities that have seen sudden and enormous population growth over the last two decades combined with major, structural economic shifts: the *maquiladora* zones, the port cities and the border towns to which displaced *campesinos* migrated in search of work. All of the northern border cities grew by at least 100 percent between 1990 and 2005. None had either sufficient infrastructure or employment for a mass of deracinated and largely impoverished new arrivals. "If that generates violence," Escalante says, "I don't want to sound cynical, but that's what happens with major cataclysmic demographic change." Cities with relatively stable populations and in which fundamental economic relationships remained the same have not seen a comparable rise in violence.

Along the northern border, Escalante observes, the homicide rate remained lower than the national average until 1994, after which "it went up and stayed there." Escalante speculates that the militarization of the border on the American side – which began in 1993 – increased competition among smuggling groups in Mexico, creating conditions that favored the most organized and ruthlessly violent. Finally, the murder rate leapt in two isolated drug-producing regions in which the Mexican state has historically had very little

presence: the so-called Golden Triangle of the northern sierra and the area west of the Rio Balsas in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero. There, between the profits available through marijuana and opium cultivation and the lack of infrastructure that might make any other pursuit economically viable, the leap in violence was foreseeable, says Escalante, especially once pressure from the armed forces was introduced. Mexico's problem, he argues, is not a failing state or an excessively weak state, but the state's foolhardy inflexibility, its attempt to fortify itself through military means without being able to offer any compensatory resources – jobs, education, opportunity – to a population it has come to regard as expendable.

That [Felipe] Calderón's war has been a disaster should be no surprise. If its goals are taken at face value – if they have anything to do with fighting *drugs* – the war on drugs has been an unceasing failure since the phrase was coined. The flow of contraband to the United States has increased, as has the violence encouraged by prohibition. The billions of dollars spent by the U.S. in Colombia did successfully hobble the FARC insurgency, break up the monopolies of the Cali and Medellín cartels, and strengthen the U.S.'s most loyal partner in the region, but they did not significantly slow the production and export of cocaine. In Mexico, despite more than 28,000 deaths and the showcase arrests and killings of major cartel figures, the traffic continues unimpeded. Last year, the Mexican government confiscated less than half the amount of cocaine that it had seized in 1991. Cocaine interdiction dropped sharply in the U.S. as well, which the DEA mysteriously takes as a sign of its success.

In August, former president Vicente Fox called for the return of Mexican troops to their barracks and the possible legalization of “the possession, sale and distribution of drugs.” Last February, Fox's predecessor Ernesto Zedillo joined the former presidents of Brazil and Colombia in declaring that “the war on drugs has failed.” Calderón, unfazed, has promised to keep the troops in the streets until the end of his six-year term. His support from the north has been unflagging. President Obama has proposed extending that

“piece of black humor”¹ known as the Merida Initiative and has requested an additional \$310 million for 2011. Compared to the funds allocated for regions that truly worry the U.S., this is a paltry sum, which suggests that the U.S. is less concerned for its vital security than for an opportunity to push its strategic interests while subsidizing its own booming domestic security sector. Despite Obama's diplomatic assurances to the contrary, his administration appears to have begun considering Mexico within the discourse the U.S. has applied to Iraq, Afghanistan and Colombia – that of failing states battling insurgencies and requiring U.S. help. It's a bad fit. The cartels are not revolutionary cells so much as organizations of global capital, but the rhetoric provides a domestic pretext for folding Mexico into U.S. security protocols. Carlos Pascual, the new U.S. ambassador to Mexico, last summer confidently proposed “a new role” for the Mexican military in Juárez, one consistent with U.S. urban counter-insurgency tactics employed elsewhere across the globe: “securing the perimeter” of five-block-square “safe zones,” and pushing that perimeter outward block by block. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sounded a similar note in a September press conference, characterizing the cartels as “morphing into, or making common cause with, what we would consider an insurgency” and calling for a heightened level of aid equivalent to that committed to Colombia. The outcry in Mexico was unanimous, and Obama quickly backed away from Clinton's comments.

