

POLITICAL PROTEST ILLUSTRATION IN THE FARM WORKER RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Posters and cartoons have aided the political campaigns of the Farm Worker Rights Movement in the United States from the 1960's to the present. This paper will examine the origins and evolution of this illustration-based advocacy, which most often takes the form of protest posters, paintings, and digital art.

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INTRODUCTION

PROTEST ART has existed since humans learned to paint on caves and left their stories behind to be communicated and preserved through wordless, illustrated narrative.

Protest illustration is a specific genre of protest art that clearly tells and retells a story or mission, poses a possible solution, and can be replicated and disseminated to the masses by the masses.

During the first decades of the Farm Worker Rights Movement (1960's - 1970's), protest illustration was essential in conveying numerous messages about the cause to a diverse group of those impacted. As art historian Terezita Romo states, "One of the main characteristics of farm worker posters has been their ability to appeal/motivate a multifaceted audience (Romo)."

The Farm Worker Movement in the United States came about during the mid-20th century as a vehicle to advocate for agricultural workers' rights and to improve their working conditions. The movement, which was led by organized labor groups like the Agricultural Workers Organizing



Figure 2 Andrew Zerneño, *The Magic Huelga Sign*, El Malcriado No. 53, 1967.

Previous Page **Figure 1** Andrew Zerneño, *Huelga*, 1966. Zerneño created *Huelga!* (meaning "strike" in Spanish) as his first poster for the United Farm Workers.

illustrations in posters, flyers, and cartoons to promote the Farm Workers Movement from the 1960's to the 1980's. These illustrated graphics focused on themes of agricultural and labor rights and were often made up of fruit and vegetable imagery, paired with depictions of poor working conditions exhibited by figures in the fields. These graphics, when combined with text, helped disseminate information about the UFW's upcoming union elections, general meetings, boycott campaigns, or newly enacted legislation that needed to be reviewed. Based on first account documentation by UFW members and volunteers, these posters, flyers, and cartoons successfully encouraged action (*"Organizing Cartoons - Mark Sharwood/Alberto Escalante"*). This paper will examine the origins and evolution of the Movement's illustration work and how contemporary artists like Esteban Cabeza de Baca, Eric J. García and Narsiso Martinez continue to use illustration to comment on the ongoing struggle for farmworker's rights today.



Fig. 4 Barbara Carrasco, *Dolores*, 1999.



¡VIVA LA HUELGA!

THE ROLE OF ARTISTS IN THE UFW CAMPAIGNS OF THE 1960'S AND 1970'S

Illustration is not the only artform that has been integral to the Farm Worker Rights Movement. In the early years of the movement, visual arts, theater, music, and other forms of the arts were all used as tools to support the movement in various manners. Actors gathered to put on plays about the plight and cause of the farm workers, performing in the fields where the workers could watch (*El Teatro Campesino*). Musicians like Kris Kristofferson, Jerry García, Cheech and Chong, Crosby and Nash, Taj Mahal, Malo, Tower of Power and others performed in concerts organized as fundraisers for the Farm Workers Movement (*Alegria and Sanchez, 36:27*).

Two significant ways in which the arts were instrumental was in communicating information to farmworkers and raising funds for the movement. Cesar Chavez, the Labor leader and co-founder of the The United Farm Workers (UFW) labor union, was an early champion of this approach. He understood the powerful role that art and symbols in graphic media had played throughout the history of labor unions, using imagery to disseminate messages and rally support by evoking the Mexican Revolution, embodying courage in the face of adversity, and fostering community solidarity to inspire workers to advocate for their rights. When helping build

Previous page **Fig. 5** Artist Unknown, *Viva La Huelga*, 1960's.

the UFW, Chavez was conscious of embedding art in the form of posters, cartoons, music, and theater into their activities (*Zapata and Romo* 32). Each of these art forms was used to convey messages through narratives of farmworkers' lived experiences as well as the union's campaigns with humor and satire. They each also evoke aspirations for justice and unity amongst the farmworkers. This chapter focuses on the illustrations created for the posters, banners, and cartoons of the movement, and how these images contributed to giving voice to the political protest of farmworkers.

The United Farm Workers logo exemplifies the role of the artist in this movement. In 1962, Richard Chavez (Cesar Chavez' brother) designed the UFW eagle seen in the union's logo. The eagle was inspired by the Aztec eagle



Fig. 6 Richard Chavez, *United Farm Workers Flag*, Circa 1970.



Fig. 7 Andrew Zermeno, *UFW Union Label*, 1960's.



Fig. 8 Carlos Almaraz, *Cesar Talking with Farm Workers*, C. 1970.

and represented strength, dignity, and pride. Richard purposely designed the eagle to have squared winged edges in order to make the symbol easier for union members to draw (on posters, etc.) and sew onto flags (*Sherman*). While this logo was effective to begin with, the eagle's head and neck resembled more like that of a turkey. In 1965, Cesar Chavez approached artist Andrew Zerneño and asked if he could rework the image. Zerneño accepted the challenge and so began a relationship between the artist and the UFW.

The UFW remained conscious of the important roles artists were playing in the Farm Workers' Rights Movement well into the 1970's, and they effectively communicated this through speeches as well as one on

one conversations. During a speech at UCLA on October 11, 1972, Chavez recounted, “we went to the people of this country, we said in whichever way we could with leaflets, going to meetings, to students, to union meetings, to church meetings, and everywhere and anywhere that they would have us, and we told the people in America, help us we need your help (*Chavez*).” Artists like Barbara Carrasco were inspired by these speeches, as she recalled hearing Cesar Chavez when she was 19 years old at UCLA: “I volunteered right after the speech. Cesar told me at the time: ‘We need artists very much (*Benavidez*).’ ”

It is important to note that many participating Chicano/a/x artists knew the working conditions that the farmworkers were protesting and they were eager to support the Farm Worker Rights Movement being led by Cesar Chavez at the UFW (*PBS and Momtaz*). They knew the working conditions because a large number of them had grown up working the fields alongside their parents. The Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF) is an example of these artists. The group was founded in the 1960’s by faculty and students at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Members included art professors Esteban Villa and Jose Montoya, along with students Ricardo Favela, Juanishi V. Orosco, and Rudy Cuellar (*Kaplan*). Each was a Chicano/a/x artist who sought to use



Fig. 9 Max García, *Royal Chicano Air Force*, 1995.

their illustrations to express the objectives of the larger, parallel Chicano civil rights movement as well as the Farm Worker Rights Movement efforts of the UFW. The RCAF consistently designed and printed posters for the UFW for ten years. As artist Juanishi Orosco remembers, “We would get the call, “We need, you know, X number of, 500, a thousand posters by tomorrow morning with the union logo on it and these words on it” (*PBS and Momtaz*, 15:59).

One example is the poster titled *Huelga!/ Strike!* (1976) by Royal Chicano Air Force member artist Ricardo Favela. The landscape oriented poster is printed on off white paper and is made up of a red, black, blue, and yellow color palette.

The left side of the image is framed by the word ¡HUELGA!, printed in red hand lettering, outlined in black, and displayed vertically. Framing the right side of the image is the word ¡STRIKE!, using the same hand lettering and colors. At the top is a smaller line of text in black, highlighted in yellow reading, “SUPPORT THE U.F.W.A. INTERNATIONAL BOYCOTT.” The bottom portion of the image is outlined by a black border that mirrors the UFW logo’s eagle wings. There are three sets of text displayed in this area. Reading from left to right,

“¡BOYCOTT GALLO WINES!” followed by “RCAF,” and at the far right, “¡BOYCOTT SUNMAID RAISINS!” The center of the image is framed by a blue border at the top and a slimmer black border at the bottom. A blue jeep carrying a black flag with the UFW logo drives down a Safeway supermarket store parking lot. Three passengers along with the driver ride along. The figure at the rear of the vehicle is dressed in blue attire with a red beret and aviator sunglasses. In the middle seats of the jeep are two figures. The subject to the left sits at the edge of the jeep wearing blue slacks, a black jacket, and a black pilot’s cap



Fig. 10 Ricardo Favela and the Royal Chicano Air Force, *Huelga Strike*, 1976.

with the UFW eagle. The next sitter wears a black fedora trimmed in red and blue with a yellow feather. The driver, dressed in blue and white, wears round aviator sunglasses. All four figures sit in relaxed and grounded positions, their faces all directed down the road. A white flag drapes over the jeep's grille, with the acronym "RCAF" in black and yellow arched over a black and red star. "ROYAL CHICANO AIR FORCE" composes the bottom arch of the flag.

This image is more text heavy than other farm worker protest illustrations. Clearly presenting the Safeway supermarket sign orients the viewer, marking the location. Providing both the Spanish and English words for strike enables viewers who speak either or both languages to understand the message. The RCAF makes their presence and identity known not only by having their text insignia on the jeep and framing of the poster, but by also having the members of the collective dress in clothing reflecting an air force, which at this point had become part of their defining uniform (*PBS and Momtaz*, 04:20). The RCAF was bringing their message of protest directly to the parking lot where potential consumers of the boycotted products were shopping. This poster, created by an artist collective made up of the adult children of farm workers, emphasizes the crucial role illustration played in protesting for farm workers' rights.

ARTISTS OF THE UNITED FARM WORKERS

In the documentary, *A Song For Cesar Chavez*, many artists who volunteered with the UFW described how they each considered the use of their illustrations to help the movement. According to Artist Malaquías Montoya: “We started to talk about the pride that was taking place at that particular time. And we started talking about identity and, ‘What do we do about the movement? What’s our role in the movement? What do we do for the farmworkers?’ And we finally -- Our idea was that we would become the narrative to the farm workers’ struggle. We would illustrate it, give it a pictorial narrative, you might say” (*Alegria and Sanchez*, 28:40).

The poster, *Support the Farm Workers*, is an early example of Montoya’s work for the UFW. The top of the image reads, “Support the Farm Workers War” in angular hand lettering that alternates from black to red. At the center coarse brush strokes frame a red circle with a black UFW logo eagle and red and black painterly silhouettes of two adults and a child. It is this image of the UFW logo that draws the viewer’s attention and then leads one to read the text in the bottom portion of the poster,



Fig. 11 Malaquías Montoya, *Vote Register*, c. 1971.

