Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Interview with Judithe Hernandez, 1998 Mar. 28

Funding for the transcription of this interview was provided by the Smithsonian Latino Initiative.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Judithe Hernandez on March 29, 1998. The interview took place in Chicago, Illinois, and was conducted by Jeffrey Rangel.

This interview was donated to the Archives of American Art in 2001 by Jeffrey Rangel. From 1996-2000, Jeffrey Rangel was contracted by the AAA to conduct oral histories of Latino and Latina artists who worked in Los Angeles and were part Chicano art groups such as Los Four and Asco. This interview was conducted by Rangel independently for his own research. The interview was transcribed with funding from the Smithsonian Latino Initiative funds.

[Note: This portion of the interview was recorded in a restaurant, so some of the words are obscured or inaudible. –Ed.]

Interview

[45-minute tape sides. –Ed.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That was in the White Gallery, no?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Some low-level [munchkin], who had been, I guess, had been assigned to find me and call me, wanting to know if they could use some of my slides in, I guess, a perpetual slide show that would just be part of the exhibit, and I said to myself, "That's interesting, but—." You know, I thought, "I spent twenty years doing this stuff, and now you're asking me if you can use a couple of my slides in a slide show that's going to be off in a corner? You're not calling me to see if you can use some of my work for the show?"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I said no. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I was like—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I think that's—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I maybe was being egotistical, but I thought, you know, come on! It's like not that I'm some big mover and shaker, but I think I have a little more space in the movement than some of the people I think they gave a lot of room to and I thought no.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Did that have to do with some of the people who were on the juritorial board?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know. I never did— I never pursued it, but I was just offended at the request, so I said no. And they kept bugging me about it. I said, "No, no, no." [Laughs.] "Okay? Is that clear? No."

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's like a lot people had problems, a lot of the artists had problems with the show. You know, people who I've spoken to just felt like there was, in the same way with other shows around Hispanic art or Chicano art, that there's more attention paid to the curatorial aspects of it than to the actual artwork itself.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And some of the artists feel like, "Well, forget it. I'm going to go show at the National Gallery or something, or whatever.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think as a movement I think maybe what we're seeing here, you know, folks like you who are writing— This younger generation is beginning to write about this particular time in history. I think people are finally recognizing the fact that this is a legitimate American art movement, and the way some people have treated it in the past—and still treat it, treat the artists associated with it—is so disrespectful that— And they forget that this is a group of people who were working as much politically as they were artistically, and you can't approach them—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Simultaneously.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —right, on the same egotistical, lofty, aesthetic trip that they used to approach artists on. Maybe you can with certain majority artists out there, who aren't political at all, who never were political, but not with this group.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You do that, and you've made the first big mistake.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, you just turned them off completely. At least they did me. I don't know who else didn't participate, but that was one of the reasons I didn't. It just seemed like I was some footnote in the show, and I thought, "Hell no!" [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: You have more to offer than that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I think.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, certainly. So what was it like, balancing the politics and the creative side, the production side? How did you—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, it wasn't separated in those days. What you did on one side was totally reflected on the other side. I mean, it seems kind of— I don't know. It's even hard for me to believe at the time, but that's what we did. A lot of what we did wasn't even personal stuff. It was political stuff, stuff that was needed by [ph: M Corps, Encor, Encore], whatever our agenda was in that particular time—whether it was Los Tres [Committee to Free Los Tres –Ed.], or whether we were doing something for Cesar Chávez, or whether we were doing something for the moratorium on the war. It was like the two were very integrated, amazingly integrated. Street murals addressing all the social ills of the time.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right. When you were— You went through Otis [Art Institute –Ed.], right?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was there kind of a spirit in Otis that recognized that as something important to address?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: So where did that come from, for you?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: From other Chicano friends. When I was at Otis as an undergraduate— I went there the last two years. Otis in those days was the last two years of undergraduate and then two years of graduate school. So you went to somewhere you know for the gen eds and stuff and then transferred. And when I went there the junior and senior year, I was the only female Hispanic, and I think there were only other two or three other guys who were Chicano or some sort of Hispanic. And then Carlos came in graduate school, and I think tops, at any particular time, when I was there from about '69 to '74, there were only ever about five or six of us Hispanos who were in the— Three or four of which were political; the other one or two were not. I was the only woman, and we were completely by ourselves with a bunch of other nice folks who were basically interested in making art. They were nice middle-class white kids, a couple of Asian kids, a few international kids, and all they wanted to do was be artists. You know, they had no other life. They had no—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Even despite all the anti-war activism going on?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That was about the only political thing that they did get involved with or had opinions about, but our stuff wasn't even about the war in Vietnam at that point. It was more about the social war that was going on at home. And the only ones you really discussed it with were your own—you know, in your studios after other people had gone home, or at Frank's [Frank Romero –Ed.] house. [Laughs.] It was relatively underground.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So you didn't get the sense that you were on the one hand being professionally trained as an artist to kind of go this more mainstream or traditional route and then have this competing sense of responsibility with the movement and politics and how as an artist you were going to make your contribution to that?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think— And I think Carlos [Almaraz –Ed.] probably felt the same way because, I don't know, we were kind of oddballs anyway. Did Elsa [Flores –Ed.] talk about her father-in-law?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Her father-in-law? No.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Carlos' father?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Not really. A little bit. I've heard a little bit about him.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He was an unusual man. He was born in Mexico, but he had— I only met him a few times, and I was always impressed with the fact that he was this— He longed to understand and to be a part of, it seemed to me, to any— And he delighted in things that were, for a Mexican-American man of his generation, very unusual. He loved Broadway. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: I heard he was a movie buff.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He adored movies—and, I mean, American films and American Broadway and he could sing any song that had ever been in a Broadway hit.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He loved literature and in some ways he was a very sophisticated, very interesting, complex guy, because on the other—and talk about, I don't know, schizophrenic—on the other side, he worked at Ford or U.S. Steel or something. And yet he harbored the soul of someone who was very— You know, he was very theatrical as well in his persona. And in my house, my mother, strangely enough for her generation, was college educated. She was from Texas, had a father who was very unusual. At the turn of the century, he was— See, my grandparents married in 1907, so he— Did he become a citizen? I guess he became a citizen at some point early on. She never did, but he did. And he was an interpreter in World War I. He spoke like several different languages—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —six or seven he had picked up totally by himself. He just had a knack for languages. But he was very liberated, thought women should do whatever the heck they liked, have any vice—any vice they wanted if they could pay for it. [Laughs.] You want to smoke, you pay for your cigarettes. You want to drink, as long as you pay for your booze that's fine. You know, as long as you understand the consequences of doing such things and were ready to pay the consequences.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And he actively campaigned for women's suffrage.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: All of which scandalized my grandmother, because she thought that was terrible. And my mother had some of those things going on in her personality. She was probably a little more conservative than my grandfather, but she still, she always engendered in my brother and I these aspirations, which I think, you know, if you would ask somebody else, were kind of like, "Well, isn't that a little out of reach?" [Laughs.] You know, what? Going to college, being professionals, you know, not working in the railroad.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wanting to be an artist.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right. Even though she didn't completely understand or maybe approve of artists, they were always supportive. My parents never discouraged us. Even as hard as it was for them to understand what I did, they never said it was a bad thing to do or the wrong thing to do or something you ought not to be doing. Just do it as well as you can.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't think they could ever really—

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's so wonderful.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They were, they were. And my dad's a pretty simple soul. He worked, you know, the railroad his entire life, and he comes from a huge family in Arizona. He left school when he was just a kid to support— He has twelve brothers and sisters.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He didn't finish high school until he was in the Army in World War II.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very bright man, but he was a product of the limitations set in his generation. But I think, seeing the way my mother led in terms of raising the children, he simply went along. "Well, okay, she must be right." [Laughs.] And he never said, "Oh, women shouldn't do this. You shouldn't go to meetings, you shouldn't go to college, you shouldn't do that kind of stuff." And so we never felt like we had any limitations other than those realistic ones that my mother also pointed out to us. She said, "Look, in your brother's case, at least he's a man, but both of you have the fact that you are Mexican-Americans. People already think that we aren't good enough to do certain things, and you are also a woman. So you have two things do deal with, and just be prepared."

JEFFREY RANGEL: She told you this straight out.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And just be prepared that someday someone will say something to you and you'll have to decide how you're going to answer and they are not always going to—

JEFFREY RANGEL: What was your response to that?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Nothing. I was just kind of dumbfounded. [Laughs.] Just, "Okay—" I mean, it's kind of the thing that you can't even respond to. You just sort of as a kid you think about it, you know, because she always told us from the time we were small kids that, "You know, there are certain people in the world who don't think that you're as good as everybody else, but you are." But her thing was also personal responsibility: "Be sure you earn a reputation for being as good as—you know, for excellence, and then no one can dispute it. It doesn't matter what color you are. It doesn't matter whether you have an accent or not. You know, if you were good at what you are, no one can deny you what you are." Maybe that was naïve, but you know be believed it. So—

JEFFREY RANGEL: And so you and Carlos having [had] that kind of—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So we had this— Yeah, we had this kindred—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Liberty or whatever.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right, we looked at Otis as an opportunity to be trained. The best possible training one could get in those days was either there or Chouinard in a classical sense. We were journeymen artists. Not journeymen. We were—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Work under all different mediums, media?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, no, what am I looking for? We were apprentices.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Ah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: There were these great European-trained guys—[Renzo, Rinzo] [Fenchy, Finchey], Joe Mugnuni, Joe Martinek—who were all tremendous artists trained in Europe, very classically trained, who were passing on their training to us.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And it was our opportunity— Umm, what's his name? Bill Ames, who had been I think a partner of Ian's [ph] in designing stuff. They were all there to impart what they knew, in this great classical sense, to train, to give us a foundation in art through drawing and design and painting and culture, and then— Well, like Joe used to say, "You're not here to make masterpieces, okay? So if anybody thinks that, there's the door. You're here to learn a craft. Charlie White was one of our professors.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Tremendous guy. Boy, talk about an influence.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What was he like?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Ah! He was a real firebrand. He was this tiny man, this little wiry guy who smoked a million cigarettes.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And he was— [laughs] Bentley Shad. I don't know if you remember Bentley Shad.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Mm-hmm.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: A California artist, very strange man, but— No, Charlie White was tremendous. He never forgot what he was. You know, he was always a black man who made art and who understood that he was very— He was an island almost. There weren't many of him who had been successful.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And he always used to tell me, when I—He told me on a couple of occasions of the times that he went to Mexico as a very young man and that was the first time in his adult life that he'd ever been treated with respect. So he had tremendous affection for Latin Americans. He said, "They didn't care that I was black. They didn't care at all. They looked at my work and they said, 'Here is a man who is an artist,' and they loved my work and that's all they cared about, and they treated me like I was a tremendous human being."

JEFFREY RANGEL: So he reciprocated in your relationship.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he was very supportive, very nice man. I worked hard for him.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What did you study with him?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Drawing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Drawing.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And so we were there to learn—to learn how to be able to craft our message in the best possible way. So in one sense I didn't care that it wasn't political, that they didn't particularly want to know or support what I was doing outside of class. I was there to learn what they could teach me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And the rest of it was my thing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see. Was your trip. So what was the message that you were learning to craft while you were there?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I was—

JEFFREY RANGEL: All different kinds? Or just about communicating visually?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Um hmm. Learning how to really paint, learning how to really draw, learning about real design. I remember—where was it?—one of my students somewhere coming back from taking a class somewhere else, a drawing class somewhere, where the first night of class the drawing instructor told them, "Well, get out your paper and what ever media you like to work in and then just draw what you feel." [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: That was it, huh?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [ph: Shaquila, Chicita] said to me, "Was that what I was supposed to get out of this, that I was supposed to draw what I feel?" I said, "Well, in my opinion, no, but I know that the way artists are trained has changed since I went to art school and, no, I don't subscribe to that, and I think it's a real cop-out, but, yeah, that's—" Our professors were— They didn't care what our style— We didn't have a style. "You guys don't have a style. You don't make masterpieces. You're here to learn."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Just those basics.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And then once you get out of here then you put those things together. Like Joe Martinek used to tell us in sculpture, "You're gonna build an armature, you're gonna work from models, you're gonna do you know figure studies and da da da, and when you get out of here if you decide you're going to weld tin cans together that's okay, but at least you're going to do it with authority. You're not going to do it because you can't do anything else."

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So I said, "'This is cool. I could—"

JEFFREY RANGEL: How did that register with other artists active in the movement, [say], the fact that you came—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think they thought he was elitist, that, you know, he'd been to college and was— But at the same time the bologna that kids give each other now that if you're interested in being good in school that you're being too white. I go, "Well—"

JEFFREY RANGEL: But yet a lot of folks who were involved in the movement were trained like that, weren't they?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Um hmm. Those of us who were, I guess—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I mean, everybody seems to have had some kind of school, art school [training – Ed.].

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Because the people who wound up leading, with a few notable exceptions

probably, were people who'd been trained to lead. And Cesar Chávez recognized that and he talked about that incessantly—you know, in the La Paz, that leaders aren't just—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Born.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean sometimes they are, but, I mean, you have to train people how to lead. And there are lots of people who have the capacity to lead and to bring things forward, but you've got to train them. You can't just rely on mother nature to produce an exception for you.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I got you. One of the things—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So was it—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I'm sorry, go ahead.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So to me it wasn't surprising that a lot of the people who came out of the movement who were leadership were those few people, and there were a few of us who went to college in those days. It was a much smaller group, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was there kind of like a— Could you readily see the difference in the work from people were—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Sure.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Were there tensions about that? I mean, how was that dealt with?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That could be a touchy subject. There were the obvious differences between people who were working from a naïve perspective as opposed to those of us who had been trained, but politically in those days it was incorrect to talk about work in a qualitative way, and so people didn't. People knew it, but you didn't say it. It was hypocritical, but, you know, it was politics. [Laughs.] What can I tell you? People— We didn't want to recreate the same kind of Western aesthetic, critical environment that had kept people from being expressive, and so, even though those of us who had been trained obviously produced work that was superior, it was very democratic. I mean, work from all kinds of levels—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —was included in lots of things just because we thought that it ought to be that way. All of us at the time were going to like Marxist study groups.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And to Maoist study groups, and so we're talking about being inclusive and not setting up these artificial "best," "better," "worst," you know, kinds of things that had been done to us, and so we were trying to be very conscious of that. I mean, obviously that's very naïve and very idealistic, but at the time we were trying to produce an environment where those kind of critical inhibitions weren't laid on people's doorsteps so early their careers or their lives. So, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How successful do you feel that you were in achieving that kind of environment?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know. I think a lot of people who— I think we achieved it for a small

period of time and then after that things sort of went back to the way they were and I don't know if that's because—

JEFFREY RANGEL: How do you mark that time?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's hard. It's one of those things that happens gradually. I think during the sixties and the seventies when the movement was very strong and people were very conscious about doing that kind of thing and being very correct that it happened, and then those people moved on and got older and they changed. They changed back. You know, the influence of the larger society is very hard to overcome, so what do you do? Not many other examples out there.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's true. One of the things that I'm curious about was I was really surprised and thought it was really interesting, cool, that you had done illustrations for *Floricanto en Aztlán* [book of poetry by Alurista –Ed.]. I was wondering how that—

[Side conversation with waiter.]

