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# Oral history interview with Sylvia Orozco, 2004 Jan. 26-Feb. 2

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Sylvia Orozco on January 26 and February 2, 2004. The interview took place in Austin, Texas and was conducted by Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas.

This transcript has been lightly edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose

### Interview

CARY CORDOVA: This is Cary Cordova interviewing Sylvia Orozco at the Mexic-Arte or Mexic-Arte Gallery in Austin, Texas on January 24, 2004 or actually, let me correct myself, we have rescheduled for January 26th, 2004. This is for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is our first session and disc one of that session.

And I'm going to start us off by asking Sylvia, would you tell us a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

SYLVIA OROZCO: Okay, I was born in Mercedes, Texas was just born there but I grew up in Cuero, Texas.

MS. CORDOVA: And where was your family from originally?

MS. OROZCO: Okay, well, my mom was from Ceralvo Nuevo Leon and my father from Guadalajara and she came over with her parents during the revolution and my father came over as an undocumented worker. He was a bootmaker and – then they met in Mercedes, got married and I'm the second child.

MS. CORDOVA: And would Cynthia be the first child?

MS. OROZCO: No, she's the fourth.

MS. CORDOVA: The fourth. So how many are there?

MS. OROZCO: The fifth. Oh, the fifth. She's the fifth one. She's the fifth one.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And you're the second?

MS. OROZCO: Second, yeah. There's four girls and two boys.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, and four girls and two boys so a total of six?

MS. OROZCO: Six, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: Maria Teresa is a – I guess she works in the public sector, she graduated from the LBJ School, and then I'm the second child and graduated from the University of Texas and I guess I'm the one in the arts. And then Irma, oh, she's kind of in the arts too but she graduated in journalism from UT [University of Texas] and then also UT in literature, Spanish literature, and then my brother's in business, Eddie, and Cynthia's in history and Bobby's an engineer.

MS. CORDOVA: That's quite a big family. What was it like to grow up with so many brothers and sisters in your household?

MS. OROZCO: It was pretty neat. We were never lonely and I think we were all kind of each other's like best friends so we didn't – not too many of us had like a second best friend. You know, because we had each other, I think, first and foremost and then – it was pretty neat.

MS. CORDOVA: And because, I guess, you were slightly on the older side, did you end up being a caretaker? Or how did things work in your home?

MS. OROZCO: I think I was like the artist of the family so I think I did the science project six times, the eighth grade science project. I did it for everybody.

MS. CORDOVA: Why would the artist do the eighth grade science project?

MS. OROZCO: Well, they liked how I did mine and so the same project – we all the same teacher, right? And so, you know, each time when it came to do the science project I did it. So I did it for, you know, when I was in eighth grade and when I was in – I guess later on. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: And –

MS. OROZCO: Almost eight times because I think my younger brother – I probably was gone by then.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: But you had already distinguished yourself by eighth grade as the artist of the family?

MS. OROZCO: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, that was actually in the second grade, I think, is my earliest recollection because I won a little circus ticket because I had the best drawing in the second grade.

MS. CORDOVA: What was it of?

MS. OROZCO: A little dog with a – playing – bouncing a ball with – he had a little clowns neck – you know, those collars and he was bouncing a ball. I remember that little drawing.

MS. CORDOVA: It sounds great.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah. Well, anyways, so I won two circus ticket with that.

MS. CORDOVA: And who did you go with?

MS. OROZCO: Well, we didn't go. I didn't go because we didn't have a car so we didn't end up going. But anyway, I liked winning the prize and having that little drawing.

MS. CORDOVA: And so were your parents encouraging of this side of you?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I think – well, my – as I said my father was a bootmaker and so, you know, he – an artisan so he worked with his hands and so I think I gained part – you know, some of my artistic abilities from him, and plus then I would always see him creating, right? So I think that's kind of really important when a child sees a grown-up putting time into something with your hands. You learn to appreciate that, that, you know, not everything comes from, you know, I guess reading or writing or other tasks but, you know, actually from making something.

And then he would make really beautiful boots. There were boots that he would make and so I remember – and because I would go to his boot shop every Saturday because I would go with him to buy groceries and so I would sit in the boot shop every Saturday from like 3:00 to 5:00 and I used to play with the colored – he had a little piece of wood and it had nails and it had all the little colored strings and threads and I would play with those and do things with them or whatever. So it was kind of pretty neat. I still remember all those bright colors and then everything.

And then my mom was real creative too because she was a writer. Well, she didn't start really writing until later on but she would always – she would do some little projects, which were – I think were kind of strange sometimes. Like she would like draw and then I remember her getting the shavings of the crayons and putting them in cloth and then ironing them and making bright – so it was – she'd make little strange projects. So I remember that, right?

And then and also as a child I remember I was always making things like Barbie dolls. I would make – I had a whole line of fashions, fancy gowns and all this kind of thing, and she would make clothes for us. She sewed by hand more than – she didn't sew by machine and, in fact, I was the only child that would actually wear some – as we grew up I would wear her creations, right? Her dresses. Nobody else wanted to wear the homemade dresses but I liked them and so I learned to sew as a child also.

MS. CORDOVA: The other kids didn't like them?

MS. OROZCO: Um-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And why didn't they like them?

MS. OROZCO: Well, they were homemade dresses and I liked them.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. OROZCO: And what else? Oh, I was also in Camp Fire Girls and that was really important for me because we made – we would always make things and also collect things, like I collected rocks, insects, leaves and a lot of these you would do in Camp Fire for beads. Like beads were the achievement. You could get a bead a citizenship, frontiers, woodsmen, all those different – and I loved the beads because they were all colorful and so I would do all these projects because the beads were the awards and then you would then sew the beads on your vest and you'd have a – lots of beads on your vest. And so my objective was to get the beads. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: Were any of your sisters in that with you?

MS. OROZCO: My older sister, she first got into Camp Fire Girls and then I followed her but she wasn't – she liked it but she wasn't too much into beads though. I was. But those are some of the kind of little things I liked. And the collecting, I think that's really important because I think that's what I still do, collecting artwork but now for the museum.

MS. CORDOVA: What did you collect then?

MS. OROZCO: Well, as I said, rocks and I still have some of my little rock collections and I collected leaves and bugs and stamps and I remember also making – I made Indian villages like out of those spools of thread I would make little totem poles and the leather from my father's shop would make little teepees and the Indian stuff. And stamps and – yeah, I think that's what I collected.

MS. CORDOVA: And were your brothers and sisters collecting things too or was that some sort of something that set you apart?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I think I just did that. They did other stuff. Like my older sister, she was a teacher. She was two years older than us and she would – she was real bright in school and so we would play school – but after coming from school or on the weekends or in the summers you take a little piece of paper and divide them in four and that would be our little play – our papers and she would make us homework and then we would play. She would be the teacher and she'd hand out the homework and we'd do little tests and things like that.

MS. CORDOVA: That's great.

MS. OROZCO: So she was a teacher.

MS. CORDOVA: So it sounds like you had a very intimate family. What was life like just in Cuero in general?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I never thought I was in a little town until, I think, I left but we were always – I don't know, we always had stuff to do. You know, the summers were doing projects and sleeping late and reading books and we lived two blocks from downtown and we'd go barefooted to go downtown or – and there was a lot of neighborhood kids and so everybody was always doing things from – sometimes we had our little Kool-Aid stands or I remember even making – we still joke about this, I made little dolls, little yarn dolls and then I got my sisters – little sister and brother to go sell them door to door. [Laughs.]

And what we didn't – I didn't discover until this last Thanksgiving we were talking about that, my brother who – that's in business and has been – he's real successful now because he's very good in business he – because I remember, I don't know I had some price I put on little dolls, right? Then he would double it and take that half – take half of it before it came back to me. So he didn't have – he didn't even make the dolls, right? Or help sell them but he was the middle – he became the middleman without us even knowing.

MS. CORDOVA: You guys had the whole system of capitalism happening in your family! [Laughs.]

MS. OROZCO: Right. [Laughs.] And the exploitation without even knowing. So just little projects. Also, in high school I always painted the PE – I mean, not the PE, the pep squad – those football murals, signs, and then when I went to college then I painted the protest signs, and then I went to Mexico I painted protest signs too so it's like it's the – what developed as kind of – well, large format. Kind of it kept going and painting some murals, also working on murals.

MS. CORDOVA: That's a fascinating progression. I mean, what were these – go from the start with the pep squad murals. What were the –

MS. OROZCO: Well, like "beat the" – we were the Cuero Gobblers and so everybody would always say, "bake the

turkey," or "fry the turkey" and we would – "kill the bulldogs" or – so we'd have to paint these – on Wednesday we'd go to Mrs. Kirk's house and they'd have cookies and punch for us and we'd have a whole evening of painting signs – afternoon of painting signs.

MS. CORDOVA: This is in high school?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it was in high school.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And what was your high school like? How would you describe that experience?

MS. OROZCO: The high school was – it was a small high school. Well, 120 – 123 kids graduated with me. I think only like 10 were Hispanic and of the Hispanic kids – the kids I used to hang out with were more kids that liked to study and most – they were mainly people from the rural communities that rode the bus. I don't know why but those were my friends and they liked making good grades and stuff like that which I did too and that's who I hung out with. And then I was in clubs, different clubs because I liked activity and like in Future Teachers of America or the Honor Society, the Spanish Club later in – we started discovering more our Hispanic or Mexican roots.

But we also had a little – my mom would always around the dinner table talk to us about and teach us about Mexican history and so learned about that, and so in high school we always had kind of this – because of my mom, she was from the valley and my father was from Mexico. We were a little different from the other Mexican-Americans growing up in Cuero that were more third, fourth, fifth generation, and we were more attached to Mexico and our roots and being proud and not as – the other people were more, I guess they had been – after a while you become defeated – had this defeatist attitude or you –

MS. CORDOVA: Assimilated.

MS. OROZCO: Or inferior, whereas in my mom and – I mean, they weren't used to being discriminated against as much because they were from the valley, right? And my father was from Mexico so it was different, and so we had a certain pride that I guess other people didn't and plus we were the smart – we were smart kids because my mom – I don't know we came up – turned out pretty – in comparing us to the other kids, the other Mexican-American kids, we were a little – we did better at school.

MS. CORDOVA: What was your mother's background exactly? I mean, she'd grown up, you said, near Neuvo Leon.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, but they – her – you should interview my mom. She has a better memory than I do but her great uncle was from – was a teacher at Columbia, Columbia University and so there was lots of intelligence on that end because he was – maybe he might have been the first – one of the first Mexican-Americans to ever teach at Columbia University. I mean, this was maybe in the early – late 1900s because there's pictures of him with – in a real fancy suit and stuff like that.

And so they were real bright and then my grandfather, he was actually from Jamaica and he went to Mexico and so he knew very – he knew English and Spanish and he was real bright and he was the foreman of a – when they came over to Texas he became foreman of a button factory – because he could speak English and Spanish. And so they were pretty – they were bright.

MS. CORDOVA: And how old was your mother when she came to the United States?

MS. OROZCO: I think she was still a young – she was still a little girl. I mean, she was a little girl so she was born in 1918 and she says – I think she said she was five or six but she's – her memory's incredible. She can tell – she remembers when she was a little girl running around and she can tell you about the oven that they used to bake the bread in or the tortillas and how they got – the day that the left Mexico and they got on the train and she's incredible, her memory.

And every time when we talk about – we were in Victoria about – well, she was in the hospital, right? And we were reminiscing, we were in high school and we used to go to Victoria and we're saying what year is that? Oh, we'll have to ask my mom, right, because she'll know exactly when it – she'll say "Oh, well, that was in September – the middle of September in 1963 because I remember your father was doing this" and she has a pretty – she has an incredible memory.

MS. CORDOVA: And your father, how old was he when he came over?

MS. OROZCO: He came later on because he was working. So I think she had us late in life, in her – I think she might have been in her late 30s, early 40s.

MS. CORDOVA: And why did they both end up in Cuero?

MS. OROZCO: Because there was a job, my father was a bootmaker and Mr. Bowne looking for a bootmaker.

MS. CORDOVA: And your mother?

MS. OROZCO: Well, she came with my father.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, I thought they met in Cuero.

MS. OROZCO: No, no. No, they met in Mercedes –

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, they met in Mercedes.

MS. OROZCO: – at a dance.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, okay.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, she says it's – he said that he saw her at a dance and he said that's the young lady that I want to marry and then he remembers how she was dressed and everything and both of them were very attractive and they were – they fell in love and got married.

MS. CORDOVA: I see. And how long did they stay in Mercedes?

MS. OROZCO: I don't think very long and then – because then they moved to Cuero but I think it was very difficult in the very beginning. I think they were very poor and that little by little they were able to, I guess, have a decent life for us.

MS. CORDOVA: It sounds like your mother had a very educated background. What about your father?

MS. OROZCO: No, my father was – I think he probably in elementary – he didn't have a lot of education, probably just junior high or something but my mother did graduate and she didn't want to – she went to business school, I think, and for – oh, and she took a corresponding course and she wanted to study but she wasn't able to.

MS. CORDOVA: I see.

MS. OROZCO: But she writes and when she – when everybody left – you know that little – her story about my mom.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I understand you guys are – her children are turning over her papers to the University of Texas. Is that correct?

MS. OROZCO: No, I don't know that.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Oh. I thought I saw Cynthia Orozco has family papers now being turned over to the UT center –

MS. OROZCO: Oh, well, she might have some.

MS. CORDOVA: – [inaudible.] Okay. And so you – your mother was maybe hoping to also see her children educated or at least grow in a direction that she didn't have as much of an opportunity to follow?