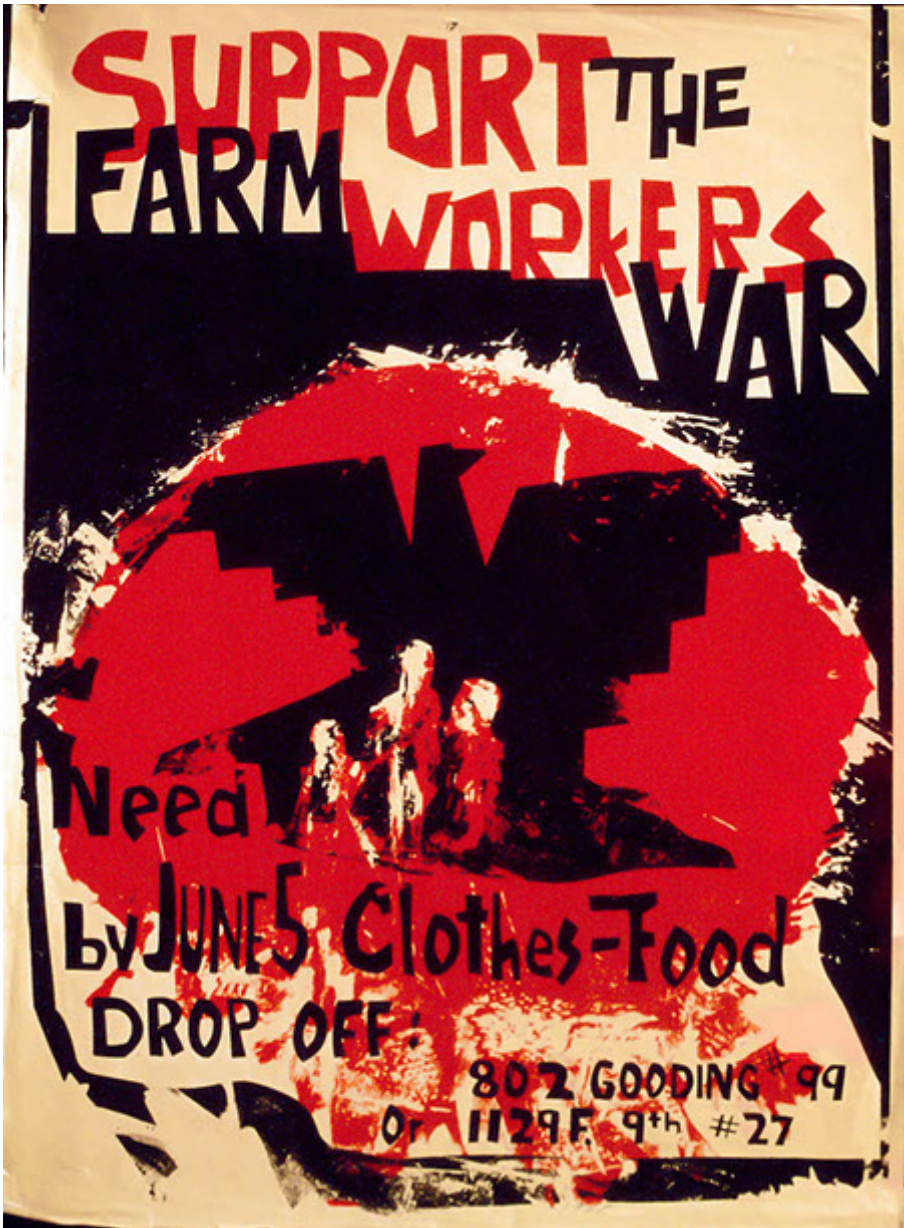


Fig. 12 Malaquías Montoya, *Support the Farm Workers*, 1968.

promoting a clothes and food drive for the UFW workers. The poster has a limited palette of colors: black and red ink along with the color of the paper.

The directness and graphic simplicity of the poster is representative of the approach Montoya and artists of the UFW took to create impactful visual and performative works. Their posters, murals, and cartoons were made up of striking pictorial compositions that illustrated messages to those who may not be able to read and also captured the attention of prospective supporters. Having these readily reproducible forms of

communication arts at the disposal of the UFW was vital in the union's effort to transmit the movement's mission. (González *et al.* 23) And so, the role of the artist within the union was solidified.

USING POSTERS AND CARTOONS TO EXPLAIN WORKING CONDITIONS

As art Historian Terezita Romo explains, “In the beginning, the UFW union’s main audience were the farmworkers, many of whom could not read Spanish or English. Therefore, the logo became very important as well as the word “Huelga.” Those who couldn’t read learned to associate both that word and logo and knew what it meant (Romo).”

The poster titled, *Huelga* (1966) by Andrew Zermeno (Figure 1 from page 1) exemplifies Romo’s point. In the image, a man is portrayed running with both feet off the ground. His right upper arm bends back parallel to his poncho-like garment which flies like a cape in the wind while his forearm thrusts his fully open hand forward towards the viewer. The figure’s left hand is wrapped tightly around a pole that carries a red flag with a white circle in the middle, framing the black UFW logo. The union logo on the flag overlaps with the man’s hat, which also features the union’s eagle set against a cross-hatched shadow. Mid-shout, the subject’s face contorts expressively. The garment he wears over his shirt reads UFWOC in red upper case letters above another black

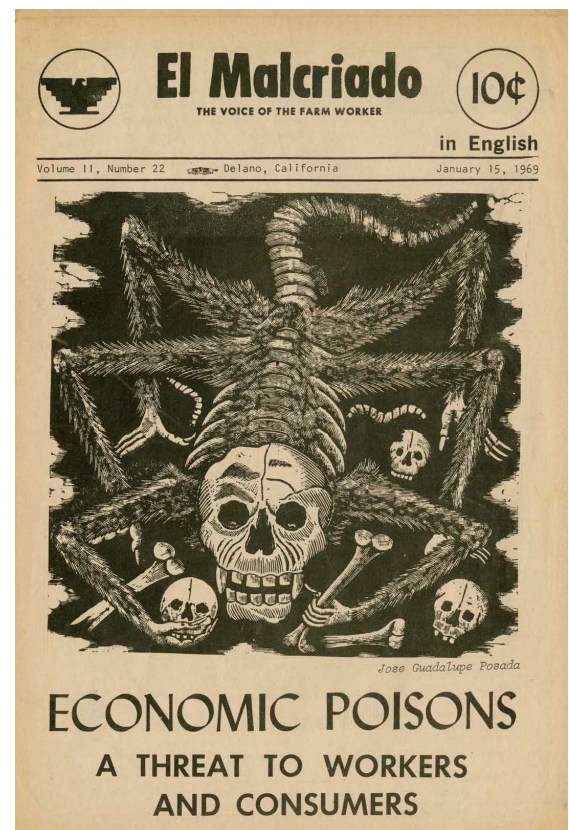


Fig. 13 Jose Guadalupe Posada, *Calavera huertista*, *El Malcriado*, No 22, Jan. 15, 1969

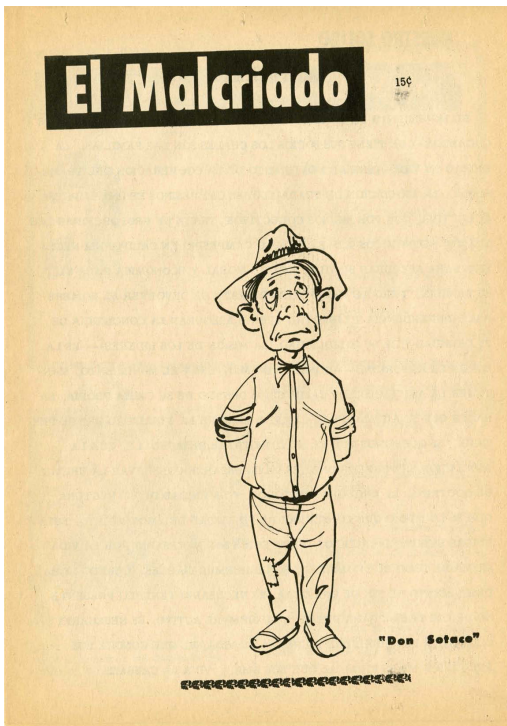


Fig. 14 Andrew Zermeno, *Don Sotaco*, *El Malcriado* No. 1, 1965.



Fig. 15 Andrew Zermeno, *Don Sotaco y Don Coyote*, *El Malcriado* No. 4-2, 1965.

UFW eagle. The man's legs sprint over the word *HUELGA!*, which means strike. The capital letters are illustrated in red with black drop shadows and flow in a slight arch.

Huelga (1966) expresses the message and identity of the union by using the United Farm Workers' logo three times within the image while dedicating a third of the pictorial space to prominently displaying the word *HUELGA!* as the image's ground. The expression of rage across the man's body and face evoke the power and political necessity of protest. The image is frenetic because the movement must be frenetic.

In the mid 1960's, Chavez consulted with artist Andrew Zermeno and playwright Luis Valdez on the creation of cartoons to include in the UFW's newspaper *El Malcriado*, which aimed to represent the voice of the farmworker. Chavez had come up with a character named Don Sotaco to represent the views of the striking farmworkers, and he asked Zermeno to illustrate him and create cartoons. These cartoons were meant to educate farmworkers about their rights and to motivate them to join the UFW union (*UC San Diego Library and Zermeno*). Artists Alberto Escalante, Mark Sharwood, and Jerry Lopez also created cartoons that would appear in leaflets and flyers handed to farmworkers on their way to work. Besides the cartoons, the overall design of the leaflets and

flyers were also carefully and deliberately designed. Escalante highlighted the significance of producing eye-catching graphics when reflecting on the early years of creating cartoons for the UFW: “I did a time study on just how many seconds workers had before they decided if they wanted to keep the leaflet they’d just been handed for further perusal. A worker is handed a leaflet, he quickly scans it, within three seconds he must decide if it’s worth keeping!” (*Organizing Cartoons - Mark Sharwood/Alberto Escalante*)

Posters are an inexpensive medium and a strategically simple way to communicate information. While creating illustrations can be labor intensive, the final reproducible piece, when designed effectively



Fig. 16 Alberto Escalante, *Join the Winning Side*, Date Unknown



Fig. 17 Mark Sharwood, *Tejon Ranch Election*, Date Unknown.



THE IMPORTANCE OF POSTERS AND CARTOONS TO EXPLAIN CONDITIONS

through use of graphic illustration, can spread a message to large groups of people. As art historian and curator Carol A. Wells states, “The intended audiences—then and now—are people who agree with the poster’s message; people who are undecided or know little; and people who are willing to rethink their positions. And at a minimum, posters educate about an issue (*Dooley and Wells*).”

The United Farm Workers Movement’s early poster illustrations were strongly inspired by art and graphics from the Mexican Revolution (*Zapata and Romo* 32). This inspiration can be linked to the fact that “many in Delano in 1965 had personal experience with the revolution and its aftermath (*United Farm Workers*).”

This influence can be seen in the poster titled *Emiliano Zapata, Tierra Y Libertad*, by Leopoldo Méndez. In this illustration, Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata is portrayed holding a banner with the words “Tierra Y Libertad” (Land And Freedom). Along the top and bottom of the image are the words “Solidarity” and “Farmworkers,” as well as the UFW eagle logo.