I was wondering how— Canto came out in what? '71?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Early '70s.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, that's a long time.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So you're doing that at UCLA. You're at Otis at the same time. You're a woman working with Alurista, who's like a total cultural nationalist, which—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: — has very strong patriarchal leanings.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How did— How does that—You've met Carlos by this time?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: 1971, yeah. Um hmm.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So you're kind of working in that, kind of heading towards Los Four maybe by that time? Aware that— At least aware of the other players in that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right. Yeah. The idea was beginning to hatch, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How does that all fit together? How do you get there?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: A lot of it was just luck. I think I was illustrating *Aztlan Journal*.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, okay. How did you get hooked up with a gig like that?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I can't remember. I think I was dating somebody. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Ohhh.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, god, how did it happen? I can't remember.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: See in those days whatever you could catch in bed could be treated with penicillin, so it was like it was a whole different time. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's a good way of putting it.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Damn, I forget. I think I was going out with a lawyer from the law school—a Chicano lawyer from UCLA Law School, who was working with Juan Gomez-Quiñones and they were just about to launch this journal.

JEFFREY RANGEL: *Aztlán*?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, the journal, the *Aztlán Journal*, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And they needed somebody to illustrate it, and I think my name came up because I was going out with this guy. So I started doing that. They just kind of hired me sight unseen. You know, I started doing the journal and then when the book of poetry came up I just seemed like kind of the natural— "Well, we have somebody who could do that," you know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, so it wasn't like Alurista knew your work?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, he didn't pick me and, you know what, all the time, during the time that I worked on the book—that I did the illustration of the books—we never met. I didn't meet him until years later.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What did you think of the book?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I loved it. [Laughs.] That was really—I was pleased. And, yeah, I never did meet him until many, many year later. And somebody sent me something not too long ago because the book had its twenty-fifth anniversary, something—

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's hard to find, too.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Is it?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, my god.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They were going to reissue it, or I forget it what. I thought, "God, I should call Al and tell him, "You know, it's been 25 years. Maybe we should do another work." [Laughs.] It's been that long. I couldn't believe it. I thought, "Holy smoke! Has it been that long?" Yeah. But, yeah, we finally met. Actually, we met more often after that when we were with the Concilio [Concilio de Arte Popular –Ed.] and Carlos and I and lots of other people began to organize the Concilio. Then we consciously tried to meet in either northern California or southern California once a year and that's where I got—probably met him more often than I ever did when I was at UCLA.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I might have been just— You've read Kubler, right?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Kubler?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Kubler.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I don't think so, no.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Art historian? You're kidding.

JEFFREY RANGEL: No, I'm not really trained in art history. [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Ohhh, I see.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I have some work to do. I'll be honest about my blind spots.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He talks about entrance, and I believe it. I think that there are people who have been incredible creative minds and talents who went undiscovered and unappreciated simply because they didn't enter the stream—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Timing, you mean?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah— when they should have. And so sometimes you get lucky and you enter the stream just at the right moment when people are willing to look at what you do, and other times it happens after you're gone—or never.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But a lot of it just luck. It's just like being born. It's like winning the lottery, of all of the— Of all the other people who could have been born, you were born instead.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And there's also a sense that those opportunities make themselves available on a regular basis. It's just those who are—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yielding to—

JEFFREY RANGEL: —able to recognize them as such.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right, that's true.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Kind of are prepared to seize that opportunity.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Or those rare people who actually make the opportunity happen.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Those people I have a lot of respect for.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So do you see that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Carlos was like that. He made things happen. He never waited.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How so?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He was always talking to people. He was always going to people and asking them to do things. I mean, it never ceased to amaze me that he had the nerve to go and ask

someone to give us a show, to give us money to do this, and just go out there and push and be pushy and be aggressive. You know, things didn't happen to him that he didn't create. He was definitely one of those people who created his own opportunities. He didn't wait for people to come to him. He went to them. And, of course, I mean, what he had to offer was astounding, and that certainly helped, but he— I mean, there are people who had less to offer who were also pushy who get things to happen.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But Carlos had that talent, and I always admired that. I always wished that I could be like that, and it's not in me to do, but he could do it, and he was so charming. His charm was actually fatal. I mean, if he got close to you and talked to you, you were a goner, you were just a goner. [Laughs.] You couldn't help but like him. Did you ever meet Carlos?

JEFFREY RANGEL: I never met him.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He was a charming man. He could just charm the birds out of the trees. He was intelligent. He was sophisticated. And yet there was something about him that was also very child-like. He was very playful and very, very funny. Ah! He was quite a guy. He was remarkable, a very remarkable guy.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So maybe you could tell me a little more about your friendship with him—like how you met, what kind of work relationship you had—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I remember exactly the first time I ever saw him. It was the first day at Otis at graduate school, and he was new. He didn't come to the last two years of undergrad; he started in graduate school. There was this small, thin guy who looked Arabic. He wasn't very dark, and he had a kind of a prominent nose and these large eyes, and he was very thin, and he had this kind of little African cap on his head, and I didn't think anything of it. There were a lot of people like that around, but then he opened his— Well, in those days he was Charles Almaraz. [Laughs.] And when they said his name I thought, "Oh, my God, Almaraz sounds Hispanic." And then he opened his mouth and he started talking, and I thought, "Wow, what planet is this guy from?" [Laughs.] He was so sophisticated. He started quoting I forget who about what, that we were talking about in this painting class, and I thought, "My God! This is an interesting sort. I have to find out what he's about." So we started talking, and it turns out he's from East LA and I was more blown away. I said, "How does somebody like you come from East [Los]?"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He'd lived in New York.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So he had been in New York already and back by that time.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, they had been back. You know, he'd gone to New York, been back, almost died in New York. He had to stop drinking after he left New York. And he was so worldly and so self-possessed and bright and so well-educated and I thought, "My God, this is—" And his folks live off Whittier Boulevard!" I was like blown away. I'd never met anybody like him. And so I sort of became kind of a fan. I just started hanging out with him. We talked and he found that I had some interesting thoughts and was not quite your normal— When I was twelve—I guess I should tell you this—when I was twelve I [was] probably the only kid in East LA who had their own personal subscription to The Daily Worker, so that's the kind of kid I was. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I was always a little off center, so probably that's why we got along. We were both— I was the only woman and he was this strange guy. And he was always bisexual, so that was always a thing with him, and it caused him no end of consternation, I think, at the end.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, I'm sure.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But he told me these wonderful stories of New York, and I just sat there and just roared with laughter, and just impressed beyond belief about all the things he and Frank [Romero –Ed.] did—the people they met and just the ideas he had. And then suddenly he got— He met Magu [Gilbert "Magu" Lujan –Ed.], and Magu politicized him—or at least planted the seed, saying, "Oh, yeah, you're really interesting. You're very sophisticated, you're smart. But you're from East LA Do you understand that you're a Chicano? It doesn't matter that you're this great artist, that you're really smart, all this stuff. You're still brown. Get it?" [Laughs.] And Carlos didn't get it, and he had to learn about that part of himself, and Magu was the first one who really asked him, challenged him to do that. And then Carlos never did anything half way. Once that seed was planted in his life, it became this obsession—to make up for what he thought was this twenty years of not knowing what his real identity was—and he plunged himself into it. This is what I'm talking about. I mean, none of us had ever met Cesar Chávez—or would even think of going up and saying, "Well, what can I do for you?" or "Can I come and work for you," or "Can I go to—"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But Carlos did. [Laughs.] He says, 'Well, I'm going to La Paz. I think I need to understand what this thing is all about, and I'm just going to go out there and offer my services," and, boom, he did. And not only did he wind up being the editor of *El Malcriado* [United Farm Workers newspaper –Ed.] and doing all this other stuff, he becomes one of Cesar's good buddies, and it's like, wow! [Laughs.] He just went out and did these things, and it was just like hard to believe. And he'd call up and he'd say, "You've got to come up to La Paz because we're doing a mural." "Okay, fine."

JEFFREY RANGEL: So that was your entrée to UFW [United Farm Workers –Ed.] and Teatro Campesino and all that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yes, absolutely, it was Carlos. Carlos was the one who went and made the connections with these folks. I mean, we traveled up and down Highway 99 I can't tell you how many times. [Laughs.] Every Friday night it's like we were getting into his car or my car or somebody's car—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Jettin' up there for the weekend.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And just going up, yeah. Exactly. It was just remarkable, and we'd be half-asleep coming down the highway back on Monday to come back to school or whatever the hell else we were doing, but it was just—

JEFFREY RANGEL: So what were you doing up there? I know you did the mural for the second convention?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right, we did that. And we'd just go up and help on stuff. We'd go and help with boycotts, and we'd go up and help on the newspaper and then we started going up to see— What's his name?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Luis Valdez?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Luis Valdez. That was just more social. We never really did much with them. I mean, I never did much with them, other than go— My cousin was in the group though.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, really?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He's a musician with el Teatro [Campesino –Ed.].

JEFFREY RANGEL: I didn't know that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, Tony Martinez. And we would stop and stay with his sister, Socorro [Martinez? –Ed.], who's a trip and a half. It was just social and we had a great time with them.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And then we'd go into San Francisco— Yeah, it was weed.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I can't tell you this now.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.] Some more. Come on! This is the good stuff.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Anyway, we'd leave San Juan Bautista and keep going up the peninsula to San Francisco, and then we'd do stuff with este René Yañez from Galeria.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How were you guys received up there?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We were always kind of— I think they always looked at as—and my impression was—I don't know that this is true at all—but my impression was they always thought of us as bumpkins. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Really?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.] You know, San Francisco is a very sophisticated place compared to Los Angeles.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's not like LA is nothing.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, but in those days, you know. San Francisco has always been a city where people dressed, and at midnight there was always these interesting coffee houses and poetry readings and stuff you could go to that didn't exist in Los Angeles. You could go to Dolores' Drive-in and have a burger, but you couldn't go to a poetry reading really. I don't know. People in San Francisco always seemed a little— They dressed a little better, with a little more style. I don't know. I always felt like they looked at us as country bumpkins. So we'd go up there and do stuff with them —and with the RCAF [Rebel Chicano Art Front/Royal Chicano Air Force –Ed.].

JEFFREY RANGEL: You guys worked with them?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Really?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Now see I've always kind of understood—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They were wonderful.

JEFFREY RANGEL: This is really good to know, because I've always sensed a kind of northern/southern competition.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: You know, maybe even some animosity that I think Magu was telling me surfaced when he was in Fresno.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Um hmm.

JEFFREY RANGEL: He would bring folks from LA up there for the Concilio [Concilio de Arte Popular –Ed.] or whatever, meetings, and there was static, so this is interesting because RCAF, I mean—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think it's because probably the times that he did it those people were like — I know that sometimes that they came up from Los Angeles as if they were the know-it-alls. Well, we've done this before. We're gonna tell you guys how to do this up here. And he was in Fresno after a lot of what I'm thinking about had happened.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: When we were first beginning to put together Concilio, and first doing Chisme Arte and stuff like that, and we'd go up there for interviews and to get stories and just to visit and stuff it was more— There was tension because there were some people who were very kind of volatile and opinionated like— Not Malaquías Montoya, but his brother—

JEFFREY RANGEL: José Montoya?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: José. He was very divisive, very— He was very— I don't know. I just remember him as being angry all the time and kind of suspicious of what we were doing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But the RCAF were like home boys. They were very laid back, very mellow. Their idea of a good time was going to the pool hall. We'd all sit there and have beer, play pool, and just talk. That was a meeting. We were taking care of business.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Were there any women in that collective?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The ones who were there were girlfriends. I was the only one there who was a participant. Many times I was the only one of the guys who happened to be a woman. The other women there were purely there as decoration. They had no opinions about anything. So, yeah, it was a little bizarre, but I got used to it after a while. And I really didn't mind because I never — I mean, I made a studious— I studiously avoided any kind of personal relationships with any of

them. They were all like brothers.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And as a consequence I could say things and not be discounted or turned off. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: [I got you].

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So it was different. Later there were some more women. Sylvia Gomez?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: She now a filmmaker. Sylvia, Sylvia— Tall lesbian woman. Sylvia— I can't remember her name.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's not ringing any bells for me.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, Patssi [Valdez –Ed.] was always different. She was always kind of an enigma. I never knew her very well, but she never said much. She was always kind of very profusely made up, looking very stylish, not saying much. But her art— I always admired her work, but she never— I could never really get to know her very well. We'd say hello. We knew who each other was, but I never had a relationship with her, so—I [don't know] what her opinions were. But, yeah, I knew Gronk. I didn't know Willie [Herrón –Ed.] very well, but I knew Gronk better, and Harry Gamboa.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How was the interaction between those—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They were different. They were younger by at least five or ten years, and they were kind of the vanguard of the punk sort of perspective on things, and Magu and Carlos and Frank and I were just— We just didn't get it. You know, we're too old for that. They'd do these things and it was just like, "Wow, why did they . . ."

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Why? They weren't necessarily— I mean, their way of being political was much more subjective. The way that they chose to express those political ideas. I mean, not the murals. I'm thinking that those were very out there. But their personal work, which is so kind of not what we were doing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Performance stuff.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, the performance stuff. Stuff we'd never done. We didn't really understand, couldn't do ourselves. It was really hard to relate, but more power to them. That's another generation; there's a new perspective. It just isn't mine. You do your thing. [Laughs.] But, yeah, I really couldn't get into what they were doing personally, but— I admired it, but I didn't really know them well.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So there wasn't so much a sense of competition as just like—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Kind of the old guard and the new guard.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —misunderstanding—not misunderstanding, but—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —just different esthetics.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And Carlos, I think, brought along a lot of those folks. He mentored more of them than I or Frank or Magu.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He spent more time with them. I don't know. Like I said, he never missed an opportunity to really kind of involve himself with someone he thought was interesting—at least for a time, to figure out what they were up to. And I think as a consequence, even if they don't realize that he mentored a lot of them in ways that they couldn't have been by Frank or Magu or me, and made the connections between these two different styles approaching the same subject—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see. That makes sense. So who were some of folks that you feel like you were able to mentor and help along in certain ways? And how would you go about doing that?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know. I was probably less involved in that than I was with my own work. I think what mentoring I did I saved for the classroom. I really didn't do it much with other young female artists. I did it more as an educator in the classroom, because I was the one who taught.

