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Oral history interview with Barbara Carrasco, 1999 April 13-26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Barbara Carrasco on April 13, 1999 interview took place in Los Angeles, CA, and was conducted by Jeffrey J. Rangel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE A (30-minute tape sides)

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay, this is an interview with Barbara Carrasco for the Archives of American Art. Today is April 13th [1999] and we're at Barbara's house in Los Angeles. The interviewer is Jeff Rangel. Okay. Thanks for taking the time to do this. Actually after a couple of years, it's nice to finally sit down and have a chance to do this on tape. So I appreciate that. The approach that we usually take in these interviews is to kind of sketch a -- They're biographical in nature, so we kind of start at the beginning and talk about maybe your family, where you were born. Where your family's from. How long you've been in the city and just kind of the general background stuff that will get us into talking about art. How you got into that. So, tell me about your family.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Okay. Well, I was born in El Paso, Texas. That's where my mother and father were born. And then I think when I was about a year old, we moved to Los Angeles. And we lived in several places before we wound up at Mar Vista Gardens Housing Projects in Culver City. So, growing up there was really interesting because I grew up - It was such a multi-cultural neighborhood. We had everybody from every ethnic group you could think of living there. Our next door neighbors were Egyptians. We had a lot of Blacks and we had Latinos were living there, of course. But we had - And everybody who lived there had to qualify as veterans. The housing projects were initially built for families of veterans. And my father fought in the Korean War. He was in the Navy and fought in the Korean War. And so we qualified for living there. We were very financially handicapped there. We were living on food stamps. I remember when we were really young. And I was pretty well aware at a young age that there was a cycle of poverty going on there. Because a lot of my friends' parents had lived there, grown up there. That was not the case with my parents. But it was a lot of - I noticed that, that once I got to a certain age that some of my friends got pregnant young and wound up living there and raising their kids there. And my father was a bus driver for Santa Monica Bus Lines. He was really conscious of trying to get us to realize that there's a lot more out there than what we were accustomed to seeing there. He always said that anybody could be a bus driver but not everybody could be an artist. He made me appreciate that at an early

JEFFERY RANGEL: He encouraged that in you.

BARBARA CARRASCO: At a real young age. Because I was in -- I used to draw all the time. All the time. And my father was actually pretty artistic too. He liked Rivera's work. And that's the first time I ever saw one of the Mexican masters' work. My father opened a book up and I remember him showing me one of his favorite paintings by Rivera. I went to Catholic school. I actually got in trouble because I was constantly drawing on the tables in Catholic school.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A sin!

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. Instead of paying attention to phonics they were doing were doing with us, or whatever the assignment, I was always drawing. And I remember -- In fact, I had to repeat the first grade because I was so into my own little world of drawing that the nuns were really upset with me most of the time. I was really - I think that's why I really disliked . . . I started a really strong dislike of nuns because they pointed out to me one time that I wasn't all that alert because I might be eating an inadequate breakfast in the morning. They asked me to get up in front of the entire class and tell the class what I had for breakfast. And so I did that and I said I had one scrambled egg and a glass of Kool-aid and everybody laughed. And I didn't know what they were laughing about. And everybody I guess had toast and orange juice. So that's when I realized that I was so hurt that people were laughing people. I didn't know why. And I ran out of the classroom and I went home. My mother came back with me and she said that that was a very mean thing for the nun to do. She said, "You know we're poor. We do the best we can." I mean, we had like -- So that actually really influenced me later on. I did a piece about that for the Chicano Codices Exhibition that opened up at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco. I did a piece called . . . about growing up in the housing projects and eating imitation foods like Tang instead of orange juice and Spam instead of meat. Stuff like that. But I also thought that when I saw this sort of prejudice against people who are poor, not only from the nuns which was surprising to me, but also from my friends' families. That there was this thing. Their parents wouldn't let them go to the housing projects to play at my house because I lived in the housing projects. And bad people lived there. Or, people who are too poor live there. And so I think I sort of compensated for like my inability to do good academically. I started doing extracurricular

stuff like there was an annual poster contest in Catholic. And I won every single year for eight years.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was it about?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It was about this carnival they had. They still have it. I went to St. Girard Magella Elementary School. It's eight years there but I stayed an extra year. They have an annual carnival. So every year I thought it was great that I won it! Every year. No one wanted me to enter the contest.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you showed talent for art or an affinity for it right from the get-go, it sounds like.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, very young. And I think in fourth grade, I had a nun who was really encouraging me all the time. Sister Mary Ann. She was great because she knew that our family had a lot of financial problems. So she let me attend summer school free of charge. At the time, there was four of us going to Catholic school. I have two brothers and two sisters, but the younger one didn't come 'til later. So she gave all four of us milk free. And I thought that was great because she gave me a little bit of hope there. And I thought the other nuns were a little too harsh and too strict and all that. But she gave me also a lot of books to read about art. And we did a scrap book together on John F. Kennedy, that I still have. I still have that scrap book. And I also have letters from her that are now at Stanford, letters that she wrote to me after Catholic school, because she went on to go to another convent in the Bay area. And that was real great because I got these letters from her saying, just encouraging me to continue drawing every day. It meant a lot to me.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you still keep in contact with her?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, no. She passed away. She was an older, she was an older woman while she was my fourth grade teacher. But then, right after Catholic school, I attended a junior high school, Marina Del Rey Junior High School. And while I was there, in ninth grade, I had an art teacher named Elizabeth Zlotkin. I'll never forget that lady because she used to sign her name EZ. But anyway, she gave me a scholarship to Otis Art Institute.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In junior high?

BARBARA CARRASCO: In junior high. That was ninth grade.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think it was Frank Romero who was talking about that as well. You guys didn't cross paths? He's a little bit older.

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, we didn't. He's a lot older than I am. But, Otis -- I was so excited to go there. But, I had to turn down the scholarship because my mother -- Yeah, good old Mom -- decided that it was unsafe for me to go to Otis. For me to take the bus and go all the way to Otis by myself. I was a fourteen year old. And she thought it was not a good idea. So I had to turn it down. I was really sad about it. I didn't understand why that she would make me do that because I was so proud of the fact that I won it. But I found out later, years later, that my mother's grandmother who raised my mother -- because her mother had died when she was six years old - so my great grandmother made my mother turn down an art scholarship when she was in high school. So, you know how people say that --

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. Repetitive behavior. Learned behavior.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It's sad.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you know that your mom was artistically inclined when you were a child?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I knew that she was pretty good at drawing because she was also a Girl Scout leader. So while I was a member, I was in the Girl Scouts with her as a leader, and so she would do examples of different projects that we were to do. And then I would have to execute them there on the spot. So I was like the guinea pig. And it was a lot of pressure there to do a good job because I was her daughter. But she could draw really well. And I could see that every time. She was real creative around the house like all the stuff in our house. Well, actually, that's another thing that influenced me. My mother was a real admirer of Japanese culture so everything in our house was Japanese.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really? How did she develop that interest?

BARBARA CARRASCO: She said that it's always been with her since she was a little girl. That when she was growing up in El Paso, that she loved Japanese vases and statues and tapestries and all that. So, when I was growing up in the projects, because we didn't have a lot of money but my mother was always buying like pieces of wood and shellacking Japanese posters on to them. I remember her taking the time to do that. That's one thing I really admired her about is that the house always looked really nice, with all these scrolls that were - and the fact that she did it herself was really impressive to all of us. I think we all admired her for doing that. And I didn't realize it until later, much years later, at CalArts, my professor there told me, "You must have studied

Japanese art." And I go, "Why? Why do you say that?" She said, "Because you have this real fine line that's really . . . ." And I said, "Oh, I grew up with Japanese images."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you think that really came through?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. I definitely do.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Unbelievable.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because those clean, precise lines.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Very clean.

BARBARA CARRASCO: And so that was interesting that they could pick that up. Because I wasn't really aware of it that much until I heard them talking about my work like that. There's influences, you know.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's interesting. I mean, from on the one hand, your father is introducing you to the idea of being an artist, or encouraging that and showing you Mexican artists or whatever. And your mom is kind of displaying the skills and techniques and also introducing you to a whole new, a whole different expression in Japanese art. And so that one seems to be pretty powerful.

BARBARA CARRASCO: My father passed away when I was twelve years old - He was thirty-six years old. He died of a heart attack. That was like a real turning point in my life because I was really, really close to my father. And that's when I began to be angry with God. I remember writing a letter to God and saying that I didn't believe in him any more. Because he took my father away from me. And I was angry. I think that's when I started on this kind of angry path that I used to . . . unfortunately. But my mother, I think, started really showing her love for Japanese culture more after he passed away. That's when she really went into putting up all the like scrolls, these Japanese scrolls of the trees and the water color paintings of -- Japanese water color paintings. And then later on, she told us that while my father was in the Navy, he had been stationed in Tokyo, Japan and he fathered two children. So I have two half brothers in Japan, which is -- You know, one of my goals is to contact them. But that sort of -- Also, his death actually in a way was a motivating factor in my life to do really well, because the one thing he told us -- I remember him always saying he wanted to move out of the projects. And he wanted to do a lot more things with his life than he had a chance to do. He kind of prepared us. He said he was going to go on a long trip. But everybody who has known me has said -- Harry and my other friends have told me that my father's death was motivating in that I wanted to carry out some of his wishes. And one of the things he said was he wanted me to make the Carrasco name famous. I didn't know what he was talking amount. I was twelve years old. He died three days before my twelfth birthday. He said . . . he told me he wanted me to go to college, something I never thought of. No one ever talked about college to us in the projects. Even in high school, I mean, all the counselors were getting us ready for technical schools. No one ever talked about college. And so, and my mother hadn't gone to college. My father never went to college. And I don't think anyone in our family, both families, had ever gone to college. So for him to say that was - I remember thinking that, "Why does he want me to go to college?" But after he died, I definitely made it one of my goals, is to go to college. There was a program that bussed kids from the housing projects on the west side and the east side and in the Black area to UCLA. It was a summer youth program. And that also had a lot to do with me wanting to go to college. Because I met Olga Connelley who was an Olympic gold medalist and Henry Bibby who's a world famous basketball player. They were our counselors! So those people -- I was on the UCLA campus at the age of twelve. So that really impacted me later on too when I was in high school. I was in the Upward Bound program and they would take us to UCLA. And during the summer we took college preparatory classes. And that really motivated me to also go to college. You know what I mean? It was real comfortable walking around on the campus. When I was twelve, when I first set foot on the campus, that was the first time I ever drank whole milk. It was sad. In the dorms because we had access to - They would take us there to eat lunch. And I remember being so surprised at the availability of milk. I mean, you could go back for second and third glasses of milk. I was . . . It may sound really strange to people but that's how poor we were in the projects. My mother would get powdered milk. And that was also in my Chicano Codices piece. The Carnation Powered Milk, along with the other artificial foods. Because you could tell right away that it was not real milk. But anyway, . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was your dad saying that he wanted you to make the family name famous and to go to college and to do these things, was that pressure as well? Did you ever feel pressure from that? Or was it more determination and inspiration?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I felt a little pressure but he actually had a premonition that he was going to die young. He told my mother he knew that he would not live to see his fortieth birthday. So, he already had . . . he had all the funeral papers, his plot already paid for. He knew that he was going to die.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's unusual.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. He had three heart attacks. The third one was the one that killed him. But, so he knew that he - He smoked really badly and he had arteries of a sixty-five year old man at the age of thirty-six when he passed away. So I think in a way, it was kind of great that he kind of got me ready for that idea. He said he was . . . by telling me that he was going to go on a long trip and that my mother was going to meet someone, another man, and I'd have to be nice to that man. I didn't know what he was talking about at all. Yeah, I think the pressure was there but I also wanted - there was so much love there for my father that I didn't really look at it as pressure as much as wanting to please him, even in death. To do what he wanted. And my sisters all were like that. We're all three of us were like that. A younger sister who has her own desktop publishing business. She's three years younger than I am. And we lived together in the dorms at UCLA. And that was another thing. My mother used to call us up in the dorms, to make sure that there were no boyfriends up there. We lived on an all girl floor, of course. But anyway, no co-ed for us.

JEFFERY RANGEL: This was where?

BARBARA CARRASCO: At UCLA. We lived in -- My sister came right out of high school to UCLA. She was only seventeen years old on the campus. And I came - I transferred from a junior college, West L.A. College. I went there for two years and then I transferred to UCLA. So we lived together in the dorms for one year and then the second year, my last year at UCLA, I lived in an apartment close to campus. But during that time, I was introduced to -- In high school, I was not involved in M.E.Ch.A. [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] at all, or any really . . . really any Latino groups whatsoever, really. I mean, in high school, I was the homecoming queen. I was editor of my high school newspaper. So I really had an interest in journalism, as well as art. I was in art production classes and I had a teacher, a professor, in high school. He passed away. His name is Mr. Shakagi. And he's the one who recognized in my work that I would do really well by trying different techniques. I did drawings in pencil and he introduced the ball point pen to me. He's the one -- I have to give him credit. He did drawings in ball point pen that were beautiful. That were real delicate. Like Botticelli type of delicate. And so he told me -- He gave me -- He told me to draw with ball point pen. And I think that was the first time I . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: As opposed to pencil?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. Because I had two pencil drawings that were in an exhibit at the museum, at the Music Center. All these high school students -

JEFFERY RANGEL: In downtown.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, downtown L.A. And both of those drawings were stolen. So, that's the first time my work was actually stolen. And Mr. Shakagi told me, "Barbara, that means that you're really good. Someone stole your work." And I remember being real upset about it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Nobody else's stuff got stolen?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No one else's work was stolen; just mine. And I was really, really upset about it because I really liked the drawings I did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What were they of?

BARBARA CARRASCO: So someone out there has them. It was about - I remember doing the drawing of just people. Different faces and people. One of the drawings was all just people and the other one was about technique and so I had pencils and I had shavings, pencil shavings. And I drew those. It was about shadow and form and all that. So that was a nice drawing. So those two drawings are gone.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So this is your art teacher in high school?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, Mr. Shakagi. And he's the one who really encouraged me to really start drawing in ball point pen. So I did several drawings in ball point pen. I had a solo show at the B-1 Gallery years later with these all ball point pen. And it did really well. And people -- when I started doing the ball point pen drawings, they kind of compared them to what the prison artists were doing, the Chicano Prison in-mates. But in fact, I didn't really see the . . . the similarities were only in the use of the pen, not the way it was . . . the drawings were at all. I didn't see that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How were yours different?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think I was sort of trying to create form through the shadowing, like putting the lines so close together that it almost looked like a smudge. I was more into like creating form through real delicate lines and shadows. And later on, I remember while I was still at UCLA, I started in the Art Department, I took this class, a lithography class. And I noticed that if I could draw . . . when I started drawing with Conte crayon and grease pencils also on the aluminum plate, that I could create that same kind of delicate thing. But doing the

same thing with just several lines put together. And I did really . . . I think the work I did there was pretty good actually. I started doing drawings about women. Because in the Art Department, there weren't any women professors at all.

JEFFERY RANGEL: At UCLA? When were you there?

BARBARA CARRASCO: '74 to - I mean, excuse me, '76 to '78. Those two years. And then . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: There were no women?

BARBARA CARRASCO: There were no women professors except one and I took her class I think. I forgot her name right now. She was the one woman professor. Gosh, I forgot her name! And it was kind of sad. I think even right now there's only like one or two in the Art Department. It's still real male dominated. But I was the first woman to be the editor of the Chicano newspaper on campus. The La Gente newspaper. But I also worked for the Daily Bruin. I was in this media internship program. So I did a lot of little drawings and illustrations for them as well as I - Prior to me actually being a student at UCLA, while I was at West L.A. College, I was involved with La Gente because my boyfriend at the time was the editor. Robert Rodriguez. He's a writer now. I did the front covers for La Gente I think for about three years before I was even a student there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think I just saw one this morning over at Self Help.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh really?

JEFFERY RANGEL: I didn't even realize it. Yeah. That that was you. But now that I think about the cover, I think, "You know, that could have been you." Yeah.

BARBARA CARRASCO: What was it of?

JEFFERY RANGEL: It was a figurative piece of a woman, just a sketch of a woman. And I think maybe she was holding something in her hand. A green background. Does it ring any bells?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Maybe it wasn't then. I don't know.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, it could have been. It's hard to talk about something that happened twenty-some years ago.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I want to ask you something about ball point pen. It seems like - Is that the medium that you feel most comfortable in now? The pen and ink?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, not at all. I feel more comfortable painting.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Painting?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I really enjoy painting a lot more because I think with ball point pen, you need a certain amount of control to execute those really well. And because of the bone marrow transplant that I went through three year ago, I don't think - My hand is not as steady as it used to be. And so, with painting I still have a lot of . . . I can control the brush pretty good. There's a question of just the precision of making a really nice delicate line. I don't know, my eyes are not as good as they used to be either. I used to draw, I could do those ball point pen drawings without any lamp at all, magnifying lamp at all. And every one thought I used a lamp, a magnifying lamp. And I didn't. See the person who introduced me to the kind of paper I should have been doing a lot of those drawings on . . . because a lot of it was not archival paper at all. It was just real inexpensive paper that probably by the year 2000, it'll just disintegrate. But Carlos Almaraz bought me a big tablet of clay coated paper. And he said, "Barbara, this is the type of paper that you should be doing your delicate drawings on because it'll preserve, it'll last long." And when I did, I switched from ball point pen for awhile to silver point. And silver point is - well, it's a really old technique but a lot of people aren't doing it any more, like they used to. It's been around since Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. But I just like the way the ball point pen would just glide on that type of paper. And the color wouldn't fade as much as it would on regular paper. So I started working - I did a lot of drawings on that paper. And silver point as well. And a lot of other Chicano artists who saw - They thought I was drawing in pencil, because it looks like pencil. But not exactly but it does look a lot like pencil. I told them it's real easy. You just go to Joey's store and buy string silver and cut it and put it in a mechanical pencil and draw with it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How does that work?

BARBARA CARRASCO: You just buy string silver at a jewelry store, about the thickness of a regular mechanical

pencil, a lead pencil, and then cut it and put it in there. Yeah, there's -- a lot of people really liked it because it's such a delicate technique. But it's been around for ages. I mean, you can do it with gesso too. Gesso, it'll stay on to the gesso real well also. But that's a lot of work because then you have to sand it down. I didn't do that. The clay coated paper's just perfect for that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's good. Yeah, I've seen some of that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Silver drawings?

JEFFERY RANGEL: The reproductions of them in catalogues or books or whatever.

BARBARA CARRASCO: In the C.A.R.A. [Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation] show, I did a small drawing with the coffin. Self Portrait in a Coffin. That was done with both silver point and ball point pen.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, that's kind of -- When I think about your imagery or your work, that's the first stuff that comes to mind. And I know that you've done a lot more than that, and maybe since then, have really developed more of an affinity for painting. Do you think that's accurate? That those are some of your most definitive pieces, or not?

END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay, we're continuing with Barbara Carrasco on April 13th, Tape 1, Side B. And you're telling me about some of the techniques that you liked to use. And you said people weren't doing that very much at that time.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Just like prison art. You know, where they have shows of prison art and low rider art and all that. But I guess because the materials were like accessible to those types, people who didn't have a lot of money. That's another reason why I actually started working with it too, is because it was inexpensive to buy ball point pens and draw on paper. But then when I was introduced to the clay coated paper by Carlos, I realized that buying archival materials is important so that it lasts long. And then when people purchase, then they'll know it'll last. [chuckles] But when I was at UCLA, the student work I did -- I think it's important to talk about the professors that influenced you. Because I had some really, really good teachers at UCLA. I had Jan Stussey who passed away from cancer a couple of years ago. But he was an excellent professor. He taught life drawing. And he was just a really, really good professor. He had us drawing skeletons and we had to . . . The models that we had were like really over weight women, really thin muscular men. I mean, we had a variety of different models. And he really worked us. I remember hearing other art students saying that he was really too hard on the students. He was real demanding. And that's the reason why I took him because I really wanted to learn everything I could learn about the how to draw well. That was really important to me as an artist. And I think he really introduced me to that whole thing of drawing well, drawing the human form and knowing about anatomy.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's real classic training in that regard.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I think every artist should have that training. Even if they choose not to use it later. But just to have it. Just to be able to know all that. And he had us actually grade all our work. And it was kind of strange because no one ever asked us to do that. But at the end of the quarter, he would sit down with the students and tell them why he either agreed with them or disagreed with them. And he was always, always really persistent with me about not trying to be so perfect all the time. He was always telling me, "Barbara, why are you trying to be so perfect, so precise?" He said, "The minute you try to do that, that you rule out all the possibilities of being real creative and being able to be expressive." And I said, "Well, it's just the Catholic . . . . "
JEFFERY RANGEL: I was wondering if that was going to come back to that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. They drilled it into you. Precision, precision.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Color inside the lines.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And so he was always telling in front of the entire class, "Oh, Miss Carrasco thinks her work is precious." He was always doing that to me. And at the very end, at the end of the quarter when he sat down with me, I kind of thought he was a little too hard on me. But this last meeting he had with me, he said that he was hard on because I was good. He goes, "Barbara, I think that you're one of the few art students I've had that I feel confident that you could do anything you want to do. If you go into mural painting, if you go into drawing, painting portraits. You could do anything. I can't say that about most of my students." And it just felt really good to hear that from him because I really respected him a great deal. I saw his personal work at the Greenwall Center. His own work is in that collection. And I think it's - I really . . . I don't know about a lot of art students studying art, but I think it's really important to know who your teacher is and know their work as well.