Other posters designed by artists supporting the Farm Worker Rights Movement used imagery that would

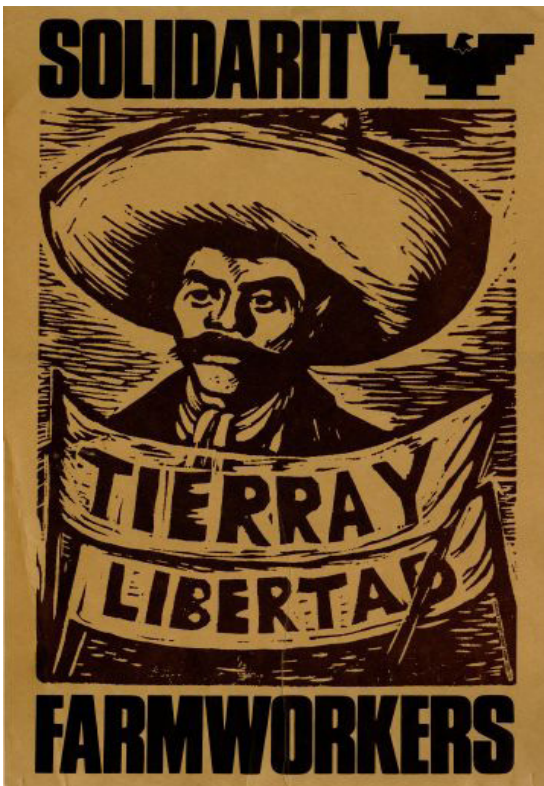


Fig. 19 Leopoldo Méndez, *Emiliano Zapata, Tierra Y Libertad*, C. 1960's and 70's.
Based on an image by Mexican artist Leopoldo Méndez.

Previous Page, **Fig. 18** Xavier Viramontes, *Boycott Grapes, Support the United Farm Workers Union*, 1973.

recall the fields and the people working within them while also depicting a narrative message through image and text. This kind of illustration is depicted in Andrew Zermeno's poster, *Farmworkers Strike to Save Their Union* (1971). In this poster, Zermeno illustrates a man and woman at the forefront in painterly detail with the UFW flag flying behind them in the background. The bottom half of the background is composed of silhouette figures marching with signs and flags and a yellow sky and rising sun above them.

Known for his iconic graphic imagery in printmaking, paintings, posters, and murals, Xavier Viramontes has been an influential Chicano artist since the early 1970's. Viramontes became



Fig. 20 Andrew Zermeno, *Farmworkers Strike to Save Their Union*, 1971.



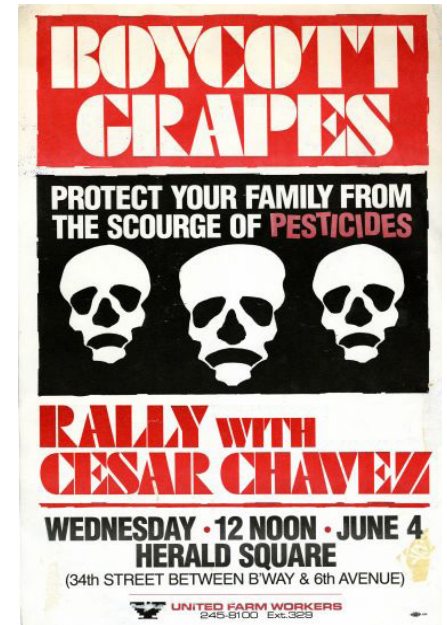
Fig. 21 Xavier Viramontes, *Chicano Bad* (July), from Galería de la Raza's 1975 Calendario, 1975.

involved with the Galería de la Raza (GDLR) in the early 70's (*Viramontes*). The GDLR is a non-profit community arts organization based in San Francisco that was born out of the Chicano civil rights movement in the 1960's and 1970's (*"Galería De La Raza Archives CEMA 4"*). During Viramontes' time at the GDLR he produced the poster *Boycott Grapes, Support the United Farm Workers Union* (1973) for the UFW in support of their grape boycott (*Viramontes*). Viramontes suggested that the UFW sell the poster in order to raise funds to

support the boycott, which they later did via mail order through the union's newspaper, *El Malcriado* (*Smithsonian American Art Museum*).

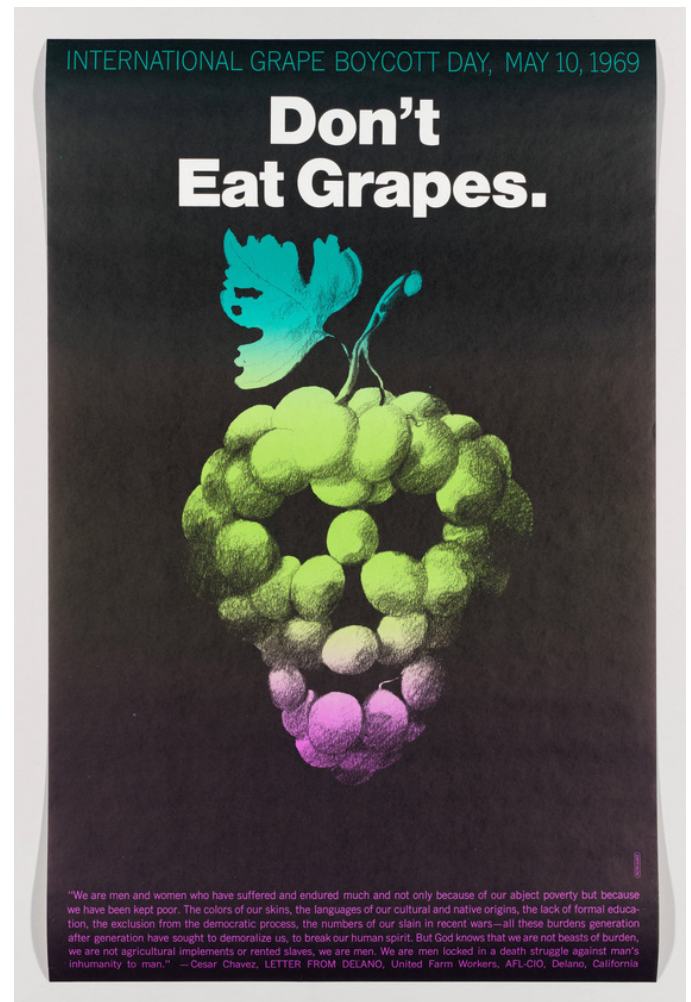
In Viramontes' poster a muscular brown-skinned

figure faces the viewer directly with wide-open almond-shaped eyes and furrowed brows. The figure wears a decorative and patterned headdress that radiates outward past the image's border and connects with their two hands that almost meet at the center of the image. The hands tightly clench blue and green grape bunches that gush a blood-like liquid that spills downwards and across the text reading "BOYCOTT GRAPES" in bold green lettering over a black background. The word "GRAPES" is flanked by the UFW flags in red, black, and white. Below reads "SUPPORT THE UNITED FARMWORKERS UNION" in a smaller but still bold orange lettering. The figure in this image resonates with the idea of the Aztec warrior which is a symbol of the fortitude of the workers fighting against "the Teamsters' violent intervention in disputes between the UFW and California growers (*Smithsonian American Art Museum*)."



Top Image **Fig. 22** Artist unknown, *Boycott Grapes; Protect Your Family From The Scourge Of Pesticides*, 1976

Bottom Image **Fig. 23** Milton Glaser, *Don't Eat Grapes*, 1969





SUN MAD RAISINS

UNNATURALLY GROWN WITH
INSECTICIDES - MITICIDES - HERBICIDES - FUNGICIDES

HOW CONTEMPORARY LATINX ARTISTS ILLUSTRATE THE FARM WORKER RIGHTS PROTEST

Sun Mad and Sun Raid: Symbolism in Farmworker Illustration

Farmworkers' struggle for humane living and working conditions continues today and has expanded to incorporate the lived experiences of contemporary farmworker populations, including undocumented migrant farmworkers, indigenous migrant farmworkers, and an ever growing population of Central Americans working in the fields. This evolution of farmworker political protest illustration and its symbolism is seen in the work of Ester Hernandez, through her pieces *Sun Mad* (1982) and *Sun Raid* (2021). *Sun Mad* is one of the most renowned illustrations of the 20th century Farm Worker Movement, while *Sun Raid* was the result of Hernandez's continued engagement with the imagery of the 1960s.

Previous Page **Fig. 24** Ester Hernandez,
Sun Mad Raisins, 1982



Fig. 25 Carlos Cortez, *Viva La Huelga*, 1993.



Fig. 26 Favianna Rodriguez, *Quiero Ser Artista*, 2010.

According to Hernandez, *Sun Mad* “talks about water contamination by pesticides and its impact on farmworkers, consumer and the environment (*Hernandez and Smithsonian American Art Museum*).” The print is composed of a bright red background. A skeleton is displayed from the torso up, with what could be read as a smile on its skull. However, the smile is the natural formation a human jaw takes when closed. The skeleton wears a red bonnet, matching the color of the background. Its blouse is short sleeved and white with two stripes running horizontally the sleeves’ hem. Brown, lush locks of hair fall over its shoulders, pairing with the pristine nature of its attire, everything spotless. The skeleton’s upper arms peek at the edge of the blouse’s sleeves, joining with the forearms that each extend forward and downward to hold a brown wicker-like basket. Behind the figure lies a white spherical line framed by a series of white triangles that recall the shape of a sun as seen in graphic media. The word “SUN” can immediately be reflected in the sphere above, while the word “MAD” is placed diagonally to the arms of the skeleton, giving a sense of deliverance from the figure. The next line reads, “RAISINS,” in a serif lettering style that brings focus to the grapes above that will dry out and become to be. The words, “UNNATURALLY GROWN WITH,” follows

underneath in a smaller, thinner, white sans serif lettering. The image concludes with the smallest lettering at the bottom, almost touching the border: “INSECTICIDES - MITICIDES - HERBICIDES - FUNGICIDES.” The last two lines make sense of the skeleton harvesting the plump and vibrant grapes, making the viewer question the true cost of the fruit.

The illustration is both visceral and symbolically rich. The skeleton, which connotes ideas of death, is juxtaposed with the grapes symbolizing the prime of life. In having the skeleton gathering and presenting the grapes, it brings forth ideas of an ecosystem which in order to function, must link an end to a peak of existence. In this way, having the skeleton symbolizing the end of life is a marker for the absent image of the raisin. By having the skeleton signify the raisin, being present in the here and now of the print, there is a phantasmic impression left of the object that is only shown in text. The image focuses on raisins as its subject by naming it, yet



Fig. 27 Gabriela Alemán, #IWD2020, *Smug Morenita*, 2020.

that product is not depicted in the print. A raisin comes to be after a grape is dried out, producing something that looks desiccated in form and feeling. If a brand is trying to sell its product on the promise of its source being naturally grown, it is fitting to depict a raisin at its prime as a ripe grape, and not in its true form nearing its end. This image works in multiple ways because it displays another part



Fig. 28 Narsiso Martinez, *The Good Checker*, 2021.

of the product that the brand does not display: the actual people who are growing and harvesting the fruit and the health risks they work under to make this possible. Farmworkers' health and lives were put on the line by exposing them to harmful pesticides used in the fields that grew these grapes.

The skeleton wearing a bonnet and blouse produces an uncanny scene which through a contemporary western lens connects to ideas of death, yes, but also ghosts. Dressing this skeleton with the same garments as the very much alive young caucasian woman on the original label, triggers the viewer to remember that character, creating a contrast between the image of life for the white figure but an image of death for the racialized Chicano/a/x farmworker. Doing so creates a kind of eerie echo of that person within the image.