JEFFREY RANGEL: You've taught a lot. You've taught all over the place.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I taught. Yeah, I went lots of places. And Magu taught. I think Frank was the only one who never really taught a lot. Neither did Carlos. But I talk about ideas there [in the classroom –Ed.] and try to make people think about where they were coming from—think about history and think about ideas and things—but in terms of bringing other young artists [around]—There weren't many women around. And I didn't feel— I don't know. I never thought about it consciously, but I never presumed that you had to bring a young man along as a protégé, so those opportunities didn't present themselves to me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What about like just your body of work and the way that it circulates so that other people in art school or other students or other people get exposed to it and say, "Wow! Judithe Hernandez is doing that. Maybe I can do that, too." Do you ever get that kind of feedback from people?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, probably I think, just because I kept to myself and I just did my work. You know, at Otis _____ _____. There weren't many women in art school anyway and I was the only Latina, so I sort of did my own thing and I remember— I remember one day— This is— God, I never felt better in my entire life. I went to— It was Charlie White's class, and he'd given us an assignment, and everything— Yeah, I took everything very seriously. I went home and I really worked on this drawing and did as good a drawing as I could come up with, brought it back to class the next day for the critique, and Charlie— You know, everybody put their stuff up and Charlie walked around the room and didn't say a word. He walked, he walked, and he looked, and he didn't say a word. And then he turned around, and then he just exploded, and he ripped us up from one side to the other, because a lot of what the other people had done was so poor, was so kind of, "Oh, just let me dash this off just to get him off my back." And he was so offended by the lack of a commitment to do your best work. He was just furious. He swore at us. He was just like a Baptist minister—you know, just reamed us out.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And then at the very end, then when he finally stopped—and he was like breathless almost he was so angry—he says, "And the only person this doesn't apply to is Hernandez. This is what the rest of you assholes should have been doing last night." [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I'm like— And everybody turns around and looks at me like— I thought, "Oh!"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Making us all look bad.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I walked out of there— That was my best day at Otis. I thought, "This is great, this is great."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That's all I did. I just— I went to school and I did what I was supposed to do —you know, try to learn what I was supposed to learn. And the rest of it was all outside. It was a kind of a schizophrenic life, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: It sounds like it.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Sounds like there was a lot going on.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: There was. Outside of Otis there was— I can't believe I did a lot of this stuff at the same time that I was going to school, but art school is so flexible one's able to do that. Actually the first mural I ever did was in 1968.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: At the First Unitarian Church in LA I don't even know if it exists anymore. It was damaged in the earthquake, so I'm not sure it exists, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Did you do that by yourself?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How did that get set up?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't remember.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think they had come to Otis—somebody from the church had come to Otis asking if there was an artist who was interested in doing it. Maybe it was '69, yeah, because I was at Otis in sixty— I think it was '68, '69, yeah. And because they didn't have a lot of money they wanted a student, so I said, "Yeah, sure. Let me go look at the building." So I went to do it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So how would you know how to do a mural if you've never done one before?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I lied. I said, "Yeah, sure, I can do this." [Laughs.] I read about it, went home and looked at the books. "Okay, this is how I have to do a grid. I go, 'Okay, I can do that.' " You know, a lot of what we learned about mural painting we didn't— They didn't train—they didn't teach mural painting at Otis.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So all of the things that we learned about and discovered about the process were absolutely self-taught. We suddenly were faced with a big space to cover and we had to figure out how to do it. If Judy Baca has made any contribution, I give her that. She's contributed a lot to the technology of painting murals, but other than that I take exception to some of the credit she's been given.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Hmm, let me flip the tape and—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Okay, the reason I wanted to ask you about Judy Baca is because in doing some background research I noticed that— Did you guys do a show together at the LA Women's Building at some point?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Actually, we worked together.

JEFFREY RANGEL: You worked together? And you worked on [The Great Wall], no?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I was one of the first people, the first group.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That first panel, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The first group of people who worked on the Great Wall. Yeah. Seventy-six? Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And the I also noticed that you were directing citywide mural programs.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, she was.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was there a period of time when you did it though?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I worked for them.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, you worked for them.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's when you worked for them?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That's how we— I forget who introduced us, but she asked me to come— When the city gave her the funds to start Citywide Murals, she knew about me. Because, you know, I was one of the few women who was around. And so she invited me to come and work for her. I mean, as painters you always try looking for a job that's flexible that will give you time to do your work and other things, so this was perfect. And I didn't know her. You know, she seemed— Other people spoke well about her that I knew and stuff. I said, "Yeah great, a mural's cool."
And for a while it was okay. I knew she had done or learned about the fact that she had done

murals earlier on in East LA with gangs and stuff like that, and that seemed to be a politically good thing to do, and she talked about— I guess it was one of the things that gave me some sort of— made me sympathetic was the fact that she— I guess she's half Mexican, but I don't think she ever knew her father. Her mother— You know, her father didn't stay with her long and he left. He was white. And so she grew up being— She remembers— When she recalled her childhood, she would say that she was always hurt by the fact that other Chicanos mocked her because you know she was not a hundred percent Mexican.

JEFFREY RANGEL: "Authentic."

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And then interestingly enough I think later on in her life she found out that that worked to a great advantage for her because a lot of what she was able to do— She's very political. I have never thought of her as an artist, ever, even when I first went to work with her and saw the murals. I always thought of her— In the days when I thought well of her, I always thought, "Poor thing, she wants to be an artist. She doesn't have what it takes." And I mean— I'm being very honest. I mean, that's the way I always felt. I always thought— I mean there are people who pursue something who can do it but are not the best at it, and I think that— And I usually tell my students that, too. "You have to be realistic with yourself, especially when you go into the arts. If you really want to be a concert-level pianist or you want to be a published writer, that's wonderful. Kids want to grow up to play for the NBA. Just because you're good in high school or good in college, doesn't mean you're going to be great professionally. Very few people get there. And unless you're really willing to accept the fact that you may not be one of them, that you may be better than the population at large at doing this particular thing, but you're not great, you have to be able to be prepared to look into your soul and say that that's going to be okay with you, that you're not going to be Michael Jordan, that you're not going to be Picasso. You're just going to be somebody who does it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: You do it because you love it.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right, not because you expect to be famous or that you think that your work is important, but just because, "Okay fine," and you do it. And I always thought that about her, that she loved art and she trained in it and stuff, but her work just always was never going to be at the level that some of us—of other people I knew—you know, contemporaries of ours.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What was it about her work that seemed to distinguish it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's sort of at the level of what I—without being too mean—kind of art school student quality. She can draw and paint better than the average person, but it's not the work of Carlos Almaraz. It's not the work of Magu or even Frank. It's just not there. Her real strength has always been that she's very intelligent, very politically savvy, and is able to get what she wants by using her smarts and her charm. And she was the only one who ever got money. I mean, the rest of us would scream and yell, but she had built you know a relationship with people in city government and finally with the people on the state level and stuff. Where Judy Baca could walk in, her reputation preceded her as somebody who did these good things with kids, and was able to get people to give her money.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So do you think it comes down to personality? Because there were a lot of people out there who were committed in doing similar kinds of work.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Who were not successful.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Who didn't have that kind of recognition—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —or were successful in different ways maybe?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And again, ironically, I think one of the things that made her successful, although she would probably dispute this, is that she was a very acceptable minority. She was a very attractive, fair complexioned Hispanic. She always presented herself as a Hispanic woman, but she was the kind of woman in those days, for Hispanic, that the majority that she was dealing with found very acceptable—well-spoken, attractive, young, articulate, not too ethnic. She was exactly right for the time.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What about her lesbianism? Didn't that kind of marginalize her?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That was very under cover. She wasn't out in those days. No way. We found about that— When I worked for her—this was back in the seventies, that first year that I worked for her—the staff only began to figure that out, oh, I guess it must have been a year or so after we worked for her, that her friend Donna wasn't just her roommate. [Laughs.] It took us a while. They were very discreet, and it was not public knowledge, not at all, and certainly not professional. I mean, she didn't—that was not— Professionally she didn't present herself that way at all. In fact, she'd even been married.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: For a short time. So, yeah, no, that was something that was not— I mean, being gay was not something that you would advertise in those days anyway. That was not an advantage. So she absolutely didn't talk about it. It was very discreet.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I guess I was just wondering if that kind of knowledge would be something that would circulate within the community.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Eventually it did—I mean, as it got out—but that was later. And then she— I don't she hides it anymore, but in those days back in the seventies it was— You know, you wondered, but you weren't sure.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And then finally, and as you got to know her more, you found out that was the case, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: So there was a period of time when you were—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We worked together.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —when you were working together.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We weren't friendly, but we worked together.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I was always disappointed. I wanted to be friends with her, and the thing that really disappointed me the most, that kind of made me just cut her off, was the Great Wall—

the fact that we had gone through this as a group. I mean, granting she had laid the foundations, got the money, blah, blah, blah, but there was like these ten artists who had worked their behinds off to make this thing happen. And it wasn't easy that first year. There was a flood that washed away all the stuff. It rained. It never rains in California, right?

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And suddenly we went—

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's dangerous, too!

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: One day the water had come through the channel and it washed everything away.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Damn.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And working with these kids and organizing all the— People really busted their butts to help make this happen, and then when the time came to have the dedication, et cetera, it was like she was the only one who had done anything. I mean, she took absolute, 100 percent— I mean, she gave kind of lip service to the fact that there happened to be some other people helping her, but it seemed like everything that had happened was her doing entirely. And it didn't just piss me off; it pissed everybody off who had worked on it. And I said, "Well, this is something I don't need," and so we didn't get along after that. And then I began to hear stories from other folks for the same thing. I mean, on one hand you can't blame her: She worked hard. She took a lot of shit from people who didn't like her. And so when it comes to taking credit, she takes credit. So I guess that's okay, but it doesn't mean other people are going to like you. It's not going to make them, if they don't like you, change their minds about you.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I've always sensed a kind of irony, in that a lot of the successes that she's been credited for are things which seem to exemplify some of the ideals of the movement—you know, collective work, working with youth, public art, creating institutions, tapping into institutional resources, things of that nature—and yet at the same time there's this kind of marginality that's part of that credit or success. So it's kind of ironic to me that despite those things, there are these —

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: People still hold her at arm's length.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And I've read it in a lot of different places and—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it's not just me. I mean, I think a lot of people who had experiences with her— She's very driven. I mean, you can't do what she's done without being that. I mean, she started out early in the seventies, a lone woman, and she managed to put this little arts empire together. I mean, SPARC [Social and Public Art Resource Centers –Ed.] is still going.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: In fact, the thing that's ironic as hell—I don't know if you know this or not— but just about two years ago I got a call from somebody at SPARC, which surprised the hell out of

me. [Laughs.] Somebody with SPARC who didn't even know I live in Chicago, right? It was this nice young woman who said, "I'm from SPARC, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Dana?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, Lindsey.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Lindsey.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: She said, "Before you hang up—" [Laughs.] She said, "You know, you did that mural a long time ago at Stoner Recreation Park." I said, "Yeah, that was a long time ago." She said, "Well, we have some money from the city. They're going to— They've been looking at several murals for restoration that they think are significant enough to spend money on, and they'd like to restore yours, but we need your permission." And so, you know, she was a very nice young woman and I said, "Yeah, whatever my feelings are about Judy Baca, hey, you want to spend your nickel on my mural it's okay with me." So they did. I forget the gal who put— She restored— The little artist. Ah, little artist— The young woman who restored it— Alma Lopez, I guess?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Alma Lopez, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Did a wonderful job. She and some of the—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I just met her recently.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, did a beautiful job. I saw it last year when I was in California. I mean, I couldn't do it myself, and I didn't get out there when they were doing it, but when I was out there to visit my brother and my dad—it was last year—we went by to see it, and it looked like it did you know twenty years ago when it first went up. I was really pleased.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's got to be gratifying

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It was. I thought it was very ironic that—Lindsey sent me some pictures of the dedication—there was Judy Baca, older and grayer—and in front of my mural. [Laughs.] And I thought, "Isn't this irony or what?" I thought, "My God, after all this time."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But I don't think I could have been civil to her even if I went out there, but I thought, "Isn't this just terribly ironic that here she is still dealing with me after all this time, and restoring [all, of] my murals." I thought, "Well, God bless her." She at least doesn't let whatever personal feelings she may have or not have stop her from doing what she should do professionally, so I thought, well—

JEFFREY RANGEL: How much of the critical attention that she's gotten do you think relates to the fact that she's a woman? I mean, how much— It seems in some ways that Magu is doing the same thing [working with youth –Ed.].