And there was a professor we had their too. His name was Jim Valerio. And he was an excellent painter. You know, a really great painter. And I think I just learned a lot about color from him. How to really experiment with color. And oils. When I took his class, we were painting in oils. And he was pretty demanding also. And he embarrassed the heck out of me several times. He told me how to really look at the model. In front of the whole class he said, "Miss Carrasco's not painting the model. She's painting herself." That's what he said. I was so embarrassed. It was a nude woman! So I was just so embarrassed. And he showed me. A lot of artists do that. They project the image onto the image their own anatomy and their own person. Sometimes their own personality. That's why when someone's doing a portrait sometimes it won't look like the person that's being painted. It'll look more like the artist. And I saw that a lot in the work of Carlos Almaraz because he had done a series of paintings, of portraits of César Chávez and the farm workers. And it didn't look anything like César. It looked like Carlos!

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] Too much ego there?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And this professor actually said, "Barbara, you really have to divorce yourself from the image, from the person you're painting. You have to really look, really study that image to actually draw it well or paint it well." And I still have that painting that I did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, the idea is to capture the essence of the model . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And to do that, you really have to . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: You have to really look. You have to really study that. Yeah. And he was just really good. They don't have teachers like that any more. And I know there was another person from England. A professor named Ian Culbertson. And he also was Richard Duardo's professor, because Richard was at UCLA. He graduated a couple of years before I did. But I think Richard and I really respected Ian Culbertson because he also was a very demanding professor. And he was really good at doing the critiques. He would tell you really honestly what you need to work on.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What did he teach?

BARBARA CARRASCO: He taught a print making class. And I did the Pregnant Woman and Ball of Yarn in his class. He was really concerned about us learning the technique of lithography which is very, very difficult. Real difficult. Because if you don't mix the right amount of acid, and there's a gum base . . . all these different things, you could lose your entire drawing. I saw other students where their whole entire drawing disappeared. So it's a really typical thing to do. But he told me, he said that you can't really be satisfied with an image unless you feel like you've really honest given it, put all your feelings into it. And he was just the type of person that would really push you to do your best. And that's what I really appreciated about him. He was always there for both really constructive criticism, I'd say. He was never there for -- You know, CalArts, later on when I went to CalArts, I noticed that a lot of critiques were just kind of negative and not real constructive. And I think that's what students need to get that from their professors. But anyway, he was just a really good teacher. And then later, I took him for a painting class. I had him for several classes. And Laddy Dill was there when I was there but I never took his class. And that was the first time I ever saw the male nude, a male nude . . . ever in my life.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A Catholic girl.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. When I arrived at the campus, I was so embarrassed. I remember the first day of class, I actually walked out right away because I was so embarrassed. I never saw . . . . ! Totally nude! And I walked out.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Come on. That was the first time you had seen . . . ?

BARBARA CARRASCO: First time. When I still in college but they never had -- all the male nudes were covered. I mean, they had little loin cloths on them. But the women were totally nude, but not the men. So when I went to UCLA, it was the first time. And I was so embarrassed. But anyway, -- and after UCLA, the first time I really got a chance to really - I was in a couple of Chicano exhibits. The first one was at Self Help Graphics. There was an exhibit there. And that was like the first Chicano art show I was ever in.

JEFFERY RANGEL: When was that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I don't know. I forgot what year that was. That must be been .. . because I graduated in '78. So it must have been '79. But, immediately after leaving, after graduation, I saw two artists working on the Zoot Suit murals. On Sunset and Vine, which was Carlos and John. John Valadez and Carlos Almaraz. I stopped and I asked them why they didn't have a Chicano artist helping them. And they said, "Well, we had asked

somebody else - Judithe Hernández. But she was out of town." And I said, "Oh, well I'm a Chicano artist. I really would love to work with you guys." And they said, "Well, we're looking for someone who's really good at doing portraits." Because there was a big figure of a pachuco for the Zoot Suit play. So I showed them some of my work and they hired me.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was that your first meeting of them?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. That was the first time I met them.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In '79. That's pretty bold.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I just came up to them. No, it was actually '78. It was still '78 because . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: You were still in school.

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, I had graduated already. But it was during that summer when I met them, when they were doing the mural. Because the following year, in '79, the play Zoot Suit opened on Broadway. And I went with the cast to New York to do the art work for opening night.

JEFFERY RANGEL: For set painting, you mean?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No. Just the decorations for the reception. It was not anything dealing directly with the set or anything. But Luis Valdez had asked me to do the art work for the reception. So on the top of this big cake, I had an image of a pachuca and a pachuco on both sides. And the original art work came from a silk screen print I did with Rich Duardo. And Rich Duardo actually selected the images and I did a stylized hard edged drawing, ink drawing, of those two images. And so the poster itself sold everywhere. I only have one left. And so, I put the images on t-shirts. And Gordon Davidson really wanted to -- He wanted to buy the images from me but for such a low price I remember saying no to it. [phone rings]

JEFFERY RANGEL: We'll pause here. [pause] We had a brief interlude there for a phone call. And we were talking about the Zoot Suit image. And Gordon Davidson wanted to buy it from you but . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: I said no to it which was probably a big mistake. I should have said yes because the image then would have been a lot more widely seen. But they were both real nice images.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Ignacio Gomez ended up doing

BARBARA CARRASCO: the poster.

JEFFERY RANGEL: a poster.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. He did the poster. He did the buttons. You know, all that kind of stuff for promoting the play.

JEFFERY RANGEL: How was that being in New York for that opening. It didn't go over too well.

BARBARA CARRASCO: It was panned on opening night. The critics panned the play. There was one critic who really hated the play. He's in this book. I forgot his name right now. Ten of the Meanest Americans. His name is John . . . I forgot his last name. He's pretty well known. But he didn't like the play at all. He thought the play was lacking in direction and a lot of other things. That was really interesting being there. I thought -- I was really excited because I was only twenty-three years old. And I thought it was a great opportunity for me to show my work. And my work was -- this huge that they had. It was on the top of the cakes. So it was all around the rooms. And I happened to make the image of the pachuca, the one woman, bigger than the pachuco. Everybody noticed that! But I became friends with Edward James Olmos and a lot of the cast members who are still to this day friends of mine. So that was really nice to get to know people like that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Had you been to New York before that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, I had never been anywhere in my life. So it was a really great experience. My mother, even at twenty-three years old, was calling me all the time. She's still like an old-fashioned Mexican mother.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And martini glasses are klinking in the background!

BARBARA CARRASCO: And she was like, "What are you doing now?" The whole cast thought it was funny that I had a mother that was so over - what's the word? Overprotective. But I thought it was a really good experience. And I still worked with Carlos and John after that, after the Zoot Suit project. When I came back, I basically was like their assistant on a lot of projects. Whenever John Valadez needed real detailed work, real precision work,

he'd call me up and say, "Barbara, I'm doing this banner and . . ." He was always doing banners for all kinds of different like movie houses and announcements.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He told me about that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: And so I was always doing a lot of stuff for John, let me tell you.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's interesting because he seems to have a real hand for detail. I mean, in looking at his pastel work and some of his paintings, it's really fine.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. He actually thought that I was like almost ridiculously into detail. He assisted me a couple of times on some banners I did for the United Farm Workers - See, during that period while I was a student at UCLA too, almost immediately I was really - I was nineteen years old when I met César Chávez. He came to UCLA to give a speech. I thought he - Seriously, I thought he epitomized what every good Catholic should be about because he was dedicating his entire life to bettering the lives of the most exploited workers in America, which are farm workers. And I immediately volunteered my services to him. I said, "I would like to do anything for you. I draw really well. If you want me to go on a picket line, I'll do that." And I had no idea that I would work with him for fifteen years. Really, seriously I didn't think I would do that all those years but I did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you met him at UCLA?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I was nineteen years old when I met him. I just became a student there. I mean, I wasn't even a student. My boyfriend was there. I was still at West L.A. College. But I was always doing stuff on the campus. And I was part of the welcoming committee that welcomed him onto the campus. So that drawing for the announcement that he was going to speak, the flyer that was done announcing his speech, is at Stanford right now. But I did a little ink drawing of César and he signed it. So that's the only drawing that's in that Stanford collection.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did your figurative principles come through on that? Were you able to render the essence of Chávez in that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. It looks exactly like him. It looks exactly like him. Yeah, thank God. Because I really thought he was - I still think he was a really great person. So when I started working with César. . . and actually I started doing small banners like ten by . . . Ten by fourteen feet was the first one I did. And that was in 1979 when they did the small ones. Anyway, but then, initially César had asked me to consult with him on what kind of images I'd come up with for a banner, for a convention. And the banners were always for conventions. And then later I would do some small banners for like specific rallies or demonstrations or in front of supermarkets. They were always on canvas. They were always different types of canvasses and different weights. But I noticed, because the UFW was not an arts organization, they didn't really treat the art work really well. They a lot of times ruined a lot of really great banners that Carlos had done and that Magu [Gilbert "Magu" Luján] had done, by folding them instead of rolling them up. And then they put them in these storage rooms that had a lot of moisture in the air.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So once a banner was used for a convention or a rally or something, would it ever be brought back out?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, for other events. They used them a lot. The same banner several times. But it's just that it was kind of sad to see the way they were being stored and taken care of. So I decided to - César had asked me to do a really huge banner for a conference one year. I forgot the year that was done actually. I have all this written down, the years. But, this one banner, he wanted a thirty by thirty foot banner done. And he gave me such short notice on it, I think it was two weeks notice, to do something big like that. But I said yes, of course to it because he's asking. I wasn't going to say, "No, César, I won't do that." But I designed . . . I decided to do it on vinyl instead of canvas because of the way they stored the work. And Carlos Almaraz had - I mean actually it was Rich Duardo who suggested that I use these inks that are really good for vinyl, Nasdar inks. They're kind of toxic actually. And so I had a former nun, which is really good because she - That born to suffer mentality is there! And I had several people . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] She helped you out?

BARBARA CARRASCO: She helped me out. We had like less than two weeks to do this big huge banner. And we finished it right on time.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where was the convention?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It was in Salinas. Or Delano. Salinas or Delano. One of those places. And it was about César's five year plan. So I sat down with him. He told me what he thought he . . . how he'd like to see the

banners look and what kind of images he wanted in them. So we would go - we had such short time that I would use people who were in the UFW as my models. Like César's daughter posed for me. His daughter Lu who's married to the present President, Artie Rodriguez. Anyway, I made her pregnant because César was talking about the future and about consumers. So I had her holding a can and then a letter from the UFW talking about what kind of pesticides might be in that product.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So the five year plan was an actual . . . was the platform for the UFW at the time.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And he wanted you to render it symbolically in this banner that you were doing.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. He wanted to expand the UFW nationwide, world wide. So the center piece of the banner was a map of the world. And then the UFW logo in the middle of it. And then on the other sides of the flanking the banner was a thing about consumerism. And then another thing about education. So I had Ricky Chávez, César's nephew, who was Dolores Huerta's son - it gets a little tricky there. Dolores Huerta is married to César's brother, Richard Chávez. So Ricky posed for me reading a book. So I blew that up. And then I had - Since César wanted the farm workers to be self sufficient. So growing their own crops and all that. So I had all these produce all over the place. And then they also had the first - That was the year that they started the first UFW pension plan in Oxnard. So, I had an older friend of mine who's been a long time UFW supporter, he was one of my models, you know, have holding the pension plan in his hand. So it was like done like so - That's how fast. I had a Polaroid camera. Took all the pictures outside and then went to work. And that's the first year I actually started using a computer, because . . . to design the work too, because it was going to expedite all the whole process of designing and composing all the images and, which unfortunately, it shouldn't be like that. But that's the way artists are treated. A lot of unions, a lot of organizations, they have such little regard for artists.

JEFFERY RANGEL: They obviously know the importance or the power of it if they're trying to get you to do - Well, the way I've always heard it explained, especially with Teatro Campasino and other artists who are painting these banners is to communicate visually in real straight forward terms what's being talked about in terms of a political platform. So that people who may not be as literate or in one language or another can see it represented in a form. So they obviously know the power of representing those things visually. And, of course, yourself as an artist, figure's really important into that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I don't know. See, what's really interesting is that they plan these conferences like six months in advance. They'll give the art like two weeks notice.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I see what you're saying.

BARBARA CARRASCO: And even César's wife, widow, Helen, she used to tell me, "Why are you doing this to yourself, Barbara?" Because it's just - But Magu and a lot of other Chicano artists have told me why did I continue to work for the UFW when they kind of exploit me and they don't pay . . . by not paying me, by giving me such little notice. And my response to that is that everyone in the union, whether it's someone on the picket line or someone who's cooking for the people in the picket line, or someone who's typing the flyers for a particular event publicizing the event, all those people, all those different types of people, they're treated exactly the same way. So I saw myself as an integral part of the UFW and not - I didn't think that I should be given special treatment because I'm an artist. And I remember being really criticized by actually Magu, he really got on my case one time, and said "There's got to be a limit to how much . . . how badly you're treated." And even a lot of people would say, "Well, why don't they pay you? Why don't they do this?" But everybody . . . I saw myself as a cultural worker. And that's why I continued to work with them for so many years. Because I just respected what César was doing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Because you're an artist. The idea of being a cultural worker - how did you come to see yourself in that role? And do you still see yourself in that role?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, I think I became aware of that when I . . . during my conversations with César Chávez because he would say - It was really great to have these meetings with him all the time. But one time he told me that he thought that he was an artist also. And I thought that was really strange. I said, "You're an artist, César?" And he goes, "Well, don't you think it takes a certain amount of creativity to get so many people to work for so little? For practically nothing?" And I thought that was so great. When he said that to me, I said, "Well, yeah, I guess so because that's true." Because what people are getting out of it is helping other people. It's just the idea of being of service to other people, to other human beings. And I told him that I thought that what I had initially thought of him as just a real good Catholic. That he was a good Catholic. And he thought that was . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Jesus was an artist too!

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And so I guess, you know, but now it's so different now because I'm not that same

person any more. I'm not - Even some students recently asked me if I still work for the UFW. And I haven't done that for a really long time because so many things have happened. I took time off to go to CalArts. And I told César before I went to CalArts - In 1990, I attended CalArts. But I told him that he wouldn't see me for a couple of years while I worked on my MFA. And he said, "What do you mean?" And I go," I'm actually going to devote all the entire two years to doing a good MFA program." And I wasn't going to do what I did at UCLA as an undergrad which was be a student and then do a million other things on the side and compromise my GPA. I was going to just do that. That was all I was going to do. And he said, "Well, go for it, Barbara. I think that's great you're going to do that." And so, and I think the work that I'm doing now, I don't see it so much as a cultural worker as much as I feel like now I just want to document people that are real important in our community, like Dolores Huerta. I just finished doing a four color silk screen print of her. Did you see it?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it at Self Help? I saw the banner but I didn't see the . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, that was in part of a show. It's part of a -Yreina Cervantes curated the latest atelier, which is Ten Women Artists. Of the ten women, five of us are experienced and there's five younger people which was a good idea to link each young person with an older person, sort of a mentoring thing. But, the image I did of Dolores is like you have to see it because it is so different from anything I've ever done. I took a risk. I took a lot of risk doing this thing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I have seen it.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh really? You have?

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think I have seen it. I think they have it up right now.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh they do? Where?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Upstairs. Maybe no. Okay. Okay.

BARBARA CARRASCO: I don't think so. But it's a portrait of Dolores Huerta. It's just a very, very stylized, graphic of her, a bust of her. And it has simply has her name in back of her. And when I first was asked to be in atelier, I called her up and I said, "Dolores, I'm going to do a print with your image on it. Is there anything you want me to put in there?" And she said, "Oh, yeah, Barbara. I want picketers in the background and my experiences going to jail, being carted off to jail for social demonstrations." I said, "Dolores, this is a print, not a mural!" And I think that the old Barbara would have . . . .

END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B

SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A (30-minute tape sides)

BARBARA CARRASCO: Harry told me, "Try to focus, Barbara" because I go into like - I could go like this. That's the way I am!

JEFFERY RANGEL: That is an interviewer's dream though because it makes - It's really about you talking about what's important. I mean, you can narrate that the best. Okay, this is Tape 2, Side B [sic], continuing with Barbara Carrasco on April 13th, 1999. And you were talking about the old Barbara and the new Barbara.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. See, the print I did of Dolores, I just eliminated all the clutter of all these images that would probably explain to someone who doesn't know Dolores a little bit more about her, that she is a leader of the Farm Workers and she's been on picket lines her entire life. And she's been in jail for her beliefs and all that. But I cut all that out because I think that she is strong enough on her own. Her image. She's more than anything a really strong female . . . what's the word I'm looking for?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Role model.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Role model. She's definitely been my role model. And I think my first role model was my mother. But Dolores has really been there as a friend too. I feel really honored that she's a friend of mine. But I've also seen what kind of person she is. I've been at conferences -- what is it? At AFL-CIO conferences, where people like former House Speaker Tip O'Neil has crossed the entire convention floor just to ask Dolores her opinion on something not even related to the farm workers. But some issue . . . . And I've just seen her command that kind of respect. And I don't think a lot of people have seen that about her. But that lady is really knowledgeable about lobbying techniques and about so many other things. And I wanted to capture that strength about her. And also, at the same time, her strength, but also how gentle she is as a person. She's a really, real kind person. And I've seen her help so many women, so many people in general that she doesn't -- She'll never, "Oh, I helped that person." She won't take credit for any of that. Her whole thing is to get people to empower themselves. Get them to -- And I think that's . . . I don't know. In doing that print, we were talking

about all the women we'd been having these meetings which is unusual about the atelier. They started having meetings about the whole process of creating a print, creating an image. And in this particular group of women, we'd been talking a lot about spiritualism and I thought -- I told them that I thought it was a spiritual process because I actually was conscious of the fact that I was approaching it differently, that I wanted to make the image really, really strong and also really gentle at the same time. And that's kind of hard to do that sometimes, you know? But I think I did because I . . . through color, you know. I have only four colors. That's real unlike me. I mean, we had the option of a total of nine colors. And I've done prints in the past at Self Help, I remember one print was seventeen colors, including a split font which was kind of hard to do. But in this print, I limited it to four colors and the colors that I picked, the palette that I picked was real unusual too, because I'd never used those colors before. Yellow ochre, a plum color, and a violet, a deep violet and what's the other one? Oh, and then a rose color. And I was just really amazed at how they all worked really well together. It just worked. The piece worked really well. And I even - Dolores is wearing a UFW button, but it's only half of the button. You can see part of the UFW eagle but you know, one thing she insisted on me putting in the piece was her slogan that she helped coin, which is "Si, si puede". Which means, "it can be done". But she's always said that. At different rallies, she's always used that phrasing. So I put that in there. But you know, so the emphasis was really about her as a person more than about the Farm Workers.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. But she so congers up everything that the Farm Workers Union is about. I mean, it's like you don't need to put all that stuff in there at a certain point because she's such an identifiable figure with that. I mean, it really speaks to both.

BARBARA CARRASCO: You know, I definitely think that. Carol Wells, from the Center for Political Graphics was here and she told me something I was just shocked to hear. That they're going to have an exhibit pretty soon of all their prints and posters, political posters. And of all their collection, there's not one single image of Dolores Huerta drawn by a Chicana artist.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's phenomenal!

BARBARA CARRASCO: Or a Chicano artist! But Dolores told me that Rupert Garcia did do a print of her a couple of years ago. But they have never seen it. Carol Wells has never seen it. And I thought that was really shocking. I mean, there's been prints done of Dolores done by Aznglo artists but none by Chicanos or Chicanas or Latinos. So, that was interesting. And I said, "Oh, God, I'm so glad I did it." Because I think she loved it. Carol loved the print of mine. She wanted me to donate it but you have to buy it. That's another thing I've come to learn to do, is to really -- A lot of us spent years giving things away free. And there's no way I'm doing that again.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So does that also speak to the change in this connection to cultural work versus a different relationship to what you produce or how it's circulated?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think a lot of - I think we have to value our work because others will learn to value it as well. Because in the past, we've donated our work; we've done things for free and people just don't seem to appreciate it that much. So, I think those days are long gone now. I think there are exceptions though. I'll make exceptions for like really . . . organizations who really are barely there, surviving on very little money or something. But I just think we have to start to be a little bit more professional about things.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is that what Magu was getting on your back about before?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. He was doing that but I think he felt, as did a lot of artists, that the UFW didn't appreciate the time and work that artists did for them. Because there was a conversation I had with César about sending thank-you notes out to people who do donate their work, which they didn't do. And they were kind of bad about that. But then a lot of organizations, a lot of people are like that. Because I knew that everybody in the UFW is treated like this; it's not just artists. Everybody. But Magu said, "If we don't take ourselves seriously, no one else will." And I think that's what he was referring to that. I don't think he was ever paid for the stuff he did for UFW either. And he did a lot. I know that he worked on a huge banner. It was like a hundred feet long or something like that. But who knows what happened to that banner.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I heard that story.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Did you hear about that?