MS. OROZCO: Right. I think she emphasized a lot of education for us because, I think, we were poor growing up. She believes, and I think how people from that generation believe, that education was a key to success and that if you're educated you can – you can make your life better and all those kind of things. And so I think that's what we were all taught about education and learning but I don't think that we learned the business component and I think that was – because we all – and we all kind of – are kind of real creative and we're smart and – but in terms of putting that into reality, I think, it's just a little bit more difficult. And I'm probably the example of that, right? Because I think that what I do and how I live it's like in a dream, right? It's not that much on the ground or whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, how do you mean?

MS. OROZCO: Well, one time I realized that when I was in a – like I was sitting downstairs and I just had a little – a little wooden table and I had all these boxes of files and stuff and then this friend of mine, he came in says, you know, you all really need to have a more professional office and have – you know, this is a museum and this and that. And I was thinking – see because I kind of – in my mind when I walk in I see a museum and I see – I see the future, right? And I don't – sometimes I don't see reality and so I think I live in a dream. I'm one step ahead visually of what I'm envisioning things to be but then I have to come back to reality and say okay, well, we're not

there yet. We're not in the dream museum yet and we do need to get a new carpet or get a new office and get new furniture and get filing cabinets and get these – anyway.

So it's like it's – and I put a lot of emphasis on academics but I think that the business component – probably I would have liked to maybe have a little bit more preparation in that or whatever, I don't know. But maybe everything would be different.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Maybe you wouldn't be as strong with that dream component.

MS. OROZCO: Right. I would be head of some corporate collection or something. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: So it also sounds like growing up that you were very conscious of being both Mexican and American and that that was part of your mother's sort of way of raising you children but it also sounds like Cuero was not an especially Mexican-American town.

MS. OROZCO: No, it was – it's mainly a German community.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: And all these years it hasn't changed. You have – well, basically it's a poor community except for the – there are ranchers and you don't see extravagant wealth like you see here in Austin or Houston or Dallas but you do see – there's poverty and the Mexican people live on one side of the railroad and the African-Americans and the Anglo families mainly live on the other side and one side of the city has better services and then the other city – part of the city doesn't.

And one would think after all these years that that was – been improved, right? But, in fact, it's gotten worse because when the flood came in '89 – '98 it kind of like destroyed all our neighborhood and flooded all the town and people – all the area where we live now have been replaced by trailer houses.

MS. CORDOVA: And was that a Mexican side of town where you were growing up? Was that –

MS. OROZCO: Well, we were kind of on the – we were on the edge because we just lived two blocks from downtown and it's been – it's become more Mexican but at that time it was kind of mixed. But, yeah, and so Cuero is mainly a German community and –

MS. CORDOVA: Did you experience –

MS. OROZCO: Racism?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: How did it show itself?

MS. OROZCO: Well, being called names when we were growing up. Racism in schools, in the classes and the schools didn't become integrated until the '60s until we were in high school and just, I guess, it's just like everybody else from that time period. Always, like the movies – the movie house used to be separated. The Mexicans were on one side, the blacks on another side.

MS. CORDOVA: So your elementary school was segregated then?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And so that meant just Mexican children or –

MS. OROZCO: No, the Mexicans and the Anglos were always together.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: But the blacks were in – at Daule and they didn't come until the '60s, until we were in high school.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you go to high school? What are those years?

MS. OROZCO: I graduated in 1973.

MS. CORDOVA: 1973, okay. And was there any sort of – a major shift in going to a non-segregated high school at that time for you? Do you – I mean, was this a significant event at all for you?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think – well, the football team got better. [Laughs.] That's why they started winning all the championships, but it's kind of sad because everybody – they're the heroes of the town while they were in high school but once they graduate they can't even find a job and so you see a lot of those guys that were football heroes now they're many – I mean, they were a lot of my friends. They either have bad jobs or truck drivers or kind of there's – it's like you get put back and if you stay in Cuero you get put back where you're supposed to be, right?

You don't – it's just, it's kind of hard, first of all, because it's a little town, right? And there's not that many opportunities because the level of education and then it's just hard to change because also there's a certain family that controls little towns. And the thing is, if you try to I guess better yourself in a little town, I mean, there's also limits. I mean, the quality of life is – I mean, you're striving to get equality but the equality is not even that much quality once you get there.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. What was the level of arts education like in the schools for you?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I remember in – there were some summer programs. I guess they were government programs in the summer – there was – if there were programs and they pretty much free or inexpensive we were there because my mom always used to find out about programs. And so I remember taking some sculpture classes in the summer and us doing some plaster paris projects and I was amazed, right? That plaster of paris, that it would like dry really fast and you could make things with it and so that was really amazing for me.

And then also clay, then I made a little clay – a little vase and then you could shape it and all that and then you fire it, then it becomes glass. I just liked that a lot and I think that made a big impression on me.

MS. CORDOVA: What kind of impression?

MS. OROZCO: Well, that you could make something and it could – and it's like a high end material. It's not a poor material like cardboard or whatever and that you could actually create something, and we would make little hot plates. I remember a vase and I just have those images in my mind. And also in – the first grade art project, I remember, we made a vase. I think they were like – like juice bottles but they had little flowers imprinted on them, or not – in the glass, right? And so we spray paint them black and then we'd glitter. I mean, glitter was, to me, was beautiful, right? Glitter, because it was like shiny and so then we put glitter on it and I remember loving that vase and it was the gift our mothers – the gift for our parents.

So I remember those images, right? Like I don't remember so much writing a report on someone or doing some math project but I remember the art projects.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that's an indicator right there.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah. That was pretty nice. And so I remember that project a lot. Anyway, so –

MS. CORDOVA: And so from high school did you go directly to A&I University?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And how did you end up going there?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think they had bad counselors. [Laughs.] And I knew our counselor was – well – [off mike] – but they can probably – but, yeah, I don't think we received the best counseling because I think somebody – if they really counseled us, with our grades and our potential we could have probably gotten some scholarship at some better university, and I never really knew that our education was at a lower level, that someone had been educated in a private school in Boston or something. I thought we were all the same and so I didn't realize that until I got to college and probably until I got to UT because at A&I they were – people have larger vocabularies, they've read, they're a lot more advanced than you are because they had access to a lot more stuff – or they had private classes or tutoring but I never realized that.

And especially not – we didn't have a car so we never left Cuero.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. You couldn't even get to the circus.

MS. OROZCO: [Laughs.] No. We hardly even went to the park because we didn't have a car and so anyway. And I didn't go – I don't think I went to a museum until I was like in college because I think the first museum I ever went to was one in Corpus, an art museum.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you remember your reaction?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I think I did. It was like "Oh, there's lots of these" and I remember, though, seeing an art –

oh, you're saying about art training. Well, I think we had also had a real good art teacher in high school, Miss Adcock.

MS. CORDOVA: Adcock?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: A-D-C-O-C-K?

MS. OROZCO: Uh-huh. [In agreement.] And she was pretty like, I guess, hip for her time and for her being in Cuero, Texas and I think she had gone and got her Masters. So she let the people in art, three and four, do experimental projects and things like that and there was some also other kids that were artistic, and I would see what they would do and they were mainly, I guess, Anglo kids that probably had other influences or were exposed to other things and so maybe I was exposed to other things through them.

And she'd – also would share a lot of art books with us so I remember always going through the art books and looking and seeing a Picasso and I actually tried to do a Cubist artwork in high school and things like that. Or batik like using that wax again that my mother used – [laughs] – and –

MS. CORDOVA: Were you really thinking about being an artist as a career in high school?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I think I was and I think that because I was always encouraged. Everybody knew I was the artist of the family and then artist in my class because there's usually – in a class you know which guys or girls are the best in art or they sing well or they run the fastest, they kind of stand out. So I would always do the bulletin boards at school, decorate the bulletin boards or if there was some other art projects I would help on that.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, what did your academic counselor think of you attempting to have a career in the arts?

MS. OROZCO: Oh, she thought it was fine but she didn't encourage me to go to the Rhode Island School of Design or anything but I went to A&I because I think it – I think they had a good football team [laughs] and I also think because they were Mexican people there, Mexican – that I knew that there would be a high concentration of Mexican-American students so I was kind of interested in that also.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you sort of becoming more politically aware –

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: – of your ethnic identity? When was that coming out for you?

MS. OROZCO: I think it was probably in – like when I was in student council or because we had a little organization of – it was different ethnic groups, you know, African-American – leaders from each of the grades and we would meet with the superintendent to give him suggestions on what we thought.

MS. CORDOVA: This was in high school?

MS. OROZCO: In high school. And I remembered one time telling them about the pink cards, the census cards because the African-American kids would get pink ones. You'd have to fill out a census card and I would always remember when they passed out the census card that they would get pink ones and I would always feel embarrassed because I knew that they felt ashamed. That why were they getting different ones from us? And so I remember bringing that up, right? I said "I don't think you all should be doing that because it hurts people's feelings and it" – then they did understand it and they changed it.

So I remember sitting around the table and I said you can ask my friend, because he was African-American, "How does it feel?" And he said "Yeah, that they would be sad" and they changed it eventually.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, and so you – I mean, you were in high school sort of in the early '70s or in '69 to '73. Is that about right?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And so, I mean, definitely the country had been through a large chunk of the civil rights movement already, though how much of that movement was reaching Cuero would you say?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think in the actual politics not too much. I think in the schools because we do kind of – it's kind of more of a protected kind of environment, they can't put you in jail or anything or – so it's easier. It's like in school, right, all the students protest but when you get on to real life it's a lot harder because you get –

schools are where you protest, I guess. I don't know.

And then also – and then when I went to A&I then there was a whole movement there, the Raza Unida movement and so I became even more politicized and so then I would come back in the summers and then influence my sisters and like I wrote the speech for Cynthia because she was president of the student class and so she gave the speech at the graduation. And it was a protest speech and it was – but it was about little things like instead of – she said – and it was kind of harmless but still it said stuff like "we shouldn't judge people by how long their hair is or how short their skirts are or by the color of skin and more by how their people" and she got fired that summer for that speech that she made.

MS. CORDOVA: Cynthia got fired –

MS. OROZCO: From school.

MS. CORDOVA: From school?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, because she was supposed to have a summer employment job after she graduated and she got fired. And then the next year my brother – because we were all real active in school, he was president of the student class and so he was supposed to make a speech, right? And so again I was home and they said "Well, that you had to turn the speech in before the graduation class – before the commencement speech". Okay, well, whatever. We'll turn one in but then we'll have another one – [laughs] – and so we did just that, right? And so we turned it in and then we he was up there he gave another speech, the real speech, right?

And he said he remembers the – he was up there and as he was giving his speech they were mumbling in the back right? The principle and the superintendent saying, "If you continue we're going to take away your diploma," and they were threatening him but he kept making his speech, right? And everybody – all his classmates gave a standing ovation and stuff but then he couldn't get a job in Cuero. [Laughs.] Nobody would hire him and he – now he always blames that Sylvia, it's your fault I had to go work in Yoakum at the Pizza Hut because I couldn't get a job. It's funny.

MS. CORDOVA: But that's great. That's fascinating to see that transference of you going to A&I and then coming home and passing it on to your sisters and brothers.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Your sort of political awareness.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it was kind of – but anyway.

MS. CORDOVA: Because Kingsville really was a hotbed of political activism at that point, right?

MS. OROZCO: Right, there was a lot of Raza Unida people there.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: There was always protest.

MS. CORDOVA: And so what was that like to go from Cuero to Kingsville into that sort of environment?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think it was mixed because I had – see, one other thing, I think I always live in lots of worlds simultaneously and I'm kind of able to live in those worlds because one is the art world. It's totally different from, I guess, like the regular – the community, right? It's – people – it's totally different worlds. Even today, right? Like even professional Mexican-Americans that have Ph.D.'s or – they're lawyers or whatever, we do not – we live in different worlds from people in – the art world is still very – it's very isolated and very elitist and even if you had all that education, if it's not in the arts education, it's not there.

And in the visual arts it's even more segregated than in the performing arts. You see a lot more Mexican-Americans and African-Americans going to the opera, going to the ballet or going to the symphony than you see at art openings. Most of the times I'm the only one there today at the art opening because it's just – but anyway, so – and A&I there was the art world, then there was the Mexican-American like, activist groups, then there was also the football because it was a big football city or university. So we were in all of those at the same time and so you have different – and I still do that. I go in different communities all the time that – but I guess – I mean, I guess everybody does. I guess one's church community is different from your academic community but anyway.

MS. CORDOVA: Sounds like football was actually important for you growing up?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I used to like football a lot and I think when I came to UT it was not important anymore

because I was in pep squad and I had a football boyfriend – football player boyfriend and also in college I had a football player boyfriend but then somehow that – when I got more into academics and the arts it didn't connect anymore. So when I came to UT – I've never been to a football game here and even though the art department was across the street from Longhorn Stadium I've never been to a football game nor do I care to go to one. [Laughs.]

So when you talk – when they tell me about football all I remember is Tom Landry and Roger Staubach but I think that was like 30 – 25 years or 30 years ago. That's when I stopped, I guess, paying attention to football.

MS. CORDOVA: And you started paying attention to –

MS. OROZCO: To the arts, I think. To art.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, what led you to leave Kingsville?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think that there was five teachers there –

MS. CORDOVA: In the art department?

MS. OROZCO: – in the art department and I felt that I had learned all I could learn –

MS. CORDOVA: Who do you remember taking classes with?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I – well, they're all still there. I mean, I went back three years ago or so to give a lecture and they were all there. All my teachers were still there except one. Dr. Scherpereel, Dr. Schmidt, Mr. Renfrow, Mr. – Dr. – Mr. McGruder, they were still there because they have tenure and it's just now that – I think only Mr. Schmidt has left and I think Mr. McGruder – Dr. Scherpereel is retiring, I think, now.