The *Sun Mad* image is also meaningful in the way that it takes over/appropriates the branding of Sun Maid Raisins (the title *Sun Mad* being a play on brand) in order to use it as a vehicle to communicate the farmworkers movement's goals: exposing the working conditions of those who grow, harvest, and process the fruit in order to demand better working conditions and pay. By taking the popularized image and molding it into its own, Hernandez repurposes the image's power from the company.



Fig. 29 José Guadalupe Posada, Luis Miguel Valdez, *Póster del Teatro Campesino*, C. 1960's.

UN-NATURALLY HARVESTED

15oz



HECHO
EN
MEXICO

MAD
IN
USA

SUN•RAID

RAISINS

GUARANTEED DEPORTATION

MIXTECOS, ZAPOTECOS, TRIQUES, PUREPECHAS

BY-PRODUCT OF NAFTA

Nearly forty years later, Hernandez revisited the imagery of *Sun Mad* in a new piece titled *Sun Raid* that comments on the conditions of 21st century farm work, stating that “the intention of this artwork is to create a dialogue about the new face of farmworkers who are mostly indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central America.” To achieve this the artist has updated her earlier print by adding more text, along with identifying

markers to the skeleton by use of the blouse, and depicting the treatment of the harvester by wrapping its wrist with a band branded ICE, or Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The blouse worn by the skeleton is not plain but filled with carefully designed patterns that reference textiles seen in indigenous communities throughout Latin America. This matters because it offers a connection for viewers who are from, or share, roots in those communities, and who may be a farmworker harvesting grapes. The specificity of the blouse also matters because it highlights the humanity of the individuals represented by the skeleton, an identifying marker



Fig. 31 Melanie Cervantes,
Free Our Future, 2018.

Previous page **Fig. 30** Ester Hernandez,
Sun Raid Raisins, 2008.

that no longer makes them a random entity. The ICE band symbolizes ideas of condemnation and entrapment to many undocumented people in the United States (*Rafei and American Civil Liberties Union*). When that band is paired together with the skeleton, multiple forms of death are invoked, both the danger of physical death through labor in the fields along with the social death of undocumentedness.

Just to the left of the grape basket reads the Spanish phrase “HECHO EN MEXICO” (*MADE IN MEXICO*), while on the opposite side of the image, very close to the skeleton’s left hand, reads “MAD IN USA.” The phrase “Hecho en Mexico” has been popularized by those who were born in Mexico or raised by Mexican family members as a way of holding pride in their origins. It is once again a pointed appropriation that alludes to the common slogan used in US manufacturing: Made in the U.S.A. Many producers of US goods feature this prominently on their product labels. The irony here being that the labor pool to produce products in the U.S.A. is largely made up of migrants from other countries, sometimes undocumented, who have had to move and work here because of trade agreements that have benefited the U.S. but hurt their own countries’ economies (*Amadeo*). And so we see some Mexican



Fig. 32 Esteban Cabeza de Baca, *Huelga*, 2023.

and Mexican-American workers and their families wear or display images with this tagline as a way to remind consumers of this irony.

To display 'MAD IN USA' on the opposite side of 'HECHO EN MEXICO' is a play on translation of the text into English. At first glance the viewer may read *Made in the USA*, but one quickly turns to the word *mad* and understands this statement as an expression of someone being angry in the U.S.A., specifically the farmworkers, the ones who enable US agriculture production to even exist. Using *Mad* also echoes the use of the same word in *Sun Mad*. It weighs heavily that forty years after that first print, the feeling of anger is still present and resonates just as heavily if not more due to the raids experienced by undocumented workers in the United States.

To include the word *raid* within the pseudo brand name in the image is a new play on the product name, Sun Maid, but also brings attention to the immigration raids at agriculture processing plants that occurred from the 2010's to present. News articles at the time widely reported that these raids often occurred after workers tried to organize for better working conditions (Harris). And so the workers' fight for humane working conditions, better pay, and health care is pitted against the risk of losing their jobs and being deported back to their home

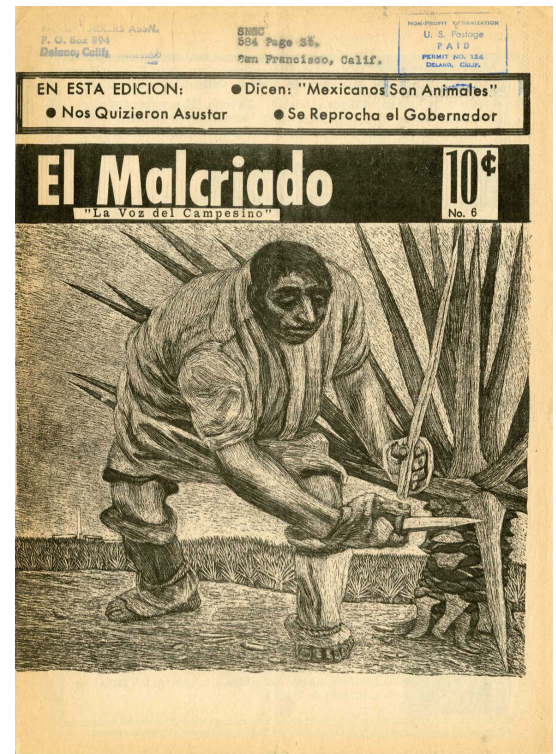


Fig. 33 Alfredo Zalce, *Cortador de Sisal*, El Malcriado No 6, 1965.



Fig. 34 Carlos Cortez, *TFWU Justicia Para Los Campesinos*, 1979.

countries which connects to the line, “GUARANTEED DEPORTATION.”

The collective elements of Hernandez’s print can be interpreted as allusions to the plight of indigenous farmworkers such as the Mixtecos, Zapotecos, Triques, and Purepechas, peoples primarily originating from the

states of Michoacan and Oaxaca. It is a protest against the dangerous working conditions and targeted immigration raids that these groups frequently experience (Holmes and Ramirez-Lopez 199). The inclusion of “BY-PRODUCT OF NAFTA” weaves the whole piece together by claiming this agreement as part of the reason for the ‘use’ of Mexican and Latin American agricultural labor in the United States. NAFTA, or the North American Free Trade Agreement, “established a free-trade zone in North America” and was signed in 1992 by Canada, Mexico, and the United States and took effect in 1994 (U.S. Customs and Border Protections).

In summary, *Sun Raid* is both meaningful and impactful due to its strategic use of descriptive text, which reinforces the artist’s political message by placing this text



Fig. 35 Malaquías Montoya, *El Picket Sign*, 2008-2009.

in locations on the layout typically reserved for formulaic product information about raisins. The image is even more meaningful as it is a byproduct, if you will, of the *Sun Mad* print from 1982, creating a sense of continuity in the fight for farmworker rights. By reusing the image of the skeleton, the ghostly presence and all that it symbolized continues in the present, as if haunting from the past and not letting go. Within the farmworkers' movement this image reiterates the fight for their labor and human rights and also brings forth the more recent massive immigration raids that are threatening their right to organize and continue to live in the United States. *Sun Raid* proves that illustrations created in the early decades of the farmworker movement, even those created by the same artist, resonate with contemporary art that comments on the life of migrant farmworkers in the United States. The iconography of the farmworkers movement protest illustrations informed many generations' understanding of the meaning of their work and the value they deserve.



Fig. 36 Ester Hernandez, *Homenaje a Cesar Chavez*, 1993.



TEATRO CAMPESINO: FARM WORKER MOVEMENT IMAGERY TODAY

Ester Hernandez is one of numerous artists active during the pivotal, early years of the Farmworker Movement and Chicano/a/x movement who continue to make politically impactful work in the present. The visual imagery and language that they developed over time influences younger contemporary artists in the movement. Artists such as Esteban Cabeza de Baca, Eric J. García, Narsiso Martinez, Favianna Rodriguez, Gabriela Alemán, and Jennifer Angarita (among many others) update the messages and narratives of these movements for the current moment by evoking the stark imagery and powerful symbolism in early farmworker political illustration.

One prominent artist in the field today is Esteban Cabeza de Baca, and his piece *Teatro Campesino* (2023) is a symbolically rich testament to the legacy of the mid-20th century farm workers movement and its continuing influence on contemporary illustration.

Teatro Campesino depicts a scene set in a desert-like landscape with a series of blue mountain ridges along the horizon. Softly swirling shapes of aquamarine and white

Previous Page **Fig. 37** Esteban Cabeza de Baca, *Teatro Campesino*, 2023.

create the sky. The terrain is smooth and has a sand quality in its varying ochre and sienna tones. In the foreground and bottom left corner of the painting three young children sit on the ground with their backs to the viewer. The child on the left wears a gray cowboy hat and has short, dark brown hair and brown skin with their right arm stretched down. Their shirt is checkered in a painterly orange and black and their pants are an ochre brown. In the middle sits a child with burnt sienna colored hair pulled back in a low bun that sits across their neck. Their top is the same color as the pants of the child to the right and their pants match the other's dark brown hair. Their arms lay relaxed along their sides. On the right a child rests with their right green pant leg bent up and out while their left arm sustains this



Fig. 38 Esteban Cabeza de Baca, *March To Sacramento*, 2024.



Fig. 39 George Yepes, *Song for Cesar*
Poster Banner, 2022.

pose by laying on the ground. The hand on the ground holds a turquoise-tinted object with the top part drawn with angular edges mimicking the shape of the eagle on the United Farm Workers logo. The child’s skin, like the other two, is brown and their bowl haircut is the same color as the child in the middle. They wear a shirt that is the same color as the ground, outlined in brown, and paired with green trousers.

The three children are looking up at a red pickup truck that stands in the middle of the image with a California license plate reading “UFWLVC.” Notably, the vehicle has no tailgate, which allows a full view of what is happening on the bed of the truck. At the foot of the truck bed, a tanned man sprawls with his back leaning against

the left panel, his right leg stretched out and his left bent in a triangle. He wears a dark umber cowboy hat over his dark hair. His head is bending forward as he plays a yellow harmonica with eyes shut. The hands holding the instrument have an elastic quality because of how each finger contorts, even displaying the right thumb floating over his brown checkered shirt, disconnected from the appendage of his hand. His slacks are khaki, similar to grains of sand, and are tucked under a pair of brown embossed cowboy boots. A dark brown stick is nestled in a hole on the truck's left panel bareing a cardboard sign reading, "FAIR WAGES" in large lettering over two lines, followed by "UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE" in smaller text at the bottom.

Next to the sign is a life-size marionette. The puppet's body is generally painted in dark beige with darker tones in the shadow areas and decorated in a pattern of two angular orange ovals, one above the other. A dark green square and a lined motif that creates an x along with maroon



Fig. 40 Melanie Cervantes, *De pie por pueblo, tierra, y libertad*, 2021.