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think John worked on it too.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. John worked on it. And Carlos worked on it. And I forget how many other people worked on it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He told me it was so big that it hit the floor. It was too big when they hung it from the rafters.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. I saw pictures of it. I've never seen it in person because by the time I got involved, I've just never seen it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: When you hooked up with Carlos and John, were you aware that they had worked with the UFW before you had met them or anything?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you knew who they were and you were familiar with them through the network?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It was Carlos Almaraz who actually talked about the UFW. He said that it was a really good experience to work with the UFW and to get to know César. He said, "Barbara, I think you should try to work with them. You'll get a lot of out it." And so I did. And then, you know, it was really nice to actually - Right about that time, after we did the Zoot Suit mural is when I joined his organization. He had an organization called Centro del Arte Publico, the Public Art Center.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I worked with them. Actually, I wrote an article about it. So some people kind of exclude me from that group when they write about that group. And I actually wrote an article about it at the time I was a member. So I can show you that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I would love to see that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Some people don't believe. Because there's a lot of people re-writing history now. I think it's really important. I'm kind of grateful to you guys for doing this oral history because some people are actually saying that they were part of an organization or some people were not part of it when they actually were. And I won't mention names but there's some people . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: What do you think that's about?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think some people really want to be recognized for their contributions. And sometimes some people feel guilty about not being participants in organizations. And I know for a fact that people like Judy Baca has never worked for the UFW but recently told a historian person, a person entering the art historian field, Reina Prado, that she had worked with me and assisted me on a Carlos Almaraz banner for the UFW. It never happened! It's on record now. It never happened. Her and I got in a truck, she says, and we drove to Delano and helped Carlos on a banner. In fact, I have never even worked with Carlos Almaraz on a UFW banner. I would love to say I did but I could never lie about something like that. And that's just fiction. And so it's interesting though, that my name is being used in something that's just not truthful at all. So, there're a lot of things like that going on. And, again, I think maybe some people really feel guilty about not participating, helping the UFW when they really needed help and whatever. But at the time I joined the Public Art Center, this was right after UCLA, I basically was a member but I really was like an assistant there. I was not like considered like this independent artist working there. You know what I mean?

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was going on over there?

BARBARA CARRASCO: There were like different projects that they would get involved in, like different murals in the city or banners that they needed for different organizations. And I basically assisted them on different projects. I don't think I ever initiated a project there. I don't think so. But I had my own space there. I had my work there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Who was where?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It was Carlos Almaraz, John Valadez, Rich Duardo, Judithe Hernández. Who else? Dolores Cruz worked there also. And Dolores Guerrero Cruz. For a short time. And then Leo Limon worked there some times and Guillermo Bejerano Herando worked there. And Robert Delgado. Tito. We called him Tito. And in fact, I have a lot of respect for Tito. He's a very good artist. So all those people worked there. And at different times. Some people were paid members; some people were just volunteer members. But everybody was trading work all the time. John was -- I don't know how many things I assisted him on. But I also assisted Rich Duardo on things. And then I also actually had them assist me on certain things too. Because I remember when John helped me on a UFW banner. I remember him actually telling me, "This is ridiculous, Barbara." Because he couldn't believe that I was actually painting the letters. He thought I had someone iron some of the letters on with real clean lines. He said, "Barbara! I can tell you went to Catholic school!" And I remember him saying that to me and I thought it was funny. I took that as a compliment. Maybe it was not. But I kind of took a lot of pride in doing that kind of precision work. It was really nice to be a part of that collective because I learned a lot about mural painting through them. In fact, on the Zoot Suit mural, I think I learned a lot about mural painting. It was like

every day . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: You had two masters there with you.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I have a tremendous amount of respect for both Carlos and John. And I'm glad to say that John is a good friend to this day. When I was sick, when I was going through the cancer, he told me that I'm the strongest woman he's ever met. So that was really nice to hear. A lot of the artists actually were very supportive.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In that particular space, you mean? Or while you were going through . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh no. At the particular time that I was a member of Public Art Center, ...

JEFFERY RANGEL: that was a different story.

BARBARA CARRASCO: that was a different story. I think because I was really young and I wasn't taken all that seriously because they were really a lot of chauvinistic things said at the time about me. And there was interesting things said. That, "Oh, Barbara's a good artist" but they never told me directly. There was a lot of reluctance on their part to give me that support because of my age and because I'm a woman. I remember once I was on the other side of a dividing wall. I was doing some art work and I was kind of quiet. And Carlos and John were on the other side and they were saying, "Barbara really is a good artist." And then I poked my head on the other side and I said, "Hey, thanks a lot guys." And they looked upset that I even got to hear them saying such a nice thing about my work and about me as an artist. I said, "Guys! What's the problem?"

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was the problem?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think at that particular time period, a lot of Chicano artists -- I think they were really threatened a little bit by -- or not threatened. I think they were insecure I think more than threatened. Because I was so non-threatening at the time. I was just a young person eager to learn from these good artists. And my mother was saying, "Why are you working with these guys who won't give you much credit? And they're so chauvinistic towards you?" And I said, "Well, it's like anything. There's pros and cons of getting involved with a group like that. Because sure, they're chauvinistic, but they're also really good artists. So I'm learning a lot about how to mix paint, how to apply paint, how to design a mural, how to work together collectively." There's so many different exciting things about working in a collective, especially a mural, because you're working with artists but you're also getting to meet so many interesting people. Like the people in the play. A lot of entertainers, people in the entertainment industry, would come to see the mural. I met so many interesting people, movie stars. And I thought that was the exciting part about working on a mural is just the interaction between different types of people.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. In terms of the Public Art Center, was there a prevailing ideology that that place came in . . . a reason that it came into existence? Or something along those lines?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think it was to serve like the community. They were really into -- I know that John had done a lot of murals in the community there. And I worked on a couple of those murals too.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In Highland Park?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And that's where I met -- I didn't realize it but I met John's wife, his present wife. She told me she met me when I guess she was about fourteen at the time. This was before John and her of course were seeing each other. But, she said that John had introduced me to her as a young person working on a mural as someone who could draw portraits really well. And I said, "Oh, really?! I'd never heard that from him." That was real nice to hear! But it's interesting that he couldn't tell me that directly. But, I think that all those artists there were Chicano artists who really wanted to make it into mainstream art but we all accepted the fact that L.A. County Museum of Art and other art establishments weren't about to allow us entrance very easily. So everybody there was pretty committed to representing their community and helping the community, being of service to the community. I know Rich Duardo had done, donated his printing services for a lot of different causes in the community. And his mother was a community activist. I really liked his mother.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did he have . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Hecho en Aztlán Multiples.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was that up and running at that time?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I have one of his original logos. I still have a bunch of stuff I wanted to donate to the Center for . . . I just donated twenty-two prints to the Center for the Study of Colloquial Graphics, and a couple of other things. But some of the stuff like that I want to hold onto because I think that's really great. I don't think he

uses that logo any more. It was a little Aztec figure holding a squeegee board.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Oh yeah.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Does he still have that?

JEFFERY RANGEL: The stuff that I've seen. I don't know what the most recent one is, if not.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh really? I wonder if he still has that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, that's the one I've always seen. But, so you have artists coming in . . . mostly visual artists then.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. Everybody was either a painter or . . . . And you know, Judithe Hernández was actually - I really thought she was a really good artist, even though I was never really close to her. But I think I learned a lot about painting through her too, just by looking at her paintings. And I didn't see her a whole lot there. She was involved at one point before I was, I think, and then had gone on to do some other stuff. But, what year was that when I - God, I've forgot what year this was. I'll find out. I have it written down. There was one point where John Valadez, Carlos Almaraz,, Judithe Hernández, myself, Dolores Cruz and Frank Romero all worked for the CRA, Community Redevelopment Agency. We were all employees there in the Graphics Arts Department.

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] Wow!

BARBARA CARRASCO: And Frank Romero was our supervisor.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I remember.

BARBARA CARRASCO: So that was really interesting to work -- You know, here we are all struggling Chicano artists but we're doing really topographical maps.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What does that mean? What's the significance of all these Chicano artists who

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because public art does not -- Harry always tells other aspiring artists to seek another skill because to try to make it in the art field, fine art field, is really hard.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's really risky.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because you don't get paid for doing murals. You get very little pay for it. Unless it's like the National Registry, like John is part of. I mean, that's big money. But to do something like for a wall on the side of a restaurant or a nice wall in the community, you don't get anything for that. And so we found ourselves there trying to make bread and butter money, living money, at the CRA. And at the time, everybody's still producing their own work and having shows, having art shows on the side and everything. But here we were learning all these different other skills. And it was a good experience I think while it lasted.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you fee the city was, aside from working on a "side job" to make ends meet, but did you feel like the City of Los Angeles was supportive of institutions like the Centro for Arte Publico or any other of those kinds?

BARBARA CARRASCO: They didn't acknowledge our existence at all. It's unfortunate . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's ironic here. You're in the bowels of the city there working, producing maps, but at the same time . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: I don't think they ever took any . . . I think Los Four kind of enjoyed a little bit of fame critical acclaim here and there. And they've had various art shows and stuff. But I don't think it was ever very seriously accepted. I don't think so. There were never big shows. I think the Craft and Folk Art Museum was great because they really had a show, a nice professionally done show, of Chicano artists.

JEFFERY RANGEL: But that show received some pretty hot criticism.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But you know what I mean? I'm talking about the fact that the Craft and Folk Art Museum as an institution was willing to show, have a big major show of Chicano artists. But, we didn't see that invitation

extended from the L.A. County Museum or any other fine art museum. You know what I mean?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. Did they figure that the centers that had developed in the sixties and seventies were providing that role to the city? Or that was a more appropriate place to show Chicano art?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Probably more that than anything.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, that it was a more appropriate place. And also that - and people at the time too, a lot of artists were producing art that was a little too political for these mainstream venues. Just speaking for myself, my work was never taken seriously because I was known as a political activist artist or UFW artist. All the stuff I did for La Gente, all the overs were all very political. Because that's what we were doing. We were reflecting issues that were relevant to the Chicano community. And so that's what we were doing at the time. But at the same time, I didn't even know about artists who were not doing that. Like Elizabeth Pérez who at that time was known as Nancy Pérez, who was a former girlfriend of Carlos's. He told me that - She's a good friend of mine now. But I hadn't known her at the time. He told me that she was off in Paris.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

BARBARA CARRASCO: doing really nice art work. Had nothing to do with the Chicano movement at all. But that she was a very good artist. And you look at her now, all these years later, she's a very good artist and no one knows who she is. So it's really interesting. I have to say I think the Chicano art movement has benefited Chicano artists. Do you know what I mean? The political movement has because look at someone like her who wasn't really part of it but should have been taken seriously as an artist because she's very skilled.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Why do you think that is?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I just think America still has, and has had and still has a problem with racism in this country. I really believe that's true. People just as recently as what - last year, Harry and I were in the MOCA auction. And the only other two - It was Harry and I and what's his name? Ruben Ortiz and Laura Aguilar, there was four of us. Oh, excuse me. And Victor - what's his name? I forgot his name. Another Chicano who was part of FAR. He was part of this organization called FAR. We were the only five Latinos in the entire exhibit. And we happened to I guess gravitate towards each other during that reception. We were all in this little huddle. How come we're the only ones? Why are we the only? And everybody, like Victor's work isn't really political at all. And Harry's isn't. Mine is a little bit. But it's like it's just still happening. And I think the only reason why Harry and I were also in the exhibit last year, we were in it for two years in a row, - And they're getting better. They're starting to include more Latinos slowly. Like they couldn't ignore Laura Aguilar even though her work is not political, but it's very controversial because she does these nude self portraits. And I hear several people standing next to her work and they were saying, "Oh, my God! This is really hard to look at." You know, the nude Latina. I don't know if she was objecting to the nudity or the fact that she found it repulsive because Laura's large. And a large body type. I don't know what she was referring to that it was hard to deal with. But it was interesting. That's another aspect to me that's really, really - I could do a whole book called - being a güera, a light skinned Latina, Chicana, is that I hear things that most people don't hear. And you know what I mean? The fact that I could even hear that comment because this woman felt comfortable enough next to me that she probably thought that I was an Anglo. So, that is really - Luis Valdez as early - I was twenty-three when Luis Valdez, his play was in New York. And I told him before that opening night, it was opening night, I told him, "Your play's going to . . . they're going to pan your play." And he said, "Why do you say that?" And I said, "Because I heard the critics out there in the lobby talking about the play." And he said, "Barbara, they think you're white! Go out there and . . . ."

JEFFERY RANGEL: And spy!

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. He actually said, "Go out there again and listen to some more." And I did. All my life I've passed for white and it's just been so interesting to hear people say all these really racist comments in front of me. And a lot of times I said nothing because I don't know if I was afraid to or because I was embarrassed or I don't know what. But I remember hearing, "Oh, that person's really intelligent for a Mexican" or stuff like that. Or my own sister, Frances. We lived together in the dorms at UCLA. And one time my sister came to see me printing on the lithography press. And somebody said, "That couldn't be your sister. She doesn't look anything like you." She has long dark, black hair and she's dark complexion. Those kinds of comments. And I don't think they would say those kinds of things if I didn't look the way I look.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Let me flip the tape.

END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE B

BARBARA CARRASCO: But I did a painting in -- what year was that? 1991. It was 1991 when the Leband Gallery at the Loyola Marymount University had a show of ten Latina artists. And actually all of us are Chicano artists but they called it Latina artists. And in that show, they told us they wanted us to do works that reflected our personal experiences and so I did a painting. It was a self portrait. But it was called "Names Can't Hurt". It was a self portrait of me putting the make up on in the mirror but the make up is dark, is like a darker type of make up. And around the mirror frame is words that I was called throughout my childhood and growing up. Like Güera, Green Eyes, Cat Eyes, White Girl and stuff like that. I did have an identity problem for awhile there. When I grew up in the housing projects, I remember a lot of other Latinas and Chicanas telling me, "Oh you must be . . . you think you're better than we are because you have green eyes." And I never even thought - that never even came into my mind! I was thirteen years old when that happened, when I first heard those things. Because my sister's really dark complexion, my father and mother were both dark complexion. And there's five of us in my family but my brother and I - he's a year older than I am, Ricardo and I are the only two güeros in the family. So my other two sisters and my younger brother are all dark complexion. And so my brother and I, we kind of like developed this sort of insecurity -- or what is that? A complex about being light skinned. I mean, that's what it was . . . a complex. We didn't look at it like it was an asset at all. Not in an environment where everybody else is brown. Do you know what I mean? We looked at it as a complex. My brother, he would be angry if someone called him Ricky. He said, "My name is not Ricky. It's Ricardo." And then myself, I think maybe because - maybe I became really involved in the Chicano art scene and worked with the UFW because of this desire to like prove that I'm Mexican or whatever. I don't know. But it's been interesting. And when I did that painting, it felt good to do that painting because, the self portrait painting, because I had never dealt with that issue of being a light skinned person and having seen it as a problem rather than an asset. Like some of my other güera friends that I've had said, "Now don't you think . . . I mean, you could use it to your benefit. And white guys will take you out and they'll treat you better than your own Chicanos or Mexicanos." And I said, "No. I never even thought of that. It never even entered my mind to do that." So that was really interesting.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. I think who was it? Cherrie Moraga writes about that quite a bit.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah, because she's a güera too. That's right. Yeah. She's a trip.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well that and being mixed race too I think.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh really. She's mixed? I didn't know that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think so. Yeah. It's really complicated - all those internal differences.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. Living in the dorms with my sister and she's really dark complected. Has long black hair. And these white girls would invite me to lunch but not my sister. So I kind of -- It was there at UCLA when I realized, I experienced racism through my sister. Do you know what I mean? More than directly. And I remember like I went to Mexico right after I graduated from UCLA with my ex-boyfriend and my mother because, being the mother she is, she wouldn't let me go by myself. So I had to take my fourteen year old sister with me. God, was that a pain.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Whoopee!

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. So I bring my sister with me and we go to these different hotels. My ex-boyfriend, because he was dark complected, and they would say they had no vacancies. And five seconds later I would go in and they had room for me. So there were a lot of -- I experienced racism through other people like him and my little sister would say, - Oh, and also, people there would invite me to different, like to lunch or different places, friends we'd met there and not my sister, my little sister. And she had the opposite experience. She was dark and she wanted to have green eyes like I did. I remember her asking my mom, "How come Barbara has green eyes and I don't?" Do you know what I mean? So it was interesting.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The differences within one family in one generation can be so profound that it's - Did you ever feel like during the movement that there was a lot of posturing around skin color or other kinds of markers of identity that were hard to either distinguish or were inclusive, exclusive? I mean, you speak about gender in that way.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, yeah. I remember Brown Power and I kind of like felt left out or the Brown Power. I remember the Chicanos referring to their women as Aztec goddesses. And there was a lot of little phrases like that, real chauvinistic phrases that were like that. But I just didn't fit into that either.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What about along the lines of sexuality? Was that ever an issue?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, never. No, it was but I mean, that we never talked about it. No one really talked about it. I mean, sexuality -- We never spoke about it in our family ever. Because my mom was the Catholic role mother and strict Mexican mother. She never even sat down and told me anything about sexuality whatsoever.

What was going to happen to my body, when it was going to happen. Nothing! I never heard about it. And at that time, there was no sex education at all. So I had to find out on my own. And through other friends and older friends. In fact, I always used to hang around with older friends. I don't know why, for some reason. But I remember there was - Especially, no one talked about like homosexuality. That was a big taboo subject, don't you think, in the Chicano community?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Absolutely.

BARBARA CARRASCO: In the Latino community, period.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. But it seems to me that there's so many cases of people either having to deal with that, or come out, or sort of assess their own sexuality during that time that it's like any other group of people. It's there. It's obvious. And it's happening. So how are people dealing with it? Is that a way to include or exclude? Were people being punished or - How was that dealt with?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, see, I know that Carlos Almaraz, he's the first person who ever talked to me about any of that at all. Because he took me one time to the beach one time and he said he was going to tell me something that might affect our friendship. And I didn't . . . I had not a clue to what he was referring to. And until he brought out this book and it was all about homosexuality and it was women with women. They were drawings, a series of drawings of women with women and men with men. And then he said that he brought me the book to tell me - it was his way of easing me into telling me that he was bi-sexual. And he thought that, because I was at that time the biggest homophobic person you ever met. You know what I mean? Because I really thought it was the Catholic also - I'm not blaming Catholicism completely. But I really thought it was morally wrong and all of that. But I really liked Carlos so much that I was surprised that I kind of rose above that I guess, because it didn't affect my friendship with him at all. I told him, "No, no. I'm not going to stop talking to you because you told me this." But I was really wondering like if he knew all his life about his sexuality. I was real curious. That kind of really opened up all this whole curiosity thing for me about that. Because no one in our family ever talked about it. And there was another interesting experience I had with the Farm Workers when César Chávez asked me personally to round up a bunch of people to go march in the Gay Pride march that they have every year. And I said, "What?!" I was surprised. And he said, "Well, you know, Barbara. They've supported us. You know, all the time the gay community has always supported farm worker rights. And I want to send a delegation of people to support them in their demonstration." So this was really interesting. So I said, "Okay, César." And within the UFW community, the UFW staff, I went around and asked - this is how I asked people. I said, . . . I asked Father Ken. I started with the priest, the UFW priest, Father Ken, who I really liked a lot. A real funny guy. And I said, "Father Ken, what are you doing tomorrow?" It was on a Sunday. And he said, "Nothing." I said, "Okay. Good. You can go with us to march in the Gay Pride March in Hollywood." And he goes, "Oh, I just remembered. This archbishop is coming in from out of town, coming into town." And I said, "That is such a lie! All of a sudden you have to go to something else." And I told him, "Why can't you be honest with me and tell me that the church is against homosexuality and you couldn't possibly be part of that?" And then he said, "No, Barbara, really . . . . " And he didn't want to deal with it. So then I went to César's own son, Paul Chávez, and I asked him. And he said the same thing. He really had nothing planned. But the minute I said be a participant in the Gay Pride March, he said he had something else to do. So you know, I went through the whole staff and was getting that same kind of response that there was only like five of us that wound up in the march. And within my own family - because it was on television - my family was really upset that I was marching in the march too. I had a big sign that says, "UFW supports gay pride week" or whatever. And my mom was being - She says, "How could you do that, Barbara?"