MS. CORDOVA: So what did you learn there in terms of art education? What do you think that you can say you took away from that art department?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I learned – I think I – drawing was real important because it's the first time we had – I didn't even know we were going to do nude models until they walked in – [laughs] – and so learning to – the importance of drawing and I also learned about – well, the art openings and receptions and all those kinds of things. That's the first – that was my first experience to that, and then we went – that's when we went to the art museum in Corpus, and I think also about the artist community, that there was other people like me and that I could relate to and also people that liked using their imagination and being creative, that that was a real asset. And I think that was kind of pretty neat.

MS. CORDOVA: Santa Barraza has talked a little bit about her time in Kingsville and I guess that was just a few years before you were there? Is that correct?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: You did not intersect?

MS. OROZCO: Not until – well, I think she – even at UT we weren't there at the same time together. I guess she graduated from A&I. Did she graduate from A&I?

MS. CORDOVA: She had two years at A&I and then she had done two years at UT Austin so you –

MS. OROZCO: So that's the same thing I did.

MS. CORDOVA: Sort of a similar track and then I guess I'd be interested in trying to figure out how those institutions were maybe the same or different for you two. At Kingsville she's talked a lot about the sort of artist community –

[Audio break, tape change.]

MS. CORDOVA: – that was there or, I guess, Carmen [Lomas] Garza – so being there at that time and then Amado Peña, I think, was there also and perhaps Pedro Rodriguez, I think as well. Did you have any sort of artist community that you were locating there in Kingsville where you –

MS. OROZCO: Well, we would – but I think we – there was – there were artists but they – I think none of the ones that were there have continued were as serious as the generation before. Mauro Garza was there and he's now a teacher here in Austin but I think his energy's more as a teacher not pursuing so much as a professional artist.

I think A&I is really important and I wish someone would do an in-depth study or dissertation on the impact of those – those professors, I think, are real important. They were there for so many years about – many, many years but I think because they lived there so long that they just – and Mexican-Americans were their students, that they taught them just like anybody else and they inspired them and showed them other worlds that we never had connections to. I think that's real important and they connected us to the art world. We didn't have that connection or even knew it existed and being professional artists and the impact of – I mean, the fact that you could be an – you could make a living as an artist.

MS. CORDOVA: I think you even got an exposition award, right, as a student there at Kingsville? Was that –

MS. OROZCO: I did.

MS. CORDOVA: Adjudicacion Excepcional de la Exposicion Estudiantil in 1975.

MS. OROZCO: No, that was at – I was – '75, I did? How do you know?

MS. CORDOVA: It's listed on your biography for the Plástica conference – the Chicana Plástica conference [September 13-16, 1979, Austin, Texas].

MS. OROZCO: Oh, okay.

MS. CORDOVA: So that's how I –

MS. OROZCO: Probably so.

MS. CORDOVA: I'm just curious.

MS. OROZCO: Oh, maybe those student – the student exhibitions, maybe that's where it was. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So it sounds, I mean, given that I'm guessing that you were excelling within the art department there. Is that –

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: – would that be a fair –

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think that I'm – like, okay, I'm smart, hardworking, and I can draw – I more or less can draw. I think if you do all those things, if you do what they tell you to do and you – I think you can do okay.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you finally – even though you think that Kingsville is a very important place you decided to leave Kingsville and go to Austin. Why did that happen?

MS. OROZCO: Well, my sister – my other sister, Irma, she had gotten a – that's one year younger than me, she got a scholarship to go to UT and so it was like okay, we have an out connection, right? Okay, so it's like now we can go to – and it's a bigger university and plus we had our other sister Maria had gone two years to Victor Junior College and then she came with me for two years. She was going to finish. So that means that I was going to be left alone. So it was better if she was going to graduate and then we would all move then to Austin. So all of us moved.

And I think – but I really think that we had reached a level of saturation. It was like been there – I mean, we already had learned what we could learn. That's – I needed to move on.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And so what did you find when you got to Austin? What was the community like here?

MS. OROZCO: Well, the art department again was always very segregated from the rest of the university because the artists – they always put the art department way out in the corner and they're different from the other departments, and, I mean, I could – because all my friends were in political science and I remember they had stacks this high of books to read, Marx and – because at that time I was coming as a junior, right? So they had all these complicated things they were – and I didn't have any books to read.

And so I just had things to draw and I remember I enrolled in a ceramics class and they said to make 10 cups and I was thinking I can't – how I'm making 10 cups and they're reading books on Marx? And somehow this doesn't seem right and so I dropped that ceramics class. I said I'm not going to waste my time making cups because I felt I was investing time and money and why was I going to be making cups when somebody else was learning or reading the great masters. And so I took a few other – so I took other courses besides my art classes because I didn't think it was enough.

My education – what they were trying to teach me and it ended up being okay, you sit in that class for three or four hours, in an art class and they just tell you to paint but they don't teach you to paint. And I always felt I was almost getting ripped off and I would – I remember going up to several teachers and asking them "How do you – I want to learn how the masters painted and I want to" – because I knew, I would read books and there was formulas and steps and procedures and there was like a level of frustration that I wasn't receiving the academic training.

And so, anyway, so I took some other courses on my own whether I would sit in on a political science class or I took Chicana literature. I remember taking – I said well, maybe this is not what I want to do. I even took a ballet course and I took – there wasn't a late ballet so I ended up taking jogging instead.

MS. CORDOVA: Taking –

MS. OROZCO: Jogging.

MS. CORDOVA: Jogging? [Laughs.]

MS. OROZCO: Which is good because I was – even before other people started jogging I was jogging. And I took lots of art history and so I think I had to complement my own education, right, because I wasn't getting what I needed from the system, and then there was – there weren't any Mexican-Americans. There was maybe one or two other ones and so –

MS. CORDOVA: In the art department.

MS. OROZCO: In the art department. And then it was very – also again there is where I realized how the level of education that I had received all my life was inferior to everybody else's because they had been to the big museums or they were from big cities and they had seen masters' works and they – when the teachers made reference to Matisse or Van Gogh they knew, right? Or even to renaissance or pre-renaissance or, I mean, I didn't know any of that and so I felt I had to do a lot of catching up and so I took a lot of art history classes and did a lot of studying in that.

And I loved art history and at some point I would have liked to teach or go into that but that takes a lot of other time and you have to – it's an academic and you have to – it's totally – it's something else.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. OROZCO: And then – so again I was leading kind of two lives because I was in the art department and doing all these abstract things that were non – apolitical and then at lunchtime we'd go and protest and kids – Lorraine Rogers and then I was in MAYO [Mexican American Youth Organization] and MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] and the Chicano movement and all of that and painting the protest signs.

MS. CORDOVA: And what were all the protests that you were participating in?

MS. OROZCO: Well, we were protesting against racism at the university and they were trying to get rid of Lorraine Rogers and getting more Chicano classes and Ricardo Romo used to give speeches and Gil Cardenas and Armando Guitierrez and all those teachers and it was pretty interesting.

And then I started working also for a newspaper called *Para la Gente*, was a Chicano newspaper and I was a photographer.

MS. CORDOVA: Did that just start when – with you perhaps?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: Or how did it start?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I didn't start it. It was a newspaper of the Committee for Real Democracy, which was actually Raza Unida and I did some drawings for that and I remember then doing some political drawings or some drawings that had political context and my teachers telling me no, that art is – you have to be more universal and more spiritual and so I had this – so I always felt it was like not connected.

And I would have these discussions with the teachers so they knew that I was – I guess, had other things in my mind and – but I still did – I did what I was supposed to do, which was more the abstract drawings. And I remember in those art classes they would – and they still do this, they might have a blank canvas and they teach them, the students, to talk about it and to rationalize it and this in-depth dissertation about this blank canvas. And I would just sit there and I was amazed. It's kind of like – and then all those kids are unemployed when they graduate because they don't know how to paint the canvas, right? But they're able to verbalize all

this stuff about it, and I don't know, I just think that the education in the art departments, they need a lot of work.

And so when I graduated from UT I applied to UT and I got into graduate school but I also applied to Mexico, right? And I got into Mexico and I was going to the academy so that I could learn more academic training.

MS. CORDOVA: And, yeah, I definitely want to talk to you about that time, but before sort of leaving UT, I'd be curious to know was there much of a relationship between the Raza Unida party in Kingsville and the one here in Austin? Did –

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it was all the same people. I mean, it's one – it's just like – I mean, the Democrats in Washington and the Democrats in Texas and the Republicans, they know the Republicans here. It's one party, right? So everybody's related and everybody's working together. So there was conferences, there was state-wide conferences, there was regional conferences. We even formed a – donate – tried to create – when they were trying to create the Raza Unida, like a third party, then they created – they wanted people to go back into their communities and organize communities.

So I went to back to Cuero and tried to organize, it was called Familias Unidas and we even had a – I think we had an event for the Diez y Seis de Septiembre [Mexico's Independence Day, the 16th of September] and my mom gave a speech about the importance of the holiday and it what it meant and the importance of education. And we took a picture of her and then I remember later that I made a painting of her making the speech.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, that's great.

MS. OROZCO: And –

MS. CORDOVA: So what happened to the painting?

MS. OROZCO: I think it's around somewhere.

MS. CORDOVA: So what kind of work were you doing at UT Austin? What was the painting – was it abstract for the most part?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it was abstract.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you doing any portraiture at UT?

MS. OROZCO: No, I did a lot of drawing just as academic studies but it was mainly abstract. When – the last year I think I started doing – some little figures coming out more like – kind of using the figure but in more ritual kind of processions or things like that. It was like abstract forms but kind of making reference to little figures in processions, whether they're funeral processions, religious processions because I was seeing some of the things in Mexico that – they were always doing processions.

MS. CORDOVA: What is your religious upbringing?

MS. OROZCO: Catholic.

MS. CORDOVA: On both sides?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, my father was going to be a priest at one time –

MS. CORDOVA: Wow.

MS. OROZCO: – but I think he liked girls too much.

MS. CORDOVA: That's hard. [Laughs.] Did you go to church every Sunday –

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: How rigorous was your connection with the Church?

MS. OROZCO: No, we – my mom was – she's very religious and she's part of the – but I think because the Church is an organizing factor or element and that's where the Mexican community comes together. So it's like if you go to the church it's – you know everyone and each year they work together to do the big fundraiser, the Hamaica [ph] and it's also the friends and – so it's also – there's social benefits as well as, I guess, religious benefits. It's community. It's about community – serves for that purpose and so it was the uniting factor in Cuero for the Mexican community.

And we would – there's two churches. There was for the Anglos and then for the Mexicans and we went to – we would go to the – we'd go sometimes to the Anglo one because it was close. It was just like four blocks and we'd walk and I remember it was a lot more – it was more beautiful than the Mexican one because it was an older church so the decorations were more ornate and I remember liking that a lot but it didn't have the Virgin Mary and the other one had the Virgin Mary. So, I mean, the Virgin de Guadalupe, so I liked the other one with the Virgin de Guadalupe because of that.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. It had the Virgin Mary but not the Virgin de Guadalupe or –

MS. OROZCO: Not the Virgin de Guadalupe.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. OROZCO: Right. And then it was also funny because I remember – and we always would get dressed up on – for Sunday morning and our next door neighbor, her daughters were older and so when they moved away she gave us a bunch of hats but they were like ladies hats, right, and we were little? And we loved those hats and we would wear the hats to church but I can – when I think of it now I know how we looked. We were little girls with big ladies hats and – [laughs] – they were probably out of style or whatever so I can just imagine how we looked but we loved wearing those hats, right? Because we had like 30 of them that she had given to us and so every Sunday we'd wear a different hat and – well, anyways, so and – so we'd go to that – the Catholic church and we'd go every Sunday. And catechism, we'd go to catechism and –

MS. CORDOVA: Has religion been an important element within your art?

MS. OROZCO: I think it's important in my – yeah, because I like those – I like the figures, the images. I think – well, religion is very important in Mexican art so it's – I mean, it's a vehicle for expression and how – I mean, it's – I mean, all pre-Columbian art is based on religion and then when Catholicism came it's also – it's just changed the form. Yeah, it's very important.

Probably if I had more time I would have more art and it would be more obvious but I think in the things that we do, like we have – we do a lot of exhibitions that have religion. I mean, like – Día de los muertos [Day of the Dead]– or our – we did that very – the "Treasures of the Cathedral of Saltillo [Mexico]." We did an exhibition on Santo Niño de Atocha.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you feel that your career as sort of a curator and working with this museum has intruded in your ability to do your artwork?

MS. OROZCO: Well, yeah – well, in terms of time, yeah, I think so because as years pass you see you don't have too much artwork. You have – well, you have an institution that's 20 years old and, I guess, an accumulation of a lot of stuff but in terms of the artwork I have less. Though I think that it's hard to be an artist because everything is against you, right? And so – but you have – the thing is time. You have to have time to do it.

MS. CORDOVA: So, while you were at UT Austin was there anything that you were especially proud of within your artwork that sort of is a special memory for you, something that you produced as a student?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I liked all my – I mean, I do like my art and – that I did and I did a lot. I was real productive and I have all of it, I never throw anything away. And I think that what I'm able to – I guess I learned that I am an artist and that I can create and that I'm able to distinguish between bad and good and to be able to read a painting and to be able to identify what's wrong with a painting and to fix it.

Like just – I think that's – I mean, I don't know to the level of other people, how they see it or do but I think I can do that. And I don't know if other – I mean, I guess other people can do it – I mean, good artists can do it but I'm pretty secure of my ability as an artist, and I think because of that ability you gain – it's a certain security that I feel and so that when I make judgment on an artwork or an exhibition I know that I have – I'm making a good judgment and I can give the reasons why. Like if somebody asked me why is that a bad painting? I can tell them, right? Or those kinds of things.