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Um hmm.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Or a Montoya. José Montoya's doing the same thing, or Carlos could be.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's not her gender. Her talent was that she always knew how to build

political alliances with the majority, with people who are really in power. She was constantly brought in as the expert on Chicano art. When some white curator needed an expert on Chicano art, she's the only name that surfaces. And you know what? It's really our fault. Because we haven't produced other people who've come forward and written books or built those kind of connections so that they're thought of as well—who can maybe tell the story from a little more—you know, from a point of more authenticity. I don't know. But she— And I really have always thought that it has to do with the fact that she's always been politically very astute. She was getting money for murals projects when people were not giving money to art, kept her thing going and has supported herself and a whole bunch of other people that she hires and keeps in business, and is able to put stuff out there. And that's her real talent. She has done arts administration.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: She could give a course in how to do arts administration. She's an incredibly — She's incredibly successful. She's not an artist. She never has been. Her work is not at the professional level that is serious work, but, because of her love of art, she has done all these things, and she's been very successful in promoting it, promoting herself as an authority and as someone to be reckoned with.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So on that level you've got to respect her.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You don't have to like her, but you can respect her.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Well, along those lines, I'm curious about— What I've seen of your work, it seems to be me to be very strongly female identified.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: A lot of women—a lot of that kind of female imagery in your work, and I'm kind of curious how that works in the early seventies, say, when an iconography for Chicano art is being developed, and if there were conscientious attempts on your part—or other women in the movement—to generate that kind of iconography? Or is it just painting what you know or what you wanted to do?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's a combination of both. I think first and foremost you paint what you know. I think it's just nature. You paint what you understand the best. But then on the other hand too, when I would get together with women like Yreina Cervantes, the gals from San Francisco—Pat Rodriguez, Esther Hernández—we'd sit as girls, and we talked about being women in the arts. There was a certain row to hoe in terms of altering the image—or the importance—of— I mean, if you look at the some of the early work of Chicanos, it's the female image as the Virgin Mary or as the hooker.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: There was kind of like almost no in between.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Like La Korona or Milinche or whatever.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it was very extreme. And only women could really alter that perspective or the use of that image to portray women in a different way. And I also think at the same time it mirrored the advances that women made in the movement. As I said before, when I first met Carlos and began to get involved in the arts organization of Chicano artists, I was frequently the only woman who was participating. By the time that era was over, there were a lot more young women who were there who are working artists. They weren't just hangers-on, and not just girlfriends of the guys. It was very different. And that's what we envisioned, that's what we hoped, that our participation, the fact that our images were going to be the real images that women could hopefully identify with, and not these extremes, that would encourage a woman who did have aspirations in the arts that whatever personal imagery they possessed, they wouldn't feel self-conscious about putting it out there.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's okay to do that. I mean, you can do the kind of images you want of women. You don't have to feel as if it's— You don't have to be limited to these two extremes anymore.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You have a voice. Get out there.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Do any particular images come to mind when you think about that range in your work or in other people's work that you felt were significant?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: My images first started out being very angry. I don't know if you saw my spray can work on paper.

JEFFREY RANGEL: No, I don't think I have.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Really kind of—

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's mostly pastels?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, you've seen the later work, the more kind of ethereal pastel on paper?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The work that I did—you know, outside of Otis that was just kind of learning how to draw and learning how to paint—the stuff that I was doing in my studio outside of that was— I was using a spray can on paper, big. I'd fill my studio wall with a piece of photo backdrop, and just let that—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Where was your studio?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: At Otis.

JEFFREY RANGEL: At Otis.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, all the graduate students had studios.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, wow, that's nice.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it was very nice. And so I'd just fill this nine-by-twelve-foot space with a piece photo backdrop paper, and probably killed my liver, but open all the windows—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Do spray can pieces, huge spray can pieces. I think that was one of the first things [maybe] Carlos thought that was very interesting, because the way he sold my participation or my membership to Los Four, to the other guys was that he told them— And I don't know who told me this afterwards. Carlos never told me what he told them, but somebody else told me what he told them. [Laughs.] I guess it was Gilbert, I don't know, because he said to them, "Well, it's not like she's going to— It's not an issue of quality. This woman draws like a guy. She paints like a man." I mean, that was his like validation to the other— That was his way of convincing them that I could be part of the group, not because— You know, my work was up to their level. In fact, I was so good I painted just like a man. And I thought, when I heard that— [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: God.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very interesting, Carlos, from somebody who was interested in integrating the group because he thought they needed a female that was really kind of a strange way—

JEFFREY RANGEL: And that's what he told you, like why he wanted to introduce you.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right, because, you know, "Your work is very strong. We need a female presence in order to give ourselves a— We don't have any credibility; we're just four guys. We don't encompass the Chicano world without having a woman's presence. You would validate us and your work is strong, blah, blah, blah." And then he went to them and said, "But she paints like a guy, all right?"

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: "It's not like you're having to take somebody who's not very good. She's good, okay?" I thought that was very cute.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How did that work out in the group?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, we fought like crazy. [Inaudible.] It was one of the most angst-filled relationships I think I've ever had. I love them dearly. I mean, now that we're older. It's like growing up with a brother that you fought with a lot.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We were always fighting. [Inaudible.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: About what?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Everything. You know Beto [Roberto "Beto" de la Rocha –Ed.] said black, I said white, and the fight would start. [Laughs.] There was always a lot of tension. Beto never liked the idea that I joined, and I think— Its' really funny. I don't know if you saw the tape that we did for— What's her name? Denise [Lugo –Ed.].

JEFFREY RANGEL: Denise.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The first taping they did without me. I [was, wasn't] in California, and then the following year I was there, and then we tape some more at Frank's house. Beto managed to make it to that first one. And when my name finally came up in the discussion—I was watching this; I nearly came to tears—Denise asked him— Oh, my name just came up. They said, "Well, let's talk about Judithe Hernandez and when she first came to be with Los Four and how it was. And Beto said, "Well, before we start the discussion—" He hadn't said much. You know, I was watching the tape; he hadn't said very much. And he said, "Well, I feel I have to say something here." He said, "You know, I really owe her an apology. I was terrible to her."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: "I was really, really terrible to her and I really want to say I'm sorry." [Laughs.] And I'm like, "Oh my God." [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, the man hadn't said anything almost up to this point, and then suddenly when my name came up he said that.

JEFFREY RANGEL: He carried that around.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: All those years, I know. And he was; he was terrible to me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So what was that about?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He just resented the fact— He wanted—

JEFFREY RANGEL: The fact that you are a woman?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, he just— Well, maybe, but I think he was happy with the group the way it was. His four friends, and—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Magu was talking about the idea of Los Four being Los Twelve or Los Fifteen. I mean, he always wanted to say—he always wanted to bring more and more people.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It frequently was, but it was— Those other seats were kind of rotating seats. John Valadez would sit in that fifth seat or that sixth seat, or Richard Duardo. It was all different— ASCO. I mean, it almost became moot, the fact that it was Los Four or Los Six or Los Twelve, because after that people always joined. Los Four's name drew the interest because they knew who we were and knew what we had done, but then after that Los Four really used whatever power it had to draw people to a gallery to really help other artists, younger artists, get their work shown.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Kind of that mentorship.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I mean, John Valadez is— Well, you've met him. He's a pretty shy man.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: In fact, he's the antithesis of Carlos. And they were very close.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They liked each other a lot, and the reason that I think that John liked

Carlos so much is that he admired him. He would have given anything to have had his kind of ease with people, his ability to promote himself, to be sophisticated and glib. And John just wasn't that at all. And I think without somebody like Carlos pushing us to help showcase other people that it would have taken John longer. I think his talent is so remarkable that eventually it would have been impossible to overlook.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But the fact that he had somebody like Carlos saying, "We have to show with this guy. He has to be in our next show." "Yeah, fine, the stuff's great, sure," and it helped. We as a group influenced a lot of careers, I think, when they showed with us.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see. What about the interpersonal stuff between people in the group? I mean, what were, as you saw it, some of the strengths and some of the things that maybe limited where Los Four could have gone.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think all of us always had a very different vision about what it could be and what it should be, and that's why we fought. Carlos saw us as a social experiment—in my opinion. He wanted us— I mean, he even had a collective house where William Bejarano and some other people—Leo Limon, I think for a time. They all lived together. They tried to live together in a house in a commune—you know, where you buy food and pay rent and just live like a family in a house. And I think Carlos saw Los Four as well—or he wanted Los Four and our activities—to be the social experiment to prove that Marxist ideas really were valid. He was very much a social scientist in a way. Magu, of all of us, I think was the most street, was the most vato loco or the most home boy. He always was. I mean, he was really a guy from East LA, very home boy. But a brilliant artist and a great mind. He's a very intelligent man. I think his weakness—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Such a heart, too.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Very, very— If he ever had a weakness, it was women. [Laughs.] Just couldn't seem to keep his hands off them. Outside of that, he was— He was also I think among the four of us perhaps the most romantic soul. I think he had this utopian vision of how Chicano life should be, and it was a very nationalistic point of view. And he used to get on Frank's case a lot, because Frank is more acculturated—was much more acculturated than Magu, but not as sophisticated as Carlos. He was sort of what a lot of Mexican Americans are—you know, neither fowl nor good red herring. He was just sort of that— Yeah, he understood Spanish, but he really didn't speak it. He really wasn't into his cultural identity very much, and he was more interested in being an artist. They used to fight about that, because he was too agabachado. [Laughs.] They'd fight about that, and then—

JEFFREY RANGEL: He and Magu would?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And Beto? Beto was just—he was in his own world. Brilliant, brilliant printmaker. Ah. He used to print for Gemini. He was a resident printer for Gemini Studio when it was open. And his work was remarkable, but I think it was more— I mean, not more, but a lot of his imagery was a result of his mental state. He's always been mentally very fragile, and in the mid-seventies he just broke down. I mean, he stopped eating, and they'd rush him to the hospital. He's always been emotionally extremely fragile, and in those days he held it together more, because I think the three guys gave him strength. But later on that wasn't enough, and his mental condition—whatever his— I don't know what his problem is, but I just know emotionally and mentally he was always very fragile.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was he closer— He was closer to Magu than he was to—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think he was closer to— Yeah, I think he tolerated Frank. He certainly tolerated me—or didn't tolerate me—and I think he liked Carlos. He admired Carlos, but he wasn't as close to him, because he was more Mexicano actually.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Beto was.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He was very metaphysical. He would talk about— And he used dope like everybody else in those days, but he would talk about dream states and cleansing himself in one of those sweathouses that Native Americans use, and he was always much more into the kind of Native metaphysical understanding of the earth and his position in it. And I think that's why Carlos enjoyed talking to him because it was a perspective he didn't have.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But he wasn't as close to Carlos as he was to Magu, because they spoke the same language. And then certainly I always felt closer to Carlos than the other three. Frank and I have always kind of had an antagonistic relationship, because he can be such an asshole sometimes, and I wouldn't stop myself from saying, "You know, you're really a jerk, Frank." So we would argue about that, but— Yeah, of the three guys— I mean, I love Magu. He's a darling man and just a lot of fun, and I respect him enormously—his work is wonderful—but his attitude about women used to get me down, because he was really pretty sexist, and still is I think. But Carlos was kind of, I used to think, almost the perfect neurotic blend of things. You know, on one side he was political and he was artistic, and on the other side he was also shallow enough to worry about other kinds of things that made him very interesting. I mean, anybody who's totally normal, who doesn't have some sort of neurosis is not interesting to me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And Carlos had enough neuroses to be just endlessly fascinating. You know, he was bisexual and then he drank and then he didn't drink and then he smoked and then he got married and then— He was just endless contradictions. And he loved to talk. And he and I would just talk about— Since we had similar kind of reading tastes we'd talk about philosophy and literature, and then he'd break out his guitar and we'd sing old Broadway tunes. [Laughs.] And [ph: rancheras], whatever else came to mind, so it was a very— Yeah, I enjoyed him very much.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So what's the creative catalyst like?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: What's that?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Between the five of you.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, we worked together; we'd all be in a studio together—we had a couple of places where we all worked together in a big studio—and you can't help but be influenced. I mean, you walked around the room just on your way to get some coffee, and you'd pass a couple of other people that are building something or making something or painting something and— It's a great way to work. I still to this day feel a little funny if I'm in a studio by myself. It seems very lonely. I don't mind having somebody else there or a few other people there. John Valadez in particular always had a wonderful taste in music. [Laughs.] He sort of controlled the stereo.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And he put on all kinds of stuff, and he was really ahead of his time. He'd play all kinds of stuff—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I remember him telling me he was really into reggae for a period.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, we got reggae-d out for a long time. Turn that off! But that's political music—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —and so I'm not surprised it didn't appeal to all of us, but he was excessive. But we listened to music, and then we'd eat together, and it was just— You know, the exchange was so subtle. I don't think it was ever really— We never sat and talked about art. I think that's one of the real—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —the real misconceptions about us.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, I've heard about these kitchen table discussions that were—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They were about everything.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —that supposedly took place at Frank's house.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: All the time, all the time. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: But I'm just getting the sense that at this kitchen table the foundations of Chicano art were being sort of worked out.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Only incidentally, only incidentally.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Huh.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's wasn't a very conscious process.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I thought it was like an agenda.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No.

JEFFREY RANGEL: You know, like [snaps fingers] this is what we're about.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Art, no. The politics were the agenda. The art was incidental to the politics.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Run that by me again.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We would talk about— For instance, when we knew we had to do the mural for the second convention, when we were fighting about it at Frank's kitchen table it was who was going to design it. On the first one, Carlos had been the designer and we worked for him, and so we were fighting about who was going to design—who was going to be the leader and who were going to be the followers on the next one. So I went—

JEFFREY RANGEL: So it wasn't like it was a collaboration in the design.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, I mean, I think we're all artists enough to know that, what is it, a camel was made, you know, the animal was made by committee or something? [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: I've never heard that one.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The camel was something that was made up by a committee. I mean, who would be an animal like that together?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Okay, okay.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Too many people's ideas.