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did they suspect that you were a lesbian or something?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I'm sure they probably did. I thought it was really interesting because I said, "Well, you know, if they helped the farm workers and the farm workers are just helping them back, doesn't mean that they're gay, that anybody that marches in that . . . ." I can't believe that people are so judgmental like that. But I just thought it was interesting because then it brought up this other issue that was always bothering me too is that Rich Duardo, one of the artists, asked me if I was a lesbian because I wouldn't go out with any of the artists, all the Chicano artists. I made it a policy of mine not to go out with any of them romantically because they had such little regard for women. And they would talk about their exploits with women in front of me sometimes and I would feel a little insulted. So I was surprised when Rich Duardo asked me if I was a lesbian. I said, "Wow! So you're just like reducing it to that, like I have to be a lesbian because I'm not going out with you guys?! What a bunch of ego manias!" I said, "Well, Richard, look at the way you guys talk about women. I'm not going to be victimized like that. Talked about like that after whatever." And I was really surprised that they just all came to that conclusion. And he said, they all thought either I must be a lesbian or I must have sexual hang-ups, from being a Catholic and all that. Which I probably did.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you ever feel like you were able to make any interventions in the way that they thought about women? Either through your work or your collaboration?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, I'm sure. I'm positive because even John - John has been really great about that. I've heard John speak to other people when he does his talks, when he used to do his artist talks, that Barbara has made us aware of our sexist attitudes and has really brought it to our attention that it's important to change and to respect women more. I mean, John has been really great about that. I think some of the other older artists are a little bit reluctant to change for the better. I won't mention names but there's a lot of them that are still doing the same things now. But it's really great when you respect somebody a lot and then they in turn respect you for . . . . Because it took me a - I remember getting . . . I was sort of branded this hard to deal with person because I would call people on their chauvinistic comments or I would bring it up to them. "You guys can't talk like that in front of me at all." Or you left our, "Why are there so few women in this exhibit?" Or "why are there so few women on this panel?" And even today, that's a big problem today, still. I mean, this is like a long time ago and it still hasn't gotten that much better.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It seems to me that most women, and particularly Chicanas, artists share that same experience that have made the decision not to date other Chicano artists because they wouldn't be taken seriously or because they don't like the way that these men are talking about or treating women and then feel like there's that process of educating that has to take place. And the responsibility primarily falls on your shoulders. It seems pretty common. So, I'm wondering - I would imagine that women who did have relationships with those artists might have had a more difficult time establishing a presence in the overall movement?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I didn't want to go through that. So all my relationships were with people outside the arts. They were always - I mean, Harry is the only artist I've ever dated.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So how did that happen?

BARBARA CARRASCO: or married.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were you making an exception there?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, because Harry and I were really good friends. We started off as good friends. And I noticed something quite different about Harry is that he really was supportive of women artists. And he didn't care if it was a woman artist or a male artist. What he did care about was that they were good at what they did. And he was always writing articles supporting artists. He was always doing it for La Opinion. They had a section they don't have any more. But it was called La Comunidad. He was always writing about different artists. And I was - I really admired that about him. That he started to write about artists in a real supportive way. And he also like included - I mean, I was a model for him many times, for his photo shoots. And I didn't know Patssi Valdez at the time, one of his most popular models. I had to meet her until years later. But Harry and I were really, really good friends for a long time. And it was real strange how we started dating because I was heartbroken over someone else. He was comforting me over that. And anyway, and that's weird because I never in a million years thought I'd go around with a person from Asco, the group Asco. Not that I . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was your perception of them?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I thought they were like just way out there. I mean, I didn't think that they were a part of -- I really didn't have anything in common with them. Let's put it that way. I thought because they were so avant garde and they were so non-traditional and so anti-mural movement and they were really anti- . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: They were always putting -- Gronk and Willie, even though Willie was a muralist and Gronk actually did some murals with him, they were really anti-traditional mural and muralists. And I think - But what I came to respect Gronk because of the mural controversy that I was involved in. In 1981, while I was at the CRA, while I was an employee at the CRA, I was commissioned to do a mural.

JEFFERY RANGEL: By the CRA.

BARBARA CARRASCO: By the CRA. Actually, it was not only the CRA. It was John Lopez who owned the McDonald's building on Third and Broadway, actually between 3rd and 4th Street on Broadway. He owns that McDonald's franchise there. He's the one who approached the CRA. He approached Ardis Secora who's an architect there. And she recommended that I talk to him. And . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: He wanted a mural

BARBARA CARRASCO: a mural painted on the outside, on the side of his McDonald's building. And so anyway, so I initially was working with Arie Secora and John and then they switched it to someone, another architect and so I designed the mural. But the problem - All these problems started coming into play because they wanted to keep me on salary there and they thought that by - See, it was really tricky. They thought if I stayed as an employee,

that they could easily own the copyright.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I don't get it.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, well, this became a really huge problem later. But, I immediately placed the copyright sign on the original sketches because I knew that as soon as they started paying me specifically to work on the mural, I was a commissioned artist on contract.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You are a contracted artist . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And so I assumed copyright from day one. They assumed that they would have copyright as an institution. So the problems also started because I think that the long term they wanted to like make posters out of it and all that stuff. That's where they were coming from. And when I did it, I just assumed right away that I would have all legal rights to it and all that. So, I contacted Alan Sieroty who wrote a bill protecting copyright for artists. He was a senator.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What's his name?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Alan Sieroty. S-i-e-r-o-t-y. Yeah, Alan Sieroty. And he was also -- He later became a commissioner for the L.A. Cultural Affairs Department. But at the time, I wrote a letter to him. I didn't know him at the time. When I became really well known, I talked to him a lot on the phone because I was soliciting all this copyright information from him. And we went -- We had some problems with -- After the mural sketches were finished, the CRA put the mural on the wall and they outlined several images in purple and some images in red. And the red images had to go and the purple images were kind of questionable to them but okay. The original sketch was sent to McDonald's Corporation in Chicago. And the McDonald's Corporation approved the mural. They said it was great except for one thing. And I'll show you the mural later. The mural in one scene - It's a history of L.A. in a woman's hair. And in one scene, there's a hangman's noose in the scene that's called Nigger Alley. That's what they called the Chinatown community next to - originally located right where Union Station now exists. So they told me to eliminate the noose because it's a family restaurant and they don't want that kind of negative image in there. So I did. I took it out. And I put a Black woman looking in into that scene. And the Black woman was actually a CRA employee. What's her name? I can't remember now. You know, I thought she'd be perfect as a substitute. Because she's like looking into the scene. It looks real nice. But the CRA had asked me to eliminate so many images. One of the images was of the Japanese internment scene. The real famous photograph of the little girl sitting on her suitcase that appeared on the front covers during the internment period.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right.

BARBARA CARRASCO: And then they asked me to eliminate the last Black slave in L.A. Her name was Biddy Mason. And I contacted the Biddy Mason Society in Pasadena. I became like a politician at that point because I had to go to all these meetings to get the community to support the mural. Because the mural was actually being censored. I was in the middle of being censored.

JEFFERY RANGEL: By the C.R.A..

BARBARA CARRASCO: And I was . . . the CRA. I was really young. I was only twenty-six years old. I think that's young. Because I was real naive about the city, all the politics too. And Dolores Huerta was really great because she was giving me a lot of good advice. And a very young Gloria Molina told me that, "Barbara, you're like a bad word in city hall right now." That's how big the controversy was because I took a stand. I said I wouldn't take any of the images out of the mural. That it would be compromising the integrity of - not only my integrity as an artist but the mural, the history of L.A.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The history. Right.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because I had three historians as consultants. I had Bill Mason who worked with the L.A. County Museum of Natural History. And he was like providing me with photographs of early L.A. and names and contacts of people who were related to the original founding families of Los Angeles. And then who else? Jean Bruce Poole who's the state historic park curator. She is to this day a good friend of mine. So is Bill Mason. And also, Rudy Acuña. So I had three historians that were consultants. And they said everything in the mural was historically accurate. So it wasn't like I was doing something like really radical or anything. And I was like really surprised that they were trying to eliminate the Japanese internment scene. So I went to three Japanese organizations for support. I went to the Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization, the Japanese - what is it called? Japanese National Coalition for Redress and Reparations. John Saito was a member there. So he came down to the see the mural. And I think those three Japanese organizations wrote letters supporting the mural to Bradley. And they were beautiful letters. You have to read these letters. They said that that image of the little girl getting ready to be interned was so important, is such an important part of their history and also part of L.A.

history because it's something that should never have taken place ever in the first place. But they were just really moving letters of support. And I was like going everywhere. I was real organized. I had like . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It sounds like it.

BARBARA CARRASCO: I had meetings scheduled. Every day I was going to meetings. I must have -- I don't know how many meetings I went to every day. But I was soliciting support from everyone from people who lived in the communities but all these other organizations. Organizations of people in the communities. Arts organizations. Lawyers for the Arts.
JEFFERY RANGEL: Which arts organizations?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, believe it or not, I tried to get S.P.A.R.C. [Social and Public Art Resource Center] to endorse the mural. And unfortunately, I never could get Miss Baca to even come and see the mural, which was real disappointing. I meant to call her about twenty times and never got a call back. Which was kind of unfortunate because I think she was looking at it from the point of as an arts organization and their funding might be in jeopardy because it was through the city. Their funds were coming through the . . . . And it was too controversial. The mural was really like too controversial for a lot of people to support, including some artists. And some of the Streetscapers [East Los Streetscapers] were -- I was really disappointed in a lot of people. But I was very happy with a lot of people too. I mean, the Streetscapers took the position that if they sign their name to the mural that they might have their future murals censored or not even considered to be commissioned. So I remember telling them at one point -- They were painting really great because I invited a bunch of artists to work on the mural. Even though I was the one commissioned to do the mural, I had invited like maybe about ten different artists do several sections of the mural. And the one that the Streetscapers were working on was a battle scene, the last battle in L.A. at Cahuenga Pass. And so, anyway, it was like a really big battle scene. And they were doing such a beautiful job. But when they said that - you know, they were painting while they said that - and I was really disappointed. And so I said, "Well, you know, you don't even have to sign your name. People are going to know it's your work. Hello." So I said, "I want you guys to stop painting." And it was Dave Botello and George Yepes and Wayne wasn't there. But I said, "I want you to stop painting. In fact, I don't want you to continue working on it at all because that's the way you feel about it." And I was really hurt by that. I have to say that I was really hurt by that because these are guys I really, really respected. And I thought they would whole heartedly endorse it. But I was real young and I was very angry at that time about what was going on. And maybe a lot of stuff clouded my judgment but I was just like disillusioned too. I was this idealistic person who thought that everybody was going to gather around a good cause and all that. But the reality is that some of the things they said were probably true. That had they got involved, they probably would have been connected with a mural, a real controversial mural, and they probably would have paid a price for it by not being commissioned or not getting funds or whatever. But anyway, I was still really upset about it. And that even fueled my fire more and I was even more pissed. And my reputation was as an angry young woman. So that at the time - right in the middle of this whole controversy, the L.A. Times did an article on - It won a Pulitzer Prize. It was a series on Latinos and Harry was a part of it. And so he came to interview me. And of course, the caption under my photo read, "The artist is known for her stormy temper and iron will." That was the caption. Did you see that?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is that the same one that had Willie on it too?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No. No, Willie came later. That was another one. But this is the earliest one where it won a Pulitzer Prize, the whole series on Latinos won a Pulitzer Prize. Where they did a thing on a Chicano cinematographer. I think his last name was Alonso. And then they did something on César Chávez and on Maria Elena Gaitan and Harry and John Valadez. And it was a lot of different people.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think I have seen that one.

BARBARA CARRASCO: And a poet. What's her name? And Alurista was part of it.

END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE B

SESSION 1, TAPE 3, SIDE A (30-minute tape sides)

BARBARA CARRASCO: Seriously, my reputation at the time was this angry person. And I didn't realize it until Meg Cranston, who is a pretty well known artist, she said, "Barbara, your reputation precedes you. I would love to have a reputation like yours." The editor for Mural Magazine, he said, "Barbara, you know a lot of people don't agree with your politics but they respect you a great deal." That's what he told me.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Let me introduce this tape really quick. This is Tape 3, Side A, continuing with Barbara Carrasco on April 13th. Okay. I forgot to introduce the last side.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, that's a good one. But anyway, no seriously, I hadn't known -- I didn't only realize

that I had that kind of reputation of being like this radical angry person until the L.A. Times article came out. Because the guy who did the article -- I was even angry with him for even saying that about me. The caption? You know, that I was known for my strong -- But I thought it would be funny if I called him up and get mad at him. He'd say, "Hey, Barbara! Read the caption again." Because I didn't think I had that kind of reputation.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And it was all based on that one incident?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, it was just based on the mural, just the fact that I was mad at people who wouldn't endorse it. And I was surprised at people who did. And one of them was Gronk. Gronk came. And Gronk was really supportive of the mural. And Harry was. And Willie was. I think it made me really think about how I kind of misjudged Asco as a group. And I started looking at them, how they - looking at their work actually. And without this - what's the word? Discriminatory look. Because I'd seen them as very different. But actually, they aren't - their work wasn't really all that different. It's the way they presented it that was different. And they were really the same committed group of artists as the artists I was connected with. They were just doing things in a really different way, a unique way, which I should have appreciated more. But, everybody has all their prejudices. Like even Gronk. He's probably the first artist, the second artist that I knew to be gay. Carlos was the first. But here's a second artist and then he said, "Barbara, if you need me to help you out, I will." And I was like really surprised. I go, "God, why am I surprised that he's so nice and he wants to help out?" It's just all those prejudices. And then I became friends with Harry and Harry would write all these articles. He wrote an article about me for La Opinion about the mural controversy. And he dubbed it "The Missing Mural of Aztlán." This is at the time when - what is it? The show was going on at the Craft and Folk Art Museum. So it was the perfect title for the "Missing Mural of Aztlán."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Right. I got it. I was going to ask you about that. That connection. On the one hand, there's these murals going up in the museum over there on Wilshire. And on the other hand, -- which is a private venue. And then on the other hand, there's a city supported/state supported mural that isn't getting the kind of . . . the same kind of support

BARBARA CARRASCO: Not at all. Well, you know, it's really just real interesting because it's really amazing. Well, at that time also, when my mural was going up, I kind of understood why certain people weren't supporting it because of all the controversy connected to it. And I kept even like thinking about why am I fighting it so much. Why don't I just give in to what they're asking me to do? Eliminate these images. But, it's this Catholic in me too. I couldn't let go of the truth. The mural was truthful. And I couldn't substitute it with images that were not truthful, that were - I don't know. They were asking me to do something that I thought was wrong. And so they . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It was a matter of ethics.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, it just came down to that. And they also at one point said, "We don't want to deal with you any more." So I had to get an attorney.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So they fired you in effect?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, they didn't fire me. They just said, "We need someone else to deal with. We can't talk to you." So . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: So you had to get an attorney.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. So I had to get an attorney. And the way I got an attorney was through the media. I went on -- Bill Stout from Channel 2 interviewed me. Then Henry Alfaro from Channel 7 interviewed me. And on that show, that interview, an entertainment lawyer came forth. His name is Jim -- what's Jim's last name? God, my memory's going bad. He's a Chicano attorney. I forget his last name right now. Well, anyway, he's pretty well known. He represents a lot of Chicano anchormen on TV, news anchormen. I can't believe my memory's going like this. And then also the attorney, Antonio Rodriguez, who's a community activist lawyer. They both wanted to interview - Jim Blancarte, that's his name. Anyway, he was with a big law firm and Antonio's like this community lawyer. So I had these two lawyers representing me. And it was great because I was tripping out on the differences between the two. They were like night and day. I mean, they were just like - The entertainment lawyer wanted to go on every single TV station with me. I didn't care about that stuff. It was amazing, the difference. But what was really great is the fact that Jim was part of this big major law firm and they offered to represent me for pro bono. And Antonio represented me pro bono also. And so that was really great because I had called Lawyers for the Arts and they wanted like $200 for a consultation!

JEFFERY RANGEL: How were you going to muster that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I couldn't do that. So it all was kind of ironic. You know, an arts organization wanting an artist - what they call lawyers for the arts. But anyway, it turns out the attorney representing the CRA - his name

was Jeff . . . . His name was Jeff Wasserman or something like that. They wound up paying him more than they paid me for the mural. That's so ironic and horrible. So anyway, what happened was it was resolved by them - they just actually gave me complete physical ownership of the mural and I lost all rights to the exhibit space, You know how I'd lost it? Not through McDonald's. McDonald's Corporation actually wants the mural, even to this day, wants the mural to hang on their wall. But it actually cannot hang on their wall because the CRA purchased the land which is the parking lot in front of the McDonald's. They actually - I have all the blue prints still to this day. I kept all the blue prints. Where they designed, the CRA designed the park. They wanted to make a park out of that to showcase the mural. So the people could go into the park, have a McDonald's, go and eat at McDonald's, come outside and look at the mural. But the CRA at that point where they dropped all physical . . . or gave me complete ownership of the mural, they also said that the mural couldn't hang over . . . could not be exhibited there because it goes, the mural would jut out two and a half inches into their air space. They own the air space. They called it air space.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The air space. They never made a park there, did they?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Nope. No park. And see, I don't think John Lopez, the original person whose idea it was to have a mural there . . . I don't think he even realizes that the mural couldn't go up there because of that little stipulation.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So they ended up having to buy that land, pay the lawyer, go to quite an extent to keep you from putting that mural up?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Unbelievable.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But even prior to that, when the mural was at the - First, the mural started out being constructed and painted on at my . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: studio?

BARBARA CARRASCO: studio at the Old United Artists Building. I had a room there, a studio there, with . . . Dolores Cruz and I were there. And then she left later. But when it was solely my space, I hired -- Well, I had a friend. Glenna Boltuch Avila was a good friend of mine and I contacted her and I said I'd like to have some kids work on this mural. So she was the head of the Citywide Mural Project and she hired seventeen kids to work on my mural. They were paid through the CETA program, I think, and partly the City Mural Project. So, Rod Sakai and her - Rod Sakai's a muralist also and he's no longer with that program. That program is now non-existent. But anyway, they worked on it and then the seventeen kids plus I hired Yreina Cervantes to work on it. And then a bunch of other people helped, different artists came in and worked on it also. Then it moved, the mural work moved because it was getting so big. We had to paint forty four by eight feet panels to make up the mural.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Forty four by eight foot panels? Whew!

BARBARA CARRASCO: Okay. Sixteen by eighty feet. So we moved the mural to the old City Hall East Building. It's right across from city hall. And we had the entire, I think it was the fifteenth floor. All open space. And so it was up there for -- We wound up painting there. And that was really amazing. So one day, right when this was getting really horrible, when the lawyers were all fighting because they were going through litigation for about a year before it was resolved. They had all the mural panels on the basement, ready to be shipped off to who-knows-where. Oh, this is what happened. I'm really bad. I'm taking all out of sequence here. But Dolores Huerta told me, later on she told me that she thought that I had this really good instinct about the mural. Because it was like my baby. Because I had, for no reason - We weren't working this day. For no reason, I decided to go to city hall to just check up on the mural. I don't know why. And I went there. And the mural wasn't there. The mural was on the docks in the basement of the garage. And I went down there and I saw these workers loading it into this van. And I said, "What are you guys doing?" And they said, "Well, the CRA asked us to take this away to a warehouse." And I was so upset. I said, "No, you can't do that." And they said, "Yeah, we have orders to do this." And I said, "Well, wait a minute. Can you wait for a few minutes? I'm going to make a phone call." So I called up Cultural Affairs and I talked to somebody in the Cultural Affairs Department. I called and I said that if they take the mural now that I was going to call a press conference with César Chávez and a lot of people and I'll make a big thing out of this thing, them trying to take the mural. And so they didn't. They called it off. They called the workers off. And I called a friend of mine from the Farm Workers and we came and took the mural, physically took the entire mural, all forty panels, to the CSO Building on First and Chicago Street, which was really strange because that's like where the Farm Workers first started. That CSO is where Fred Ross and César Chávez and Dolores started. So anyway, Tony Rios was the head of the CSO and he let me stay there. He let me put the mural there for about a year. And that's where all the interviews and all the press coverage of the mural started right there. Because USA Today came and it took them two hours just to light up the mural, the mural was so big. And then it wound up on the front cover of USA Today. And then people in Boston saw it. An

organization called Children Are the Future. So they asked me to go to the Soviet Union with a bunch of artists and kids. And so that's how the connection was. Also, the L.A. Times did a huge article on it. It was on the front cover of the Metro Section. The entire page. That was really great. And that also kind of elicited a lot of support from people I didn't expect. You know, people are inviting me to speak about it and go places.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The article actually cultivated the support?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It was amazing. Because people said -- I think also too that people want to be part of something like that that's getting -- You know, it wasn't like I wanted all that press coverage; it just kind of happened. It was weird how it happened.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was this before the NEA controversy?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, it was before. Years before, actually. Because it was 1983 when I was on the front cover of USA Today. It was really amazing, the support though. So then the mural actually wound up in - We took it from CSO to the Farm Workers headquarters in Keen. And so it's there now to this day.
JEFFERY RANGEL: I thought it went up.