MS. CORDOVA: So you gained a sense of – sort of ability to value and change or observe qualities that you like or dislike in others paintings too?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.] I think critical – I don't know if that's critical –

MS. CORDOVA: The critical eye.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So that would be the definitely one thing that you could credit UT, your experience at UT with

perhaps? Or was that just an overall sort of maturation process?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I don't think I can credit UT for that. [Laughter.] I don't think there's too much I can credit – I don't – I'm sorry to say but – well, I mean I liked my teachers. There's some that I like, that I did learn something from and they're my friends but in general I think – and I didn't take the bad teachers because I knew who the bad teachers were and the teachers that are like – they could talk a lot but they couldn't really do good art or they – it's like a bunch of air. I knew who they were and so I didn't take them. So I only took the good ones.

MS. CORDOVA: And even still you don't feel it was an especially rewarding educational experience?

MS. OROZCO: Well, no, I mean, the ones that I – I mean, I – like I took Mike Frary, I learned watercolor from him and so I learned to, I guess – to learn to appreciate watercolor and I liked him. I liked Kelly Fearing because he taught me drawing and a lot of techniques and I think he was fair. He would treat everybody the same and he was also kind of – he taught us a lot about art and he also didn't like those other teachers that were a bunch of air or whatever. And then I – well, anyway, so those were some of my favorite teachers.

MS. CORDOVA: And then did you – well, actually, what I'm going to do is I'm going to stop this tape and insert another and perhaps we can talk about your time in graduate school if that's okay, if we're okay to continue?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, great. Let me just stop this tape.

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: This is Cary Cordova interviewing Sylvia Orozco – for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art. We are on disc two of section one and I was just about to ask Sylvia about going to graduate school and the choice between applying for, I guess, UT Austin, which you did, and the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City. And how did you even to know to apply to San Carlos?

MS. OROZCO: Well, because I was working for the newspaper, *Para la Gente*, it was also run – it was run by the Committee for Real Democracy. They – Jose Angel and Luz Guttierez and Armando Guttierez they negotiated an agreement with the Mexican government through President [Luis] Echeverria for – to do 50 scholarships for five years mainly for Mexican-American students so they could teach – they could study medicine and it was targeted towards producing more doctors for rural communities because of the lack of the doctors.

And I don't know whether it's because of their lack of disorganization or whatever, they didn't get enough people to apply, and also because I was working for the newspaper I knew of that opportunity and so both my sister Irma, who was the editor of that newspaper for a while because she was in journalism, we both applied and she got the scholarship to study literature and I got the scholarship to study art. She had already gone down there. She was more – a little bit more organized than us, I guess.

MS. CORDOVA: She got you guys into UT, she –

MS. OROZCO: Right, that she had already went – her – she was determined to learn Spanish perfectly and to be able to read and write in Spanish to advance her career as a reporter and so she went to Mexico and she went on her own first without the scholarship and she lived with my cousin, my father's cousin – or niece, I think, niece, and was starting to go to school on her own. And then we got the scholarships and then I went later, like a few months later.

MS. CORDOVA: Just because you've mentioned it, I'd be curious to know what was the presence of the Spanish language in your home growing up?

MS. OROZCO: Well, my father never learned English and my mom was very – she could speak – she speaks perfectly in both English and Spanish and so we grew up always listening to Spanish and they'd speak to us in Spanish. In the beginning we spoke back in Spanish but little by little we would speak back in English and – or we would speak – I think we would speak less with my father because we would speak in Spanish but our Spanish was more limited. So that's kind of sad too – but all of us liked Spanish and we weren't embarrassed to speak it but we would just speak it less. And he always wanted us to learn English first or better, to concentrate so that we wouldn't have the problem of Spanish.

MS. CORDOVA: But how ironic that it also became a barrier to your communication with your father.

MS. OROZCO: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: Rather tragic actually.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, but I remember one time that – well, now that movie that's real popular that – what is it? Where Al Pacino's in it? *Scarface*.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh.

MS. OROZCO: Is that *Scarface*? Okay. Well, I remember we went to the movies and I sat there and translated that whole movie during the movie.

MS. CORDOVA: For your father?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.] I think everybody else left that was around us – [laughs] – because I was translating during the movie in the theatre and I think that was kind of fun.

MS. CORDOVA: So there was also some moments of bonding as a result of –

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: – being able to bring the English world to your father.

MS. OROZCO: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: And so then as – when you – had you been to Mexico before? Like what was your –

MS. OROZCO: No, never.

MS. CORDOVA: Never.

MS. OROZCO: Well, I had only – when I went to Mexico? Okay, well, anyways so I got one of those scholarships and I did apply to UT and I got into school and I was like so happy to reject them. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: I'm sure.

MS. OROZCO: But they knew that I loved Mexico, right? Because they gave me – and they liked me and I guess they liked my passion for Mexico because I won a – the Co-op Book Award and they gave me a book of Mexican murals and they all signed it. It's a – it's an important award, right, that they give each semester to one student. So it's all signed by all those teachers which now some of them are deceased like Bob Levers and – so I think it's – and that book is – I still use it, I make reference to it because it's an important book in art history, one of the first books about Mexican art.

MS. CORDOVA: And the mural movement in particular. They knew to give you a book on the murals.

MS. OROZCO: Right. So it was – that was kind of – so I guess it was more obvious than I thought. I think I argued a lot with those teachers.

MS. CORDOVA: I wouldn't be surprised – [laughs] – and so what year would that have been that you went to San Carlos or to Mexico?

MS. OROZCO: '78.

MS. CORDOVA: '78.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I graduated in '78. So, yeah, so we went in '78 and yeah – so I had never been – I hadn't been to Cuero, I had been to San Antonio maybe once on a – for a Future Teachers of America conference, and to Kingsville, Corpus, and then Austin and that was it. Those had been my world and then went to Mexico City.

MS. CORDOVA: That must have been a shock?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it was a shock. I didn't know what to – well, I didn't know – even today when one tries to explain to people what Mexico City is it's impossible because what we in our minds perceive as Mexico, everybody thinks Mexico's a little village and – but yeah, Mexico is pretty incredible. I mean, I remember those images like it was yesterday when – the first time I – because everybody else that I went down – we went down there with I think 23 of us that got the scholarship and it wasn't too organized, as I said, and so we lived the first two weeks in a hotel in Diplomatico and I don't think they liked us too much but –

MS. CORDOVA: 23 students at the hotel, I'm sure.

MS. OROZCO: And so most of them were studying medicine and so they would go to another campus and so I was the only one in the arts and so then I had to venture on my own and go find San Carlos, right? And

everybody telling me it was at the Zocalo. I didn't know what the Zocalo was and so I just went on the subway and all of a sudden I came up and there I was in the Zocalo, the National Palace and the cathedral and the colors and the – all the people and the noises and the smog and the old buildings and then the streets are like all – the city's sinking and they're so all like this and walking down the street with people with bundles.

And at San Carlos, it's two blocks in back of the National Palace so in that area, the Calle Moneda, is where there's lots of vendors and people selling all this stuff and you have indigenous people and it's like all the cultures coming together and then there's – you see extravagant architecture then you see the very poor. You see different time periods, everything at the same time and catty-corner to the academy was this – where they used to have remnants of fabric they would – and old clothes and so there was just piles and piles of material and people carrying these gigantic bundles on their back with the multicolor shreds of materials. And then I'm like what is that? I couldn't figure out what all that was, right?

And then I remember going into San Carlos and trying to get all my papers together and there was students all over the place and then they – then I learned about the *puentes* and how – do you know about – do you –

MS. CORDOVA: I'm not sure. The *puentes*, the bridges?

MS. OROZCO: Right, but in Mexico what that means and the strikes, like when someone – when there's a holiday because as soon – I think we got there in August and then a few weeks afterwards, after we were trying to get – because we had an orientation like for a week with CONACYT which – the scholarships were through CONACYT which is the National Council of Arts and Technology and they still give scholarships to students. And we would – it was a five-year scholarship and we would go – they had to set up the whole system, right? We'd go to the bank and get our money and at that time it wasn't too bad but as – I was there five years during that time it devaluated so in the end we had to – everybody had to get jobs and stuff.

But anyway, we were there for – okay, so after August then you go into the Diez y Seis de Septiembre so all the preparations for the Mexican Independence day and the banners and decorations and then people start taking holidays. So that's what a puentes is, like if a – if the holiday is on Wednesday, well, they start on Tuesday and they don't come back until the following week or so but I didn't know and like here you have to be here at your class at a certain hour and a certain time and – but in Mexico it's not like that.

The teacher might show up, the teacher might not show up. You go for the coffee, the teacher's sick or today's a puentes, today's the day of the – day of All Soul's Day, the Day of the Virgin, the Day of the Mule. There's even the Day of the Mule, the Day of the Secretary. So it was very hard to adjust because I was used to so rigid American schedule and then the protests. On October the – I think October the 8th or the 12th or the something, they did – it was the anniversary of Tlatelolco [October 2, 1968].

MS. CORDOVA: Tlatelolco. The student protests.

MS. OROZCO: Exactly. So then – so as soon as I got there it was – they were doing the big banners and posters – [laughs] – for the protest, right? So here I was painting the posters again. So I dived right in with the – and the mural class, which I was enrolled in, they were the main ones that were in charge of making the posters and the gigantic banners for the protests, and then also they had a system for silkscreens that you – it was a little portable wooden box and you make the silkscreen real fast and then you glue it and then you run so that police don't catch you and so we learned to do all those kinds of things. And –

MS. CORDOVA: And so were you also just learning about all this history too all at once or had you known about those student protests?

MS. OROZCO: Well, no, I didn't know about that. I mean, I knew in the U.S. that there – people were protesting but I didn't know about – so I was learning at the same time. Well, what is this? What happened and what are you all protesting? So and then plus my Spanish was not that good and then I couldn't really read either and I remember seeing big headlines, right? Like in Mexico in the evenings they do the newspapers, they do a morning edition and an evening edition and they try to sell you the paper so they have this gigantic five inch – and you think okay, some bomb has been dropped or some president has been assassinated.

So it was like my priority. I have to learn to read, right? And especially when I was in the classes, right?

MS. CORDOVA: What do you mean you had to learn to read in Spanish or –

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, read in Spanish.

MS. CORDOVA: – because you weren't used to reading in Spanish, just speaking it?

MS. OROZCO: I mean, I had in UT placed out like 24 or 30 hours of Spanish and taken classes but it's not the

same, and so anyway, so that was when I had to practice and plus nobody knew English either. People didn't know English so I was just in there so I had to learn.

And so as soon as I got there I was in the protests with all the kids – the students from San Carlos, and then another week, I remember then they had painted murals for a community in Milpa Alta. See and the mural group, they were the most radical ones of the whole school, right? And they had painted some protest signs for – and a mural for the indigenous groups in that little town and so on Sunday they said now they're going to thank us, thank the group and so we're going to go on a picnic. And so we all went, the mural group – not the scholarship group, me, just me with the mural group, right? So I went with the mural group to this little town and –

MS. CORDOVA: That was Milpa Alta?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: And they divided us – because it was poor families, indigenous families, they divided us up, you go with the Gonzalez, you go with the Sanchez because we would be sharing their food, right, and one family didn't for the 15 of us that went, and so then we all went in – got in these big trucks and went into the mountains and spent the day with the families and then we divided up and ate the food. And I remember wandering in the little forest or whatever and we picked leaves that were – they told us it was tea and then so we gathered tea and then came home. Those were really wonderful experiences.

MS. CORDOVA: And it sounds like you were welcomed fully into the mural group?

MS. OROZCO: Oh yeah. Yeah, I was right there with them. Yeah, they used to call me – well, later on I became "the Chicana," right, that was within the group.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. So you were still identified as American?

MS. OROZCO: Oh yeah. Yeah. Or "la gringa," they would call me "la gringa" sometimes. And then just – and then starting – and then I – in the mural – well, I was in upper – I was supposed to take – be taking the upper division classes, which I took but because I felt I hadn't had that academic training I went back and took – sat in on undergraduate classes like the anatomy class – which was taught by a doctor. It was quite a wonderful class, and you learn all the bones and the muscles and all of that but you learn them in three-dimension, you make them with plasteline.

MS. CORDOVA: Plasteline?

MS. OROZCO: And you sculpt and you're sculpting you learn them and then you first do the bones, you do a skeleton and then you do a muscle study and then you do a 3-D basic body and then – so that was one class, the anatomy class.

MS. CORDOVA: What a shift from UT.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, and then another class was the basic – the painting and drawing and in there they teach you the materials. You have a materials class and so you go to the – what they call the almacen [store] – do you know Spanish?

MS. CORDOVA: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. OROZCO: And they give you – and this is like for the freshmen when they go – in Mexico you don't go to university where everything is mixed. I mean, art students don't take English and geography or chemistry. You just take art classes. It's very specialized and so you have five years training in just the arts, right? Arts and art history. And so you learn – you have a very strict academic background and so in the – and so all the art students are together.

Okay, so in – you go – the first year students, they go to the almacen and they give you three little bags. They give you a bag of blue pigment, yellow pigment, red pigment, and then they give you a bottle of glue and you learn that paint is basically pigment plus glue. And that's what I had been asking my teachers at UT for years. What is paint? And that one teacher that I asked what is paint? He said, "Well, you don't have to know that." Just go UT and buy – and you go to the UT Co-op, and you go to the UT Co-op and there are 200 tubes of paint, which ones do you buy? And I don't have money to buy 200. Why do I buy this one and not buy that one? And it was very frustrating.

And so then I went to UT – I mean, went to Mexico, I start learning about the materials and I get obsessed – I get

obsessed with materials. In fact, that's what ended up being my Masters thesis was materials, right? And what is paint and what paints are more durable and which ones to use for murals and which don't use and why don't you use them. And anyway, I was fascinated with that and I still – I feel sorry for those – and I taught at – when I came back and I taught, I taught through the color theory that I learned in Mexico at ACC and then when my students would then go and take someone else's class their teachers would always be amazed as, "What do you teach them?" [Laughs.] "How do they know how to do that?" Because we're basing it all on theory and on science, it's not like which color do you like best and those kinds – it's not intuitive training, it's academic training.