JEFFREY RANGEL: All right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think we— You know, we understood that you have to have someone who sets the creative tone. It was also a way for us to understand and learn how the other worked, and that was a conscious decision. We all thought— At some point in time we each had to design something [that] the other people work on, because when we do murals together there has to be— I mean, we were artists enough to understand it had to be plastic consistency on the two-dimensional surface. Magu can't come and paint like Magu in this spot and have Frank paint like Frank in this spot. Otherwise, it's going to look like shit. You know, somebody has to design it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They're the director, and then you do what they say. "We're painting it this way."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, okay.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And you talked about the content, you incorporated people's ideas about what the design should look like, but somebody designed it. I mean, the murals that Carlos and I did in Hazard, in Ramona Gardens Housing Project— I don't even know if they exist anymore.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, they do.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Do they? They're probably really— They're old, but they're really messed up. When we did those, I helped him on his first. He designed his and I was his assistant.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Which one was that? Do you remember?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: La Adelita? So he designed his wall and I helped him. I painted exactly the way he told me. And that's a good experience to work that way. Then when I did my wall, I was the leader and he helped me. And he did it my way. We consciously gave ourselves experiences like that, where— Like that big wall along—near [inaudible] Junior High, near Figueroa. The Figueroa Street mural that he and Valadez did.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I'm not familiar with that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't even know whether it exists anymore. With flying tortillas.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I've never seen it. I'm not sure if exists.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I've got slides of it. I know Frank does, too. Valadez designed that, and then Carlos worked with him. I mean, we always set ourselves up so that we had to work for someone else, so that we could integrate our styles and work— We could make a product that was consistent visually.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So in the end there's a lot of exchange happening in the way that each person's style develops. You begin to incorporate aspects of other people's—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But it wasn't a verbal exchange. It was a doing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right. That's what I mean—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: "Okay, think of it like this." It's like when you're in a huddle with— "You know, all of you know how to play football, and [inaudible] here. Well, you do this, and you go out for the pass, blah, blah, blah." And that's the way we worked. "Okay, I want to do this and I'm going to do that, and you get, ta-da, ta-da, ta-da," and then everybody spread out and did it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I got it.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And it was a way of collectively working, but you can't work without some kind of direction, some agreed-upon direction.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Does that exchange show up in the pastel work that you do later?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It doesn't?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No. We always had our own work. The murals that we did together were collective. Those that we worked together as— I don't think we ever designed one totally on our own. No, I guess Carlos's, the ones he did on that neighborhood center on Soto, he might have done entirely by himself. But most of the public murals we did we always did in concert with the other members.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What about canvas work?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I mean, Carlos went home to his studio and did his Brides on Fire and his palm trees and Echo Park, and Magu would do his strange little sculptures, his crazy dogs, and Frank would do his thing, and I would do mine. And that was totally separate on our part. Our personal visions were always very different from one another—which I think had to have been influenced by our participation as a collective, as a painting collective. We came back and brought some of the stuff, put some of the themes to our own work. But if you look at our own work: Very different. Magu's approach—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. But I see a lot of similarities, too.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, I—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see a lot of similarities with Carlos and Magu, say.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, probably more similar between either their— Some of their iconography is— Yeah, I think I would agree. And Frank. But if you look at Beto's work and you look

at mine, you really don't see—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think those guys share, in terms of iconography, more of a—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, and then Valadez was on his own.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very on his own. Yeah, so it was — I guess it just depended, I mean, I don't know on what, but we all had our separate visions about our personal art.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So it seems like—this may be a point, too— And let me know if you're getting tired, or whatever, if you want to—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Why don't we take this discussion in the car? Get out of here for a while?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Okay, cool.
[Interruption in taping]

JEFFREY RANGEL: We were talking about, well, one of the things that I wanted to ask you about was— We were talking about the generation of iconography and the way you guys kind of worked with one another and yet maintained your own styles and stuff like that, and it seemed to me to be a good point to talk about the reception of Chicano art or the reception of—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The lack of reception.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —or the lack of reception. [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think that's the most troubling thing. I think one of the reasons that I took such an imposed, long retirement since coming to Chicago is that after struggling for twenty years before I left—easily twenty years—of doing what I thought was some pretty darn good work, only Carlos—and that was only by sheer ambition—was able to really earn his living as an artist. We always got good critical reviews. Even people who didn't like quote/unquote "ethnic art" always said good things about what we did. I always got good comments, great comments about my work in particular. I never could sell the goddamn stuff. Nobody wanted to promote it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [What's that about]?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know. It wasn't fashionable. It wasn't eighties. It wasn't what people were doing. I'm a figurative artist and people didn't want figurative work. That's what galleries thought. So I just couldn't do it. I couldn't get it to sell. And museums— I guess one of the real blows to me personally, maybe my ego more than anything else, was when we first moved here, I had just packed up my studio in LA, and we moved to Chicago. So all the work was relatively new. I had just finished doing it in LA and brought it— Some of it was still there; some of it was here. And that's when they were—when what's her name—Livingston, Jane Livingston, and her buddy John Beardsley—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Beardsley, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —were putting together that first show at the Smithsonian, because when they finally— You know, they talked to me in LA about it, and when later that year, in '84, I guess it was, when they wanted to pick a piece for the show, because I didn't have anything new, they kind

of lost interest. I was looking forward to being in that show. And I wasn't.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was that the Thirty Hispanic Painters one?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It was the first big show. I forget what it was called.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I think that was like '84 or something.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it was '84. I was supposed to have been in that. And because when Beardsley called me and said, "We want to come and see the new work in Chicago," I said, "Well, I really haven't had a chance to get anything rolling. You saw the stuff in LA What do you want?" "Well, we were hoping for something newer—" [ph: Dot, dot, dot, dot. OR? Da, da, da, da.–Ed.] I wasn't included, and I thought, "Hey, wait a minute! It seems to me I was a part of that whole scene, and you're not going to include me, just because I don't have anything new!" I thought to myself, "I don't believe it. Fine, don't include me." I was just pissed beyond belief. I thought, "Why? How can you dismiss someone who's been a part of the thing for twenty years, one of first people to be—one of the founders of a movement, and you don't include her because she doesn't have anything new?"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, that doesn't make much sense.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I was just appalled, and just burned up and hurt, and I just said, "Okay, fine. Fuck it."

JEFFREY RANGEL: So that's one of the things that put you on hiatus for a while?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I just said, "Fine. I guess that's some kind of a signal from you guys that you don't value what I do. You don't care about what I do. You don't care about what a lot of us do. Fine. I won't bother you anymore." It was very disappointing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I can imagine. But there were shows before that—say, the *Murals of Aztlán* show.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, and we had been doing those. We have a long history of showing at some good places. But the other part of it, the piece that I could never put together, was selling the stuff, even though it got critically reviewed very well. It just never sold. I had a show in New York. Didn't sell a piece. They raved about the stuff: "Beautiful, beautiful. This stuff is gorgeous." But didn't sell a piece.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I can't understand that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't either.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Because in the east wasn't there—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The piece that you saw over my sofa—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Uh-huh.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —was in the New York show. Nobody bought it. And it was cheap! [Laughs.] Eight hundred bucks!

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow!

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I couldn't believe it. I thought, "This is a signal. People are telling me they don't want my stuff. Fine. I'll just pack it up and go home to California and be an educator. I don't have to put myself through this humiliation anymore." It was the wrong time. I don't know, it was the wrong people, I don't know. But it was demoralizing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I can imagine.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I just decided, "I don't want to do this anymore."

JEFFREY RANGEL: And how did you find your way back to it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, people are now beginning to come to me. I mean, graduate students are hunting me down for interviews, and museums are calling up to find if I'm interested in doing stuff, and it's like I've been dug up again, so I thought, "Maybe now is the time. Maybe that was the wrong time" I don't know. I could never really understand it myself, so— I said, "Fine. I haven't lost the desire. I still want to do— I want to be able to leave something for my daughter that she can talk about and say, "My mom was a part of this," be able to have that.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So, yeah. I mean, I'm prepared to start up again. Probably I'm just a little more cautious than I once was about who I trust with what I do.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. So that show in New York was kind of the critical juncture there?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It was a turning point, yeah. I thought it was going to be the beginning of the beginning. And it wasn't; it was the beginning of the end.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, wow.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, I got great reviews. But I didn't sell one piece. I don't know about the other— There were four other people? I forget—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B.]

[Note: JH and JR have moved to JH's office. –Ed.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: You mentioned the shows, reminded me to ask you about the Los Four show at LACMA.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And then you came on—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right after that.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right after that, and it went to a few different venues.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Mm-hmm.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It was at Long Beach, Santa Barbara—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It was different versions of that show.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, okay.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And then Oakland.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oakland was— Yeah. Oakland was the first show of Los Four with five.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Okay.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And wasn't there some controversy around that show [in –Ed.] regards to the way local artists were responding to it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I can't remember. There always seemed to be controversy about everything we did. It was never a clean situation. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Okay. Well, if it's—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I can't remember. I remember, yeah, there was some— I think what it was was the Bay Area artists, of which there many fine artists—you know, our contemporaries at the time who were working—they had not been invited and yet we were, and we were outsiders, so they were starting from you know artists from Los Angeles instead of the home boys.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I think that sort of rankled. It's just there was always something to fight about. But, yeah, I think that's what it was.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see, and the other show I wanted to ask you about was I think it was— Well, the response that you had written to—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: —William Wilson on that one.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Well, I guess just any sort of comments on it. You laugh about it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I know. It was so funny that I had the nerve to write it. Uhh— [Laughs.]. The thing that's ironic, when I seventeen one of the reasons I was able to go to Otis is that I won this scholarship, and it was a sizable one. I mean, not in terms of dollars today, but in the years of tuition that I paid for at Otis. By virtue of winning it I was able to— My parents would have never been able to send me. And it's funny, one of the judges who was on the panel who awarded me that scholarship was William Wilson.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow. [Laughs.] Woo, that's a nice twist.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: The irony— I don't know if he remembered me, but I remembered him, and I thought, "Is this ironic? I'm answering this guy, and he was willing to give me a scholarship." But, yeah, you know, the criticism was so petty and so uncalled for that I just felt impelled to open my

mouth. You know, people like Shifra Goldman just make my skin crawl. That's the bad side of art history, as far as I'm concerned—the people who just— You know, they think their career rises and falls on what they can shoot down, how many points you get for killing something, killing an artist, and it just burned me up. They couldn't talk about this was ground-breaking, that it was a first—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —what the merits of it were, that, yes, as this goes on they expect to see better and more sophisticated things. But all they did was just tear it apart for what was wrong with it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I thought, "Come on, guys, have you got not heart at all, no soul, no vision? You know, you're historians. You're supposed to interpret things. You're not supposed to try and kill them dead."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right. And so that was the sense of Shifra Goldman's take on the *Murals of Aztlán* show?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And I knew her for years.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Just out of context there?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Same bullshit criticism. And what made it more disturbing or more— What pissed me off more about what she said was that she implied that we had sold ourselves out, that in an effort to try and aggrandize ourselves with the establishment the art institutions, that we had basically sold our souls and were kissing their asses so that we could have the show and make ourselves important mainstream artists, and that really, really ticked me. It wasn't the reason we were doing it at all, and I don't never whether she even went to the show, but the whole show— In fact, we had fought you know—we hadn't fought with the museum; we didn't have to fight with them—but we had insisted that the experiences that we wanted their patrons to have—which we knew very well would not be the people who lived in East LA, who had had the experience of having a mural painted in their neighborhood—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They already knew what that esthetic experience was like. [Laughs.] These rich guys on the west side don't know what that experience is like.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And you know it would be something very educational for them to experience, something that they don't get to see every day, though the people of East LA have seen it very often.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And so we thought we'd try as much as possible to recreate that experience in the museum so that people who had never seen artists at work and the process would be part of it. And then Shifra writes all that bologna.

JEFFREY RANGEL: How did you think that panned out—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very well.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —and the process of working as well?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Other than the fact that we were in a museum, we're enclosed in a building, it felt just like it was on the street. People came by and said good things and said bad things, gave us suggestions. [chuckles] You know they did everything people do when they engage an artist and they see them doing something. They feel like they're free to say things, because, "Well, here I am on the street and I can say something to you because you're not in your studio where I can't see you. Here you are in front of me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And so they engage you in conversation. It was almost the same experience. And she just didn't get it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Didn't get it, huh. What about the exchange between artists who were involved in that show? Were you guys working on your pieces simultaneously?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, we were.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And did that create some kind of energy for the thing? Or everybody was just kind of doing their own thing?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It felt like we were in the studio, either in our studio in Highland Park or out in a housing project doing murals together, working on each other's murals. It was the same collective process. It didn't feel any different to us other than the fact that it was inside a museum and it was enclosed and they'd give us drinks from the bar for free. [Laughs.] Little perks for being in a museum. It felt very comfortable. It was what we always did. I mean, here we were getting to do this inside a museum venue. It was fun.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Did she ever respond to your comment?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, she did. I think there was an editorial war that ran through a couple of magazines. After I wrote about her, she wrote about what I said, and then other people picked it up, and other periodicals or something, and talked about what we said to each other.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right. Hm.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But I never spoke to her about it again.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I need to track that down.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I think I have— There's a book I have at home called Community Arts or Community— A big book. He retells—or cites some of the places where the discussion continued after the initial letter writing. And I forget who else picked it up, but, yeah, people talked about it for a while. I guess it opened quite a can of worms, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, and you haven't spoken to her since?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Never spoken to her again.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Hm.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Never liked her. But I thought, "She's important because she's writing about something that nobody else is willing to write about."

JEFFREY RANGEL: She's out there.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, and I don't necessarily agree with how she interprets what she sees or the emphasis of which she gives some things and not others, but at least she was writing about it when no one else was.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But after that I said, "You know, that's it."

JEFFREY RANGEL: So what do you think the strengths and the weaknesses of the criticism of this body of work has been?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That people really have never really understood the context in which it was produced. I think one of the failings of the few people that have written about it is that they are trying to dissect it or they're trying to interpret it via the same means they have when they talk about Western art or other mainstream art without really changing, retooling their thought processes a little bit before they tackle it. It's not the same. It was probably one of the first—the first of the American movements of art that was really fueled— I mean, there have been American political and social movements that included art, but I think this was one of the first artistic movements that really got a push from the social— Undoubtedly, art was a product of the civil rights movement in the sixties among African Americans and stuff, but this is the first huge body of American art that was produced in response to a social/political situation, not the other way around. And nobody seems to get that. I mean, you can't talk about Chicano art or Latino art of the sixties and the seventies, which was predominantly Mexican-American, without talking about them as a people, without talking about why those artists were working. They weren't working— Carlos and I and Los Four and all the other people we knew weren't being artists to be artists. We weren't. We were all soldiers in the battle. We just were. I mean, later in life, as we've gotten older and that time has changed and there are younger folks to take our places— I mean, now at fifty I feel like I am a painter, I'm an artist, that's what I do, but I didn't feel that way at the time. I was a political being. So were the artists that we knew. We happened to serve the cause through art. We weren't organizers. We weren't other things that the movement needed. We provided them with imagery, with a visual symbol for the issues. That was our job. That's how we saw ourselves.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So it's kind of like you guys are interpreting, gathering all the spirit of the times —