BARBARA CARRASCO: It went up -- The only time the mural went up was - The first time it went up was at Otis Art Institute. I'll get the date for that for you later. But it went up for a show called Agit-Pop and it was for a show curated by Robbie Canal. And only sixteen by thirty-feet of it, half of the mural, was up there. Because it was too big to put the whole thing in there. Yeah, I think even the last time it was there actually. But anyway, it was there for that show. And then it went back to storage. And then the only other time it came out of storage was for the MIT show, the L.A. Hot and Cold show. They took exactly a third of that mural to MIT, the last third, which was the most controversial part. So that was great because that was a real important show and I got really good reviews. I was very happy. The Boston Globe said that was the only work that they'd call hot in the show. That's what they said. You know, the show was called L.A. Hot and Cold. And they had like twenty-two artists or something. Twenty-three artists. And _____ Martinez and I were the only two Latinos, Chicanos in it. But Harry was also part of that show. They had like two parts of that show. Pioneers and then the up and coming artists, whatever. Emerging artists, they called us. So Harry's work was shown at a near by bank. And then all the rest of it was shown at the MIT Lizst Gallery. And Dana Priess Hassen came to L.A. to look, to curate the show. He was looking at a lot of artists' work when I was in the Soviet Union. So I didn't even get a chance to meet him so it was kind of nice that other artists were showing. Shifra Goldman also was showing him my slides of the mural. And that's when I realized what kind of reputation I had because that's when Meg Cranston, she told me that everybody was trying to get in that show. They were all wining and dining Dana to get in that show.

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] You weren't even around.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I wasn't even around. And Dana, he's the nicest guy. He had a lot of respect for all the women who were in the show. It was really great to meet a curator who was not a chauvinist. You know what I mean? He was real supportive. And when I got there like a week early so I could touch up the mural and then I got - I was there for the opening. It was really, really nice to be there, to see the mural shown in a big show like that. And then the third time it was shown, and probably the last time, in 1991 Peter Sellers put the mural up at Union Station. The entire mural.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I saw a video of that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: You did?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, I think it's in Harry's papers or something up at Stanford.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh really? I didn't know that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, that was the first time that the mural was shown in its entirety, the whole mural. And just to do that -- just to do that, Paramount Pictures let me borrow their Stage One to touch it up. And it took me seven days, a whole week, to clean it first. And then I hired a whole bunch of artists to -- Robbie Canal sent some of his artist assistants to help me. It was real nice. God, really great people came up. And it was just amazing because . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was it on canvas? Or was it on tile?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It's on wood and Masonite panels. I used the textured side of the Masonite board because it looks like canvas. I had a nice texture and it kind of looked like canvas but it was actually Masonite. And it was reinforced by wood all the way around. Especially because we didn't want any, the panels to warp or anything.

So we had it coated really well. And all of the seventeen kids who worked on the mural, they worked on that as well. They coated the mural with clear lacquer so that it could be protected. And I tried to make, get them to be, to feel like they were a part of the whole mural process. So they went to a lot of those meetings where they saw us arguing with the CRA. And a lot of those kids went there. And I think a couple of the kids went on to art school. So that was great. And we kept in contact. One of them works at Children's Hospital. I can't believe it. I bumped into him in the cafeteria. I felt so old. He said, "But, Barbara, I met you when I was fourteen." Oh God. But anyway, it was really great because a lot of those kids were gang members. And they felt so good about their work. That was the greatest part. That's the best part of the mural project is getting to know the people you're working with. And at first, they were like - some of them, because they were gang members, had problems working with each other. So we had like these really strict rules established that if anybody started a fight, they'd all be fired. That was rule number one. So I said also that if they - because I noticed that the way they were painting not really - They weren't very like serious about the painting. Because they knew they were getting paid. So I told them that I was going to point to every section of the mural and say who painted what. And that motivated them to paint a little bit more carefully. But anyway, that was the great part about working on the mural.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was the relationship between CRA and Cultural Affairs during that time?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, actually, I brought the Cultural Affairs into it because of my friendship with Glenna. And I had worked with her on other murals in the past. The Citywide Mural Project. In fact, one of them was John Valadez' mural at Brooklyn and Soto. It's been whitewashed and repainted with those Streetscapers mural. But John had a real beautiful mural up there for a long time. And I think the earthquake is what destroyed part of it. But Glenna is the one who - I talked to Glenna about it and she said "We'll get involved. We'll kind of bridge the gap there." And that's how Fred Crotin and Glenna got involved, even though we had some problems with Mr. Crotin there. But, you know that whole story, don't you?

JEFFERY RANGEL: I don't.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Anyway, . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs] I'd like know it.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But you know, it's just real interesting because the more people you bring into a project, you can also have more problems.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Sure.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But it's also - there's like pros and cons to all those kind of involvements. But I think on the whole it was really good to bring in the Cultural Affairs because they had all this expertise in mural painting and also we access to their equipment and their personnel. And that part was really good because the CRA had kind of minimal, really minimal experience with the arts. No, they were used to doing - I think the only art for their offices and all that. But they'd never really done a large art project at all. I think that was the first one. But they've been involved since with a lot of them.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, they seem to have a pretty significant hand in things now. I'm just wondering how they came to occupy that profile now. It may not have anything to do with this.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, no. I heard that there are sort of like provisions in their contracts that came out of their experience with me. For sure. I'm pretty sure that copyright's one of them. Copyright issues. Because I know that they retain copyright on a lot of the public art. And I think that they have to - Like if some instances, they have to share copyright with the artist. That's what Self Help Graphics has recently done is agreed to share copyright with the artist concerning the atelier prints. But before it said, on the bottom of the contract it said, "Sole copyright by SHG". And there's no way we'd agree to that. Or in the past we'd say just for the opportunity, we'll let them have copyright. But there are so many problems that can happen. Someone could publish that like they did Richard Duardo. Someone actually - a major card company purchased one of Richard Duardo's prints.

JEFFERY RANGEL: At Self Help?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, at Self Help. It was the Boy George print he did. Years and years ago. Did you see that?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA CARRASCO: That was a beautiful print. And they made a card out of it. Paper Moon or something like that. It's a big major card company. And Richard sued them, of course, and he won.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And he won.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So is that what caused Self Help to rethink their copyright?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, not really. It was the women in this particular atelier. All of us agreed that it was not something we could agree to, to let them have sole copyright. So now Tomás Benitez has talked to several copyright lawyers because we work in contracts to include co-copyright.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Co-copyright.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But it's a process. I mean, it's kind of a shame thought that it's taken so many years for things to change. But that's just the way it is.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The nature of it. You have to go through the conflict and the controversy to know that those things need changing sort of in the first place. Because it's such a relatively young community in the arts movement.

BARBARA CARRASCO: I know. It really is. Because we're still having the same problems like even finding out like - Once you sell your work. Like I sold - When I was a student at CalArts - I became a student at CalArts when I was thirty-four years old. In 1990, I went to CalArts. And I created a painting as part of a student project there. And the painting has been to so many shows because a bunch of the faculty bought it, purchased it from me as a gift to the Provost. Beverly O'Neil now owns it. But the really, really funny painting I did of Minnie Mouse holding a fairy book in one hand and a paint brush in the other and her eyes are cross eyed because nobody in that school paints. I mean, at the time I was a student there, they didn't. I don't know if they do now. But they're all into art theory and nobody can practice - no one's painting. So that's what it was a commentary on.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Why Minnie Mouse?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because Walt Disney founded CalArts. So it was a perfect image to pick. And it was really funny. Everybody really thought it was funny. But the problem is that since it's gone into her hands, it's been to all these shows and I had no knowledge of it until one of the people who helped purchase it to give the gift to her, Beverly, told me, "Barbara, it's been in so many shows. And it's been here and there." I said, "I sure would love to get a copy of where it's been exhibited."

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are you supposed to be -- are you supposed to have some kind of what do you call it?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Approval?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Are they supposed to pay you?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh no. No, no.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Once you sell it, it's out of your hands.

BARBARA CARRASCO: It's not mine. But they have to tell me . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: But when an art . . . I'm sorry. Go ahead.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But when an art -- you were going to say an art gallery . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: sells a piece of your work, or when somebody sells a piece of your work and it goes up in value, aren't you supposed to get a percentage of that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. There's a CA law. I think it's five percent. You're supposed to get five percent of the sale. The person who can answer that question better than I could is John because that has happened to John a lot. Did he tell you?

JEFFERY RANGEL: He mentioned that. Yeah, that's why I'm asking.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because he's been ripped off really bad. A lot of us have been, where people buy your work and they purchase it for such a low amount of money. And artists are struggling at the time and they're ready to let go of it because they want the money so bad, or need the money so badly. And then the gallery owner or whoever sells it for like triple the amount or many more times. And then the artist doesn't even know about it. And it's supposed to get a percentage but in California law it's supposed to be five percent. That's what John told me. And you don't hear about it at all. That happens a lot. [phone rings]

JEFFERY RANGEL: Now we're back. But we only have a couple of minutes on this side. So I wanted to just kind of formally come to a close. But you were saying something about not having any regrets about what you've gone through and that only maybe you wish you had been more diplomatic at certain junctures.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. Because I think sometimes when you're young you don't really understand all the consequences of your actions, you know? And I may have been a little insensitive to some people. But I don't think I was too bad. I mean, I had a bad temper but I think I - You know, that more than made up for it. No, because I remember apologizing to certain people about over reacting about certain things they said or whatever. But working with César Chávez- he's the one who kind of made me realize it's not too late to change for the better. Even though like just the fact that I was really at one time, really homophobic, you know? And then now I have so many gay friends -- I'm not saying that to -- I became friends with Laura Aguilar when we were doing the mural thing. I became friends -- She was only nineteen or something when I met her. And she was - It's interesting to see her because she was extremely shy back then. And now she's doing these nude portraits! I would never have thought in a million years that the person I met back then would do - you know, show the work she's showing now. I just never would have thought that. Because she was real quiet and now she's really . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: A transformation.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, it's really amazing. I just saw her a week ago. And she was laughing at me because she says, "Remember, Barbara, when I wouldn't speak up and I would just let you talk and talk." And she interrupts me now. And telling me what she thinks.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's really nice to see.

BARBARA CARRASCO: She's made me realize too though - When she first started showing me images of the homosexual community, I - she told me, she says, "Barbara, remember how homophobic you were?" I go, "Yeah, I remember." Because I didn't know Laura was gay until she told me at a restaurant. She told me, she said, "Barbara, do you notice anything different about this restaurant?" I looked around and I said, "No." And it was all men in there. It was all men in there.

END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 3, SIDE A

BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 3, SIDE B

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay. This is Tape 3, Side B. And . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Laura's like -- There was a big important - I think it was important -- a big conference of Chicano artists in Santa Barbara, at UC Santa Barbara - I'll give you the date later. And it was a major show, major conference of women. Yolanda Lopez was there, Judy Baca, Amalia Mesa Bains, and Diane and I don't think Patssi was. Was Patssi there? No, Patssi wasn't there. And there was a lot of artists and Laura was one of them. And Laura, during the conference, talked about my reluctance to even look at her work. So I was like really - I was so embarrassed. But _____

JEFFERY RANGEL: But the fact is that you've made the change. You know, you've grown in that way. And kind of acknowledged it now and you can be good friends with her.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It was just a process because I really grew up with a family who thought that was immoral, that community was immoral period. And I even think Catholicism had a lot to do with that. You know, just growing up in a strict Catholic home.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's something that I want to ask you a little more about. But maybe we can touch on that in the next one. I forgot what I was going to say. I guess, maybe some of those transformations, how they represent - how you can read them in your work would be something that I would be interested to hear more about. So maybe when we come back the next time we can pick up on that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: That'd be great.

JEFFERY RANGEL: All right. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW.

END OF SESSION 1, TAPE 3, SIDE B [only five minutes on Side B]

BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A (30-minute tape sides)

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA CARRASCO

IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
APRIL 26, 1999

JEFFERY RANGEL: Okay, this is an interview for the Archives of American Art with Barbara Carrasco on April 26, 1999. The interviewer is Jeff Rangel. And we're going to give this another shot since the mic wasn't on for the first time. Let's go back and cover some ground that we went over. We were talking about your mural paintings. Your international experiences with mural painting. Okay, go ahead.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Okay. Well, basically, the controversial mural, L.A. history mural, that generated a lot of really good publicity not only for the project but for me as an artist.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I'm going to -- I'm sorry to interrupt. When I was going through Harry's stuff up at Stanford, there's a video of you, I think, when the mural was shown at the train station.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah, that time. Oh yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And it seemed like at that point your kind of state of mind after that that it seemed like that you were just tired.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I was. I was really . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Tired of struggling through that stuff. So it's interesting now to hear you say that it generated a lot of good publicity when in the moment it looked like you just were done with it.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But that was taken in '91. So that's -- you know what I mean? I think in '83, '84, I was really burned out over it. But sometimes time is pretty healing, you know, and I can look at it now and not feel so much frustration over the whole thing because it really never was exhibited permanently anywhere. So that in itself was a real disappointment to me. But at that time, I was just joking around. I was joking around about how it's so ironic that you can have a really big name coming out of the newspapers all of the time and still be financially strapped. Yeah, it's - I think it's a real common irony among artists. But that's what I was kind of talking about really. Because, here all these people are paying homage to me as an artist but they're not buying my work! And that whole thing too made me realize that people really don't want to put political art on their walls. You know what I mean? That's what I really am convinced that it's not something - like if you really want to make a lot of money, it's not the thing to do. But anyway, it did put me in some good places like the Soviet Union. When people come -- Children Are The Future, an organization in Boston, when they asked me to come on the trip, it's because they read about me that I work with children. That's the reason I was asked to come on the trip. And then the first time, I just went with a small group of people. And we did the mural in the Children's Museum in Yerevan, Armenia. I had such a good relationship with the artists that they paid for my second trip to go there a year - actually a year and a half later.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The Armenian artists, you had really good relationships. But the other artists from the U.S. as well?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Both, both. I got along with everybody really well.

JEFFERY RANGEL: For the record, who were the artists from the States that went?

BARBARA CARRASCO: David Fictor, a very good muralist from Boston, and Paul Goodnight, who's also a muralist and a very, very well known artist locally in Boston. And it was just really good to work with two exceptionally good artists. And not feel discriminated against because I'm a woman or because I'm younger, because I was younger than both of them. And there was just a lot of mutual respect for one another. And we designed the mural collectively. And we actually delegated a lot of responsibility to David because David, I think, in my opinion and I think in Paul's also, he's the better muralist. He's an excellent muralist. And so he was funny because these two people of color sort of went . . . Okay, David, go with it. And it's not about color; it's about who has more experience and who can make the mural look as cohesive as possible and just look as good as it can be. And then when we worked with really great Soviet artists. They were both men and women and some of them were older people and some of them were younger people. That was really great too - to get to know some of the older artists. And they seemed like - I noticed that they were less political than the artists here. Their work was mostly abstract. And ours was . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is that because there was a lock down on communication in the Soviet Union?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I think so. Because I brought along posters, Robbie Conal's posters with me. I said I'd like to photograph them with the posters so I could give the photographs to Robbie? And they seemed reluctant to pose with them. I don't know why. But they were just really great artists, all those people who worked on the mural. And the first time, it was just working on the facade of the Children's Museum in Armenia.

And then the second trip, we did a little bit more ambitious project. We took a trolley bus off the lines and that was a real crazy process because we had to go through the city council. We had to get approval from the city council in Armenia to have that taken. I was going to meetings. But that was another interesting experience for everybody.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did the trolley car actually go back into use then?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, that was great. That was the great part of it. Is once we were finished with the mural, the mural was -- The first mural was called The Missing Peace. And it was about peace between our two countries.

JEFFERY RANGEL: P-e-a-c-e, The Missing Peace?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. But it was like a missing jigsaw puzzle and it was all about that. And then the second mural was about peace also but it was called Peace Stamps. And we made stamps all around the trolley bus and each artist was assigned a stamp to design. So it was really nice because it was a collective project but yet we allowed for everybody to have their individual expression put on the mural.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And did it work?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I think it worked really great. It was beautiful. Actually it was really beautiful.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was your image?

BARBARA CARRASCO: My image was like just a girl waving hello. Like that to me was America waving hello to all the people. That's what I wanted to do. And above her, of course, I have the UFW eagle. [chuckles] I had to put the UFW farm worker eagle on there. But Ricky Chávez, César's nephew and Dolores Huerta's son, he was thirteen years old when he came on the trip with us. And I had to get permission from both of them to let him come. I thought it was a great opportunity for him. And he did a really beautiful -- I took many slides of his image because he did such a good job. It was a view of La Paz, the Farm Worker headquarters. And it was real scenic and real beautiful. He painted with lots of greens and earth tones and stuff. And he felt really proud after it, that he had accomplished something in another country. And many people were seeing. So the day of the dedication of the mural, we put it back on line and all of us were on the bus. And we took photographs of people looking. Older people, it's just that they were smiling as we passed them. They were at bus stops and they were - It was just really nice to see people looking at this unusual sight. A mural actually painted around the entire trolley bus. I thought it was great.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was it like working out there? What was it like on a daily experience?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, it was very different. I think for Ricky, he was amazed at how kind everybody was and how excited they were to work with us. And also, they were really interested in his uncle, Cesar Chavez. They knew who he was. And he was just amazed at the level of art appreciation among . . . everybody there. Like fourth graders over there were doing stuff that I was doing in college.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really?!

BARBARA CARRASCO: They were doing etchings and engravings in fourth grade! I did my first etching at UCLA. That was 1976. So, you know, it was just amazing how far advanced they are in making those kinds of materials accessible to young people. And they were just doing beautiful work. I mean, beautiful animation. We broke up into different groups. There was one group of kids who came on the trip because they were from New Jersey and they were from the school of animation over there. I forget what it was called in New Jersey. But anyway, I can get that name to you later. But, they did a film about war and it was called, the title was "A Drop of Honey". And it was based on an old Armenian folk tale about how stupid war - War starts off as something - They have a merchant sort of around the Middle Ages. And he comes in with his dog and the dog - There's a drop of honey on the floor and the dog licks it up. And then someone hits the dog or something. Then the two people fight each other. And then they go out and get other people. And then it just escalates. Yeah, it was a really nice animation film. And then there was other people doing prints there. And they're into a lot of wood cut, wood blocks.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So it seems that there's a real affinity between some of the techniques that you see regularly in Chicano art, wood cut being one of them. Poster making or muralism being another. Was there that kind of recognition?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, they weren't really familiar with the Chicano art movement at all. But I think through talking with us and they were familiar with the Mexican movement, the mural movement. Some of the artists were. And I forget some of the artists' names that we met over there. But they - In fact, some of them came over here years later, to the United States. So that was interesting to see them come back here.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was that an exchange? You said it was a exchange . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: It became an exchange later because the Soviet animation that they did was shown in the United States. And then ours was shown over there. It was an exchange like that. It was art forms of one kind or another. And let me see, -- oh, and then some of the artists -- Mr. Gideon who was the head of the Children's Museum, the Director of the Children's Museum, came to Boston and did some works up there in Boston. So they have been keeping it alive. The exchange is really through the organization, Children Are The Future. And Judith Woodruff is the Director.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So it's still happening now?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, but they're going to different countries though. Not just the Soviet Union. I think they went to Germany once. And then I was trying to get Yreina Cervantes, another friend of mine, an artist, to go on one of those trips, to get involved with The Children Are The Future but I don't know what happened there. She was really busy. But they're always looking for artists.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is that how you got to Nicaragua too?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, the Nicaragua trip was through UCLA students. It was organized by a lot of UCLA students and faculty. So it was called the Chicano Delegation to Nicaragua. It was thirty-six writers, artists and musicians that went on the trip. So that was in 1986 during the height of the war. Not a good time to go but in a way, it was a good time to go. At the same time. Because it was both dangerous but it was really the most -- I don't know - I guess eye opener for me trip I'd ever gone on because I hadn't realized how poor those people were. And how they dealt with war. Just the whole idea of living with a war going on. And the artists there that we worked with were really great artists, Nicaraguan artists. But they too thought that there was a connection between the Chicano experience and the Nicaraguan people. But the more I was there, I didn't feel that myself.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What did they see the connection as?

BARBARA CARRASCO: They saw like artistically. That they were very supportive of one another. They had shows together a lot, many shows together and did a lot of murals together. So that we shared in common. But I think day to day experiences were so vastly different that half of the group opted for leaving early.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really? It was just too difficult?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It was very difficult. We saw people with - You know, who were affected by the war. People walking around with one arm, one leg. That kind of thing. We went to restaurants and there was maggots in the rice. It was unbelievable. I came back appreciating everything that we have here in the United States. I mean, it sounds strange coming from me because - but I realized that Americans are incredibly fortunate to have so many resources at their hands. And once we were there, I think we actually - Towards the end of the trip, the people that stayed for the entire trip, we . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Which was how long?