And anyway, so I thought that – and I really haven't – and I wrote the thesis and I – but I never in my – one of my goals was to actually publish it and do a simplified version and kind of – but I haven't ever really gone through with that either. But I did teach – one time I did teach a class here for artists but I think that was back in the '80s, teaching some of that theory.

But anyway, I thought that was real exciting, going to Mexico and then learning to make paint. Where we would get the pigment and you'd go down the street and you'd buy the little tubes at the perfume factory and the little tubes of – like what the toothpaste comes in?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. OROZCO: The metal tubes and you get the pigment and you get beeswax and linseed oil and talcum powder and then you grind it and grind it until all the little bumps are gone and then you stuff it in your tube and then you have your little tubes and that's what you paint with and it was just real exciting for me.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, and very practical.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, isn't it? And so you understand, right? You're in tune or in harmony with your materials and you can understand them and control them.

[END OF TAPE ONE]

MS. OROZCO: –and that's – you know, that was the muralist and – all had that training. You know, everybody had academic training, and even – you know, I – Picasso and all those artists of, you know, the beginnings of the century had that academic training, and now it's being lost each time. But –

MS. CORDOVA: If you – if you had to choose certain muralists, who would you say you were most influenced by?

MS. OROZCO: Well, you know, I don't – I don't really consider myself a muralist, but just artist that I have a passion for are, you know, [José Clemente] Orozco and I mean, I loved the three Mexican artists, the three masters, right, but the most for me is Orozco, and then, you know, Diego [Rivera] and – then I like – [David Alfaro] Siqueiros. I like all three of them.

So, you know, taking those classes – so the first – I think the first two years, when I was in San Carlos, the undergraduate classes were still there, so the school was alive with, you know, activity the whole day and the evening, because the upper division classes were in the evening and the undergraduate was in the morning. But then the next – but after the two years, they moved the undergraduates – it was a political move – out to the cornfields in Xochimilco, because they didn't want them to be so close to the National Palace, because they protest too much. And so then the undergraduates [sic] would – we were just a few, right – we would go in the evening, and it was dead. So it kind of changed the whole dynamics of it all.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. It was an effective way of depoliticizing the university.

MS. OROZCO: And so then – and at that time, then I met also Pio [Pulido], and we – then my scholarship money was less. And in the beginning, the first year, we all lived – the women of – from that group, six of us, we rented a house.

MS. CORDOVA: Is that from the mural group or from –

MS. OROZCO: No, from the scholarship group.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, from the scholarship group. Okay.

MS. OROZCO: It was called Becas for Aztlan [Becarios]. Yeah, we rented a house at the Colonia Country Club, Calle Tenis. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: Nice. [Laughs.]

MS. OROZCO: And it was – it was upper – upscale neighborhood that was – you know, people had moved out and it'd gone down, and so – in price and level –

MS. CORDOVA: I see.

MS. OROZCO: So it was now being rented out, and I lived there for, well, I don't know, maybe about nine months or so, but then I met Pio and then moved out, and then Pio and I then moved into – well, for a while with his sister in Arboleras, and then we moved to Satelite.

MS. CORDOVA: In where? Where did you –

MS. OROZCO: Arbol – you know, from Arbol?

MS. CORDOVA: Mm-hmm.

MS. OROZCO: Arboles.

MS. CORDOVA: And then you moved to –

MS. OROZCO: Satelite. Colonia – Calle Diplomatico.

MS. CORDOVA: And tell me about meeting Pio. How did you meet him?

MS. OROZCO: Well, Pio was in San Carlos. He had already finished at La Esmeralda, which was another art school. It's not the – now I think it's still equivalent – it's now equivalent to a bachelor's but before it was just like the school of fine arts. I guess like the Institute of Chicago, but it's just the school of fine arts. And he had already finished there, but he needed a place to make the sculptures.

And so he would go in the mornings to make ceramic sculptures. They're upstairs in the ceramics department. And so he would – he's really fast in – as an artist. He creates real fast, and so – you know, like a – almost like a panadero, you know, make things red and, you know, it's finished. And so then he would have a lot of time just to hang out and talk in the halls, so I would always see him talking in the halls, and then he would go, like, from one room to the next room. And he would also go to draw with [Gilberto] Aceves-Navarro, which was a well-known, you know, neo-figuratist. They're – you know, another important thing in Mexico, a lot of those artists that are famous, they're also teachers. They teach there. And – well, anyway, so then he would wander into the mural studio, and so we just would – that's how we met, started talking.

MS. CORDOVA: And just backing up for a second, you say that you would not call yourself a muralist, but you were still in this mix of muralists. Is that correct?

MS. OROZCO: Mural students.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. What would you call yourself, in terms of what's – is it just painting in general that you would specialize in or –

MS. OROZCO: Well, I was in the mural department – in the mural – you know, concentrating my studies in murals, but what I – I studied the technique of murals. I have this little book here. I had a little mural class, and see here they're – they were teaching us how to – the polyangular perspective. The teacher was a student of David Alfaro Siqueiros, so he showed us how they would plan a mural, you know, the lines that they – the composition lines.

MS. CORDOVA: The graph charts.

MS. OROZCO: Right. And so like that this – you know, this one was – it was thicker, and it would go to thinner to make an optical illusion. Anyway, so this was –

MS. CORDOVA: And this is your student notebook that you used at that time.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah. So, like, another – so that was like real technical. Another – I was talking about those technical classes I took. I took another class of – it was called Geometry for Artists, and so you would learn how, in making a composition, that there was a structure – a geometrical structure underneath the painting that's related to the golden section, so that when you start planning a work of art, you're not just putting it where you like it, that you're putting it where – in relationship to the space on the canvas and where – where the points of interest are in relationship to the eye and to the body and it's all in a formula. There's a formula that exists that the golden section that Michelangelo and all – everybody studied.

But anyway, we learned to do that, and we would, you know, make – do studies, and then that you apply in

painting or you apply in mural, in mural art. But I would just consider myself – I just, you know, have studied mural painting, but I don't consider myself a muralist.

MS. CORDOVA: What kind of painting were you doing at this time?

MS. OROZCO: I did just figurative work.

MS. CORDOVA: Is that portraiture or full body or what –

MS. OROZCO: Full body.

MS. CORDOVA: And so was that also using the anatomy class that you have been having, and then also these other issues of perspective and shape.

MS. OROZCO: One of the sad things is when we moved, it was kind of abrupt when we moved over here. We left all our art with Pio's parents, and they threw it away.

MS. CORDOVA: That's so sad.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it is sad. It's like five years of art.

MS. CORDOVA: And their reasons for throwing it away?

MS. OROZCO: Well, they never really appreciated Pio as an artist. They always thought he should have been a sign painter, and they didn't – you know, whereas my parents, you know, thought art as something meaningful and creative and like kind of beauty to it. But his parents would either make fun of it or couldn't understand it or want to hide it or devalue it, and so they threw it away.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you find that out?

MS. OROZCO: When we went back.

MS. CORDOVA: And you say you left suddenly?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm.

MS. CORDOVA: How come?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I – because – well, one – you know, we would just come once a year to Austin, I mean, to visit my parents for Christmas. And then we'd sometimes come up to Austin, and I think there was an opportunity for me to get a job, a very – well, I was going to curate an exhibit at the – with LUChA [League of United Chicano Artists]. And there was – the money had devaluated in Mexico, and we just decided we were going to move up, and it wasn't planned. And so we just didn't go back, and then all of a sudden we had to go back, because we had a rented house, right? And so we just went and in one day moved everything out and put everything in a store room and left. It wasn't planned. Whereas had it been planned, and you know, this friend of ours took us in a truck and just brought some, you know, so essential things back but left the artwork, so it was kind of sad.

MS. CORDOVA: It must feel like such an incredible loss, because, I mean, your development at that moment was both critical for you I would imagine a complete shift for you. You –

MS. OROZCO: I have a slide of a few of the works, but most of them are gone.

MS. CORDOVA: And you were in Mexico for how long? Exactly what years were those that you were there?

MS. OROZCO: '78 to '83.

MS. CORDOVA: And now, I'm confused because I'm aware that you were also involved in the planning for the Chicana Plástica conference, and that was in 1979 I think. So how would that work?

MS. OROZCO: Well, you know, well, because, you know, I had been – when I was at UT, as I said, I was involved with the Chicano movement, and so the artists, who also had a role – you know, they were also involved, and so we were organizing exhibitions, first I was in CASA, with Sam Coronado, and then MAS I think came later with Santa [Barraza] and Modesta [Barbina Treviño]. And so we were active, and then there was LUChA I think was founded in '79, so we helped doing exhibits over there. '76 I think was the –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I think it might have been.

MS. OROZCO: And so we were – there was like – we already had like a commonality. We all felt like we were like

in the same struggle, and so we had this connection, right? And so they knew I was down there, right? And so I still – either we call each other or, you know, when I would come up, I would see them or there's still a relationship. And so because they got this idea to do an international conference and they knew I was down, so they said, "Okay, Sylvia can help us and connect us with artists." And so I helped them – we invited artists like Raquel Tibol. The art critic – we invited Jorge Camarena, so I think later he decided he was going. Adolfo Mexiac, who had been one of my teachers, and Jaime Mejia – he had a – he was an artist, but more he was like a cultural promoter and he had a TV program on art.

MS. CORDOVA: Jaime?

MS. OROZCO: Mejia. And Pedro Meyer was an important method and photographer, and then also I got students involved, like 13 students that had came from San Carlos, and Pio was one of them, too.

MS. CORDOVA: And what year did you meet Pio? You know, where does –

MS. OROZCO: I think that was '79.

MS. CORDOVA: In '79. And you and he got married, correct?

MS. OROZCO: But not 'til – I don't know what year it was.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: A while later.

MS. OROZCO: I don't remember what year. I think we were married –

MS. CORDOVA: Were you still in Mexico?

MS. OROZCO: No, we got married here.

MS. CORDOVA: In Austin, so it was well after you'd already moved here.

MS. OROZCO: I can't remember what year it was. Was it '79? How do you know?

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, no, I'm not sure.

MS. OROZCO: Oh, you don't know?

MS. CORDOVA: No, I'm not sure what you're –

MS. OROZCO: Oh, okay. Well, I have it somewhere.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: I'm sure you do.

MS. OROZCO: Oh, okay. But another important was – and that will – was the exhibition that we organized at – the Manuel Alvarez Bravo exhibit. Did she tell you about that? How we went to the studio?

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, I'd love to hear about it in your words, if you could. Sort of how did you even arrange that, or how did that happen?

MS. OROZCO: Well, we just called him and made the appointment, and we went over there and asked him if we could bring the exhibition. And he said yes, and he gave me the photographs, and I can't remember it. I think we just asked for them, and then – because I remember I brought them, because I went and got them, and I hand carried them, and then we put up the exhibition.

MS. CORDOVA: And you put that up where?

MS. OROZCO: The Texas Memorial Museum.

MS. CORDOVA: The Texas Memorial Museum.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I still have a poster that advertises that.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, that's a great poster.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And I guess this is sort of leading me to ask you a couple of questions just about Austin at that time. There were so many groups emerging frankly that there's just a lot of different enclaves for where Chicano or Latino artists were coming together. I guess one place was Juárez-Lincoln University. And did you have some association with that as well?

MS. OROZCO: Well, that was LUChA that was there. That was the building where LUChA was.

MS. CORDOVA: And so it was based in there, correct, with the sort of cultura centra?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm.

MS. CORDOVA: And so when did you start participating with LUChA or how did you –

MS. OROZCO: Well, they did exhibitions, and so while this is – the artists say, well, you know, we're going to have an exhibit and let's put an exhibit here, and we would just take all our work and put it in exhibit.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: And that's what would happen.

MS. CORDOVA: And you mentioned CASA. What was CASA?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. That was at UT – Chicano Art Student Association – and it's the same thing, but we were all students, and we would orient – we would either have exhibits at the academic center or at – I remember there was a bread and roses – bread and roses place. You know, some of the nonprofits, you know, we would organize little exhibits.

MS. CORDOVA: And that's when you met Sam Coronado?

MS. OROZCO: I met him at UT wandering in the halls, because there's so few of us Mexicans. And you know, when you see one, you say, "Oh, who are you, and what's your name?"

[Laughter.]

MS. OROZCO: And so CASA brought us together because we would meet and have, you know, or have the little exhibits.

MS. CORDOVA: How many students were there about in CASA?

MS. OROZCO: Maybe around 15 or so?

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And is he the only person from then that you've stayed in touch with?

MS. OROZCO: No, Mary Ann. Well, I call her Mary Anne, but she goes by Ambre Gonzalez. Victoria – she became an actress.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And so those were during your years at UT, and then you also became associated with MAS.

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm.

MS. CORDOVA: And that I guess was started initially by Santa Barraza and –

MS. OROZCO: Nora?

MS. CORDOVA: Nora [González-Dodson].

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, because they worked at – they were illustrators at a book company. And so I think – I think they had a – you know, needed an outlet or a vehicle to continue their, well, their activism and also their Chicano stuff, well, because they were both married to Anglo husbands I think. And so they needed – and plus that's what their art was about, right? So they started – they organized this – the MAS and they said if I wanted to be a part of it, and I said sure.

MS. CORDOVA: And just because they knew you and they knew your work, and they were seeking a way of –

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think it didn't matter if you did abstract or if you did whatever, that you were an artist. And

you know, they wanted to encourage people to do art.