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Mm-hmm.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —and then producing imagery which reflects that? How much of that is invested with your personal kind of outlook or your personal stories?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, I think at the time—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Do you know what I mean?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —it was a complete investment. All of us had— There weren't any of us

that had adopted that way of life. We had all been born into it. We were all products of exactly the kinds of things we were struggling against. Struggling against the discrimination, against the stereotypes, against the lack of opportunity in education, treatment of immigrant workers. I mean, all of that was part of who we were. And it was only— And it was the first time that any of our generation had had a voice—had had the voice, the ability, and the opportunity all at once to do something about it. I mean, certainly all my life my parents talked in very subtle ways about discrimination. I remember my mother saying that they had attempted to buy a home in Whittier after the war. My father was a veteran with World War II, and they had wanted to buy a home in Whittier, and when she went to go see about these new homes that were being built, they told her, "Oh, too bad. They've all been sold." Well, unknowingly, her girlfriend, who happened to be an Anglo, went the following week, and they told her, "Oh, no, there's lots of homes here to buy."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Hmmm.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: "None of them—almost— There's still quite a few that you can buy." So she told me mother. My mother was pissed off beyond belief. She wanted to make an issue out of it. [Laughs.] My father didn't want to, but she did. But it's like all these generations of people had suffered those kinds of slights, that kind of discrimination, those kinds of humiliations, but they could never do anything about it. They didn't have— All of those things didn't come together around a set of issues that made them revolutionaries. It wasn't until our generation came when we were free of a lot of the constraints. I think one of the failings of Mexican-Americans has always been is we're too goddamned polite. We're too polite and we're too humble. And if we just— Our generation managed to put— Our innate upbringing to respect authority and to be polite to be hospitable finally was overcome by this desire to recognize and address the things that were wrong.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And, yeah, I think that's entirely where it came from.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So were there moments that for people who you saw that the tension between having that kind of—being that first and foremost political beings and then aspiring to enter mainstream networks or do a show at a major museum or a gallery or move in those other directions? How was that tension played out or not?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That was one of the things that did cause quite a bit of, yeah, tension.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Did you have aspirations for that?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Of course I did. Anybody who says they didn't lies like a dog. I mean, you can't go through the educational system in an American institution, especially at the time—but even now—and not have a standard set for you that is maybe historically the same standard that's always been, or the current standard that's established by forces outside you. But eventually, unless you're just a total revolutionary, total iconoclast, you recognize it as a standard you need to achieve in order to be validated in society for what you say, for what you do. And I think those of us who weren't so blind and so narrow in our interpretation of the revolution understood that the only way that we would have power—not politically, but artistically; which we were still artists after all—the only way that we would have the ability to show our work, to make the statements in a work that we wanted and have that work seen, was to be validated by the larger society. And that meant showing in certain places, being reviewed, being accepted.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was that ever recognized as a front for activism?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, it was perceived as a weakness.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Hmm.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: "Oh, you want white people to like you. You want to be validated by white folks." Well, yes and no. They're still the keeper of the keys. What do you want? You know, when you're not in control of the game, you can't change the rules. I mean, they're just a political reality. You know, we didn't control the game, and if we wanted to be able to put ourselves in a position where we could control part of the game, you had to play the game until you got your piece of it. But that was always viewed as being a sell-out. And Carlos and I used to struggle with that one, because it's like, "Now come on, I mean, either, yes, we can be pure and then we can go down in flames and make no impression on the world or no improvement in our situation whatsoever because we're so fucking pure, or you can soil yourself a little bit and get out there and win some acceptance from people that you think you don't like so that you can have some authority, some power. And that's the only way it's gonna happen—politically or artistically.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But that wasn't a popular viewpoint. That was very vendido, as far as a lot of people were concerned. "No, no, you have to stay pure and eventually you're win." "Yeah, right, when hell freezes over." So in that sense we were more practical, I think. All of us were ambitious enough to want to be validated, to want our work to stand on its own, for people—and I think finally—you know, in the final analysis—maybe it's a very Eurocentric, Western indoctrination, but, I mean, in the final analysis, ideally, I think, anyone from any culture, from Mars, should come and be able to look at what I do and say, "Oh." I'm not going to be there to explain it. It's going to stand or it's going to die on its own. Either it says something that's right, that leaves something that anyone from any culture finds that they can come in on and interpret, or they don't. It's that simple.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It seems like it would lead to a kind of schizophrenia.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Sure.

JEFFREY RANGEL: You know, if you're first and foremost a political being, but at the same time you have these aspirations that are being—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, we were honest enough to talk about it. [Laughs.] And it didn't make us popular. I mean, really, we got some heavy criticism for it, but other people wanted that too. Hell, a lot of those guys became lawyers in the long run.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Mm-hmm.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, Ross, what's his name? Muñoz? Isn't he a lawyer now?

JEFFREY RANGEL: As far as I know.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And guys like that, in the moratorium on the war, and here they're accountants and lawyers and God knows what else. We were just honest enough to talk about what our ambitions were beyond this.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, we didn't spend all our time in schools just so we could live in East

LA in a $150 apartment for the rest of our lives. I mean, there's a bigger world out there. We were looking for equity for our people.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Looking for opportunity, you know. Hopefully the revolution doesn't go on forever. At some point you move on.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right. And it seems like there were a host of people, or quite a few, who were reticent to move on, for different reasons, you know.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I guess the most cynical interpretation was, for me—I guess if they were more giving I might say something else—but I think the people who argued the most and who resented us the most were exactly those people who had only ever found any validation or any voice within the movement, and they knew that if we moved on that to a higher plane then that was the end for them.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They didn't have any more to say. They didn't have any more original ideas or any personal vision. That was their entire life. If you took that away from them, I don't blame them for being upset. You know, I finally have been able to find something in which I can be important, and now you want to take it away from me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I think the people who were like that died away. I mean, they didn't have staying power. And the people who did have something to say beyond that, who continued to reinterpret it in different, maybe less hostile ways or less confrontational ways, are still around.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Maybe they became politicians. Maybe they became educators. Whatever. But the influence goes on. I mean they haven't— You can still talk to Juan Gomez-Quiñones, and he's not going to sound like a Republican. [Laughs.] You know, maybe he's not the same radical revolutionary he was when he was 30 years old, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —he's not some— I mean, his way is more— It's got to be different. I mean, it's not a hit-you-over-the-head sort of message anymore, but he hasn't, I'm sure—I haven't seen him in years—but I'm sure he hasn't given up saying the things he used to say then, but only in a different way.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. I mean, you talk about Juan Gomez-Quiñones it reminds of another kind of question about the interrelationship between the Academy, say, this kind of growing body of scholars, like Juan Gomez-Quiñones, a group of artists, and people who find their identity more as politicians or politicos, just they're more kind of committed to that sphere, and what the kind of movement between those areas are—if they were less defined maybe then, where you would have somebody who's a politician who would do artwork and maybe teach as well, kind of everybody's doing the same kind of work, or if those differences were recognized and adhered to in certain ways.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, I think those differences were— I mean like Carlos was never a serious politician in anyone's mind. He was politically smart, and he knew how to engage people who were basically political and become involved with them and draw from them information and ideas that he needed, but I think all of us— I mean, it's just like in life. Hopefully those of us who are blessed find out what it is you're good at and you do it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And I think that's exactly the way it was in that time, as it is now. People did for the movement what they needed to do to support the issues the way that they could do it, and there weren't many people who had their feet in both, in two disciplines at once.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see. I'm just always perplexed about the relationship between culture and politics and art and politics and the way—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Strange bedfellows. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, I mean, and this seems to be a time when they're so tightly wed that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I think everything is political. I think politics is one of those things that straddles everything. It's everything. Every social issue has a political component. There's just no way to get around it. I mean, politics is in everything, and art is not any different. I mean, the details of those politics will change from discipline to discipline, but the idea of moving as a political animal within that discipline happens all the time everywhere, every generation, every issue. There's always a political twist to everything. People who are smart and know how to play it, to people who are naïve [and –Ed.] don't.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Crash and burn.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, because I think innately man is a political being. I mean, once he wasn't the only person around and there was a group of them, politics started. You know, who's in charge?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Who's got the power?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right. You're following me or I'm following you. Yeah, it's human nature.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. One of the other things that I was curious about and you had mentioned before was about the Concilio.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And I'm wondering— I've gotten bits and pieces of how it came together, maybe what its charge was, but I'm at a loss for the particulars about it and like the range of people who were involved.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And how long, the hands-on kinds of things that you guys were able to address, how effective Chisme Arte was in actually being a voice for that body.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know that by anybody's standards that it was ever very successful.

It made us feel good. [Laughs.] It was fun. It was a reason to get together with our friends. I'm trying to remember— The first—and I don't know if his name was even mentioned to you— Damn, what's his first name? Leonard Castellano.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't even know if he's alive anymore—or where the hell he is.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Neither do I.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But Leonard way, way in the beginning was somebody who had— He helped found Mechicano. And they had sort of started the idea of some sort of arts organization that mirrored some of the organizations that were starting up about mainstream artists, that were politically based and stuff, and I think that it began with him. He never— Leonard was the type of man— He was always— If he wasn't in charge, then he wasn't in it. [chuckles] And so when Carlos — Carlos became kind of infatuated with him, and he spent a lot of time in with Mechicano trying to find out how they had gotten that started and stuff and then— It seems to me that the idea basically started there of expanding that into a state-wide organization, ultimately one over the southwest. I don't think that ever really happened. But because there was this separation between the north and the south, that there was some thought that if we want to lobby for our rightful piece of the California Arts Council pie and the Humanities for the Arts money and all that kind of stuff that the only way we were going to do it is if we had a group that had some kind of political force— and that represented everybody, not just LA artists, etc. So I think that was— And then by that time the idea of organizing and political representation and stuff and working politically that way had become a big part of Carlos' vision, in that he had worked for the farm workers and saw that model and connected with some other people up north who were like minded, like René Yañez and the RCAF. And then it just sort of happened—you know, the idea that we would forget our regional differences and meet as a group of people and talk about—create an agenda that we could all support. Because it was the seventies and people were very kind of not as disciplined as they might have been in another—I don't know. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: What do you mean by that exactly? [Said tongue in cheek –Ed.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We were just too loose, too many drugs and too much beer, and people were just— They weren't— What they were good for was actually breaking down some of these regional animosities that had existed, and sharing all our similar war stories and just kind of creating friendships, and some creative alliances were— I know, down the line René did a calendar where a lot of us all took a month— You know, the RCAF took a month, and some people from LA did months, and so it was a way of finally working collectively across the state. We had tried at one point, I recall, very early on, to meet with the—what was it called?—The Artists' Alliance, which was a California group of mainstream artists. And that wasn't very satisfying. They didn't understand where we were coming from. They were career artists who were either trying to get more money from the arts [or something]. They didn't even have a political agenda as such, and so they didn't really know what to make of us. They were sympathetic, but they weren't very interested in embodying us as a subcommittee or anything. And so it came to pass that we met several times in these large meetings, tried to create an agenda, and Luis— Between Luis Valdez and Malaquías Montoya and—

What's remarkable about Carlos is that he would go around and put these things together, but he didn't want to be the mero mero. He wanted other people to do it. He liked the idea of putting— starting this down the highway, but he didn't want to be driving, and— [Laughs.]. I always found that

fascinating. He worked his butt off to make this thing happen, and he would talk with this one guy and then he'd run and talk with this other guy, from the north and south, and help to put these people together, but he didn't want to lead it, and he wanted somebody else, somebody like a Luis Valdez or Malaquías, and so it happened. For a while it happened. You know, we met on a regular basis and there was Chisme Arte. I mean, that he enjoyed doing because— I mean, he was basically a visual artist. When push came to shove, what he loved to do best was be in the studio. And then we did the magazine in LA, and then, I don't know, it just seemed to lose momentum.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What kind of work did you do on the magazine?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, we'd go up and interview, get any good stories from the north about what they were doing up there, issues up there, and write about it, take pictures. Magu would do things about the barrio, and put out words that people didn't know the definition to. [Laughs.] In Chicano terms and stuff.

JEFFREY RANGEL: With a glossary in the back.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And stuff like that. It was just very— And then it was just a revolving editorial door of all kinds of people writing stuff and artists who participated. Leo Limon was just a kid then. He was just a kid! He had just come back from the Army. And he was a skinny kid in those days. He's a big guy now.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And, yeah, it was just— It was a way to bring ourselves together. It didn't really get us where we wanted to go, but it was a way of introducing everyone to one another and kind of getting rid of those regional—not all of it, but breaking down those— Because there was the north and there was the south and never the twain shall meet, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: What about out of state, like—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Never really— I personally never really got involved in that. I mean, I know that all those people were out there—the Corky Gonzales's and all of that kind of stuff, and we'd support the things that became— But California's such a huge place. I mean, it was like an entire universe for us. I mean, other people possibly, who were just political people, got involved with the regional politics in the Southwest, but I didn't see that many artists doing it. It was really kind of confined to California. It was enough.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, there's certainly a lot going on, but it's interesting, too, how you might compare artwork to come out of different regions of the U.S. dealing with similar issues., if not the same issues, and just kind of how that's reflected in the artwork—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —production and stuff like that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I'm very ignorant about what was happening, say, in Texas or Arizona at the time, or New Mexico. California was just— We're very self-absorbed.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, as anybody from Chicago will tell you. [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's easy. It's so big. I mean California's just such a big place. And then people from San Diego— Did you meet—what the hell was his name?—Mario— Mario, Mario, crazy Mario. Mario—

JEFFREY RANGEL: From San Diego?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he and his wife had a gallery for a while. Mario— Damn, what's his name? A real crazy guy.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Was it [ph: Torrero]?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yes! [Laughs.] Did you meet him?

JEFFREY RANGEL: I've heard of him.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You've never met him?

JEFFREY RANGEL: I've never met him.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He's a crazy man.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Totally nuts. [Said with affection –Ed.] And the people from San Diego are very different, because they're right there at the border.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So you had these guys, who were a very different bunch of bananas, very Mexicano because they're right there on the border, then the people in LA, who were like all over the—you know punks who went to the Atomic Café after an art opening, and then way up in San Francisco. I mean, it was such a huge universe, just in California, that—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right, right. So if you were to distill some of the most distinguishing qualities about LA and that time as a bed for cultural production, what was it that seemed definitive to you?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Anything I could say would be disputed from people from San Francisco or from San Diego. [Laughs.] I don't know. As I recall, the thing that was interesting about the artists who worked in Los Angeles is that— I used to— They were the group that was most interested in — Although they worked hard for the political agenda, in the long run I think they were the ones who had the greatest interest in their own careers as individual artists in the long run. And I think probably, if you look at who has survived, probably more of them continue as some kind of force in mainstream art than almost from any— Well, I mean, there's some notable exceptions in the Bay Area: Rupert Garcia.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Such as?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Carmen Lomas Garza. René [Yañez –Ed.]— The people who are artists who have influence. But many more from Los Angeles that have survived with careers beyond that time, because I think that's where their interest was. Maybe it's because it's true about LA or Hollywood people. It attracts a certain selfish soul, who's very self-absorbed and egotistical, but, be

that as it may [Laughs.], it also attracted some very talented people—the John Valadez's, and the Carlos's, and all those folks. And then that new wave of people who I'm not really well acquainted with, Eloy Torres and—

JEFFREY RANGEL: The Streetscapers.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Robert Gilde Montes was almost the next generation [for, from] me. I happen to know him because he was at Otis just as Carlos and I were leaving. And I knew he and Eddie [ph] for a long time, but there's that whole other group, starting with maybe those two guys going forward who— I mean, just a lot of quality, good art was produced by those folks and continues to be produced and have some staying power.