BARBARA CARRASCO: That was three weeks. But I think we got to know how to mix paint. I have never done that before . . . actually mixed -- learn how to make gesso from scratch. Those artists did that because their resources were limited. And you know, I think they really appreciated us, our willingness to learn those things too. That we weren't - We were eager to learn how they actually did their work. But my family was upset that I went. They said, "How could you go at a time when there's a war going on?"

JEFFERY RANGEL: They were concerned for your safety.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, they were concerned for my safety. And I realized when I was there that it was a pretty dangerous environment to be in. But I think it made me really, like I said, appreciate everything that I'd taken for granted. Yreina Cervantes went on that trip. And Kathy Gallegos, another artist. And Richard Burges from UCLA who's real involved in the alumni association right now. And I think he's been involved with so many different things also.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Was Brad Burns on that trip?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, he wasn't on that trip. He was one of my professors at UCLA. I thought he was great! Wasn't he a great professor? Oh, I thought he was the greatest! I just loved that guy. But, he passed away, didn't he?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, that's unfortunate.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He was actually really influential in my pursuing history. I took his classes at UCLA.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Was he? Well, I really liked him a lot too.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He did a lot of work on Latin America obviously, Central America.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. But I think he actually - some of his lectures actually made me sort of understand what I was doing there. Do you know what I mean? I mean, I felt like I wasn't there just to do a mural. I was there to really have some dialogue with artists over there about how they approach art making and what influences them. But aside from the art making, we also did visit some of the former jails of Somosa. And those were pretty scary to look at. I mean, we saw etchings on the wall of people who had carved with their nails or whatever to tell them that they wanted to . . . . Yeah, that was difficult to look at but I also think it was really good for us to see what happens to people in a war time situation. And some of those people were political prisoners.

JEFFERY RANGEL: The artists that you were exchanging with?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And then there was someone - Vernon Belcourt was there was from the American Indian Movement. He was there. I had earlier in my career at East L.A., I had worked with the American Indian Movement briefly. Well, I actually was on one of their support committees for the Paul Skyhorse, Richard Mohawk case. Do you remember that?

JEFFERY RANGEL: No.

BARBARA CARRASCO: There were two Native Americans who were accused to killing an FBI agent. I think they were - I don't know exactly where the killing occurred. But this case was - Leonard Weinglass was their attorney. And so my sister and I and a lot of UCLA students at the time were there on the support committee. And we wrote articles about it in La Gente newspaper. So I think all the experiences that I had in Nicaragua kind of made me think about really how every Day of Los Muertos. All the Chicano artists do images about death. But that trip really impacted the way I look at death. Like I came back and I realized that making a calavera and jokingly having fun, or dancing or whatever. That that really had nothing to do with my life. I couldn't relate to that 'til when I had a show at the B-1 Gallery after that. I had a solo show called Here Lies/Hear Lies. In that show I had ten drawings of people in coffins. But they were based on - I decided to take that whole thing about death a little bit more seriously and I sent out ten questionnaires to ten artists. Oh, they weren't all artists. I have to say that one was a lawyer, Armando De Leon. Another was Robbie Conal, an artist, an Anglo artist. And who else? Harry Gamboa, my husband, writer, photographer, video artist. And let's see - who else? Rudy Acuña did one. And the questions were like what they did for a living - those kind of basic questions. And then if they were to die tomorrow, what kind of objects do they want to be buried with? And how do they want to be remembered? Stuff like that. And I let them know in the cover letter that I wanted them to know that the questionnaires were going to be framed alongside the images. And they were. And at the opening, it was amazing everybody was reading the questionnaires. They were just so . . . . You hardly ever go to art shows where people are actually reading everything. It was really interesting because I took it a little further than most people, the whole concept of death. And I think - And then I also did like some images of people in our community. Like Jimmy Swaggert was in a coffin. I put him in a coffin with a prostitute.

JEFFERY RANGEL: [laughs]

BARBARA CARRASCO: There's money in there and I said, "Here lies our preacher." And then I did one on Chief Justice Rosenberg, "Here likes our judge." And a journalist and different types of people in society that really influence the way you think and act. But anyway, it was really amazing at first. Some people when I first brought up, approached people to participate - like Gloria Molina, I had actually asked her to be a participant and fill out a questionnaire, she didn't want to do it because she thought it was morbid. And I told her, I said no. In fact, the show was actually received as humorous. A humor show about death. I don't know. I guess because some of the answers are pretty funny. Like Diane Gamboa said her greatest fear about death is that there might be an after life. So, you know, people were laughing when they were reading these things.

JEFFERY RANGEL: There's something witty about that as well that when you read that kind of stuff, it makes you confront your own perceptions or thoughts about death. Laughter and humor is a way, a response of discomfort sometimes rather than humor.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. Harry wanted to be buried with a straight jacket on him. He was wearing a straight jacket in there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I've seen that image I think.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, it was reproduced several times. But everybody --like Robbie Conal, his posters of

course were in his coffin. And he wanted to be a baseball player at one time so his bat's in there. And it was just really - It was just kind of interesting to see what people . . . . And Rudy Acuña, he said something that the only thing that really and truly mattered was how much love he gave his family. That his family's the most important thing. It was just real interesting. So that was like it touched on death in a different way. But I think that was like the beginning where I -- I actually did a show about death before that. It was called - What was it called? I forgot. My memory's going bad. It was at a little restaurant on Melrose next to L.A. Eyeworks called - It no longer exists. Gaye Girardi was the owner. The Border Grill. It was called The Border Grill. And the show there was all about death also but it was really simplistic. And that show made me think about doing another more serious show. That's how Here Lies/Hear Lies came about. So I approached Robert Berman at the B-1 Gallery in Santa Monica and he was really reluctant to give me a show there. Because he said, "You know, you're known as a political activist artist, Barbara, and you're not really - I mean, drawings?" I think that he thought that I might not be, I guess - I don't know what his reluctance was about. But Robbie Conal, a friend of mine, he went to lobby on my behalf. And that was really nice. Because he had done that several times and still has done that to this day. I don't remember how I met him, at all.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did he come to -- You mentioned before that he came to support you when you were at the CRA controversy. Did you know him personally before that kind of incident went down?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, actually no. You know what actually? This is what happens when you get old. I don't remember how I met him. God, I feel bad about that! Well, he's worked with L.A. Weekly and that's how I met him. He had to do the critic's picks. So he picked me and did a story on me. And that's how I got to know him a lot better. And then when I was going to CalArts, in 1989, I applied late for the MFA program there. And I missed the financial aid deadline and all that. So Robby was trying to help me out there. And he recommended that Bernard Riley, one of the curators at the Library of Congress, come and see my work and maybe consider me for their - They had a Political Art on Paper Collection. So he purchased several drawings and sketches. And that helped pay for my first year at CalArts.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow! And that's at the Library of Congress?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. The mural sketch. The original mural sketch for the L.A. History Mural. That's there. As well as one of the Here Lies pieces is there. And a bunch of other political drawings that I've done.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Can I ask you a question about the title of that show - Here Lies/Hear Lies? H-e-r-e is understandably about death, like rest in peace. But how do the hearing actual, to hear something - how does that connect with the death?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, because I think sometimes before people pass away, or even after people pass away, people lie about a lot of things or attribute certain things to people who have gone because they're not there to defend themselves. [chuckles] So you know what I mean? Yeah, and that's the reason why I wanted to have that in there in the title. Not that the people themselves are lying about themselves. That's not what I was really referring to. I was referring to how other people view them after they've passed away. Or even when they're living. And also, one of he motivational factors that led me to write the question, or to send out the questionnaires, was that I wanted really people to think about living, what they've done in life. As opposed to - I don't want them to talk about death. But in talking about death, you have to talk about life. So I really wanted to get that, people to start thinking about what they've done and how much they've contributed or how little they've contributed. I mean, just to start talking about it. Because all the images I saw at the Dia de Los Muertos events, they didn't really refer to anything like that to me. I mean, I never felt like - I always felt like it was a Mexican -- a lot of Chicano artists were relying on Mexican imagery or just appropriating certain images from Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations. And I wanted Chicano artists to talk about their lives, their particular lives. And I think the show really was effective that way. People were doing that. I think even the fact that Gloria Molina declined. I think that was interesting that she viewed death as a morbid, even talking about death is a morbid experience. You know, all the people who accepted didn't look at it that way at all.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did any of those images get shown in a Day of the Dead context? Or exhibition or anything like that? If so, what was the response to it?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Everywhere they were shown - They were shown several places. They were shown in San Antonio, Texas and San Francisco and L.A., several places in L.A. And everybody really liked them. And people said, "Wow! Someone actually did something different. This is really a unique art project." And then I was amazed at how many people asked me for a copy of the questionnaire. So what I did was after I completed that show, when I would talk about it in San Francisco. I did maybe five Chicano artists from San Francisco, they wanted to fill out the questionnaire. So I did their images. And then I went to - Juana Alicia was one of them and Ray Patlán was another. And I did Armando - what's his name? He's a friend of Harry's. Oh, my memory! Oh, Armando Rascon, that's his name. And then even my family, among my own family. My niece who's a UCLA student now, Eva Carrasco, she wanted to fill one out. And she was very young at the time. She was only like

twelve years old. She just wanted to fill it out. And I thought she was too young to fill it out. So I gave her one. And it was just interesting that people wanted to do that. And so, I don't know, I guess I set out to do that. And the way the critics looked at it was it was really well received by the L.A. Times critic. She loved the show. And then Shifra Goldman, she labeled me - the title of her piece - what was it called? Contemporary Moralist.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Contemporary moralist?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, because I had Jimmy Swaggert's image in that show. And maybe she thought I was trying to take these individuals who are in the public arena and sort of give them identifying characteristics, or characteristics they should have, or . . . I don't know.

END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 1, Side B, continuing with Barbara Carrasco on the 26th of April. I wanted to actually go back to how those images of the show Here Lies/Hear Lies connects back to Nicaragua and your experience with death there, was that what the show came out of, your experience?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, that really influenced me, seeing death or people that were so close to death. They lived with the war on a daily basis and all the casualties of war were walking around in their streets and all that. So it really did make me think about just the fact that Americans have no idea how devastating that is, to live in a country like that. And what it does -- And I was amazed at the spirit of the young people there. They were just -- You would think that they would be down about it or saddened by the war, but they were really strong. Their outlook was real positive in life. I don't know if we would be so. It was amazing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: They were resilient . . . ?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I think so. I think they were. I don't know if we would be. I think we . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's hard to say. What kind of work did you guys do there?

BARBARA CARRASCO: We did a mural about the Chicano experience in the United States with Yreina Cervántez had an image of people being deported. There was a helicopter search light on these people, undocumented workers. And we had the whole Farm Worker thing was in there. Farm workers actually in fields, working in the fields. We had an M.E.Ch.A. student in there. Just different experiences in the Chicano community. Then at the dedication, it was interesting that all the artists were there and all the people who were tourists were there. They had a UCLA professor there. Circuncle was there, is that his name? Kunzel, excuse me, David Kunzel was there. And even though he's not an artist, he actually lent us a hand one day. He's painting. So that was kind of nice, you know, people would come by. There was a woman from San Francisco who was visiting Nicaragua just on her own and she happened to - She'd never worked on a mural before but could mix colors like nobody, no artist I know. So she was great. Because the weather was very humid and very, very hot. So she - The paint was drying really quickly. So we needed someone to - we had to have someone mix colors constantly. She was really good at it. So it was really interesting to work with people like that. Just meet these - That's what really great about working on a mural is that you get to meet so many different types of people. And then their experiences are so different from yours and it turns out some people are really talented and they never knew they were. And that book - that particular mural was on the front cover of Mario Garcia's book.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Oh yeah?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. So he gave me a copy of it. I gave it to Dolores Huerta because she's in it. She's in the mural also. Oh, I should have kept it though! Only because . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Oh, she kept it?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, I gave it to her as a gift. But I wish I had a copy, you know. I didn't think about it until later. Let me see. I don't recall the title but it's a book that he wrote. That may have been in 1989. Something like that. 1989 or '90 is when he wrote it. And then he called me up and asked me if I would send him a slide of it. And he requested all the artists' names and all that. But I have the name of the press that did it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I should know that. That's my field. [laughs]

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I don't know if you want to switch gears here but I'm interested in an exchange between Chicano artists going to Nicaragua and the real processes or mural making and collaboration, being transformative in and of itself. And obviously the way that you looked at death when you came home changed.

Can you comment on maybe how it might have influenced the artists over there, maybe how their perspective, how that changed? Through the exchange.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, I think that they -- See, the poets -- We broke up into different groups. And the poets did workshops with other poets. And then there were times when we had presentations of poetry readings with Nicaraguan poets. And then we went to the Nicaraguan art shows, l art shows. So I think that they thought that we were incredibly fortunate to have really good art materials. Because we left behind our really good brushes. It was just everything was considered a luxury item to them because they're economically devastated by the war and all that. And I remember just being amazed at the fact that they were impressed with all our art gear that we brought. Like our art - I brought a poster container to hold all the posters and I left that with them. And just being able to - And then they gave us so many of their posters. That kind of exchange was great because now those same posters, I just recently donated them to the Center for the Studies of Political Graphics. So it's kind of nice that I got to bring back - but I thought that it was really nice to see how these artists create art in a time under like, crazy circumstances. They had to use - a lot of them used like really primitive printing techniques, like off-set - what is that? When you paint on - monoprints. When you paint on glass. That was easy to do because they don't have printing presses. They don't have access to really good easels or anything like that. Just art materials in general just were scarce there. But I think they - I don't know. I don't think we really shared too many common experiences. I really don't believe that. Because we have never come even close to going through - I don't know.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So what year was that when you were there?

BARBARA CARRASCO: That was in the summer of '86. Because I went to the Soviet Union in '85.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And at that time you were being depicted or portrayed in the media as the - what was the quote, Barbara?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Known for my stormy temper and iron will.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Stormy temper and iron will. What did you think about that when that kind of ... ?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I got a little upset about it but I thought it would be really funny if I called the writer and asked him why he did that. Then he would say I was just fulfilling that description there. But I don't know. I didn't really like being labeled an angry person more so than - I don't think I'm any more angry than another Chicano artist, any other Chicano artist. I don't know if it's because I'm a woman that they said that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, I guess that's what I was . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: I felt like that was kind of a -- Yeah, I think it's a bit of a sexist comment. But it kind of even kind of goes back into a little stereotype of the Mexican spitfire type of stereotype. I just don't think that -- But I felt like I had to change my image in a way after that came out.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. In a way I just felt like people were afraid of me almost. I don't know what they were afraid though.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Having told the truth?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I think that's what people were afraid of, the truth. But I had one artist, Meg Cranston, who's a pretty well known artist. She told me once on the phone, I was talking to her, and she said, "Barbara, you have a reputation to die for." And I said, "Really? What do you mean?" She said, "I just envy your reputation. Everybody talks about you. They said, 'oh, you've got to watch out for Barbara.'" And she said, "You know, it takes years to develop a personality, a reputation like that." And I said, "Well, it also takes years to down play it too, though." Because I don't think I'm as angry as I was back then. Because during the mural controversy, I really believed that people who tell the truth would have an easier time. But I was dealing with the CRA. Maybe I over reacted to a lot of things they did. But I think they were over reacting to things I did too. I mean, they were really unfair to try to censor something and then say they weren't trying to censor it. They were always denying that they were censoring. They were just making suggestions; that's how they put it. And then they kind of like really added to that reputation of mine, saying that I was real hard to work with. So I had to seek two attorneys to represent me. Well, actually, they asked me to seek an attorney because they didn't want to deal with me. So Antonio Rodriguez and Jim Blancarte were both my attorneys. So it was interesting to see that because one was an entertainment lawyer and one is a community activist lawyer. So really, that was interesting.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah, you mentioned that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, I mentioned that earlier? Oh, okay.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Which is fine. But, I'm just wondering what it was - if that kind of coverage in the press was what really made you reconsider cultivating a different sort of identity, persona - whatever you want to say - or if there were other things in your life that generated a change in your perspective or something like that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, my association with Harry really, that's what really helped transform me from that person to a person that's more accessible, I guess. I don't know if that's the word, accessible. But it was like a physical difference when I started seeing Harry. Because I basically never wore -- I never wore dresses. And I never wore make up back then because I was working with a lot of male artists and I thought - I really wanted to be taken seriously as an artist. So I didn't want them to like see me as this young woman who's content in being just somebody who assists people in their projects. And I didn't want to be -- I made it a point to not get involved romantically with any of those artists. That was just something I consciously did. But when I started seeing Harry, he introduced me to a lot of like - I think he's really good at image making and all that. And he bought me make up and he bought me nice clothes. And I remember some people were upset about it. Shifra Goldman was upset about it. She said it was - I think she told him at an art show, "Why are you trying to make Barbara into one of your women in black?" Because I guess his previous girlfriends had worn black a lot. That was like an Asco thing or something, the black attire and all that. But I think even before - like at that stage of my life, when I was really young, I don't know. I didn't want to - I really wanted to make a name for myself. I wanted people to respect me. And I thought the best way I could do that is to really concentrate on becoming a better artist. And I got such really good training at UCLA. I thought I received the best training an artist could possibly receive from the professors at UCLA that I had. And then like building on that, I think I was always eager to work with other artists. Like Robert Delgado, I helped him on his mural on the Inner City Cultural Center mural that he did. And then I used to go see Mena Agens doing - I used at SPARC doing her woodcuts. And it was just really good to work with her. Not because she was an older woman but because she was just a really good artist. A really prolific artist and then I was - I was always hanging around with other artists and watching them paint or draw or whatever. And all my mini trips to Mexico. I remember going to Mexico one year. I forget what year it was. I went to go see Arturo Garcia-Busto's painting a mural in Mexico. And I stayed like for - I think I was there for two weeks just watching him paint.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow! In Mexico City?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, in Oaxaca, Mexico. He did a mural at the government palace in Oaxaca. And the entire mural was about the history of women in Mexico. And it was just beautiful. And it was done in a technique that was really rarely utilized here by people now. But it was encaustic. Working with paint, pigment and wax. I just couldn't believe it.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Have you ever done that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I've never done it. But it was really great to see him paint this beautiful mural and to give women credit in Mexico's history for their contributions. Like he had Margarita Masa in there, next to Benito Juarez. I didn't realize that she wrote all of his speeches.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I didn't know that either.

BARBARA CARRASCO: So it was really a learning experience. I just would go on my own. And everybody thought it was really bold for a young woman to travel in Mexico by themselves. That was like unheard of too I guess. But I met all these other great artists. I went to the Taller Gráfica Popular in Mexico City just to look at the wood blocks and the linoleum blocks there. And I thought they were just beautiful. They just weren't archived well enough but they were just great to look at. But I think that was my learning. I think I always felt like there's always room to learn. So going there to Mexico and watching these great artists paint was just all part of it, trying to become a better artist. And I would bring my work and ask them to comment on it, what they thought. So all the artists in Mexico City really liked my work a lot. And a whole film crew actually came to the U.S. and did a whole thing on my mural. So it was shown on Mexican television. And then one of my images, a real popular graphic I did, was mass produced without my permission! In Mexico City, by this group of theatre artists.