MS. CORDOVA: And what about you? I mean, it sounds like there was also this sort of – of course in addition to the Chicano movement, there was also this feminist consciousness coming out. And how was that impacting you?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think in my case, I'm probably not as – I'm probably a little bit more I guess subtle or – I think my first battle or struggle is just about the oppression of, you know, Mexicans and Mexican culture. And I think I, you know, probably participated in those – with MAS, but I think that's probably the first struggle was being Mexican or being accepted as a Mexican American, and the second was I guess as a woman.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you ever feel moments when you were being discriminated against as a woman in the movement? Were there significant moments like that for you?

MS. OROZCO: I don't think so obviously. I think that's because I – just always didn't want anything to do with it.

MS. CORDOVA: And – I'm sorry, were you gonna say something?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-mm [Negative].

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. So a lot of – I mean, how – in coming back and forth between Mexico and Austin, how – did you feel like you were again sort of translating cultural politics or artwork from Mexico? I mean, I'm also thinking about your time in Kingsville and going back to Cuero.

[Pause for technical direction.]

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, and we're recording again. And I was actually just going to maybe ask you one last question, and then we'll wrap up here for this particular session. And I just wanted to sort of know about the cross-current or the transference that you were sort of maybe both creating in Mexico, like coming from Austin to Mexico, but also going from Mexico to Austin, and the communities that you were involved with. And was there anything in particular that stuck out for you in either of those two situations?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. Well, I think more – I was more – well, maybe both. Well, just that the time where I did the Plástica Chicana and helped bring those individuals over here, I think that might have been important for some of the – a few of the students, because I know one later traveled to the United States and has done work here.

MS. CORDOVA: Who was that?

MS. OROZCO: Arturo Reyes. He was one of the – one from the mural class. And – but I think – but actually like bringing – going back to Mexico and influencing Mexico? I think maybe just in one case where we – they had an exhibit of Chicano art and posters, and we made a mural there at the Museo del Chopo. And again, this might have had more influence on Pio, because again I think it was mainly his work, and I was kind of like a secondary artist on it.

MS. CORDOVA: On his mural or –

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, though we had both signed them, but I really don't feel it was my mural, because, you know, I think he was like overpowering. It was his work, and I just kind of helped paint here and there. And the images were very Chicano, and maybe that influence helped on that.

MS. CORDOVA: But you were also maybe giving those sort of particular images so maybe that was your contribution.

MS. OROZCO: Right. Yeah, I think that, but you know, when you create, like if you make the painting, right, you draw the painting? I mean, that drawing belongs to one person. It doesn't belong to two people. And then another person might go and, okay, you've got to put red here. Okay, put red. But the mural really belongs to that person. I mean, credit needs to go where credit is, you know, credit belongs. But that mural and that piece was done specifically for that exhibition. And there's a book, and I think I have it at home, that documents that exhibition.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was of Chicano artists from all over the United States being featured in Mexico City?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. CORDOVA: That would have been maybe 1980 or something like that?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah, that, and then there was a conference that went along with it, too.

MS. CORDOVA: So maybe you were at that point when also Mexico in general was starting to take Chicano artists more seriously.

MS. OROZCO: No, they weren't serious at all. I think they were just like, here's an introduction.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, well. [Laughs.] And with that note, we'll bring this interview to a close, and I'll hope to set up our future interviews that we can get all of your time at, starting with Mexic-Arte.

MS. OROZCO: Okay.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right, this is Cary Cordova. I'm here with Sylvia Orozco for an interview for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Today is February 2nd, 2004. It's a Monday, and we are here in Mexic-Arte Gallery, where Sylvia Orozco works as the curator. And actually, that gives us a good starting point for this second session, tape one or disc one. And Sylvia, I'd like to just know how Mexic-Arte started, how you – I believe you and Pio came back to Austin, Texas, and came up with this idea for this gallery, maybe with Sam Coronado, so maybe you could tell us about that.

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think it started way before, like, when I was at the University of Texas, and because I had been involved with CASA and with MAS and kind of also just seeing that there were alternatives for I guess art spaces in museums, just that the whole world of the nonprofits was exposed to that. You know, being at the University of Texas and working outside in the community, like working withLUChA, and knowing that there were – that the whole nonprofit world existed and that there were opportunities for funding for nonprofits, you know, that people – there were grants out there, there's public monies, and that the whole – that it was a possibility.

Okay, so because I was exposed to that, I always knew – I knew that, right, and I knew that that was in the back of mind. I knew that that was a possibility. And then – so then when I went to Mexico, I continued my relationship with the Chicano artist here, mainly Santa [Barraza] and Modesta [Barbina Treviño], and that's when we organized that international conference. And so then when I came back – oh, and so then even in Mexico, in Mexico, well, the scholarship that I received, you know, was for five years, but it was the same amount, and so as the devaluation took place, it dwindled down to hardly anything. What might have been $200 in the beginning was probably $20 after the five years. And so I had to get, you know, a job to supplement my income, and so I started teaching English in addition to going to school.

MS. CORDOVA: In Mexico.

MS. OROZCO: In Mexico, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And then Pio also had been – then I met Pio in the art school, I mean, at San Carlos. And he had already graduated or finished, and you know, we first lived at the Colonia Country Club, but then we then moved out, and then eventually lived with his – some of his family members for a while. But then we moved to Satelite, and that's where our – he had given classes for several years in Satelite, after-school classes. But he was the instructor of someone else who actually also was in his home, and he was like an amateur artist. And then I told Pio, "Well, why don't – you know, you're the main – I mean, you're the teacher. Why don't we start our own school, and so we'd get paid direct instead of being paid by the hour, right?"

And so anyway, so then we rented a house in a, you know, upper middle-class neighborhood, and so the people – the community there could afford to take private painting classes. And so we started having the painting classes in the afternoon from like 3:00 to 5:00 or 4:00 to 6:00 for kids and for adults, and in the morning, we had adults. And so at one time we had 150 students, and we would advertise in the local newspaper, kind of like the *West Austin News*. It's kind of like the local – like a neighborhood kind of newspaper. So anyway, so we got a lot of – we had popularity, right, and then we developed a really good teaching method, so the kids were learning to paint, because it was oil painting.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, a great question to insert there may be to find out what kind of teaching methods you were doing. I mean, you've been teaching for a long time now. Was this your first serious teaching experience?

MS. OROZCO: Well, even though they were kids, what we were teaching them was real – well, there were adults,

too, and there was even – and then there were even, you know, the young people from that area that were interested in art. We had a group like a group of young people that were in their 20s, and we formed – we had like this community of artists or people that were interested in art. And actually several of them went on to be artists now.

MS. CORDOVA: But who were those people?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I don't know if I remember – well, there was Juan Ho – and Juan Jose I think Ferrera was his name. Julio now was a – he became – he was a painter, but he also then became a lawyer for Belles Artes, and one day when we were in Mexico, we ran into him by sharing the same taxi. It was like incredible that we saw him after so many years. And Rafael, he also became an artist, and I think those are – and then there were some women that we used to paint also with us, but I don't know if they actually ever got a little bit more serious in their work. But anyway, so we had – so we had, you know, we had children, we had people that were retired, and then we had this young, you know, fledgling artists that were interested.

MS. CORDOVA: And all of these artists were teaching at this school?

MS. OROZCO: No, no. We were teaching them.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, you were teaching them.

MS. OROZCO: No, no, we were the teachers.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. So just you and Pio were –

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, Pio and I were the teachers. It was our school, and you know, it was in our living room downstairs, and we lived upstairs

MS. CORDOVA: That's great. What did you call the school?

MS. OROZCO: Oh, we had this very ambitious title: the Centro de Informacion y – Investigacíon del Arte. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: How did you come up with that?

MS. OROZCO: Oh, I don't know. But we were trying to – we were always kind of really ambitious. Not only were we doing the art school, because that was – in the end, that was – the art school was a means to finance what we really wanted to do, which was to do research about Mexican art, and I think that comes from two – you know, one, from me being very interested in Mexican art, and now I was like in the center of the world really. For me it was the center of the universe because it was – I was discovering all these things that I had never – you know, being from a little town, you know, going to Mexico City, the greatest artists in the world and seeing these great – you know, the murals were public, so I could see them, and I was, you know, being taught by teachers who had studied with them. And so it was kind of just an incredible experience.

And then so I wanted to do more, learn more, right? So every time there was – and then I knew I was going to come back. It wasn't like I was going to stay there. I knew I was going to come back, you know, to Austin, Texas. I wanted to like gather, you know, gather stuff, and as I had gathered things as a kid, like collecting, I was again gathering. I was gathering information, and so every time there was a lecture, you know, we would go and either record – we would record – in the beginning we had these little, you know, kind of – we didn't have any money, so we had like little recorders that hardly we could hear on them. And with time, we had video equipment, because we were earning – we were earning pretty good, you know, having those 150 kids doing this.

And so we put – then we'd spend all our money on tapes, on film, on videos, on books, because we wouldn't work the whole day except, well, on our own art, and then we'd just work in the evening, except the few classes we had in the mornings. And then we'd also – that gave us the freedom to go to lectures, so we'd go and record the lectures, like if Raquel Tibol was doing a lecture on Frida Kahlo or Teresa del Conde, or we would go to all these openings all the time and take pictures and interview artists. And it was pretty incredible, you know. We were pretty ambitious. We wanted to like collect everything that was, you know, both from the Mexican school and I think also we were involved in the contemporary art scene.

MS. CORDOVA: How – I mean being from the United States and being a Chicana, were you also sort of bringing any of that world to Mexico City? Was that part of the experience?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think they were more intrigued – people were intrigued because, you know my Spanish wasn't as good, and they were very accepting because I was so interested in Mexican art, and for them, a lot of them, even though they were in Mexico City, they didn't appreciate it. Like in the case of Pio, I was saying one was my interest, and second was I think his kind of discovery, though probably he won't – I don't know if he'll

ever admit this – but it was his discovery of being Mexican, because he grew up in a Jewish-Mexican family.

I think it's a little confusing to be growing up Mexican and Jewish at the same time, because Mexico is so Catholic, and the art is so related to religion there, and the history's so related to religion, and then if you're brought up in a Jewish community, you know, it's very – you're separate, and you're taught other cultural things. You know, like you don't celebrate the main Mexican celebrations like, you know, Christmas and Día de los Reyes and Día de los Muertos and all those kind of things.

And so Pio, because he was in the arts, you know, he did like those kind of things, and he – I remember him telling me that he would go from house to house, because he had lots of friends in the neighborhood, because you know, they all celebrated those things and have their Nativity scenes or have, you know, their special Mexican celebrations, whereas in his family, because his mom was Jewish, you know, they celebrated or were brought up more in the Jewish tradition and religion. And so I think that all of a sudden then here comes someone, well, a partner that's very kind of interested and I have short time of here, I need to – I'm very intense, and I need to be immersed in all of this. So I guess together we started discovering the Mexican art and the whole cultural world or whatever.

And he was very – I guess in his – what the art that he was doing and his group of his peers, he was, you know, pretty prolific and successful in the kind of art that he was doing. And so he was accepted within his – among his contemporaries, and so that was another world that I had access to. You know, I met – some of these artists are well known now, like [Gabriel] Macotela and all the Cassar Dineros [ph], Oliver Nijosa [ph], all of those artists that were a part of his class that he studied with, and so I was exposed to that, the contemporary world that was happening then. And so it was like the two things happening – discovering the past and remnants of the past and immediate past and then the contemporary world.

MS. CORDOVA: How was that inspiring you in your art?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think – you mean like today or then?

MS. CORDOVA: Then.

MS. OROZCO: Well, then it was really exciting because we were a part of the contemporary world, like we participated in – that was a time in Mexico, it was a very exciting time, when they had the Salones de la Plástica , which were the competitions. You know, they had the Salon de Pintura, the Salon de Escultura, the Salon Experimental, the Fotografía, de Tapiz. And so these were major competitions, national competitions with major prizes, and so all the – everybody, you know, participated in those, and one, because the prizes were very attractive. It was also very prestigious, and it was just – you know, if you were an active artist, you were going to try to participate.

And also, kind of the la polemica [controversy] that existed, you know, because there were certain judges, and so then certain judges would support certain artists, and there were all these articles in the paper protesting, you know like – and you know we got involved even in that. I mean, we wrote several articles for the newspaper. You know, when it didn't – when we didn't agree with the winners. [Laughs.] We would write our letters – you know, letters to the editor, so, you know, we – it was a part – it was like activism – we were activists I guess at that time also.

And then all of a sudden then we – because we kept going around and taking photographs, many slides, because I think the first time the first that I can remember that we started, it was in 1979. There was an exhibition. It was a homage to Jose Clemente Orozco. It was – the Bellas Artes, the Palacio de Bellas Artes. It was three floors of his work, and they set up his studio in one of the galleries of – you know, a reproduction of his studio, and then the whole palace was filled with his art. And I remember thinking, well, you know, this is – most of these are from private collections, and I'll never see these again. I'll never have access to them. And so we really need to – we really need to document this, and so at that time, they didn't have the rules about, you know, you can't take photographs, you can't use flash, those kinds of things. And so we went around, and we took photos, slides of everything in that museum.

And then – so that kind of started, and it kind of snowballed, because then after that, every major exhibition, we would take slides of them. And so people started seeing us at all of these openings and we knew all the guards. They'd say, "Oh, go ahead, you're fine." You know, we'd take photographs. We started taking slides of everything, and it was all for the center, and eventually we got letters from the officials saying we could do this then. Even at the opening, we'd take photographs. Like I have a – I have some pictures like of a when the Rufino Tamayo Museum, when it opened [1981], and I have a picture of – they were walking together, President Portillo and Gamboa and Tamayo, they're all together.

MS. CORDOVA: Wow.

MS. OROZCO: And then I'm trying – I even tried to interview Zabludovsky. I don't know if you remember – you know Zabludovsky, the famous – he's like the Walter Cronkite of Mexico. And I would try to interview him, and he said he didn't want to get interviewed.