Fig. 41 Narsiso Martinez, *Easy Grape*, 2019.

brushstrokes peek out from the middle of the design. Its head is painted in black on the top where hair would be, the face has one button shaped eye and one black oval eye, and a scarlet triangle stands as a nose between the eyes and mirrors a thickly bordered 'v' shape of the same color situated below it. Just below the 'hairline' is a white outlined drop, simulating a sweat drop that would run down its forehead. To the right, a yellow stripe with red dashed,

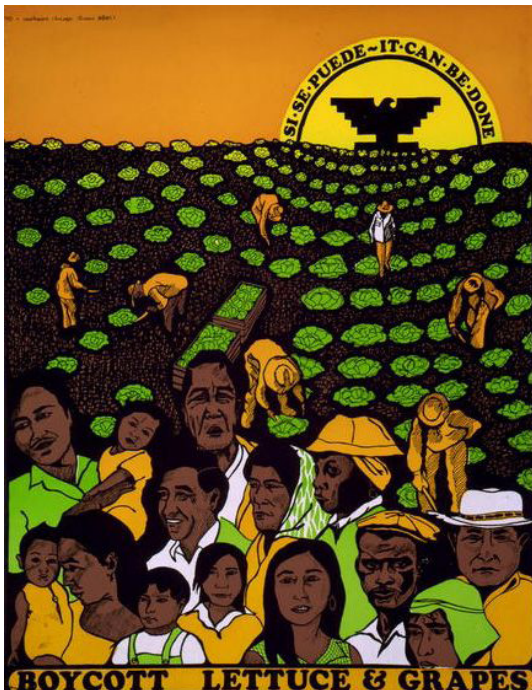


Fig. 42 Artist Unknown, *Boycott Lettuce and Grapes*, Date Unknown.

swirling symbols runs down the face and connects to a black scalloped color around its neck. On the right side of the forehead is a band of deep orange, while a dark lime green triangle shape reaches from the neck up to the yellow stripe by the mouth. Brown x's and dashes follow the edges of the yellow, orange, and green shapes, much like stitches. The shoulders are raised and guide the arms into a loop that creates a circular negative space between them and the torso, ending with the right tubular hand laying atop of the left. An arch with three stitches falls on the edge of the right hand, attaching one of multiple black strings to the brown cross shaped marionette control hovering above the puppet's head. The left hand is darker in shadow and connects to a brown handled shovel that

runs diagonally across the abdomen with the black blade structured to lay inwards instead of out.

Like the right hand, the shovel is attached to strings that link up to the marionette control that is being held tightly by another set of cords which wrap around a white skinned hand. This hand belongs to a hunched bald man sitting crossed legged with brown pants above the truck's cabin. His face, like the rest of his body, is light skinned but is topped off by a peach tinted pig nose. Out from the man's sleeveless white undershirt, his left arm folds downwards and across his overlapped legs, his hand closed, his skin constructed of bulks of fleshy peach paint. A thin rope wraps around his neck with a chocolate toned sign hanging over his chest reading, "PATRON" (*boss*).

Immediately next to and slightly behind the "patron," sits another man of the same skin tone perched with his legs folded over the other. He is dressed in the same uniformed outfit as the Patron, only he boasts a wide-brimmed flat top hat over his bushy gray hair. His right arm puffs behind him while his left arm juts sideways til his elbow redirects his forearm towards his companion

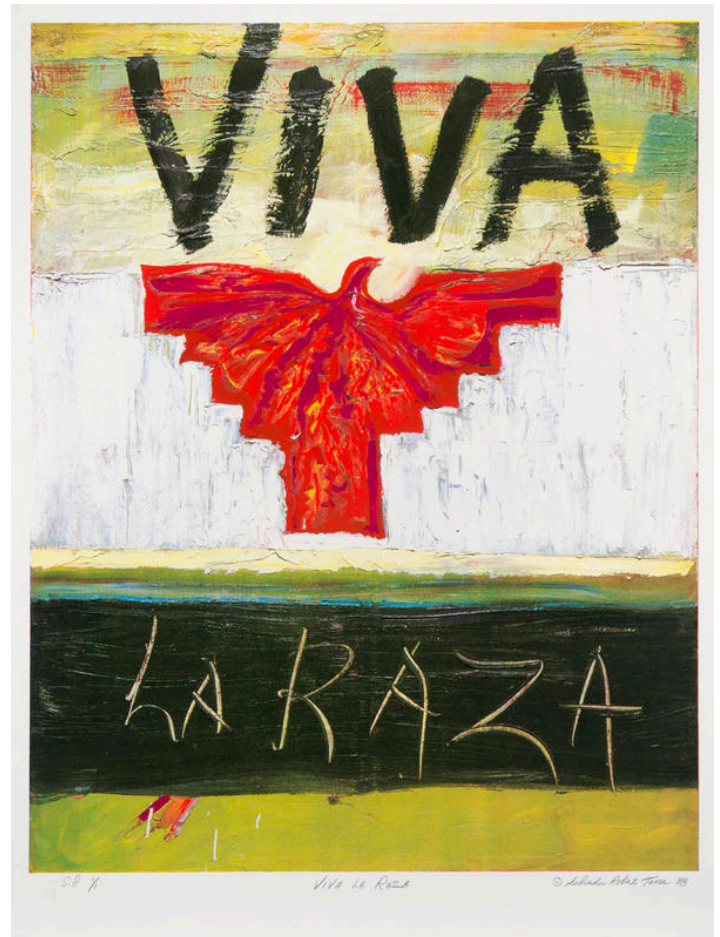
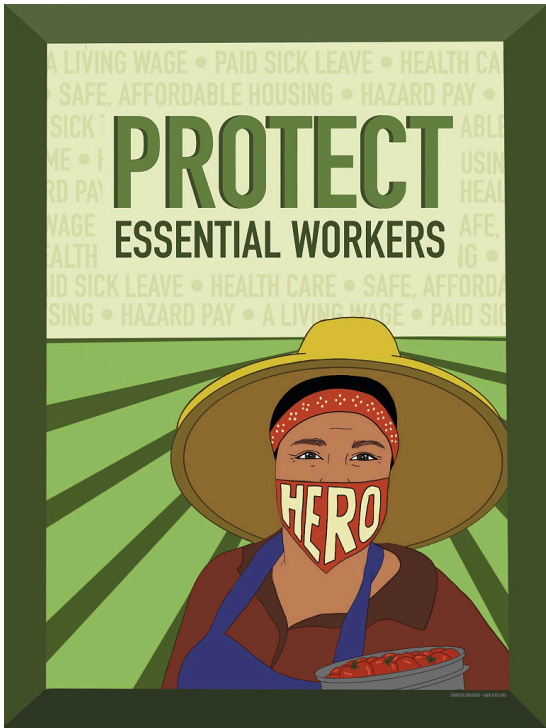


Fig. 43 Salvador Torres, *Viva La Raza*, 1998.



with an elongated sausage finger pointing to his “PATRON” sign. Meanwhile, this man’s sign, which also hangs from a string looped around his neck, reads, “MAYOR DOMO,” (*foreman*).

Below the “mayor domo” is a feminine figure with her head directly to the right of the foreman’s sign. Her skin is darker than his and her chestnut hair is tied back with white ribbon. The figure’s face is stamped with red blush dots, one on each cheek, and her lips are painted the same color as the truck. Her mouth is open as if in speech and her eyes look upward and away with long lashes

sprouting from her lids. She wears a long-sleeved dark walnut blouse, with her right arm sliding behind her back and her left arm swinging downwards without a trace of her hand. The figure’s upper body protrudes directly above the truck bed, but the start of her skirt and waist line up perfectly with the top of the truck’s right panel and her skirted legs then push out aslant the tires with her feet in pointy auburn shoes with the toes turned outwards. Horizontal lines, stripes, and dashes of color run down the skirt with hues ranging from bluish grays to yellows, reds, and peach. The belt around her waist is



Fig. 45 Yolanda M. López, *Women’s Work is Never Done*, 1995.

Top Image Fig. 44 Jennifer Angarita, *Protect Essential Workers*, 2020.

twisted in green, white, and red with one end sticking out and then up like a cactus.

Another male figure sits by the right back corner of the truck, in front of the female figure. He is dressed in an all black outfit that includes a cowboy hat on his left leaning head and boots. His skin is a reddish cocoa color with dark browns mixed in for the shadows. The character holds a caramel guitar in a playing pose, though there are no strings connecting to the headstock's tuners. His left hand alone, unjointed to the rest of his arm, wafts above the body of the guitar, its index and little fingers picking at the phantom strings. A round beige sticker outlined in red with a black jagged winged bird at its center lays atop the instrument, next to the left hand. The upper part of the emblem reads, "UNITED FARM WORKERS" and the bottom, "OF AMERICA." Below the bird are the letters, "AFL-CIO." A triangular piece has been cut out of a black paisley bandana and pasted directly onto the surface of the painting, on the figure's right wrist. The right hand wraps over the top of the guitar,



Fig. 46 Eric J. García, *Chicano Baggage*, 2017.



Fig. 47 Esteban Cabeza de Baca, *Guitarra*, 2023.

while three of its fingers position to hold a chord on the invisible frets. The right thumb of this cowboy, much like the right thumb of the other musician, flips outwards, suspended in the air and disconnects from the rest of the hand. In the middle of the flatbed there is a cardboard colored medium size object made up of three separate simplified flower shapes, each rising to different heights with the middle being the tallest, all held up by straight vertical

lines that connect to their respective semi-ovals at the base. The shapes at the base are all linked and each has a backing to hold them upright.

Within the truck's cabin in the far left by the driver's seat, the top of two small children's faces peep out the back window at the scene taking place on the truck bed. The rear view mirror reflects a desert landscape with mountains at the horizon, suggesting the general setting of this image is a valley.

Esteban Cabeza de Baca's artwork is replete with imagery symbolizing the farm workers movement. The picket sign pushed into the side panel of the truck reading, 'Fair Wages, Universal Healthcare' carries two demands that the United Farm Workers were making as part of their campaign.

The musicians performing on the flatbed truck depict the Teatro Campesino, a Latino theater company started in 1965 on the Delano Grape Strike picket lines of the United Farm Workers Union. When the theater company was founded, the actors performed short skits on truck beds, traveling through different farming towns. These performances dramatized the struggles and causes of the farmworkers and communicated the movement to the farmworkers and others who would empathize with their mission.

The United Farm Workers (UFW) union insignia is represented in the "UFW" in the truck's license plate and the UFW sticker on the musician's guitar. The figures of the 'Patron' (boss) and the 'Mayor Domo' (foreman) controlling the Mexican doll puppet to work with the shovel while a drop of sweat



Fig. 48 Artist Unknown, *Untitled*,
El Malcriado No 18 January 1-31, 1970.