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was the image?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It was a pregnant woman in a ball of yarn. It was in the C.A.R.A. show. A lithograph print. And so sometimes -- I wasn't really upset about it because I thought it was really great that it was being shown by so many people. It's a really strong image. And so . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did they at least credit you for it?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, they did. Thank God.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Let me ask you a question. You reminded me when you were talking about the mural of the history of Mexican women, or women in Mexico. Would you consider yourself - do you identify yourself as a feminist artist?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah, I do. I definitely do.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I mean so much of your imagery is woman-centered or depicts women in a lot of ways. I was just wondering if maybe that in some way contributed to what people perceived as your iron will? I mean, there maybe some kind of connection there.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. I think artists get labeled all the time. And that was my label of being either a radical artist - Although I don't think I did anything radical. So that's what I didn't understand. I didn't think I - I mean working with the Farm Workers in itself is definitely not radical. Because César Chávez was basically really a devout Catholic and a pacifist, a follower of Gandhi also. And all the time I worked with him, I never once heard anything out of his mouth or anybody in the Union's, about doing anything radical or violent or anything like that. So I don't know. I think people perceive me as radical because I didn't do what everybody else was doing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: In terms of what?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Like the pregnant woman in the ball of yarn. Even before that image, I did another image of a woman with all this history going out along in her hair of -- It was on the front cover of a book published by the Chicano Studies Center called Essays on La Mujer. And that cover, that was the first cover I did -- That was actually the first illustration I did that was reproduced on a book and also posters. And some people thought that -- and that was a really, really passive image. It was just a woman with all these -- women professionals, images of women in her hair. But this braid across her, right near her mouth, that was what was strong. Because I was also saying that it's a cultural barrier. That that braid represented a cultural barrier to entering professional fields. Because there's so many stories of my friends whose parents prohibited them from going to college. Just going to college, seeking a higher education. And even in my own family, my mother made me turn down an art scholarship. So I told you that. And then just recently I went to Mexico City, or El Paso, and I read an article a young Chicana who got accepted to Harvard and her parents made her turn it down. So that's why I did that braid there. And also women themselves need to break away from these barriers. They just need to be convinced that they have the power to do that. So I'm not just saying they're exterior barriers, but there's a lot of internal barriers. Like the fact that there are certain women also that I really respect in the Chicano art scene for doing that, for making - what is it?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Breaks.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, breaks. And one is Elizabeth Pérez. She was formerly known as Nancy Pérez. And a former girlfriend of Carlos Almaraz. She had gone to live in Paris for five years just to study art over there. And at a time when everybody was working on the murals or the Chicano movement, whatever. And I think it's great that she did that. Because she's a very talented artist. She does her work well. And I think that's what really matters. And like John says, "All that really matters is the art itself." You know what I mean? Even though all this other stuff has something to do with it, contributes.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Could you tell me a little bit about your working relationship with other Chicana artists? I mean, it seems like at this moment there's a real handful of Chicanas who came out of the kind of arts movement and are well identified at this point. Do you feel like there was some kind of - What was the relationship like among you?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think I have been really fortunate to have known such good artists. The older women artists, like Santa Barraza, who's a really great artist. I think she started out in Texas and then she's gone all over the place. But these older Chicanas who take the time to encourage and to suggest and make suggestions to the younger artists -- at the time I was younger. I think they really had a positive impact on me because I do the same thing now to younger artists. That's why I always feel like I come back to . . . because I've been fortunate that other people have done that to me, and for me. And Yreina Cervántez who's just a few years older than me was really great because she's the one who introduced me, or brought me my attention to Frida Kahlo. I had never really been interested in Frida Kahlo until I saw Yreina's work on Frida and who influenced she was by her. She said she wanted me when I went to Mexico one time to bring her back a book on Frida. And right after that, I was like doing all these images of Frida! So that was really great to get to just, act on these suggestions by different artists.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were there ever any collective spaces or groups specifically for Chicana artists that you participated in?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No. The closest to that was like special projects. Like the special women's issue of the

Chismearte issue. That brought together a lot of women in a brief period of time for just a special issue. But it was really exciting because we had Elsa Flores and Elena Viramontes and all these different artists who were in a room together and talking about their experiences. You know, when you work on a project . . . whether it's a magazine -- in that particular instance it was Chismearte Magazine that we were working on . . . you know, in the process, we would talk about other things that we had in common. You know, about Catholicism. About sexism, of course. And about relationships we had with lots of people -- our teachers, mentors, different things. So that was all really great to share with other women. And at the same time, I was going to mainstream, or women's conferences organized by the Women's Building. And there would be Latinas there. Linda Vallejo was going there. And just different women that I had met and I wouldn't have met them otherwise I don't think. There was a lot of women at Self Help Graphics that I got to meet and became friends with. And even some women who are not artists but who work at arts organizations like Mari Cárdenas. She was just really great because she worked with Sister Karen and she was really good to all of the artists because she would send out notices for art projects, public art projects, or proposals for grants and all that stuff. She would send to artists. And there was no one else doing that at the time. There was no one doing that. So she became like sort of an honorary mother. That was great to have her do that. And then there's just so many different women. I don't know. There was another woman - Rosa Maria Marquez. I wanted to mention her because she was at the head of the Chicano Service Action Center. And a long, long time ago. I met her when I was really young, right out of UCLA, 22, 23. And she was like that. Like this real nurturing type of person. Real interested in what I was doing as an artist. As a person. She was always inviting me to different women's events. And I don't know - she's a lot older than I am. Well, not that much older than me. But old enough where I felt like I was gaining a lot of experience.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You were being mentored.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And I thought it was - You know, now, she's like this really well known singer now. But at that time, I just knew her as this hard working community activist. And so it's interesting to see how people have changed and gone into different areas.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Sure. What about the imagery in terms of working with a group of women, whether it's on Chismearte or something to that extent? Was it conscience on your part collectively to try and put out different images of women that were being used by men at that time? Or was there that kind of thinking?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I think we wanted to show -- I think our main intent in that special women's issue is to show that we're very versatile. Not only in different mediums but in the imagery itself. Like we were conscious of the fact that some people choose. And we think it's great also that some people choose to incorporate a popular image in Mexican imagery into their work. But some of the women that were in this particular issue were doing things that -- Like Linda's work was so different from everybody else's. She was doing these plexiglas installations and they were just way out there. They were not figurative. And so, I thought it was good to do that, to show that and then to show that some people were doing images like Yreina was doing water color even back then. But she was doing portraits of young Chicanas. And that was in there. And Judithe Hernández did a really nice ink drawing. It was very nicely done. And let me see. Who else was in there? Elsa Flores did one, an image of herself. Like from a scrapbook. So all these - But they were done in a really - Every one of them were executed really nicely. And you could see that everybody had a different way of approaching art making and a different way of - Some people were really subtle, some people were really bold. We wanted to show that. That's what I wanted to do. Because I've been in art shows where everybody does the same sort of similar work and I definitely did not want to do that. This was trying to showcase what we were all about, what Chicanas were all about. We're all different. And we all look differently. And we sometimes think differently. I mean, even though we have a lot of common experiences, we also have some very strange experiences. [laughs] I mean, at the time for me, I was - there were very few gueras that were involved. In a way, I actually don't remember any gueras, except for Elizabeth. But people of light skin who could pass for Anglo like I could. So I felt like sometimes it was always an issue with me. You know, like not dealing with it. Because I never dealt with it actually in my art work. But it never was an issue with all the other artists. Do you know what I mean? I always felt really, really comfortable with everybody. And we were very, very close. We were like a big family. Because really that was . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: A big family for one issue? Or did those relationships continue outside of the . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And even to this day, Yreina and I like - we talk almost like sisters. I could maybe

months, several months pass by and I'll get on the phone and talk to her and it's like I talked to her yesterday. That's how the relationship we have - and that's been real - that's been really great. We've lost several Chicana artists too, who've passed away. Cindy Oneso who's a really good photographer and a poet. She passed away. I think there was one year where five or six of them died in one year. It was really - When Carlos passed away, Cindy passed away at the same time. And Mena Agens, the older woman, she died that year. I think there were so many people who passed away that year and so it was kind of . . . .

END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B

SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A

BARBARA CARRASCO: But I think that every, every Chicana has had that experience.

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 2, Side A of the interview with Barbara Carrasco on the 26th of April [1999]. And you were describing Carmen Lomas Garza's image.

BARBARA CARRASCO: I believe it was a silk screen print and it was of a young girl talking to her boyfriend outside the window. She's indoors and the boyfriend is outdoors. And the mother is nearby, knitting, but it seems very keenly listening to their conversation. But that's a really - I mean, I could really relate to that image because that's exactly how I grew up. I had a very strict Mexican mother. She was very strict. So I think a lot of Chicanas and Latinas could relate to that, her imagery. And when I talk to Carmen - like I haven't talked to Carmen now see, since the women's, the Chicana conference that took place at UC Santa Barbara on the campus. And that was like - what year was that? I've forgotten what year that was. Amalia Mesa Bains was there. Yolanda Lopez was there. A lot of the Chicana artists were there.

JEFFERY RANGEL: It was in the nineties though, wasn't it? In the last five or six years maybe?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, yeah. I think so. Let me see. Yeah, it was in Santa Barbara. UC Santa Barbara. I think it was '88.

JEFFERY RANGEL: '88?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did you participate in the Governor's Conference on Chicanas that happened in the Sacramento or something like that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I was involved in that too. That's when . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: What was that about?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, that was interesting because like it wasn't just with Chicana artists. It was Latina businesswomen, community activists. Community activists were involved in that. What's her name - from the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts, Carmen Zapata, was there. And I remember that Carmen Lomas Garza did a speech about - I really, really liked her speech because she talked about the fact that during the Chicano movement that the movement utilized Chicana art and imagery and that we gave of ourselves so much that it was time that we started doing work about our personal experiences. As women, as mothers and all that stuff. And I remember some, a few people actually misinterpreting what she was saying. Some people, the real traditional and more - I don't know what the word is to describe the people -- but they really misinterpreted some of the things she said. They thought that she meant she was turning her back on the Chicano movement and she was going to go off and do her own thing. And that's not what she said. She was saying that there's a time now, there's a time then for all that work to be utilized by the community and by that movement. But there was a time now for us to really express ourselves, what we've gone through and all that as women. And even Shifra, I think, misinterpreted her. Shifra was going to write an article about her speech. And I saw it and I said I definitely did not get that impression, that she was moving away. I thought it was great that - See, that kind of made me realize too that it was time for me too to do some of the images that were really needed to be transferred on to canvasses.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Such as what?

BARBARA CARRASCO: About the whole issue of being light complected. And another of growing up in the housing projects, being poor. But also, some really positive images too that just never -- I just sort of neglected them because I was so busy working on so many different . . . .with so many different community groups doing art work for them.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So it was more of an introspective time?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. So I think all those conferences were extremely important. Because it brought -- there was a conference at Northridge that brought together Chicana poets and writers. And I think the poet Lorna Dee Cervantes. She did some really - I mean, she was like the first person, Chicana I ever heard speak in a public forum about some really, really personal experiences. I mean, I have never heard anyone talk like that in my life. I was shocked. It was like being a big huge confessional! [laughs] Oh, my God! She's talking about that?! Because no one - I mean, we don't talk about it. As Latinas, we - our mothers - I mean I have never had a mother/daughter talk like I'm sure some Anglo mothers and daughters have had, those talks about development. Just different things. We just don't do it. I think it's kind of sad that we don't do it but so it was really good - These conferences were a way of dealing with those issues that are never dealt with in our own homes. Never dealt with in our homes. In fact, they were covered up as much as possible. So when you go to these conferences, you get to talk to older women and other women who have had similar experiences but were afraid to talk about it, or were ashamed to talk about. Just all these different things. So it just really - I thought she was incredibly brave for talking about these issues. I don't feel free to talk about what she said because it was very personal. But I just really respect her for being so brave and opening the doors for talking about those things. There was a lot of women like that back then. Like Ana Nieto Gomez, too. She was a really strong feminist who had a lot of bad experiences because she was a strong feminist. And all those women, I think these women are just - I think they really, really helped to open a lot of our eyes to ourselves. Just to look introspectively. Because there's a tendency for us not to do that. I don't know. And I think even in the Chicano art community, I think maybe because all of the arts organizations are primarily men, I never felt comfortable enough to talk about issues that - I never felt that they could understand where I was coming from. So I never brought it up.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Were your images referencing some of those more personal things?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. Right about the time when I was working with the Public Art Center, I felt like I really -- I really felt like I learned a lot from those men that I worked with. But I was also kind of frustrated that I was not in a position to initiate my own projects. So I started doing that image that was a recurring image. It was an angry, pissed off screaming lady. And it was a profile of her. And I did a million portraits of her. At that time, it was really interesting because I still have the drawing. But I have the first one I ever did was . . . is on a piece of paper. I did it with ball point pen really quickly. I was angry about a lot of - I think I was just feeling a lot of - hearing a lot of sexists comments. I did this angry woman. And she's pregnant. That was really odd. I don't know why she was pregnant. But I showed that drawing at Self Help Graphics one time and a really good artist from Chicago, Ricardo - what was his name? Ricardo - I'm trying to think what his last name was. But he was a master printer. And he came up to me and he said --

JEFFERY RANGEL: Carlos Cortez?

BARBARA CARRASCO: No, no. His name was Ricardo -- I've forgot his last name. I'll find out. Because he was married to a friend of mine. So they're friends. They live in San Francisco right now. And they both don't - They no longer produce art at all because I think they just got frustrated. He was trying to become a professor at U.C.L.A. and he had a really hard time. He ended up getting - There was so much resistance so he - I think him and his wife - his wife was an artist too. But they both gave up on art making because they just felt like the professional - it was a dead end. That institutions were not opening up their doors to Chicanos or Latinos. Anyway, but he told me something really interesting. He said, in the angry drawing, he said, "Your drawing is done so well but it's not . . . . " The thing that he liked is that I was really loose. He said when he saw some of my other stuff, it was real tightly drawn images and real clean images and this one was almost like a sketch almost. And I didn't realize it but I had drawn her hand over the stomach and the lines going across were her hands. He said, "That's like you're not be able to draw." You're saying in that drawing that that's your artist hand and you can't draw. You can't draw these personal images. And it was weird coming from a man! You know, I looked at him and I almost felt like saying, "How dare you!" but he was right on. And Harry's been like that too. Harry has said that to me several times. And it's interesting that men will see . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: They'll see something in your work that

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. But no, they'll see things about myself that -- They'll say things about my work that other Chicanas don't see. I guess because they have the same problems, the same issues, of holding back. So it was just real interesting to hear. I just remembered that guy. I haven't thought about him for such a long time. I've got to find out what he's doing. He was such a good artist. But him and his wife both lost their teenage son in a car accident. And it just devastated them both. They moved and stopped producing art. It was unfortunate because they were both really talented. Anyway, so that's interesting.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I guess I'm curious about you producing these images of angry women within a male space, or a male dominated space. How does that - There's no dialogue created between men and women about what does - I mean, John or Carlos or whoever don't look at that, "Barbara, what are you so pissed off about?"

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh no. They do. That definitely did take place. They did comment on it. They said, "Why don't you mellow out and loosen up." So there was a lot of -- You know, we would laugh at how seriously we took our work too. So, and although that happened a lot, we talked -- They actually asked me why I was angry. And I would say, "Well, you know, a lot of times we work on these projects and I don't get really my due credit. Not that my ego's speaking. It's just my self worth, esteem is suffering because of it." So it's like - No, it's been really good because all the arguments I think I said before, they're really good though. Because I think it's even made them realize - I think all those discussions with them actually has made them more aware of their comments, made them more sensitive to other women when they deal with them.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. And it's a long learning process. It's hard for somebody to do that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: It doesn't happen over night.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And then to automatically become super-feminist or whatever. I guess you know that better than I would. Let me change directions here a little bit and ask you what the creative chemistry between you and Harry is like. I mean, to me it's really interesting because we mentioned a little bit before about your commitments and your kind of method of producing and the folks that you work with seem - I guess there's some cross over. But I don't think for the most part people would identify you two and your work really closely. And so I wonder what that's like to be - is it that the opposites, the creative - make for a creative synergy for the two of you? Do you know what I mean?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, see, I think right about the time when I was actually starting to see Harry, I think what I start -- When I was younger, I was a lot more judgmental. This is either right or wrong. And when I was working with the Farm Workers, I thought that was the right thing to do because Cesar was such a great, charismatic leader. And he really believed in what he was doing and I believed in him. So I was like so loyal to the Union. And Harry, I think he thought that I was afraid. I had a lot of fear about doing my own personal work. And he was right too.

JEFFERY RANGEL: He mentioned that in his interview.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh he did? Yeah, he was always telling me, "Why do you always have to do work for them?" He supported them but he just thought that I should be spending, I should have been doing some other images also while I was doing those. What was I trying to think of now? What I really respect about Harry and Gronk and all that, is that they were doing something that was different from what I was doing. And I appreciated that. It's the same way I appreciated -- I think people appreciated my work, my take on Day of the Dead. Because it was different. It was not the norm. And Asco definitely, their work was not the norm. They were so on the edge that I really couldn't relate to anything they were doing actually. To be honest with you. But I respected the fact that they were doing work that was like - I think I heard Gronk and Harry talk about murals, that there's a reason why they didn't like the murals that much is because a lot of the muralists were drawing on what was done in Mexico or they were drawing on other murals. And that they all saw it like everybody kind of following each other, or bouncing off each other ideas. And I think what Asco is about is like taking an image and saying, "Okay, we'll do a mural. But how unique can we make this mural?" And taping Patssi to a wall and calling that an instant mural was like really taking it to another . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, Humberto Sandoval was up there too.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I just liked the fact that they were doing different things. But at the same time, like their experiences weren't all that different from ours. They grew up poor in East L.A. I grew up poor in West L.A. Two different areas. They went to public schools like I did. They started creating art an early age, just like I did. But it's just the way they -- Their take on it was different because they chose to really be different. And I guess Harry and I, I think when I introduced him to César Chávez one year - I forget what year that was when I introduced him to him, when I first started seeing him. I thought he got a chance to see how many people were - I guess because there was a lot of people there and it was just for a wedding. It was César Chávez's son's wedding. And he was just amazed at how many people came under one tent. There was a big large tent. And I think he was amazed at the support that was there. I think it made him see the Union in a different light. And then all the other stuff I've done, like all the images of women. All my images about women, Harry's been real supportive of that. But he used to get a little upset at me for going to so many meetings, like political meetings, and an organization I was involved with, Cafe Cultural, in the Boyle Heights area, where it was a cultural center of artists and writers and poets and it was really nice space. Manazar Gamboa and the Barragan family was involved in that. A lot of people were involved in that. And we had fund raisers there. We supported artists and poets. It was really nice. I have a whole file on that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Really?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It's over there at Stanford.

JEFFERY RANGEL: When was that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, that was before I got --

JEFFERY RANGEL: Here I am, asking dates again.

BARBARA CARRASCO: But I have that, all those files are up at Stanford. I kept everything. I kept every single memo that was issued.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wow. Did it last for awhile?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, it lasted for a couple of years. There were art shows, readings there. All kinds of different things going on. And it was just artists supporting artists. That's what it was basically about. And then there was another gallery that was started by Manazar Gamboa also. And I had to work with him many times. I first met him before I became the first Chicano to be the judge of the Beyond Baroque. So I did the interview with him that came out in - and Chismearte actually. So I did an interview with him and I did a drawing, a graphic of him that appeared with the interview. But he started a gallery called Galleria Ocaso which means Sunset. It was on Sunset Boulevard. And it was really nice. It only lasted a couple of years and that was it. Because all the money came out of everybody's pocket. It was very hard.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Hard to sustain.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, but Gronk had his really great shows there. He had a lot of shows. Diane and . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Where was this?

BARBARA CARRASCO: It was right on Sunset Boulevard near Descanso Street. Do you know where that is? Really close.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Like the Silver Lake area?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, It was right next to Descanso Street. I remember that street. But I had a show there with Curtis Gutierrez and Diane and it was a really, really good turn out. And that's where I met Dr. Ramón Favela. He came to see that show. And I've been friends with him ever since. And he's great because he's also a really good art historian and just a good resource person too. He's given me a lot of good advice about how to price my work and how to approach galleries and all that stuff. So it's just really good to connect with all these people. And also, at the same time, I was getting involved in all these things, Harry also kind of had problems with me getting involved with these publications. Community magazines like Corazon de Atzlan and Americas 2001 and Caminos Magazine. He just thought that my energy was going in too many different directions and that I wasn't focused. And so I think he was right probably. Because I really felt I didn't have any time for my own work. It was like I really regret it in a way now because - not totally - but I regret that I didn't devote some time to do some personal imagery back then, more than I did. Because that's time lost. You can't make that up. But I thought my involvement with all these publications was exciting too. I didn't look at it like it wasn't. But he was pretty critical of that, I guess. And then just the way we - I'm a real people person and Harry's - He thinks he's a real people person but I don't really think he is. I don't. Because he does a lot of his stuff is really one on one, him and either his typewriter or the computer. But when you do murals, you're with lots of people and you do a lot of . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: In the performance genre, he talks about working with a lot of people at one time.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. But those are like real sporadic. They're not consistently. I'm talking about like just - He does work well with a particular group of people. I'm talking about like when I first met him, he was like really considered an outlandish character. Everybody said, "Oh, you're . . ." When I first started seeing Harry, everybody thought that we were so drastically different from one another that everybody made it their business to tell us that they didn't think we'd last. Everyone from Gronk to Jose Montoya to . . .Yolanda Lopez. Everybody for some reason just thought that we were a mismatch. But he has such a great sense of humor and he's a really honest person. Some times he's a brutally honest person. But I respect that actually. The fact that he's an honest person.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Long term relationships with men demand that and you can carry that into your art making too. Assuming that that makes that transition that is really helpful, constructive.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, actually there's been times where his suggestions are so . . . they're just really well thought out suggestions. He really takes the time to really get involved in the conversation and he's a pretty giving person like that. I think people don't really credit Harry for all the early stuff he did to support Chicano artists. Like all the work he did for the section called La Comunidad, for La Opinion. He wrote about John. He

wrote about a lot of artists and myself included. And I think that's what I really liked about Harry too that he was always helping, encouraging other artists and helping them write grants. He's an excellent grants writer. And that kind of thing, I thought that was great because in a way he was doing basically what I was doing in a different way. He was helping artists one on one and I felt like I was helping people in a mass, in a community, in a big. But he was really helping artists to empower themselves. Because you can't really produce art without some financial assistance. So, he was really - He helped a lot of artists get their grants.