Whatever shape it takes, the war on drugs continues to be a highly profitable enterprise, even more so than the drug trade itself. All the killing keeps prices per gram high, so the cartels do fine, as do the legions of *sicarios* and the funeral directors they help to feed. The bankers who wash the money also win, as do the businessmen into whose enterprises the newly laundered funds are funneled. The American weapons manufacturers whose products freely cross the border south as the drugs flow north also stand to make out nicely. So do the corporate U.S. security consultants

¹ Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juarez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields* (Nation Books: New York, 2010)

and military contractors who will deposit almost all of the allotted Merida funds, and who can expect to glean billions more from the ongoing militarization of the border on the American side – someone has to build the helicopters, the cameras, the night-vision goggles, the motion sensors, the unmanned drones, the private prisons that hold the migrants. The politicians also stand to gain, not only Calderón and the PRlistas who will likely ride in on his failure in 2012, but the Americans who have sponsored him: the agile ones who can leverage campaign contributions from the aforementioned contractors, the shrill populists who win votes by shouting about the barbarian hordes advancing through the Arizona desert, the temperate moderates who get re-elected term after term by expounding in even tones about the need for something called “comprehensive border security.” As long as so many stand to gain from Mexico's misfortunes, the killing there is unlikely to cease.

Excerpt from Ben Ehrenreich, 'A Lucrative War', *London Review of Books*, October 2010, pp. 15-18

Pancho y Blanca

Iván Alejandro Martínez Zazueta

Iván: This is a part of my personal history, a part of the past that shapes me. These are my roots and my wings. This is the story of my parents.

Childhood

Pancho: My name is Francisco Martínez Silva. I was born in Mexicali, Baja California in Ejido Guerrero, the 8th of March, 1954.

My childhood was very difficult. It was very frustrating not knowing my father. Taking up responsibility as soon as I was able to start working. They placed all the responsibility on me. I wasn't able to go to school. Since I was ten or eleven years old I had to work – after school, picking cotton.

Blanca: My name is Blanca Margarita Zazueta Verdín. I was born in Los Mochis, Sinaloa on October 10th, 1957. My mother, Margarita Verdín Ríos, and my father, Eustaquio Zazueta Gámez, they came here wanting to progress. They were looking for a better life for their children.

I had the happiest childhood. We had a canal where I would go dipping. We would catch animals to eat. We would catch fish, shrimp, rabbits... What are those birds called? Picui ground doves. We'd catch plenty and fry them all up for the kids.

My dad died of prostate cancer. He was in bed for about three years. He suffered a lot. The day he died... Thank God I didn't see him die, because I would've gone crazy. As soon as I stepped out to look for an ambulance, he passed. It was really sad.

Adolescence and Growth

Pancho: Always remember: in every generation, in every place, there are social classes. Our farmland had social classes. All of that

neighborhood where you grew up... There were no lots – those who had property, owned parcels. They used to call us settlers. That's what they called us. The farm owners were the ones with money. They took a lot of interest in baseball, so we took up soccer. Why? Because they had baseball. It was all they knew, it was all they liked.

Since they were the owners, they looked down on us. I remember the rich would abuse the women. Since they were wealthy... A lot of them came from the south, from my mom's region. I still remember, it happened a lot.

Blanca: I met your dad because he was friends with my brothers. I was too young, I wasn't interested, but he was interested in me. Until one day he asked if I wanted to be his girlfriend.

Iván: How did he ask?

Blanca: He just asked if I wanted to be his girlfriend. He said, "Say yes or yes." He never said, "Yes or no."

Iván: How old were you?

Blanca: I was in the eighth grade. I must have been thirteen or fourteen.

Pancho: I met her in the neighborhood. She was part of the group. Neither her, nor me nor the rest of the group had a partner. She didn't have one and I didn't care for a girlfriend. I was a troublemaker, you see. I did have the curiosity like any young man.