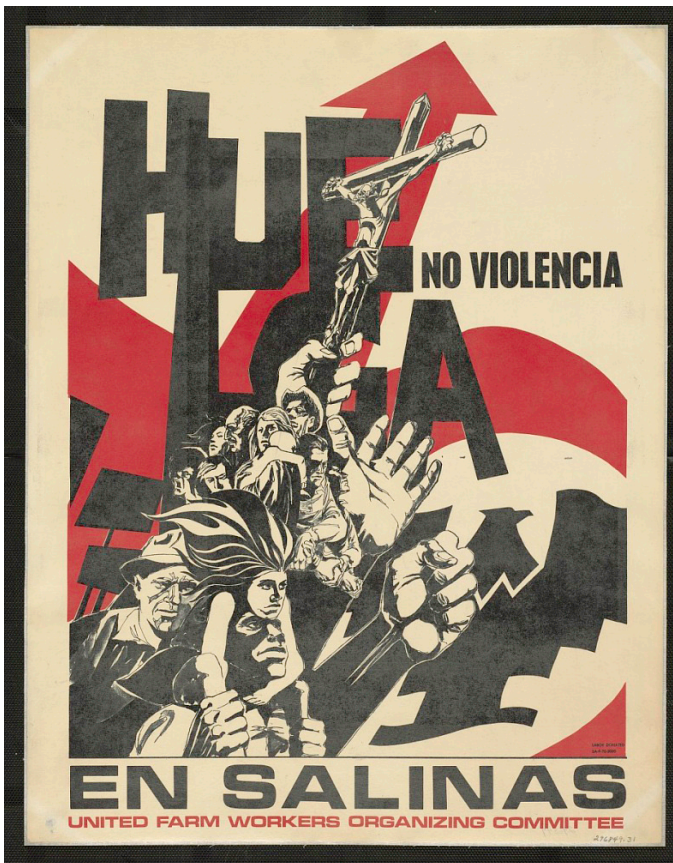


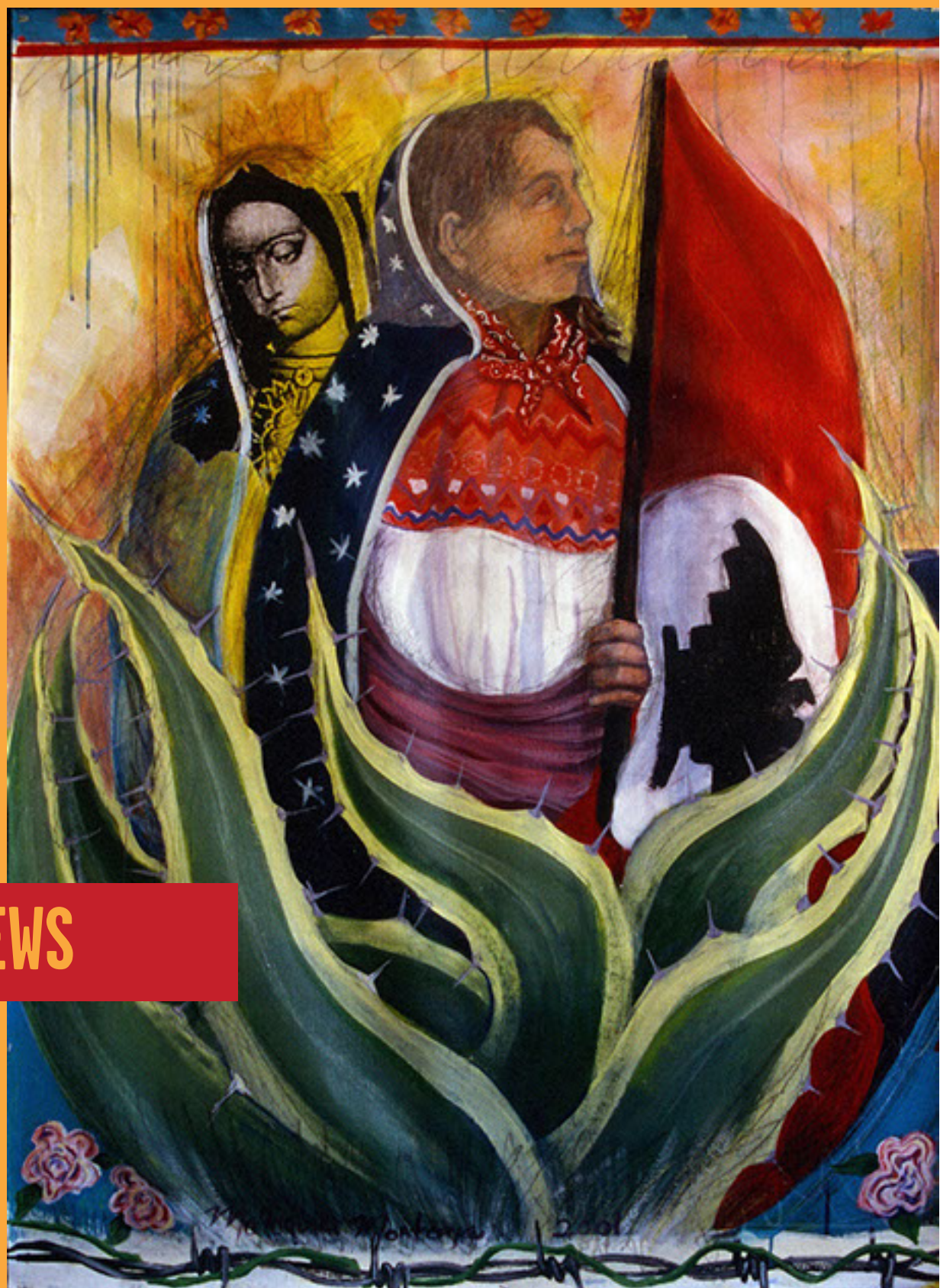
Fig. 49 John A. Armendariz, *Huelga No Violencia En Salinas*, C. 1960s-70s.

runs down the doll's forehead alludes to farm workers having to work through risky conditions without a choice in the matter, unless you speak up for your rights alongside the other labor union members.

The children viewing the performance at both ends witness the performance, perhaps taking in the message and hopefully having it influence their actions in the future.

Key to interpreting the image is the landscape, which depicts the migration journeys of migrant farm workers. It also depicts Mexican cultural imagery that resonates with Mexican and Mexican-American farmworkers. The marionette is reminiscent of Mexican ragdolls

known as "Marias" and is another symbolic representation of the farm worker. Having the doll holding a shovel adds to its functional role. The woman standing outside of the truck to the right of the guitarist seems to be a songstress who accompanies the musicians in their performance. This contemporary painting by an artist of Mexican and Native American heritage whose parents were active participants in the Chicano movement is significant in how it has been influenced by first person accounts from the early days of the Farm Workers Movement.



INTERVIEWS

TEREZITA ROMO

Terezita “Tere” Romo is a Lecturer and Affiliate Faculty in the Chicana/o Studies Department at UC, Davis. An art historian, she has published extensively on Chicana/o artists and art, most recently as a contributor to the Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibition catalog, *iPrinting the Revolution!: The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now*. She has served as the chief curator at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco and the Arts Project Director at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago as well as Arts Programs Director and Research Associate at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. As an independent curator, Terezita has organized numerous exhibitions, including “Art Along the Hyphen: The Mexican American Generation” at the Autry National Museum in Los Angeles and “Reframing Comunidad: The Art of Ester Hernandez and Shizu Saldamando” at the National Museum of Mexican Art. She is the co-curator of “Traitor, Survivor, Icon: The Legacy of La Malinche.”



Fig. 51 Edelweiss Cardenas, *Terezita Romo*, 2023.

Previous Page, **Fig. 50** Malaquías Montoya, *Virgen Campesina*, 2001

Q: In your opinion, what are the defining characteristics of farm worker protest posters? Which posters or images do you feel are iconic for the movement and why?

ROMO: One of the main characteristics of farm worker posters has been their ability to appeal/motivate a multifaceted audience. In the beginning, the UFW union's main audience were the farmworkers, many of who could not read Spanish or English. Therefore, the logo became very important as well as the word "Huelga." Those who couldn't read learned to associate both that word and logo and know what it meant.

Initially, posters with images, vignettes were important for that same reason, especially with recognizable figures who were the farmworkers, the bosses, the contratistas, etc.

Later as the boycott campaign grew, the audiences for UFW posters grew to include English-speaking, American born Chicanas and Chicanos, as well as Americans of another ethnicity and race. The posters also had to appeal to more than rural farmworkers and include potential urban supporters, including young people.

For me, the most iconic poster is Andy Zermeno's "Huelga!" poster, to the point that Chicana/o art historians mark it as the beginning of Chicano art.

Q: How do you feel the images and posters of the movement evolved over time?

ROMO: This is an excerpt from my catalog essay, "Points of Convergence: The Iconography of the Chicano Poster" for the exhibition, *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California*:



Fig. 52 Andy Zermeno, *Viva La Huelga Viva La Causa*, c. 1960s.

The evolution of Chicano poster art began in 1965 with the production of graphic work for the United Farm Workers' organizing and boycotting efforts, within and outside the union. During the 1970s, the artistic process and iconography developed further with the advent of artist-led collectives throughout California. These organizational entities created artwork and community cultural activities that expanded the Chicano Movement agenda further into cultural and historical reclamation. In the early 1980s, the Chicano poster entered an era of commodification. As Chicano art and artists entered the mainstream art world

of galleries and museums, the Chicano “art” poster was created and gained value as collectable artwork. Within each of these phases, Chicano poster production was marked by distinct changes in intent and iconography.

Q: Are there any aspects to farm worker’s protest imagery that you feel is under-valued or under-studied?

ROMO: The regional approaches utilized by artists; the similarities and differences among the imagery, composition, text in farm worker posters from California, Texas, Arizona and other parts of Southwest.

Q: What would you like/ what are the top three things you would want students studying farm worker protest imagery to learn/to know?

ROMO: How difficult or at the very least, challenging it was for artists to create these posters given the different audiences they were trying to reach

The importance of understanding the motivation(s) for each artist to create these posters—their personal



Fig. 53 Dignidad Rebelde, *Ink and Protest*, 2014.

connections to farmworkers; or in the case of urban areas, their commitment to seeing the farm worker struggle within their role as Chicana/o artists.

How pivotal the farmworker struggle and the formation of the UFW were within the larger Chicano Movement, national civil rights, and its impact on many Chicana/o artists.

Q: Do you see elements of the '60s and '70s protest imagery in contemporary art and illustration?

ROMO: Yes, in art of Favianna Rodriguez, a Peruvian American artist; posters by Dignidad Rebelde (Jesús Barraza and Melanie

Cervantes); all of whom are in Oakland and were inspired by Malaquias Montoya, a Chicano movement artist who created numerous posters for the UFW and farmworkers in general, included those who were undocumented.

Q: In your opinion, what makes Andrew Zermelo's poster, *Huelga!*, 1966, an effective protest poster? What artistic elements do you see as being particular to the farm worker movement?

ROMO: This is an excerpt from my catalog essay, "Aesthetics of the Message: Chicano Posters, 1965-1985" for the exhibition, *!Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now:*

Andrew "Andy" Zermelo's early offset poster, with its large image and prominent exhortative text, reflects his background as an illustrator. . . it was Zermelo's idea to use cartoons in communicating the UFW's message more effectively that generated his most recognized and enduring artistic creation—Don Sotaco, a farmworker who takes on the growers and California's enormous agribusiness in his role as a striking union member.

Zermelo's first poster for the UFW, *Huelga!*, utilized a minimal yet effective composition. His conscious use of the Spanish word for "strike," economy of graphics, and dominant main figure demonstrate that he understood his diverse audience. Even though Don Sotaco is dressed in

tattered pants with a hole in his shoes, the honorific title of “Don” (esteemed; sir) and portrayal of the striker in motion with forceful facial expressions generate a sense of agency and urgency. “I was trying to show the spirit of the workers . . . who were attacking the status quo,” Zemeño recalled. “And [that] they were eager to get in there, to do something for themselves.” Running with the unfurled UFW flag proclaiming the strike, Don Sotaco—and by extension the UFW—elicits action from farmworkers and their supporters. Based on its effectiveness with local farmworkers, the UFW distributed the poster as part of its strategy to reach a national audience, and it continues to be produced today.