JEFFERY RANGEL: So did that help, your art production for the masses, is that connected to your sense of identify as a cultural worker?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I feel - I felt like it did then. But everything's so different now. Everything's shifted to more personal work as opposed to collaborative work simply because my health went bad. And then I had a child. And everything's just drastically different. I had a bone marrow transplant in -- what year was that? October 9, 1996. But that really changed my life because for three years - Actually three years before that, I was fighting cancer. And then I had the bone marrow transplant in '96. And then having a child while I was sick, that was just really overwhelming. I didn't produce any art work at all. You know what's really interesting is right when I graduated from CalArts, I didn't produce any art work at all either. For a couple of years. Not one bit of art work. Because when I entered CalArts, I was thirty-four years old and I decided to get my MFA degree after what? Eleven years or something since I graduated from UCLA in '78. And so I'm in the art department there and the experience there was so different from UCLA. Because UCLA is studio oriented where you actually paint and you actually draw and you're actually producing prints. At CalArts, it's all about art theory. It's not about producing at all. So it was just really difficult for me to actually comprehend all the dense theory material. I had a hard time with it because I'm not - I didn't understand LeConte or Foucault or Derrida at all. So I made a commitment to really understand it. I had told Harry that I was going to move away and I was going to move into the dorms. So I did that. Because I felt like - And I also told César Chávez that I was going to go for two years and get my degree and that I really wanted to just concentrate on being a good student. And so I told him I was not going to be available at all for those two years. And I basically - When I moved into the dorms, it was to actually be there as a student and to absorb as much of that material as I could possibly.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did that change your production, your way of making art?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. Oh yeah, because the critiques there were severe. Not to me though because everybody sort of -- my reputation precedes me. Not to me but I saw what they -- The critiques were pretty harsh to other students. But they were constructive but they were just really like getting to the core of why you produce a certain image, that it made me really re-think what kind of images I was producing as a Chicana artist. And it did it so much so that I didn't produce any work. I almost felt like . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Wait a minute. Can you explain that again?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Because you know, John Valadez told me that he talked to another artist, a young Chicana who graduated from CalArts also. And the experience did the same thing to her that it did to me. She didn't produce anything for two years, for a couple of years after graduating. It's because CalArts, they really make you talk about your work. And I think Chicano artists really don't really talk about their work as much. I mean, we talk about other issues and people talk about their art on a superficial level almost. And I think CalArts there's a . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: You're connecting the theory that you're learning with talking about your work that you're producing.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. And I'm thinking am I producing this work because it's easy to produce? Am I doing this work because it's expected of me to do this? And all these things were coming up in my head and I kept thinking - oh!

JEFFERY RANGEL: What kind of answers did you come up with?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I kept thinking I was doing some easy images, like everything was too easy to -- You know, like even though I was taking popular images and personalizing them and re-interpreting them, how I interpret them. Like Frida, images of my connection with Frida. I did her portrait and my portrait and this braid, our trenzas, our braids are connected. It was a real popular image that I did. And everybody liked it. And I thought like I don't know if I was doing that because it was so simplistic. And I was thinking about if I was doing it because -- Why was I doing it? And the way I explained it in public was through Yreina I was introduced to Frida but I really felt like one I looked at her body of work, that I really wanted to get as personal with my work as she was with hers. So I wanted to make a connection with her. And the connection was through the braids, the imagery of the braids coming together and forming a flame so that I was keeping alive her strength or I guess her bravery for doing all those kind of personal images.

JEFFERY RANGEL: And that seemed too simplistic?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Well, now, after CalArts, because I did that image before I went to CalArts. So after CalArts, I'm like . . . . . But every time I sat down to do some art work, I went through that whole thing. Why am I doing this? And I didn't really feel inspired to do a thing. I just went for two years of not doing anything. I just didn't do anything. But my body was telling me to have a baby. Because I put -- Because Harry -- Harry was kind of reluctant to -- because he had gone through a first marriage and he was reluctant to go through a second one. So I was really anxious to get married and have a baby and my time is running out. My biological clock is ticking real fast. I was thirty-nine when I - Harry and I got married finally in '93 on March 16, in Las Vegas. And that only after I threatened to leave him. [laughs] Just kidding. And then I had a baby. I got pregnant nine months later. I actually got pregnant nine months later. So I had my baby July 17, of '94. And then seven months later I was diagnosed with cancer. So that was really . . . .

END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE B

JEFFERY RANGEL: This is Tape 2, Side B, continuing with Barbara Carrasco on the 26th of April. And you were talking about the focus that you took to CalArts in really sort of learning the theory and I'm assuming kind of making it your own but also not having to engage with that kind of exclusive language but yet really coming to study it and know it and then, - It's kind like once you do that you realize that you don't need to use that . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It's like learning to use some certain tools and then once you know how to use them, you can use some of them and not use others. And that's what I felt like at UCLA I was given all the skills to - technical skills. I learned anatomy. I know anatomy really well. And I could choose to distort that anatomy now because I know it so well. But I'm real fortunate to have gotten that really good training behind me. So I entered CalArts knowing that it was a theory based school and not a studio based school. What I wanted to get from it is all that it could offer me. But it was difficult. It wasn't easy for me to do that at all. So I had to make a commitment to really learning the materials. So I moved into the dorms. I kind of severed ties with all kinds of people, including Harry. In fact, I think CalArts was - Since Harry was reluctant to get married and all that, it was perfect timing for me to do something like that. To delve into something, not to waste my time either. Because Harry and I didn't get married until after CalArts. But he had said, Harry said that he had noticed that I was a pretty disciplined person and he thought that I could do that. That I could get through CalArts. So when I applied - I applied really knowing that I wanted to commit myself to getting the degree in two years. So I was in the library a lot. Constantly in the library studying, not only the language but different art movements in New York and all over the place, and the Bauhaus. And that everybody has art history. So I just wanted to get all that information down and whether I was going to utilize it later was not important. It was just being able to go through that.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Did it make you think about your work differently?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh, a lot differently. Yeah. I think it was really good though because it actually made me think about just the thought process that's involved in art making. Like a lot of people sit down and just will doodle but I wanted to have the work be meaningful, the work reflect how I felt about certain things, issues. And I think CalArts really sort of geared me to that way of thinking.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Could you point to a piece and say like this really represents the bond, or the mixture of UCLA, CalArts training that was really conscious about what the creative process was and technically I was able to render that?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. I did a self portrait and it was called Names Can Hurt. Names Can Hurt, not can't. But it was a self portrait. And it was the first piece I ever did that I actually have a text in there, something that a lot of CalArts students do, incorporate text into it. But that's like the first time I've ever done anything real personal about the skin issue, the light skin issue. And it was really -- It's a really strong image. It's a self-portrait of myself in front of a mirror putting make up on. And the make up is dark complected make up. And around the mirror is all the names that were directed to me when I was growing up, like green eyes and guera and white girl and all those kind of things. And pocha. Mexican's would call me -- you know, not born in Mexico. And I felt like I was really -- When I was growing up like I felt different because I wasn't like everybody else. Growing up in the projects everybody else was brown. I was standing out. But I felt -- And then the other way, when I go to UCLA or CalArts, I could pass for Anglo but I'm not. So there's all these -- Well, that was like the first time I actually did a painting that was about that. And I think that has a lot to do with CalArts. In fact, all the work I did that summer prior to my graduating from CalArts, it was all real personal work. It was at the Le Band Gallery at Loyola Marymount University, a group show. And all the work for that show was personal. That was really good to do that. But there's something happened after graduating, where I felt like I just needed to take time off and just not produce. Just to think about art, and what I was going to do. Two years I didn't do anything. Not a thing.

Not a thing. And I talk to other artists and it's not so uncommon for artists to do that. But Harry sort of really encouraged me to read about - to read a lot of different works by artists and writers and by people, writers from other countries, not just American writers. So he did that for a couple of years when that's all he did. So I thought he was wasting time, because he wasn't producing. But actually, everything is a process.

JEFFERY RANGEL: You need to feed yourself and then come out with something different.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, and then when -- César Chávez passed away in '93. I kind of slumped into like a pretty bad depression. I felt like that was -- He was our great leader and there's no one who could fill his shoes at all. I didn't know one single person who could do that. Only Dolores Huerta, who's also a co-founder of UFW and a good friend of mine. I felt like she's the only one. And then when she wasn't placed in the presidency to replace César, that even depressed me more. So I don't know, I just - because I felt like she really should have been. And even though she never really talked about any of that stuff, I was just really disappointed about that. And I think a lot of people felt like the movement was falling apart because he was - I mean, how many leaders do we have? We have very few. And I don't know. During that whole time, I think I did some images but they were not anything I'd show in a public gallery. They were real personal images. And actually, they were kind of like just sketches and they were depressing sketches. Everything was depressing. I don't know why.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Well, it seems pretty apparent why. What about now? Where do you see your imagery going? What's your interest in terms of medium? Things of that nature. If you were to look ahead, what kind of projects do you see yourself wanting to engage?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I really, really want to get involved in doing some art work around being Catholic, growing up Catholic. Because I think that's really -- that's behind a lot of the reluctance to do personal imagery. And last summer, I got a chance to work with some priests from the Dolores Mission. And I felt, even though I had some problems with Catholic school, I felt so at home with these priests. It felt like I was where I should be. And these priests were so dedicated to their community. Father Kennedy and Father Dolan. That I felt like maybe I should really look at how Catholicism has affected me. Because I was really - I didn't realize it but I think I've been a really strong Catholic all along. Even though I hadn't even gone inside a church for many years because I was upset about how our parish priest treated my mother and treated my family. He was pretty bad. But these priests made me realize that you can't blame all these bad experiences on - the whole religion on a couple of bad experiences. And I had spoken to Father Luis Olivarez before he passed away many times. I was a friend of his. And I had told him that I wanted to do a show about growing up Catholic. I had told Harry a million years ago. You heard those tapes.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Yeah. I heard the tapes. I thought you actually created imagery on . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: I have sketches only. And the sketches were -- well, they're pretty interesting sketches. I think if I were to actually get a grant - I would have to get a grant or something to do this show because it involves building a lot of different things in there that I need to really deal with the whole issue of growing up Catholic. And right now, there's a lot of women doing projects around spiritualism and Catholicism and so this is like the perfect timing to do something like this. But I really want the support of - I don't want people to feel like I'm in any way, shape or form doing anything negative about Catholicism. So I want to really involve, I want to dedicate the art show to Father Luis Olivarez now. Because he was really a great person because he was real accessible. I could sit down and talk to him about my problems with the Catholic church. The sexism, the thing about - you know, the church's stance against homosexuality and also against

JEFFERY RANGEL: abortion.

BARBARA CARRASCO: abortion. Not only abortion, but even just . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: contraception.

BARBARA CARRASCO: contraception. I can't believe it because that affects so many poor people. And it affected my mother. I mean, she was actually thrown out of a confessional for confessing the use of birth control pills. I told you that. So that's something that - I didn't want to deal with that. But you know I really think that it would be a really great project. But I also want to do something about relationships between mothers and daughters and mothers and daughters and grandmothers, and grandfathers too. I think there's a lot of material that hasn't been touched upon. There have been artists who have done a lot of work around that like Santa Barraza has done stuff about her grandparents. And there's a lot of really good artists right now who are doing stuff about honoring their ancestors and all that kind of thing. But I want to talk about even the conflicts between older and younger people and about sexuality because that's something that is not talked about at all. I mean nudity in itself has been a real problem. It's even been a problem among Chicano artists. One of my works was almost censored in the CARA show because it depicts female breasts that are exposed. The Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn. I won't say who tried to censor it but one of the curators thought it was offensive to her because she's an artist and she thought it was a sexist image. It was a comment about sexism too.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Coming from the . . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. But I was really definitely adamant about keeping that in there. I would have fought tooth and nail if they would have censored it. I mean, regardless of the fact that it's a Chicano show or not.

JEFFERY RANGEL: That's interesting. I guess it raises the question of how your art is interpreted, even within the Chicano arts community, and the room for misinterpretation.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. I think that there's like the Pregnant Woman and the Ball of Yarn image, that image alone has generated so many - I think it's wonderful to see people talk about your work so and interpret it so differently. Some people think I'm talking about forced sterilization which was a pretty horrible thing that was happening a to a lot of women many years ago and in a lot of countries. But I wasn't talking about that at all. That was not my intention to talk about that. But and then other people . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It resonates.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah. It comes from that. But I was really basing it on the fact that my brother treats his wife so badly. A real chauvinist. He wouldn't allow her to go to college. I don't know how -- My mother -- Because my other brother's not at all like that. So my younger brother chose to be really chauvinist. My other brother's fine with and prefers women who go to college and all that. So it's interesting within just our family how you can have a lot of differences.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Such fertile ground for work.

BARBARA CARRASCO: See, I think Carmen Lomas Garza and who else deals with like personal images like that? Santa Barraza. They touched upon it but I think they're doing it in a - I don't know how to say - not a superficial way because I think their work is really great. But I think you can actually expand upon those images that they're doing.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you see maybe a next generation of Chicana artists or Latina artists who you've been working with, dealing with those personal issues or more in depth?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Oh yeah. Just within the atelier group that I'm working with at Self Help, the ten women artists, the younger artists from Berkeley, Favianna. She's very young. I think she's only twenty-one or something. And she's doing some stuff about sexuality that is going to shock everybody!

JEFFERY RANGEL: What's Favianna's last name?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I forget her last name. I'm terrible. But anyway, but she's from Berkeley. She's a friend of Yreina's. Yreina met her up there and invited her to be - So Yolanda Lopez and I - you know Yolanda's a little older than I am -- we're just amazed at the fact that she's doing some really bold images. But it's the way she's executing these images. It's all digital. She's using a computer for every -- This is a silk screen process. And she's like every single thing on her silk screen print is digitally executed. Isn't that amazing? Not one thing is drawn or painted or anything.

JEFFERY RANGEL: Does that make it multi-media? Mixed media?

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think she really -- she inspired even older artists to want to go into that. Expand. In fact, -- I think that's what really exciting about working as a group. Because you can talk about all these different ways of approaching image making. And then, Favianna, again she's the youngest in the program yet she's inspired all of us to do that. I mean, I have to admit that like a couple of years ago, my sister who owns her own - what is it called? Desktop publishing business. She's the one who actually inspired me to utilize the computer to produce some of the work, the larger work. Because it was much simpler to design stuff for the Farm Workers that was going to be projected to large scale banners and mural banners and all that. I'm terrible. A guy named Ernest Pintoff at USC, he invited me to write an article about doing art work for the Farm Workers but using the computer. So I wrote an article. My first article - or the title of the book is called The Complete Guide to Computer Art and Animation Schools. So I think I'm the only artist that's in the book. And then there's animators and art instructors and different people who contributed articles to the book. But he was really interested in what I did for the Farm Workers, which was really surprising. He read an article that Max Benavidez did on all the artists who had worked for the UFW right after Cesar passed away. And based on that article, he contacted me and asked me if I'd be interested in writing it. So it's about two pages long. And I think I'm a fairly good writer. But it's really exciting to do something for a book. But anyway, getting back to the images that younger women are doing, I think all of them are doing images that we wish we could have done but were reluctant to do. There's another artist from Santa Monica in the group who's doing something about her mother being a domestic worker. And that's pretty bold too. Her images are real - It's just real interesting to see how younger artists are doing images that affected not only their lives but their mother's lives. They're almost like paying

homage to their mothers in a way because the mothers really don't have a voice, or a creative voice. So they're . .. .

JEFFERY RANGEL: Is there recognition on their part of the work that you did, or continue to do, as creating the space for them to be able to make those bolder sorts of images? And kind of delve into the more personal subjects?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Is there a space to talk about it?

JEFFERY RANGEL: Do you see you and the work that you've done as opening their ability to talk about that? And what kind of reciprocity?

BARBARA CARRASCO: That's the great thing about this workshop is that Yreina Cervantes who has really selected all the artists. That's what she wanted to do is connect younger artists with older artists, or more mature artists. And I think she did that really well because even among the older artists, we sort of all respect each other pretty much. And it's really nice to hear a young artist say that they were really inspired by my early work. And "Oh, I know this work." Or "I know that work. It's really me. I can relate to it." Or "I just really like it. It's inspired me to do this or that." It's just really great to be in a place where you can talk about all those influences. And even though like Yolanda Lopez's work is so different from mine, her and I both are I think -- I can say this about her is she's a strong feminist. A very strong Chicana feminist. In fact, I think some of her images are really some images I would probably never do myself. Because they're a lot more overtly political, overtly bold. To have a woman coming out of a -- A runner coming out of -- The Virgen de Guadelupe's halo. That's pretty -- My mother was offended by that. And older women, if you talk to a lot of older Chicana women. But then she has spoken to a lot of older women and they have said, "That's great that you did that. That you had the courage to do something like that." So it's interesting to get all this feedback. It's both positive and negative sometimes. My mother was really appalled that she would do that. And Ester Hernández . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: And by your mom being pretty conservative, so that's . . .

BARBARA CARRASCO: She's very conservative. And another person who really influenced a lot was with Ester Hernández her Sun Mad Raisins print. That was amazing. And I didn't really know her personally but I met her at SPARC doing an art show there. And I asked her if we could do an exchange. If I would give her one of my prints I did, the Self Help Graphics print. I did a self portrait about censorship and she would let me have one of her Sun Mad Raisins pieces. So we did that. I just think her work is really great because here she is a former farm worker. She's doing an image about farm workers. And it's like - But she's also using pop imagery to make a statement. And it's like one of those - You know, I really liked her approach because it doesn't hit you over the head right away. I mean, as soon as you look at it you know it's . . . .

JEFFERY RANGEL: It's strong.

BARBARA CARRASCO: It's very strong. But it's nice to look at though. Even though it's a calavera there, I think it's a nice image. It's a really familiar image

JEFFERY RANGEL: I know what you mean. Barbara, we're coming to that closing point. But before I did I wanted to give you a chance to put sum things up - I think it's difficult in these interviews to shed some light right in the middle of your career and ask them to sum things up. But I'm going to ask you any ways. [laughs]

BARBARA CARRASCO: Go ahead. That word says it all. But. But, I'm going to tell you any way. I'm going to ask you any way.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think that's kind of one of my last question, in terms of where you saw yourself maybe heading in the future. But maybe in terms of things you really feel like people need to know that they haven't been as aware about your work. I don't know . . . anything. Maybe there's not. Maybe you prefer not to. I don't know.

BARBARA CARRASCO: I think I'm still evolving, hopefully in the right direction. But I just think that I really haven't even hit -- I haven't even begun to really do some of the images I want to do. I feel like I've been given a second chance because my health is good now. I have a beautiful daughter. A loving husband. But I feel like I've been given a second chance and I don't want - I really want to take advantage of all these new experiences, like being a new mother. I mean, it's new for me. She's only four and a half. I think that there's always room for growth, artists to grow and mature. Not only artistically but intellectually. I really want to start reading a lot

more and writing a lot more. I want to eventually write a book.

JEFFERY RANGEL: A biography?

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I've always wanted to write one.

JEFFERY RANGEL: These interviews will be helpful in that.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Yeah, I need a copy of it. But I've always wanted to because I think I've had a really great life. So far. Even though I've had some set backs. But I don't know, I'm very fortunate to be here right now. And I don't know, I think I'm looking at everything differently now too. I really want to look at some of the good things, like project a lot of good positive energy. And I think that's what's really important too. Is to really look at . . . project the good that we have to offer. Because a lot of people see Chicano art as really talking about a lot of the struggles, the heartache, the pain and suffering and all that. And I don't know, I want to do that too. This is interesting because Eva Cockroft and I met recently. She just passed away from cancer. But I got a chance to meet with her and I've always admired her work and all that. And we were going to do a show together about our experience with having cancer. And you know what's interesting? Because she was going to really - all the work she showed me was all about that part, of the suffering aspect and the brutality of having surgeries and the cancer treatments and all that. But I told her that I really already drew images about what I went through. But I would really focus in on the healing process. The healing process has been one of, I believe, support. Because I have a really good support system. Or a lot of loving. I'm real fortunate to have so many good artist friends and so many good - just the art community as been really supportive. And even though we've had our differences and all that. That's what's really great about it is that when someone - when I was ill, everybody just set all that aside. I received so many great letters. And it just made me think about I want to be good to all these people who maybe I haven't been so good with before. But you know what I mean? It made me really think about how important friendships are and how important family is. And to give my daughter something positive to look forward to so that her life will be one of maybe hopefully struggle free. You know what I mean? I think Harry and I - I have to admit, I think we're good parents. I think we've given her a lot of love and I think we'll continue to do that. So I don't know.

JEFFERY RANGEL: I think ending with the idea of wanting to put out the positive energies is actually really a nice place to mark this view and then maybe take a look at what comes out of it. So, thanks for the time.

BARBARA CARRASCO: Okay. It's documented now. Thank you.

END OF SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE B

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