JEFFREY RANGEL: They're all from LA

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it seems like they're all from LA

JEFFREY RANGEL: You know, it's not like it necessarily attracted that personality.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Maybe that environment, yeah, just produced that kind of person, I don't know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Were there institutional kind of foundations there that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think the fact that LA is so big, and there was so much support for what they were doing, even if it wasn't by the larger society, just because Mexican-Americans or Latinos had managed to reach a point because of their numbers to create certain institutions like Plaza [Plaza de la Raza –Ed.]—you know, have people in key positions in other mainstream institutions and galleries that they were able to promote obvious talent. Maybe that was it; I don't know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: San Diego is a little soft on cultural institutions. San Francisco's probably a harder nut to crack.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know. There's a lot more snobbery and elitism that goes on in San Francisco.

JEFFREY RANGEL: San Francisco also seems to be a place that is enamored with itself, in a way that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very much so.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —doesn't connect into larger networks quite the same way that LA does, especially international ones.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I think that's right.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So maybe that is something that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I think you're right.

JEFFREY RANGEL: —allows people to make that move. What about Plaza? How was your experience there? What did you do? Who'd you work with?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, I always had misgivings about that place. It's always survived. I guess it have to give it points for longevity. I always thought about it a little bit as the salve that eased the conscience of certain politically liberal white folks and successful Hispanics, who felt they needed to support something, but they needed to support something respectable.

JEFFREY RANGEL: What was so respectable about it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, it wasn't some off-the-wall kind of thing. It wasn't radical. It was just there to be a cultural—showcase for East Los Angeles, to have the best of our culture displayed—you know, dance and art—and to pass culture onto kids, and that's the kind of stuff that you can raise money for. And as a consequence, I mean, although it survived all these years, what it's done is very kind of— It's nice, but it's not particularly consequential, I think, in the long run. I mean, it's never given rise to some great artists, as result of bringing them along, and never created a situation where artists could come and work in studios and use— I mean, and to really support an artist in a real way. I mean, it's find to give them a show, but how can you do a show if you can't do work?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: A lot of them can't afford studios. Or to have a dance school where people can actually become dancers, and then you can have them perform, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't know. It just always seemed a little bit of like here's a pat on the back for the people who are on the board. But that's my opinion.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And how long were you there?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Actually, I only worked there I think it was one summer and I tell you that was one of the things that turned us off. Geez. You know how they paid us? Larry Ramirez, who was the director at the time, he was— Boy, talk about somebody who just got stuff done. It didn't matter how ràsquache the method.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He would simply— He was an old boy from the barrio. He was just a kind of a worker. I don't know how he came to be director of Plaza, but eventually they tossed him out. But he couldn't get us paid through the normal means, so at the time there were this called—they were called CETA [Comprehensive Education and Training Act –Ed.] workers.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: They were being paid by the government. They only catch was is that it was his daughter. He had a grown daughter, and she was working through some social welfare organization, so we had to go and fill out questionnaires. And you know who one of the people was who did this, too, was Luis— What the hell was Luis's— Luis Perez from Los Lobos.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He was there. He was doing music with us at the time. We had to go over this social service organization where Larry's daughter worked and fill out these questionnaires like we were drug addicts, so that we could get on this payroll.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I've heard this.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Did you hear that story?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, I heard this. I think Elsa was telling me about this.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yes, and that's how we got paid. We had to go and say that we were drug addicts in this rehabilitation program or something so that the CETA checks could be generated.

JEFFREY RANGEL: For some kind of rehab program?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So that we could get paid. Because they didn't really have the money to pay us at Plaza, so we had to do that. So somewhere, in some bureaucrat's drawer—[Laughs.].

JEFFREY RANGEL: You've got that paper trail.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Are you going for public office at all?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I thought, "I don't believe this. I don't believe we're doing this. We're going and lying about that just so we can get a goddamn check. I don't believe this."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That was pretty weird.

JEFFREY RANGEL: But at the same time what I've heard about Plaza— The people who were there simultaneously, it's just an amazing collection of artists.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, we've all passed through there. Because they had jobs, they had some money, and when you're a young artist starting out and you're trying to balance the eating and buying stuff to paint with, yeah, they had jobs to offer and stuff, a certain kind of support, but—

JEFFREY RANGEL: So is it a misconstrued notion that the fact that you folks were all there at the same time that there's going to be this fertile exchange of ideas? Or that there's this collective sense of commitment to working with youth who are coming through those programs?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I don't think so. I think we were just there because it was one of the things we did to have a paycheck come through so we could keep ourselves going, and it wasn't that romantic. It was really pretty practical, the reasons that we were there. The fact that a lot of people whose names have lasted beyond their employment with Plaza is just kind of one of those historical happenstance. You know, it's like the twenties in Paris, you know, you have in a hotel bar Hemingway and Lillian Hellman and Dorothy Parker all sitting around talking. You know, it just happened that all those people were famous writers, just like— You know, that's what happened. I mean, we passed through there, but it was like just one of those historical flukes that all those people also happened to be—went on to do other things. I don't know. I don't know how to explain it personally. I really don't.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Were there other spaces, cultural centers that you thought provided that kind of atmosphere?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No.

JEFFREY RANGEL: No?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, there weren't. It was the only really established place there was, and it struggled along. I mean, they didn't really have time to engender any kind of camaraderie or anything. We were there to help them pay their light bill and stuff, getting these kids through these classes and stuff, and meeting our agreement to do certain things, and there was no real interaction, no exchange. It wasn't—

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Karen [Boccalero (Sister Karen) –Ed.] was what made that special. I mean, that was her baby. You know, she had talked her way out of the convent to run this thing, and because it was a one-person— Like Judy Baca's operation, it was the force of one person's will that found the money, that organized, that made this thing work. And her people, the people who worked with her for many, many years, were her friends. They were her family. They relied on her for everything. She'd fix their papers if they came from Mexico. She found them a place to live. I mean, she wasn't then doing social work. It just happened to be social work through the arts. But Plaza [Plaza de la Raza –Ed.] wasn't like that at all. It was everybody's political football. Anybody who wanted to associate themselves with some kind of Hispanic good deed threw money at Plaza or did something with it just because it was the only thing to do.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Probably the people who were more radical went to Karen, because she was really more grassroots. She was not compromising at all. She didn't kiss anybody's ass to get money, and she just ran that place through sheer will. And it was very successful. It was very different from Plaza, very different. And the artists there were very devoted, very— Yeah, they were very devoted.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And they're both still going.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Yeah, it's great.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's interesting that both those kinds of institutions can survive.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's a big world. There's room for everything. But, yeah, Plaza was, I don't know— Maybe it's different. I don't know. It's been so many years. I grew up in Lincoln Heights, so I remember a time when it wasn't there, but that was years ago.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, it's growing.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Isn't Frank [Romero –Ed.] on—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, I think he's on the board of directors or something like that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. So back to some of your personal work and stuff. I was reading in an article or an interview you've done that you think of yourself as a draftsperson first and foremost.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.] I'm a drawer; I'm not a painter. Yeah, in English there's no word for somebody who's primarily someone who draws. When you say painter people have a vision of a fine artist whose medium is paint. My medium is not paint. I draw. [Laughs.] Fortunately, somebody created pastels so I could do what I do in color, but if they hadn't I'd be using a pencil. I'm not a painter. I don't handle paint well, I don't think. I mean, not well enough that I want to tell people I'm a painter and paint and do it professionally. Carlos was a painter. You know, you have a certain affinity for materials. That's why people do different things. There are sculptors, printmakers who like process. I hate process. I can't stand the idea of not being able to see what I'm doing for 24 hours. [Laughs.] It's just like, God! How could you stand it?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I put my hand to the paper, and the minute I move it I see the result of what I'm doing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's immediate. It's wonderful. It's exactly the way— That's what feels best. And to have control over that line. There's no accident. Nothing's going to drip. No accident's going to happen. [Laughs.] No happy accident, no tragedy that I don't make myself.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So maybe that's kind of being a control freak, but, yeah, it's what I do: I draw. It's just seems the purest form of art. It's the basis for everything. It's like learning the alphabet for writers.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That makes sense.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very— Yeah, it's the foundation of it all.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yet you've done a lot of murals, too.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I know, but I never considered that painting. It's not about technique. I mean, it's not about the quality of paint, like if you look at somebody like a Titian or a Velásquez or a Vermeer, where the quality of the paint, the way it's applied to the surface, is so beautiful. It's just heartbreaking the way he had this wonderful stroke. It's a miracle. I don't do that. I mean, that's not what I do. Carlos was very good with paint—very good with paint. But, yeah—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I was just curious about that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.] Yeah, yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I wondered if you had any—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, I like sculpture, too. It's just that it requires a bigger environment to do. But I always liked sculpture. I like working in three dimensions. But murals were— Murals are kind of— They're like giant graphics. I mean, they're something that you plan. They're not as emotional as studio work. They can't be, by virtue of their size. You have to control the surface a whole lot

more. There's less opportunity for some happy accident and a lot of opportunity for tragedy if something is off scale.

JEFFREY RANGEL: True.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's a lot more about controlling what you do and, therefore, whatever emotion there is involved in mural painting, it really has to do with whatever imagery you've chosen and less to do with the application and the quality of the media with which you've done it. It's much more about the image. It's totally about the image. It doesn't matter about the paint. It matters [about –Ed.] the image.

JEFFREY RANGEL: So as far as Chicano art goes, do you think that there's been an inordinate amount of attention paid to murals?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Mural art?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Or muralism?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, absolutely. But, on the other hand, you can't bite the hand that feeds you. If we hadn't done murals, nobody would be— Well, it would have taken longer for them to look at us. That's what helped put us on the map. I think if anybody ever wants to give us credit for having done anything, I think that we opened the door by means of reminding people that Latinos and Mexicanos in particular have been the foremost practitioners of the mural art in the twentieth century. There isn't anybody who's ever been better than they have—from Los Tres Grandes to Mujeres Muralistas —you name it. As a group of people that has been our thing—monumental, two-dimensional image. Absolutely. We're the kings of that. And if that's what it took to put us on the map, that's great. But there's a whole lot more to those people. That isn't all that they do.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And they discovered that of Rivera and Siqueiros and Orozco and Tamayo and those other guys, but they never have seemed to discover that about us. You know, they're more than the sum of their murals.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: There's a lot more to them than that. They just never seem to grasp that.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Think that's a matter of time? Stereotype?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. I mean, eventually everything has a cycle, I think. Figurative art will come back into fashion, and they'll go, "Whoa!" I mean, because if you look at the work of Hispanics by and large across the board we don't tend to be minimalists or nonobjective painters.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We tend to be more visceral.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Narrative in that way.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, very much more narrative, very figurative, so it's—It just seems to be what you're most comfortable with as a culture. I mean, just philosophically if you look at the

writings of a guy like Octavio Paz, or you look at the literature, it isn't Nietzsche, it's not Kierkegaard. [Laughs.] It's not that kind of stuff.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We're a different kind of folk, coming with a different passion for living.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's true.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Expressing very many of the same themes of disenchantment, of being disenfranchised, of being lost—a lot of the things that Existentialists talk about—but represented in a very different way because of culturally the way we are.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I like that idea.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We're deep; we're just deep in a different way. [Laughs.] It always burns me when people talk about philosophy as if philosophy happened in Europe, but fuck, you know!

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Philosophy happens where two guys get together and disagree about something. It's just that you haven't read about it, that's all. Or the fact that it isn't said the way that you're accustomed to hearing it. And personally I find it too hard to get to those guys. It's too obtuse.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, Sartre is about as much as I can take. Those other guys I just read and I go, "Phhw! I'm sorry, I don't get it."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, I get it, but it's depressing.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's not like you can't—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, it's got— Tell it to me a different way. I mean, the fact that we as a people can do something like Day of the Dead—in the way that we do it. If you can't see that as a very profound way to celebrate death and to integrate the idea of a life cycle and the importance of life and death and existence, boy, you're missing the train totally.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Big time.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. And you don't have to be a damn philosopher to get into it. [Laughs.] This is what always makes me angry about— I guess one of the things that has made me angriest about being perceived as a— What is it this teacher called us? They took us downtown for a field trip once when I was in high school, and she said, "Now, remember, people will think that you're from a disadvantaged background," and I thought, "Wait a minute. Disadvantaged in what way? That we don't have a lot of money?"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: "Right. But in any other way? What are you, crazy?" I could never

understand why people have ever been presumptuous enough to believe that African Americans and Latinos from their historical backgrounds, if you bother to study them, have not presented ideas and come to conclusions as profound as anything written by Greek philosophers or—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Big time.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But you don't know about it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I think it goes back to what you said before about the way that it's presented, and what gets construed as either high philosophy or high art or high culture or—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Or frivolity.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Folk.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Folk. Oh, that really burns me up. Yeah, when we're really— I remember when— What's his name? I don't remember the man's name. He saw our stuff. He saw the murals of Aztlán. A wealthy guy. I remember he lived up in Malibu or something. I forget what he was— Danish, Swedish, something. Carlos talked to him—another person Carlos charmed. And when he went to Europe— He was an art collector and when he went to Europe he went to [Boborg] on our behalf and proposed an exhibit there. And I remember he showed us the response from Boborg, and they said that it was very interesting, thank you for the slides, but they didn't do "folk art." [Laughs.] And it was like, "Geez."