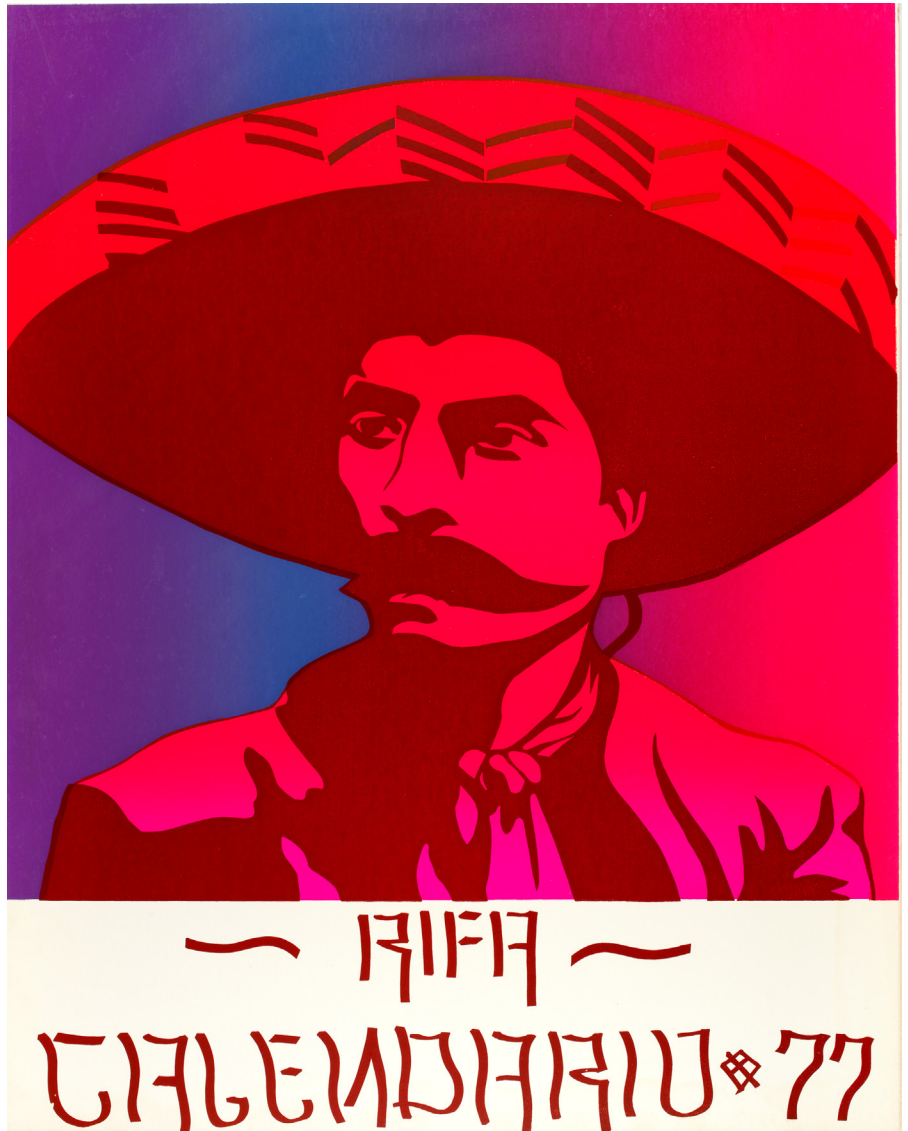


Fig. 54 Leonard Castellanos, *RIFA*, from *Méhicano 1977 Calendario*, 1976.

ESTEBAN CABEZA DE BACA

Esteban Cabeza de Baca was born in 1985 in San Ysidro, California, and currently lives and works in Queens, New York. He received his BFA from Cooper Union in 2010, and his MFA from Columbia University in 2014. Richly layered with color, texture, and pictographic references, Cabeza de Baca's paintings combine plein-air observation with historical representation and material experimentation. Born to Chicano parents and growing up along the US-Mexico border, the artist's signature landscapes of the American Southwest mix past, present, and future—mirroring the myriad histories and cultures of the land they depict.

Q: In your opinion, what are the defining characteristics of farm worker protest posters? Which posters or images do you feel are iconic for the movement and why?

CABEZA DE BACA: I think what's characteristic is efficient design to communicate the ethos of the grape boycotts.

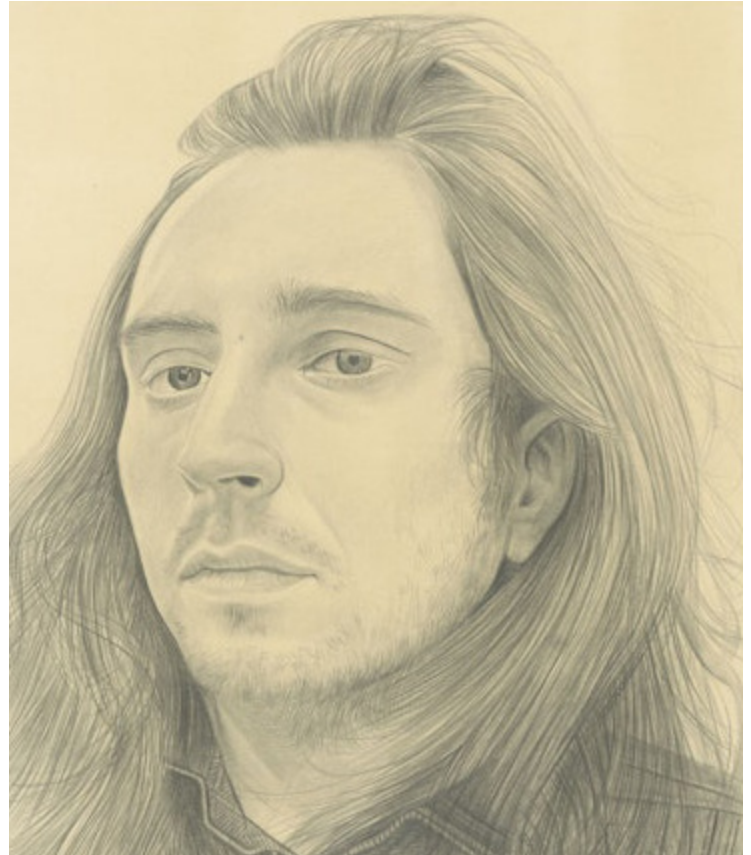


Fig. 55 Phong H. Bui, *Portrait of Esteban Cabeza de Baca*, 2022.

The point of design was created by Cesar Chavez studying political iconography. You have to imagine how do you grab workers' attention and consumers at the supermarket to buy ethically. I think about the logo of the united farm workers and the protest posters as carrying the message of labor unions and justice.

Q: What would you like/ what are the top three things you would want students studying farmworker protest imagery to learn/to know?

CABEZA DE BACA: I'm inspired by the next generation of students protesting for their rights. I also inspire them by looking back on the successes and shortcoming of the 1960's civil rights movement my parents were and are still a part of. I think I want to show my students how multicultural coalitions came together for liberation. I think that is important right now. Even if we disagree about many things, how do we come together to have diplomatic conversations and listen to each other. Also I hope to inspire my students to see this is a long distance march towards equity and not a short sprint.

Q: Do elements of the '60s and '70s United Farm Workers protest imagery influence your art? If so, in what way(s)?

CABEZA DE BACA: Growing up I was surrounded with this imagery. I would see so much Chicano culture, Mexican murals, the music and so much more I took it for granted. I think contemporary mass visual culture indoctrinated me. I have had to de-program myself by spending a lot of time out in nature observing and learning from plants, ecosystems and ways of care that predate colonization in America. It's almost as if my intuition is faster than my conscious mind but that ecological non-individualistic mindset connected me back to my parent's story of working with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Their work of gathering people of the proletariat towards a mass mobilization is inspiring to this day for me. I want to imagine that for myself going forward within my art practice in material and ephemeral ways.

Q: In analyzing the pieces in your latest exhibition, "Alma" at the Garth Greenan Gallery in New



Fig. 56 Esteban Cabeza de Baca, *Organizing*, 2023.

York City, I noticed the inclusion of the muñecas de trapo or Marias in your paintings. What is the significance of the dolls in your work?

CABEZA DE BACA: I am trying to retrieve family stories before they disappear. I suppose I employ the dolls vis a vis the legacy of Philip Guston, Kara Walker or James Ensor's impulse to tell stories consciously and unconsciously. Some of these stories are very intense. I'm almost working in stream of conscious to narrate not only my story but also the history of story telling in Chicano, Mexican culture. Our reality gets flattened or exaggerated by the false construction of the US Mexico border and paranoia around migrants stealing jobs. But my community contains so much complexity within our past that I employ in figuration elements like the dolls. I think it's also trying to play in the ways my Mom couldn't play and trying to act out scenes from both of us growing up along the border. I'm interested in making a framework that future artists like me can employ to tell their stories in new and interesting ways.

Q: In your opinion as an artist and expert in Latinx and Chicanx art, how do you see the role of illustration existing in the 1960's and today?



Fig. 57 Artist Unknown, *I Am Somebody - Together We Are Strong*, ca. 1975.

CABEZA DE BACA: From my point of view good art is good art. Whether it's early Warhol drawings for ads, to Basquiat getting inspired by comic books in his wonderful paintings, I see so much potentiality in art and breaking the border between high and low forms of art as well as craft. I think it gets complicated by AI and I think the lessons of labor unions for illustrators will have to fight for better copyrights for artists work that fed the AI learning. But in the studio working, painting what's important is imagining ideas for problems we haven't figured out yet. Not just making the same thing other people have made with manneristic adjustments but real innovation in image making. That is what I'm interested in with my painting. I want my work to really push us to see how interconnected we are with the environment and every choice we make on a small level has big consequences and that gives me hope. What I mean is that collectively we have a lot of power and individualistically not as much. And we can leverage that for progressive thinking in art.

ERIC J. GARCÍA

Eric J. García uses history and a graphic style to create political art that confronts our understanding of the present. Using sculpture, mixed media installations, murals, printmaking and his controversial political cartoons, he aims to challenge his viewers to question sources of power and the whitewashing of history. After receiving his BFA with a minor in Chicano studies from the University of New Mexico, Eric Garcia went on to complete his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is a core member of the printmaking collective, Instituto Gráfico de Chicago, one of the newest members of the Justseeds Cooperative, a part of the emerging Veteran Art Movement, and is a dedicated teaching artist. Garcia has exhibited nationally and his work can be found in the collections of the National Museum of Mexican Art, the National Hispanic Cultural Center, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Fig. 58 Eric J. García, *Self Portrait*, n.d.

Q: In your opinion, what are the defining characteristics of farm worker protest posters?