[Laughter.]

MS. OROZCO: It's kind of ironic because he's always interviewing everybody. But –

MS. CORDOVA: How do you spell his name, Zabludovsky?

MS. OROZCO: I'll try to write it in a minute. Zabludovsky with a Z, Zabludovsky. He's the father of Abraham Zabludovsky, who's – I think he's still a news reporter. But anyway, so that was kind of exciting, and one little story kind of I guess as the climax of all of this is that we would – all of a sudden so everybody kind of started knowing us, you know, because the arts communities, even in a big city, it's small. Everybody knows each other and the museum directors, curators, artists, collectors, reporters, and then so they ended up doing an article on us in *El Excelsior*, in the major newspaper, about our – what we were doing, right, us going around and doing all this documentation. It was a funny story.

And then so one day we were at home and then we got a phone call, and I asked Pio, "Who's that?" And then he said, "Luis." And I said, "Luis who?" And he said, "Luis Echeverria." I said, "Oh, really," and then I just went on and said, "You don't meant the president, do you?" And he said, "Yeah, it's the president, the ex-president." I said, "Really?" And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, what did he want?" He said, "He wants to meet with us." I said, "Oh, really? Okay." And so there we go, to go meet with Luis, the ex-president of Mexico, at his home, and that was a pretty interesting experience.

MS. CORDOVA: And what was he hoping –

MS. OROZCO: He knew – well, he had heard about that we were documenting all the Mexican art, right? And so this was a long time ago. This was in '79, like in '79 or so, or 1980, and he said, "Well, I have this idea. I want to put all these images on CD – you know, on these CDs."

MS. CORDOVA: Wow.

[Laughter.]

MS. OROZCO: Or on these not CDs, but on these disk things. I don't know if he called them CDs then, and I remember that, you know, he had these ideas, and then he wanted to like sell these – well, I don't know if to sell them or to preserve them, and that was his idea. But you know, our – the kind of equipment that we had – and it was – we weren't like professional photographers. We were just like, you know, documenting, and so I don't think what we had was exactly what he needed, but – or wanted – but, you know, he was – it was an interesting experience. I remember sitting there and talking to him, and then he showed us his home – well, where we went to – I think that's the other one for Siqueiros, but he showed us the Diego Rivera murals. He has several Diego Rivera murals in his home or in that office where it was. El Centro de Tercer Mundista was the name of the place, and that was an interesting experience.

MS. CORDOVA: That's a fascinating story. [Laughs.]

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Where are all those photographs now?

MS. OROZCO: Well, we have some here, and some of the tapes I think I donated to the university, because we did interviews also. But we never had the money or the time to kind of follow up with that, because once we got here, it was more about survival and trying to get things – you know, it was like starting all over again. And so it kind of got dropped. The project got dropped.

MS. CORDOVA: The actual project of documenting everything got dropped.

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. And a lot of the – I remember we had a lot of little rolls of film, like a big bag like that, but we never had the money to develop it, and so it didn't get developed either.

MS. CORDOVA: That's horrible.

MS. OROZCO: And by the time we did develop some, it was too late, because the time had gone by too much.

MS. CORDOVA: The film had gotten too old?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So some got developed, some didn't. We have some that are here in the folders in the – but you know, we took thousands of slides, but we still have some of the material.

So this whole project of building this school was sort of inspirational in a way for what came next here in Austin. Is that correct?

MS. OROZCO: Right, most people don't know that. That it just didn't start out of nothing. It was building up for years. [Audio break, tape change] – so we did that until – oh, and then we were even into video. We did video art, and I did a video art piece with four other women. It was kind of interesting.

MS. CORDOVA: What was that like, and who was it with?

MS. OROZCO: I knew you were going to ask. Oh, like Magali Lara was one of the artists. Carmen –

MS. CORDOVA: Carmen?

MS. OROZCO: She's a writer.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, okay.

MS. OROZCO: Carmen Boyd [ph]. Well, I – yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: That's all right. What about the actual project? What was it? What did you create?

MS. OROZCO: Oh, what did I do? It was video, so it was about the – it was like a symbols – it was like the lips. You have lips, but then they were transformed into the teeth, and then the teeth became – they had letters on them, and the letters became a typewriter. And then it was like images – it was images, and then it was transforming into a Volkswagen.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] So it went from lips to teeth to typewriter to Volkswagen?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. CORDOVA: Is there a specific message that you were attempting to create through that?

MS. OROZCO: I think it was talking about somehow, sometimes that we're looked at as objects, that, you know, the objectification of women I think that was – it was a statement about that. And I remember we did a little – I did a little storyboard, and then it became the video images. It's here somewhere, because I showed it – I showed it recently, well, about maybe three years ago. And I remember Linda Pace was here, and I showed it to Linda Pace.

MS. CORDOVA: Really? What did she think, how did she respond?

MS. OROZCO: She thought it was interesting. But I think what's most interesting is it was done so long ago.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. I mean, probably right at the start of video art at that time.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, mm-hmm. And then there would be like video like happenings, and we would go and videotape those also, so it was kind of neat.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you have a lot of those catalogued here in Mexic-Arte?

MS. OROZCO: Some.

MS. CORDOVA: Some.

MS. OROZCO: And again, you know, it's – I think we probably have more documentation than any other like – and I say that because I think – I don't really know I haven't gone and looked, but other cultural centers, because one, I never throw anything away. And you know, we have kept things little by little, whether it's not perfectly catalogued or whatever, it's still somewhere. Like I remember doing – I wanted to find all the women, Mexican women, in Mexico City, the Mexican women artists, like documenting them, you know, what kind of art they do, their address, their phone number, and I made little cards for each one, and I still have it. It's in the – it's sitting over there in the library, I saw it a little while ago, little cards on each of the artists. And I would call them and you know, surf and check the information, so I think that's kind of interesting.

MS. CORDOVA: It sounds like you have a very valuable archive.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, it's pretty neat. I remember calling Aruthia, Cordella Aruthia [ph], and Rina Lazo, and so, oh,

so when we decided to – you know, what we decided to leave –

MS. CORDOVA: Mm-hmm, leave Mexico.

MS. OROZCO: It wasn't a plan either. It was all abrupt. You know, myself, I'm pretty like, you know, I like to plan and do things, I'm pretty like – but I think being combined with Pio that was kind of chaotic. Sometimes we'd go with the chaotic order, sense of order. And things would just happen, like the time we just picked up and left and didn't, you know, plan to leave and we came back and put everything in a room, and then eventually a lot of it got destroyed.

MS. CORDOVA: So that was maybe one way that Pio was influencing you and the direction of your life, would you say?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I would think so, but you know, it's good and bad, because some things I might have never done. And you know, like he was more – I guess he had more of an entrepreneurial spirit, and I don't think I grew up like that. You know, mine was more about education and studying and picking up the books, and his was more like out on the street kind of thing. I don't know. I think it's because growing up in a big city, it's like survival. Like I know that he – well, his family never wanted him to be an artist. They wanted him to paint signs, so he had all kinds of different professions, because he was multi-talent – I mean, he's multi-talented, like him and his brother had a dress shop. I mean, he never had – he never did that before in his life, and all of a sudden, he was – because he was designing and cutting patterns, and then they were making shirts and pants and all, I mean, just like from one day to the next. He's doing set design. He did those little molds for ceramic figures because they – so it was just like one thing – he was very – he's very technically skilled, and then I think out of need, those kinds of things.

And so when he saw – when he would see like an opportunity, he, you know, he would want to go for it, though he might not know how, but it was me that knew how, right, or could find out how. Like one example is this building, right? Like I probably would have been too shy – "Oh, well, we can't get that, right" – but there was a big sign in the window, says it's for rent, right? And he said, "Well, just call. What does it hurt?" I said, "Well, it's probably too expensive, and it's not covered." Now, well, we called, right? And it happened to be Mr. Smith, who was also Jewish and a very nice man, and you know, it was wonderful that, you know, he said, "Yes, I want to rent it to you." And you know, he also came from a difficult background, and he had the entrepreneurial spirit, and he knew that if people wanted to do things and they were a hard worker, they could do it right.

MS. CORDOVA: And so that's how you ended up in this building that we're sitting in right now.

MS. OROZCO: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: Though you did not start off here first, right?

MS. OROZCO: No.

MS. CORDOVA: Where did you start?

MS. OROZCO: We started off at the Arts Warehouse, and the Arts Warehouse, that was another opportunity. And Santa told us about it, because when we came back, all of a sudden – well, they knew I was coming, I was back, right, and they knew, okay, she's been in Mexico, like, the land of, you know, wealth for someone who knows about Mexican art, and honey and milk, you know, because all the resources, so she knows a lot, and she has a lot of contacts and all those kinds of things.

So when I came back, when we came back, it was in December of '93 – no it was '83, there was like a lot of turmoil in LUChA. One, because I think that there was – it was becoming successful. They had I think like a $40,000, $50,000 budget. For that time, it was pretty good. And all of a sudden, well, there was, you know, an organization and potential funding, so that meant jobs, right. And so people are always basically bottom-line after the jobs. And there was a lot of people in the community that were interested in that job, whether they knew about art or not, and some people felt that because they were from that community, that they deserved that job and those opportunities. But maybe they should have started some other kind of organization and leave the arts to the artists, right? Like they would say it in Spanish, "Zapateros y zapatos," and I think it would have been a lot better.

So those community people kind of took over the arts organization, and so the artists were left without an organization. And I was there for a while. As I said I came – and we came very abruptly because all of a sudden I was offered a job – well, not a job, a project. It was just to curate one exhibit, which was of Luis Jiménez, and the name of it was "Del Chuco a la Loma [1984]." And it was the drawings and prints that would complement the sculpture exhibit that he was having at like Laguna Gloria [Art Museum, Austin, Texas].

MS. CORDOVA: And where was this exhibit going to be at?

MS. OROZCO: At LUChA, and it was located – well, it was no longer at Juárez-Lincoln, because it had to be torn down, and now it was in – well, it's over there by not Chicon, but the next street over. It was on the corner. It was in a little – I think there's some other kind of nonprofit there now. It's next to the funeral home.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. Actually, maybe I can just clarify a few details with you. Why did Juárez-Lincoln close? What had happened to lead to its closing?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think the building sold. Oh, Juárez-Lincoln was a separate entity that was a school, an alternative university.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: But LUChA just happened to rent an office there, or they gave them free space or something, but they didn't own the building. And they painted it –

MS. CORDOVA: No, I thought that they were somehow more –

[Laughter, cross talk.]

MS. CORDOVA: Integrated.

MS. OROZCO: They probably were, but I didn't really know that much about that. I just knew that that was a place to exhibit, and that's where the – where LUChA was, and Raul Valdez had painted a mural on the outside. And it was kind of the gathering place of the Chicano movement. And that's what I basically knew. I didn't know the details of the organization, because I just there as an artist, not as an administrator.

MS. CORDOVA: And you came back right about the time that they were about to destroy the Valdez mural, or had they already destroyed it?

MS. OROZCO: It came down – it came down with the whole building. They didn't destroy it separately. They, you know, demolished everything at once.

MS. CORDOVA: And I think that was in 1983, so just at this point that we're talking about, where you were also coming back and working with LUChA.

MS. OROZCO: Right. And so when I was there, the people that were on the board were people that had been active in the Brown Berets and also that community organization. I mean, I think they all had good intentions, but again, I think that maybe they should have maybe concentrated their efforts in some other kind of like social work or some other forming onto separate nonprofit, because there's all kind of monies, you know, for all kinds of social programs. And maybe this one just had a little head start, and they wanted to use that also, but it would have been better for the community if they would have stayed out and just let the artists run that organization.

MS. CORDOVA: So you're –

MS. OROZCO: Because that has influence even today. It's still – I mean, it's very complicated, but because of that kind of struggle between community and artist, and you know, you're not from east Austin or you're from east Austin, it's still – it's very much part of I guess the Latino-Chicano art politics here in Austin.

MS. CORDOVA: How do you mean exactly? Maybe you could explain that a little more.

[Laughter.]

MS. OROZCO: Well, it's happened over all these years.

MS. CORDOVA: And what I think the main criticism that I'm understanding in regards to what was happening with LUChA was the mission was changing from an arts-focused organization to one that was more focused on changing politics maybe or lobbying for social change. Is that sort of what you're suggesting?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah. But even if – that would have been okay. I mean, if things transform, you know, something might have started out as one thing, but it change. But either way, you have to do the work, and you have to do the homework, and you have to dot your I's and cross your T's and turn in your reports and get your audits and do your financials and get the grant request in. I mean, you have to do all of the, you know, administration work, and you know, and that wasn't being done.

And so I think that what happened eventually was well, if you don't turn in your reports, you're not going to get funded in the next year. No matter what your mission is or how good you're doing a program or whatever, you know, if you don't do the requirements, you're not going to get funded. And so that's what happened, right, whereas in our case – so then we – so I was in that – I did that program, and then we decided, well, I'm just going to – we're just going to form our own.

And so – so we formed Mexic-Arte. It was founded in '83, but we actually incorporated it in '84. And see, the good thing is that well, you know, I'm pretty good in terms with paper and reports and, you know – because I, you know, all during school I did pretty good and all that kind of stuff, I mean I think if you just try, it's not hard. You just have to do it, right, and if you're diligent and persistent and all that kind of stuff. So, you know, we always, you know, did all that stuff, so we kept growing, and we kept – and then there was that little competition at some point.

MS. CORDOVA: Between Mexic-Arte and –

MS. OROZCO: And LUChA.

MS. CORDOVA: And LUChA.