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's seems like a hard label to shuck.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Yeah, they don't see us as bona fide, one hundred percent professional artists. They think we're some kind of little campesinos sitting in their village in front of their house carving or painting. [ph: Come on! C'mon!]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Do you think that had anything to do with the way that your stuff was received in New York or in those other shows?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, because it's funny. The people who went to see it really liked it. The critics who reviewed it, reviewed it well.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think what makes or breaks whether or not something is a commercial success is how much the person who is promoting it believes in it. And if you don't understand it, if you don't know what to say about it, if you don't know how to promote it, then it's not going to sell. You may have the best waffle iron in the world, but if you don't know how to tell somebody that it's better than the next one, they're not going to buy it. [Laughs.]
And I don't think anybody has ever really— I think people know more about how to promote African American art now that it exists in great quantities. Because I think the only thing that's ever stood —and my African American friends might dispute this with me—but I've always thought that between white folks and black folks in America the only thing that's ever stood really between them — And I mean tragically enough. I mean, their culture was ripped away from them. Nobody will dispute that. I mean, that's why they don't speak their own language and they didn't know their own history and their own customs and stuff until they decided to investigate, since civil rights. But prior to that, when they got here they got off the boat and, boom, they stripped everything away from them. And so for those 500 years the only thing that has really separated white folks and

black folks is the fact that they're black and white. They share the same culture. They share the same language. They've gone through the same experiences, good and bad, together for all this time. And the only thing that still separates them is the color of their skin. It's like Ireland. You're Catholic and your Protestant. That's all that stands between those people. They are all Irish! They are all white! They are even all Christians! [Laughs.] Only you're Catholic and you're Protestant. And I think that even in that animosity what has enabled African Americans to be go into the bigger institutions and have meaningful shows and have white liberals get behind their thing and promote it and say how wonderful it is now is because there's no cultural translation they need to go through. They understand these people. They've lived with them for 500 years, they speak the same language, they have the same history together, and they don't have to translate anything. Now they just have to acknowledge that they're—

JEFFREY RANGEL: They have a shared history in the same sense that Latinos or Mexicanos in the U.S. and people who came to the Southwest share history. I think it's the way it's presented that's radically different that creates more of that gap than skin color—as well as skin color.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think white folks see us as being—have always seen us as having a dual loyalty. While we may have been born here, we're still loyal to Mexico, too. We talk about it a lot. We only live a few feet away from it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We speak the language.

JEFFREY RANGEL: For sure.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, we get the constant infusion of immigrants that support that dual loyalty, and I think they have always— They haven't known what to do about that, because they don't want— I mean, blacks have had to get into their trip totally. They didn't have another choice, didn't have another option. All of their stuff got stolen from them.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: We have always had another option. And I think there's always been that unspoken resentment about, "How do you deal with people who aren't a hundred percent American?" You know, they're—

JEFFREY RANGEL: And that goes right down to the reception of culture.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Of what they do, yeah. That's why it's easy to simply relegate what they do to folk status.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I think when you think of them as immigrants, then it's—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right. They're not capable of producing that stuff, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right, you just take the next step.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Exactly. It's easy to devalue what they do or to minimalize what they do to some other status that is less than. I don't know. I could be wrong. I'm probably full of shit. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: I love those final qualifiers. "Everyone seems to—but then it could have been some way else. I don't know. What do I know?" [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Who knows? Who knows? I mean, it's always been hard for me to put myself in there—although one of the things that I've always thought about those of us who've had some marginal success in the larger society is that we were able to cross or to adopt or to absorb or to learn how to behave and how to think and to act with white folks in white society. They never learned how to do the same for us. They didn't come to East LA and stand on the street corner and talk. But I can go to East LA and feel relatively comfortable, even though it's— The more you get away from it, the harder it is. I think you become more judgmental, unfortunately. But I can do that, but then I can also go to somebody's home in Brentwood and feel completely comfortable talking to them, and not feel intimidated, but— And so that buys me some understanding of where they're coming from.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I see.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But not a complete understanding of where they're coming from. I can interact with them on their own level and feel some level of comfort, but when they're not one of your own people you never really know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You never really, really know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And so, while I think I understand where they're coming from and have spoken to them in their own language and really felt as if we'd come to some understanding about one another, sometimes people surprise you—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Sure.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ:—and you think, wow, we didn't understand each other at all. At all.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: So I don't know. That's why it's hard to tell about people. That's why they're so endlessly fascinating and frustrating.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Because you [never know].

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's why it makes my job hard.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.] I can imagine. Have you talked to any of the people who were curators and stuff who were involved in Los Four shows and their take on—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Not yet.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That might be interesting.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Not yet. I haven't—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I would love to know what they thought—you know, what we were like and what we did and why they did it and where they—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Some of my colleagues have done that.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah?

JEFFREY RANGEL: They have begun to sort of write about that more investigatively.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: That would be very interesting. Since the midpoint of the century, I think arts administrators have had so much influence and so much power about what is seen and what is promoted, what is not as promoted that— And nobody ever writes about them. And I think that's a part of the story that's missing. That would explain a lot.

JEFFREY RANGEL: One of the things I am trying to dig up along those lines are the different avenues of funding, like you were talking about: while you're at Plaza getting some kind of CETA grant for drug rehab to make those things go.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.] Right.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I mean, I think that's an important part of the story that doesn't get addressed so much. The problem right now, I think, with where we're at is there's so much work to be done that it's really about just still doing the groundwork, at least for those more specific channels. Like I was saying, some of the things that I'm interested in, the networks of artists, for me it's intriguing, but I also think it's really important to talk about an arts movement. I mean, how are you going to define an arts movement? I mean, it's really difficult to draw the parameters on what is and what isn't, who is and who isn't, and so I'm trying to think about those networks of relationships as being a more effective way of thinking about it. But that channels into funding and it channels into how somebody's able to access different types of funding versus not. It channels into those notions of the taste makers and the curators and the gallery owners and the people who consume it—how that shapes what is recognized as a body of cultural production.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it's true.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's a lot to take on. When I first started this that's what I thought I was going to be able to do. [Laughs.] It's more like a life's work.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I was going to say in the next fifteen years you might be able to scratch the surface.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's such a complicated thing. I mean, the idea of art being something you can study, even if you think about it, is a very kind of a Western notion—as opposed to art being an integral part of life, just being a component of what you do, whether it's for spiritual purposes or utilitarian purpose. It's not anything that stands apart from the society.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah, totally. Well, it's been commodified in that way.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yes, it has. Yeah, it has in Western society, because it's been designated as special. It's also has become a commodity.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You saw— I mean, what was that famous—Claes Oldenberg, who had to buy his own piece so that the value wouldn't fall, when it was sold from somebody's estate.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right, right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I mean, that is the absolute epitome of being turned into a commodity.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's a good example. That's a good example.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. But it's interesting. I mean, I'd be interested to hear how you think, having been a participant and continuing to participate, how those people at that level shape how your work is received or not received.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Umm—

JEFFREY RANGEL: What mechanisms of empowerment you have or control or don't have.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Gee, almost none. I think that until the taste makers, the people who control the prestige institutions—like the Whitneys of this world and the Guggenheims and the MOMAs, etc.—remove from their vocabulary and consciousness the idea that what ethnic people do is folk art, nothing much is going to change. The audience will always be significantly smaller. And it's everybody's loss. I mean, if those institutions that have the ability and the money to expose a whole world of people to all different kinds of things in their proper light—you know, not as decoration or folk or whatever qualifier they want to put in it so that it's not on the same plane as, God forbid, Julian Schnabel [laughs] or great Western art—I think that that's always going to be a problem. And I don't see it really changing. I mean, those people are going to die someday, but they're being replaced by people who share the same values.
I think one of the things that disturbs me most about the art world and the people who run institutions and the people who run art schools is that they continue to regard art and artists in really only one way. They don't really see— Although, you know, one would be believe that because they're artists they have to be more open-minded and more visionary and more et cetera. But they're not. They're really much more closed off than one would suspect. Probably you'll find your average geneticist more open to new ideas in his discipline than you would artists and arts people. There was a standard that remains sacred that they adhere to, and as long as that's the case I don't see it changing much.

JEFFREY RANGEL: The case of individualism you mean, that kind of—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, the Western standard for what is good and what is not. Personally, I don't think urinals on the wall of a gallery is high art, but if you happen to do that in New York you can get a show. If you're a John Valadez, maybe you can get a show in LA I mean, to me that seems skewed somehow. That seems wrong. But I don't control those things. And the thing that's really most disturbing is that if you ask the average human being who goes to a museum and wants to see things he can get into emotionally, he'd tell you the same thing. The people in New York who put on these big shows or fill the galleries with the stuff are showing these things to each other, I

think often in a kind of a one-upsmanship. "How bizarre, how irrelevant can I get to impress you, and that you're still convinced that it's something so sophisticated that if you don't say it's wonderful you're going to look an asshole."

JEFFREY RANGEL: Right.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: You know, if somebody would have the guts to stand up and say, "You know what? This is bullshit. This is not sophistication. This is terrible." [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Along those lines, I wonder what you think about kind of that following generation who moved into performative—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Huh!

JEFFREY RANGEL: —aspects and a lot of the you know cutting-edge work now being done?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Performance. I don't know.

JEFFREY RANGEL: In the multi-media—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I may be the wrong generation to ask that question to. I just—I've always felt that if you have inclinations to perform, then you're in theater. That's the kind of artist you are. You're in theater. If you want to work in two dimensions or three dimensions—maybe even video might qualify, too——

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —then you're a visual artist, but I don't think putting yourself out there in a bird costume in a gallery— I don't know. I have real problems with that. Maybe I'm just—I'm too out of it. I missed the boat in terms of the generation that says that they get into that. I just don't—I think there's a place for it, but it's being mislabeled as visual art. It's not performance art. It's theater. And what's wrong with being theater? It's very avant-garde theater. But it's not— I mean—I don't know. I have problems with that. I find it very hard to embrace that as part of my discipline. I just think it's a little too far out of the definition that I understand as visual art. But then, you know—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Hey, there's room for everybody. [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Call it what you will. I guess it can be interesting. I personally don't— I've never seen much of it and never really got— I don't have a knowledge base to look at it and say, "Well, I think it's—"

JEFFREY RANGEL: Viable or not.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, most of it that I have seen doesn't appeal to me. Even as theater it didn't appeal to me. So.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah. Just curious.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But that's me. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Just curious, yeah. So I have to ask you one last question about a kind of sum total Los Four question—the legacy, so to speak, what you felt the most important kind of transformative— Was there anything transformative about it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: For us personally?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Yeah.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I'm sure there was.

JEFFREY RANGEL: And collectively.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I'm sure there was. I mean, I don't think it'd be— I wouldn't be the kind of person I was today if I hadn't been through the group. I don't think any of us would. I can't really tell you how it changed me, how my life or the things that I pursued in terms of art would have changed, because that was my experience. I think whatever good Los Four did beyond whatever good it did for themselves was the fact that it did help raise the consciousness of the larger society that there are artists out there of other kinds doing other things that are valid and valuable to see. But I don't know. History is such a quirky thing. I don't how twenty or forty or fifty years down the line, depending on what else has happened, how we may be perceived, but— I don't know. People at the beginning of something, you always wonder how whatever contribution you make is going to be viewed. I think we just helped put things on the map. We took that first step—which was just something we couldn't help ourselves from doing. It had nothing to do with being courageous or visionary or anything. It was a combination of the right people and the right time with the right abilities who just said, "Let's do this." I don't think it was any more heroic than that. I think a lot of things aren't very heroic. You just do what you do. You know, life presents you with choices, with roads, with paths to take, and you simply choose to take it or not.
I mean, I could have just been friends with Carlos and never lusted to join Los Four. But I did. And I did join them, and it certainly—it involved me in things I never would have been involved in if I had never met them. And consequently I like to think that whatever I brought to the group, that my particular presence as a woman or as someone who did the kind of work that I did, that I affected their way of working or the opinions or ideas that they held. You'd have to ask them, but I think there must have been some impression. But—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Sure. So in the way that it happened it almost sounds like happenstance.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It was. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Does that say something qualitatively about the importance of it?

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: No, because, I mean, if you look at the Impressionists— I mean, everything that happens, there's always a kernel of something that gets the ball rolling, but as people get on board to something it's just who happens to be there. I don't know; history is such a big thing. I think there are very few people who actually make history. I know people always talk about history being made. I guess maybe it's being Mexican, I don't know, I always have a feeling that history is being played out. It's not being made; it's already been made. We're simply playing out what has already been determined that would happen. Maybe that's very fatalistic. [Laughs.]

JEFFREY RANGEL: Fatalistic, yeah. [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: But part of me is I just can't help but think that to be so egotistical and so presumptuous, that somehow we are the captains of our destiny, I don't think so. I just—the world — I think after you live a certain amount of time I think you realize— I think when you're a young person you think you have so much control. You think that you can control everything. And the older you get you realize it and you come to terms with the fact that you control very little.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Very little. And if good happens to you, that's wonderful. You may have had a hand in having that happen. And then you blame yourself for the bad that happens to you, too, but I don't know that you should do either—you know, pat yourself too much on the back or kick yourself too much in the butt—because there's a lot of stuff that you don't have any control over. It just happened. Sometimes you're lucky, sometimes you're not.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Sound like wise words to me.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: [Laughs.] Not wise, but just—

JEFFREY RANGEL: Well, they're ringing true.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: It's what life has taught me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: They're ringing true at this moment.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Good. I don't know, I just think it's true. One thing I never—if I can pin one medal on myself—one thing I've never suffered too much from is ego. I think I have a healthy amount of it, but I've never had the kind of ego that's disturbing other people. Those kinds of perceptions of one's self or anything else really have always bothered me. I just try to— I guess because I come from a really normal family—normal parents, nice people, hard-working people who produced this oddball who's an artist, but my brother's a lawyer, so—

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —they made up for it.

JEFFREY RANGEL: There's a balance in there somewhere.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Right. Sooner or later he'll be a judge, and he'll be a damn good one, too.

JEFFREY RANGEL: [Laughs.]

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: He's a D.A. in Los Angeles.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Wow.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he's a good soul and very strong, very normal, very focused, honest, upright, law-abiding.

JEFFREY RANGEL: Sure. You've got to be.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he's a good man. He's never quite understood his crazy sister, but that's fine. He accepts me.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That's good. That's important. The bottom line.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Anyway— Well, I hope some of this part of it has been edifying.

JEFFREY RANGEL: It's all been really helpful. It's been really helpful, and if there's anything that—

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Do you want me to send you a resume or something? I've got them somewhere.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That would be fantastic.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Because I don't know whether mine is the same as Gilbert's and Frank's in terms of the shows.

JEFFREY RANGEL: I'm sure it's not.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: I may have some that they don't and—

JEFFREY RANGEL: I'm sure it's not.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: —give you a fuller chronology of—

JEFFREY RANGEL: That would be great. That would be really helpful.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Well, also shows that I was in that they were not—women's shows that they weren't in.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That would be really helpful.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: And also I'll send you some slides.

JEFFREY RANGEL: That would be wonderful.

JUDITHE HERNANDEZ: Do I have your address in Michigan or wherever the heck you want me to send it?

JEFFREY RANGEL: Uhh—

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]