GARCÍA: I can tell you my opinion which ones that are iconic. Just in using symbols, I would say, the Huelga flag of the United Farm Workers Movement, just the red flag with the white dot and the Black Eagle is the (most) iconic of all. It even goes further past the Farm Worker Movement, becomes quite almost like a nationalistic Chicano symbol. I think, you know, everyone recognizes that that black eagle on that white circle and the red flag as defining that time period. And you know, especially with Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, the Movimiento around that, I think that's like (if) we're talking about symbols, that's it, right there.

Q: What would you like students studying farm worker protest imagery to learn or to know about?

GARCÍA: Yeah. I think the important thing to talk about is the Movimiento, or the you know, that this Farm Worker Movement didn't die in the 60s and 70s. I think it's (that) this is an ongoing movement that we can still talk about

today, that's still going on. I think that's important for students to understand. The Farm Workers Movement didn't end, the struggles didn't end. Everything wasn't accomplished. There's still farm workers who are working in the fields today, who are underpaid, who are not given access to their human rights, who are still dealing with pesticides, who still demand a human living wage so that, and it's not just West Coast. There's plenty of places that are farms, that have immigrant workforce in Florida and the East Coast. So I think those are all important aspects to keep in mind, that this was not just a specific time capsule back in the day, that it's still happening.

Q: Do elements of the 60s and 70s UFW protests imagery influence your art? If so, in what ways?

GARCÍA: I think definitely so, like (if) we're specifically talking about *Lechuga Lucha* print, I specifically am looking at that little cartoon (*Huelga*, 1966, by Andrew Zerneño), of the guy holding the



Fig. 59 Christie Tirado, *Trabajadora Esencial*, 2020.

Huelga flag, and on his poncho is the Black Eagle. That's a direct reference, and I put that in the poster, the headless horseman with his poncho, with the *huelga* in his poncho. So, yeah, there's direct references, and there's a lot of imagery that I'm looking at as well from the Movimiento period, not just the Farm Workers Movement, but in the Chicano Movement that I look back and try to not necessarily replicate, but I've been inspired by.

Q: Since we're talking about *Lechuga Lucha*, I saw the name Joaquin on there. Are you referring to Joaquin Murrieta?

GARCÍA: Right. Yes, I've done many different projects with Joaquin Murrieta, and I'm assuming you're familiar with his story, how he's become almost like an iconic figure of resistance, and has played a part within the Chicano movement of understanding our history and the idea of colonization of the West and abuses of the people who've lived there, and has almost become a Robin Hood type figure. So, yeah, I place him. I'm mixing stories there in that specific print. He's now this defender of the farm workers against the bosses, recreating this idea of the Farm Workers Movement. And then it's a play with

words as well. The *Lechuga Lucha*, you know the Headless Horseman, the head of a lettuce, and you know the let us. And the play on words is lettuce, let us fight. Let us fight. It's all wrapped up in that.

The other element that's in there is the East Coast story of the Headless Horseman, of Sleepy Hollow with the burning pumpkin head. And then this vision, it's the burning lettuce head.

Q: Do you see elements of the 60s and 70s protest imagery in other contemporary art and illustration?

GARCÍA: I do, I see elements of it and in modern protests definitely. Two artists that come to mind is Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes from Taller Tupac Amaru (Dignidad Rebelde). They're from Oakland, I believe. They do a lot of action printmaking. So they'll be at the actual demonstration and they'll be screen printing and giving posters out; really action based print makers and putting their work right on the streets, right in the hands of the protesters, and a lot of their imagery, I think (that) they're referencing that era that you're speaking of.

Q: Who are some of your favorite farm worker poster cartoon artists from the 60s to the 80s?

GARCÍA: I would say definitely, Jose Montoya and Malaquías Montoya. Jose Montoya and his group, the (Royal) Chicano Air Force, definitely were directly

working with the farmers, the Farm Workers Movement during that time, and are famous for a lot of their imagery that came out during that time period dealing with the farm workers. Also, in conjunction with them was the Teatro Campesino. They weren't necessarily creating visuals, but they were creating *teatro*, theater at the farms or the fields that they were talking about.



Fig. 60 José Montoya and the Royal Chicano Air Force, *Southside Park Mural*, 1977 (restored 2001).

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the topic in general or that you would like to be covered or looked into more?

GARCÍA: What I was told a lot about those imagery, specifically the political cartoons that were coming out in *El Malcriado* and the other pamphlets and newspapers that during that time were intricate, (was) that many of these *campesinos*, or many of these farm workers, didn't have primary educations and I don't know what their education levels were, but the use of imagery was allowing them to see and visualize the things that were happening. There was a more universal language that through the visual helped them cross a language barrier, even if it was English or Spanish, or if they didn't even know how to read or write, the visual was able to help them understand the workers' rights or to understand what was happening, what were the unjust that maybe they weren't aware of. The visuals were a strong tool for activists to use during that period to really talk to the people who were in the fields.

I think the arts were very important for all these different movements. You know, if it was the visuals through

murals or through the print media or even theater, to be physically engaged with something that you can interact with or laugh at; humor is another component. So, yeah, I think the arts were really intricate within that movement going on.

Q: In what way do contemporary posters or imagery play a role within everything? Because now we have social media, and there's an even wider audience with which you can communicate. Since people are so attracted to visual messages right away in order to actually read a whole article, would you say it still plays an important role?

García: I definitely think about it, specifically with a poster or a political cartoon. They're saying the average attention span is growing shorter and shorter all the time. So you only have, I don't know, five seconds before you're going to swipe something. So you better get the attention of your audience within that time frame. So a political cartoon that's one frame, it's very short, it's minimal text, and hopefully the image is doing the heavy lifting for you, but something you can read quickly and get larger, complex information from it quickly. Now the other debate is, the ideal understanding of the internet now is you can



Fig. 61 Eric J. García, *Chicano Codices #1- Simplified Histories- The U.S. Invasion of Mexico 1846-1848*, 2015.

get these images. You can have access to these images from anywhere to anyone, right? So someone in China can have this, someone can in Poland, Mexico, various places can have access to the images. But with the algorithms, do you really have access to them? So there's a whole audience that can be deleted from me giving them information. But the way that can be circumvented is through the physical media, because there's no algorithms that would prevent you from picking up a newspaper or prevent you from getting a physical printed poster. So when I print in the newspaper, it's random who picks up that newspaper versus a newsfeed that's filtered specifically for you.

CONCLUSION

Protest illustration continues to influence the Farm Worker Rights Movement today. Artist Eric J. García uses his work to bring awareness to the matter and promote courage within the people. In *Lechuga Lucha* (*Lettuce Struggle*), 2014, García depicts a man fallen on the dirt of the lettuce fields, with an open mouth as if screaming, stretching up his right arm in a stopping plea while holding a whip that falls limp down across his belly. The figure wears tan slacks paired with a white shirt and red tie along with a coral fedora hat. Above his head is a jagged speech bubble that reads, “JOAQUIN!” The bottom fifth of the image is planted on multiple rows of lettuce heads.

Lechuga Lucha takes over a popular lore and image like that of the headless horseman, connecting to a larger audience outside of those who are already aware of El Movimiento, and further than superimposing, replaces the original characters with symbolic individuals from the history of the Farm Worker Movement.



Fig. 62 Eric J. García, *Lechuga Lucha*, 2014.

The name of Joaquin in the image, refers to another figure in popular lore of 1850's gold-mine rush era California, Joaquin Murrieta (*García*). To Mexican and Native American peoples, Murrieta represents a Robin Hood-like character that sought vengeance from the abusive power of the Anglos who took their land and murdered so many of their community. It is said that when California rangers went out hunting for Murrieta, they decapitated

him and brought back his head in a jar as proof of their kill and to collect their bounty. The illustration García has produced reflects this aspect of the story, bringing back Murrieta from the dead, holding his own inflamed 'lettuce' head to avenge the farm workers and confront the figure of the abusive farm owner, as shown in the fallen man holding the whip. "Let Us Fight," is a play on the word lettuce, much like the title, *Lechuga Lucha* translates to Lettuce Struggle or Fight.

The fight for farm workers' rights did not end in the 1970's or 1980's--things remain unresolved. The struggle for basic human rights continues in the fields and in meat packing plants where undocumented workers are still employed to work in inhumane



Fig. 63 H. Gonzalez y Louie the Foot, *Hasta La Victoria Siempre*, 1975.

conditions. Illustration still plays a vital role within this plight. Images composed by artists can be seen enticing people on news media platforms to read further about the current state of farm work. These illustrations are also used by supporters of the movement when they repost them on their social media feeds and spread knowledge about the issue to their followers.

Yet there are still limitations to using social media as an effective distribution channel, as media companies' algorithms filter the content that a user sees in their feed, and their internal policies related to limiting political speech and other content classified as controversial remain opaque and ever-changed. With this in mind, print illustration and murals remain essential to the movement. The printed poster for example continues to be used out of cyberspace in protest marches, pasted in community cafes, schools, or outside building walls. Murals continue to be produced by grassroots collectives across the country who support the movement. These tangible graphics are still the best way to speak to a vast audience.



Fig. 64 Melanie Cervantes, *Yo Te Cuido, Tu Me Cuidas*, 2021.

The inspiration behind my research paper stemmed from a desire to explore the significant influence of art on this critical movement in Chicanx and Latinx worker rights history. As a Mexican-American who was born in Mexico, I did not grow up with previous generations of my family having worked in this country's farm land. In Mexico, my own maternal grandfather worked hard to acquire a small piece of land to farm and raise a handful of livestock, while my maternal grandmother was a cheesemaker who started a small business in order to further support their ten children. My family worked in the fields, but it was their land in Mexico, and the purpose of their labor was to keep food on the table and further



Fig. 65 Daniel DeSiga, *La Cosecha (The Asparagus Pickers)*, 2005.



Fig. 66 Zeke Peña, Excerpt from *Food, Land, and Us*, 2021.

their children's education. My grandparents knew that working the land would not financially sustain each of their kids, so they encouraged them to go to university and pursue careers in law or accounting. Some did. But three of my uncles had to immigrate to the United States to find better opportunities. The eldest son participated in the Bracero Program (a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico from 1942 to 1964 that allowed millions of Mexican laborers to work temporarily in the U.S. agricultural sector) in California and then returned to Mexico. While my other two uncles found work in the construction industry in Alaska--quite literally the polar opposite of the warm and lush environment in our

hometown--my parents, for the same reason, moved our own family to Chicago.

Throughout my primary and secondary education, I never learned about the Farm Workers Rights Movement. Cesar Chavez was a name I could only associate with the then touted best boxer in the world, Julio César Chávez. My father, a retired teacher from Mexico, worked in food packaging plants in Chicago while my mother eventually worked in a school lunchroom. What I always noted growing up, was that even though they belonged to unions, my parents did not feel safe enough to speak out at times. Reflecting back, I am upset that the Farm Workers Right Movement was not discussed in my history books. Chicano families were more likely to have known about it, but not ours. Writing this paper was important to me because I was able to finally learn about the movement and be inspired by how we as a people can and have organized and how the arts continue to be a catalyst for furthering action.



Fig. 67 Sentrock, *Para Los Niños Con Sueños*, 2024.

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