Iván: How was he as a boyfriend?

Blanca: He was a jerk. He still is. He wasn't very affectionate – just like he has been all his life. He wasn't a hypocrite.

Iván: Was he jealous?

Blanca: Yes, he was jealous.

Children

Blanca: You were one year old when your dad left to work. He worked as a "bracero" because he wanted a better life for his children.

Pancho: I was there as an illegal.

Iván: Did you miss anything?

Pancho: I missed your mother as a woman and you guys... you were little.

Blanca: After a year, I wanted to go with him. When you were two years old. So we smuggled you and Francisco illegally.

Iván: How?

Blanca: Before, gang members would dig holes along the border. Virginia and I went over. We took a ball and discretely started playing until we crossed you both. Once inside we walked to "el hoyo". You know where that is? From there we went to where your grandma lived. Then Jaime, my brother, came to pick us up. They used to call you guys "little wetbacks."

Depression

Pancho: When you get money you can go crazy. Money turns you into... Not everyone can handle money. You start doing things you shouldn't.

Iván: Abundance?

Pancho: Women. Those sorts of things... That's why they say,

"every cloud has a silver lining." If I had kept my green card, I wouldn't be with your mom today. Your mom is not a pushover. She has her limits. She made me see it.

Blanca: They took away his green card. They cut it with scissors. He still had his passport. He could have continued working, but he refused. He said, "How can I leave again?" He wanted to rest while he fixed his paperwork.

After that he couldn't fix his paperwork and became depressed. He didn't have a job and he got depressed. He started hanging out with the wrong crowd. His depression and wrongful behavior lasted about three years.

Pancho: She was the only one that helped me. Neither my mother nor my sisters helped like she did. Your mom says Graciela told her to leave me. My new job became my therapy and rehab center. When I started working... I thought, "Friends? Drugs?" No more, no more, no more, no more. If I ever started using drugs it was because of... What did you call it? Depression.

She helped 100%, with her support. If she wouldn't have been there, I'd be lost. I wouldn't be here talking to you. What I'm trying to tell you is that I owe her my life. I'd give her my life, anything. Without thinking about it for a second. I ask God, which I believe in, to take me first. I wouldn't know what to do without your mom. Honestly, I'm not running my mouth – I talk from the heart. I'd give my life for her.

Transcript from *Pancho y Blanca*, a film directed by Iván Alejandro Martínez Zazueta, produced by Producciones Ej Guerrero and Mexicali Rose, 2012

Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez Mexicali Rose / Marco Vera

The exhibition *Radical Localism: Art, Video and Culture in Mexicali's Pueblo Nuevo* is dedicated with all of our heart to the loving memory of Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez; teacher, historian and chronicler of our beloved Pueblo Nuevo barrio.

To speak of Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez, is to introduce oneself to an important piece of the puzzle in the history of Mexicali, the northwestern Mexican city where he was born; more specifically, the Pueblo Nuevo barrio, a place that saw his birth, growth and development.

He was a tireless cultural promoter, creating 32 cultural spaces where children, young people and adults could find a way into the world of literature.

Still, his greatest professional satisfaction lay in his literary works, among which we can highlight, *Pero sucedió* (1982), *Y nació Pueblo Nuevo* (1999), *Compuertas... entre canales, historia y leyenda* (2003) and his final creation, in collaboration with photographer Odette Barajas, *Retratos Neopoblanos* (2010).

More so than his chronicles, his cultural spaces, the recognition received or the books he wrote, the most admirable thing about Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez was his excellent qualities as a person. He was always well known for his rectitude, his commitment to the community, and his pleasant virtue in cultivating fraternal relationships and solidarity. As a father and grandfather, he was an example of love and devotion in all of his undertakings, and as a husband, he was a gentleman in every sense of the word.

Pueblo Nuevo will always have you in its heart.



Odette Barajas, *Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez, cronista del barrio de Pueblo Nuevo*
(Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez, chronicler of the Pueblo Nuevo barrio), 2010

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