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. CORDOVA: How did that show itself?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think there was a little bit of resentment, but you know, I always look at it the more, the better. I mean, in the other communities, I mean, how many theaters in Austin do we have? You know, how many theater groups are – you know, in other communities there's a lot. There's different museums. I mean, look at Fort Worth. Now how many museums are there? And people always think that there can just be one, and it's not true. There can be as many as a community can support, but you have to be, you know, you have to have – I guess enforce those best practices or whatever they're called. I don't know, so.

MS. CORDOVA: And so it started just with you and Pio and Sam Coronado?

MS. OROZCO: Well, Sam basically – you know, he knew that we wanted to start a nonprofit, and he said – well, he was just coming back from Houston. He had worked on a nonprofit over there, and he said, "I'm tired. I want to do just art, and you know, I'll be the third person, because you have to have three people to incorporate, that's the rule." And he said, "I'll be the third person" – me and Pio and Sam – "but I really don't want to do any work right now." And so we said, "Okay, well, we'll just go ahead and file our papers, right?"

And so – and again, the good thing is that I can always, you know, I'm pretty resourceful, so Santa had also had communication. I think she's on the board of Women and Their Work. And so I got a copy of the Women and Their Work acts and incorporation, and then so I used theirs to write ours, right? So I – if I – if they got approved, and I just wrote ours and I changed it a little bit, modified it, and then so I wrote our acts and incorporation.

MS. CORDOVA: That's fascinating. Now, had you had much involvement with that gallery?

MS. OROZCO: Women and Their Work?

MS. CORDOVA: Mm-hmm.

MS. OROZCO: Well, when I came back, see, Rita [Starpattern] was really a good person, and you know, she was very supportive, so when we came back, she was the first one to support me as a woman artist, and I actually did a performance. It was funny, and it showed the videos from Mexico, because they had a performance art series. I should have brought the little notebook that had the poster. I still have the poster.

And we did – we showed the videos from Mexico, the ones that I had told you about, and other artist videos, and then we had – I remember passing – because at that time, they were giving – if you were poor, they would give you cheese, those big blocks of cheese, you know? And we got some of that, and we packed – we cut it up and then we had masks, paper masks, like a Reagan. We put the Reagan mask on, and then we passed out cheese to the people who came to watch the performance. It's kind of funny, so that was pretty neat.

Oh, and then we did another really interesting thing in Mexico that was also in '83 I think before we – I think it was in the summer – a really important exhibit called "Adonde llega la calle?" – where does this street reach? – It was a British social worker and activist who came, and there was a lot of criticism. You know, the artists got all excited because how is it that they were turning the museum over to this guy, right. And so they gave him the Museum of Modern Art to do this project, and so he invited some artists, and we didn't get invited. But then we went and said, "No, well, we're going to take a wall," and so we went and took a wall in the museum. And we did a gigantic flag, which is red and green and white, spray-painted and painted it, and then –

MS. CORDOVA: The Mexican flag.

MS. OROZCO: The Mexican flag, yeah. And then had people write on little ribbons their wishes for the future and like glue them up there, I mean, put up them up there like little milagros. And then we made a super cactus, you know like Superman, and you could put your head and take pictures. And then we did a Virgin de Guadalupe you could put your head through, and so they took pictures with that. And that was in the summer of I think 1983. And they published a book of that – it's a catalog.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: But what was I going to say? Why was I saying that?

MS. CORDOVA: Well, Women and Their Work and sort of your –

MS. OROZCO: Right, so we – that was some – some of that stuff was on video, so we showed that, and then we also showed – well, the flag later we showed in an exhibition, the flag that we made, because then we went and took all the little like milagros that people had pasted and we made a big flag. We bought satin and glued them and taped them up there. There was funny things, like I wish the Aztecs would have come back. [Laughs.] I remember that one.

MS. CORDOVA: What happened to the flag now?

MS. OROZCO: I think Pio has it.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] That's so funny. So Women and Their Work was a supportive venue for you.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, and then later I was on the board also. So being on the board, I also – see, the only way I thought that I could learn, because I didn't study to be an arts administrator or never did I think I was going to be one. It just kind of happened, so the only way I thought is that I would go – I served on the, you know – and it wasn't like I was planning it right. It just kind of happened. I was curious. What is a board, and what – how do boards work? And so they invited me to be a board member, so I was a board member, and then also every meeting that ever existed for the arts commission or arts funding, I would attend. I was like – well, both of us, Pio and I – so I learned a lot about arts funding and the whole system.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, they provided you a model for how to start here really.

MS. OROZCO: Who?

MS. CORDOVA: Women and Their Work.

MS. OROZCO: Well, through Rita, yeah, Rita, and through – and yeah, and then they were supportive of me as an artist.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, did you have any criticisms with their organization or anything that you attempted to change when you were starting here? Is there anything that stood out for you like that?

MS. OROZCO: No, I think that – I think that Women and Their Work was real interesting, and also they had a connection already to other alternative spaces around the country, and which, through the Latino world, I didn't know about. It was through probably through Women and Their Work that I got introduced to that. Like NAAO, the National Association of Artist Organizations, and later I was on that board and learned all about alternative spaces and that we were an alternative space. And later on I consciously made the decision that I didn't want to be an alternative space, that that was not what we were about. Though we were that, but I eventually realized that we didn't want to be that. We wanted to be a museum and an institution.

MS. CORDOVA: You wanted to be more accessible rather than perceived as an alternative space? Is that along the lines?

MS. OROZCO: Well, first it was – in the beginning, it was because the alternative spaces, I learned what they were. They were all mainly Anglo artists creating alternative spaces because they couldn't – young, contemporary artists, they couldn't get into the museums, because the museums were controlled by the older Anglo artists. I mean, and both of them were usually male-run, right, and so then I realized that the big museums were getting the big money, and the alternative spaces were getting a little money. Even though they were getting money, it was still little money.

You know, if you look at the grants, the list of grants, for the NEA, you'd see $5000 for all the alternatives, and the museums $50,000, $75,000, $155,000. And then I realized, well, we don't even have major museums to protest against. You know, there isn't – you know, how can we even – you know, we're not – our struggle – we

don't have the same struggle. You know, I can't be fighting to be in a warehouse. You know, I'm trying to get out of the warehouse to create a dignified space to show art, and we're showing art from the past also. You know, it's not just what people are making now, because we have another mission. We have to teach what's been denied of us. We don't know. You know, we can't grow up learning about Greek. We can, but not – there's more to that. There's, you know, our own culture we have to learn about, and we have to have accessibility to our own history. And so we're still trying to do that now. I mean, we're still not there.

MS. CORDOVA: You think so?

MS. OROZCO: Well, no. We don't have a decent building. This is not a real museum building. And people still perceive us as a gallery, and we're not a gallery. We have a collection. Oh, and I didn't tell about the collection. Now that started – see, so then because back in Mexico in '83, when we decided that we were going to move up here – or maybe it was when we went back – oh, we – people already knew about us, right, not only the younger artists but also the older artists of La Plástica Mexicana. These were people who actually had studied with, Frida [Kahlo] and Diego [Rivera].

Like Los Tres Fridos, which is Arturo Garcia Bustos, Arturo Estrada, and Rina Lazo, we went to them and asked them to donate work for the effort we were going to do here, and they did, and that's actually the beginning of our collection. And we went to the Taller de la Grafica Popular, and because we would go there anyway to their meetings and stuff just to learn about them, and so that was where our collection started. So the first exhibit that we did was our "Day of the Dead."

MS. CORDOVA: That was your very first exhibit?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I forgot to tell about how we got to that. There's a lot of things. Well, see Day of the Dead is November the 2nd and November the 1st. Okay, November 2nd is my birthday, and so it was a special day, right? So it was like, okay, we get to go and do something, go out, and so we would go to Mixque, which is outside of Xochimilco, where they celebrate Día de los Muertos. It's a little, bitty town. And so I was exposed to Day of the Dead. This was in like 1980. And for me, it was quite wonderful, and so when we came back – and so – and every year I would go, so I'd learn more and more about it. And so –

MS. CORDOVA: But you hadn't grown up celebrating Día de los Muertos.

MS. OROZCO: No, never, mm-mm. And so when we came back in 1980 – I mean, 1983, and I wrote a grant that year in '84 to the city of Austin for two exhibitions for the Day of the Dead, which is November of '84, and "Realidades Mexicanas" which is going to in January of '85. And in "Realidades Mexicanas," we would show some of the work that was donated. It was three exhibitions actually. It was workshop and workshop to cover your graphics and that had been donated, plus Gilberto Cardenas had some here. He was a collector. So we used his also.

MS. CORDOVA: Had he opened his gallery yet at that point?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-mm [Negative].

MS. CORDOVA: When did he open his?

MS. OROZCO: The '90s, the late '90s.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: But he had already been collecting on his own. Okay, then we had – oh, I forgot to talk about this one, "10 x 10." That was another exhibit I helped organize when I was in Mexico for LUChA.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, so an exhibit for LUChA that was held in Mexico City?

MS. OROZCO: No, here.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, here. Okay.

MS. OROZCO: It was 10 photographers, 10 Mexican photographers. And so I went to go see Pedro Meyer, and he was at that time seeing Graciela Iturbide, and so then he went and asked, but he was still living with his wife. But anyway, go. But anyway, so I went to the home before he divorced I guess, when he was still living with I think it was Eugenia. She worked in the anthropology department. Well, anyway, and he then invited some of his friends, right, because he was with the Consejo Nacional de Fotografia. So he invited eight other photographers, and he was one of the persons that we invited to come to Plástica Chicana, so I already knew him.

So anyway, so LUChA had never returned those – hadn't returned the photography. They had it the whole time,

because it was either traveling – or well, maybe they just had it. And so we showed it again. Eventually we did return it, but –

MS. CORDOVA: The photography that was shot at the Chicana Plástica conference, is that –

MS. OROZCO: No, that was Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

MS. CORDOVA: It was Bravo.

MS. OROZCO: This was later. This was like ’82 or ’81, after Plástica Chicana.

MS. CORDOVA: So they’d held the photograph exhibit of materials, and they hadn’t returned those materials.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, so we had – yeah, we had three exhibits. See – okay, I forgot to tell this part. Okay, we moved to – when we came and we started Mexic-Arte, well, we didn’t have a place, right.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: We were living in a little house in east Austin with another friend, Ricardo de Solion [ph], he lent us a room there and so I was riding the grants and stuff out of there. And then Santa told us about this project called the Arts Warehouse where they were renting studios to artists and they wanted to create something like the Torpedo Factory, and that we would have art studios and be making our art and the people would come and look at our things.

Okay, so we as artists then went to the Arts Warehouse and said we wanted to rent a space, right, and what we could afford was – it was 10 – it was like 300 square feet, what we could afford. And – but we didn’t have any money either and so we said what if – and Jane Hume [sp] was the director and she was – her husband was an artist and so she was kind of very open to ideas. And since she didn’t know too much about art but she liked artists and she had that spirit of let’s do things we told her well, what if we paint a mural on the outside of the warehouse in exchange for the rent for three years. She said okay, and so – but we turned in several designs but we never – it never happened because they never could decide on the design.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MS. OROZCO: It was a Watson and Casey project.

MS. CORDOVA: I’m sorry –

MS. OROZCO: John Watson and Jim Casey, they were developers –

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: – and they had opened – they had decided to do this project to try to garner support from the city council because they wanted to build the city council complex, and it was all supposed to be this project, right? The city council complex, the art museum, the art alternative space, all this was supposed to work together but the economy turned down and they had to sell and so we had to move out but for three years we did programs there. And we had the little bitty space and – 300 square feet but they had a big 10,000 square feet of empty gallery space where Jane was supposed to organize exhibitions or she was supposed to get people to organize to put exhibitions there.

Well, one, that’s a lot of work. Second, it costs money and so it was empty a lot, and so we went and told Jane well, what if we would – it’s always empty. Could we use it for our Día de los Muertos? She said “What’s that?” And at that time nobody knew what Day of the Dead and it was – so we kind of came at it like well, it’s like a Mexican Halloween, and she said “Oh, okay well, that’s fun.” And so then we decided we were going to do the Mexican Halloween, right, and then we told her we were going to do a procession, like in Mexico they do processions. We were going to add low riders and then they got kind of scared that all of a sudden that people from East Austin were going to come down sixth street and go into the warehouse.

But Mr. Casey – Jim Casey was also very supportive and we asked him for a grant. We got, I think, $3,000 – $2,000 from the city and then we asked him – he gave us $2,000. That was our first corporate grant ever and he still – he’s a member of the museum and he comes to our events here. He lives in Houston now.

MS. CORDOVA: That’s great.

MS. OROZCO: And anyway, so we got –

MS. CORDOVA: Were you aware of other galleries around the country celebrating Día de los Muertos because –

so it sort of spontaneously for you came up?

MS. OROZCO: Yes, because what we – that's what we always did –

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: – for the last four years in Mexico, our five. So then we did the – and we all this material, right, because we had slides, we had video, we had pictures, we had books and we started teaching people about it. And it was great. We had a – and I remember we sent out – I don't know what we were thinking, we sent out 10,000 initiations. Can you – it took us like I don't know how many weeks to do that bulk mailing.

MS. CORDOVA: Ten thousand.

MS. OROZCO: To separate them and to – I mean, what we were going to do with 10,000 people? We never even thought of that, if they would have come, right. But it was – it was packed. It was a big, big success because we had all the low riders going down sixth street and we went to the bars looking for the low riders and we found a hearse driving down East Austin and we cornered him, stopped him and that guy was coming out and he wanted to fight and we said, no, no, no we want to borrow your hearse for the Día de los Muertos and we can – we even wanted to paint. Pio painted some designs on the back and it was pretty neat. But we did a lot of stuff.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, were people – they got over their fear of low riders?

MS. OROZCO: Oh, yeah they – no, it was not so much low riders it was just the concept of the unknown and also the Mexican people coming to downtown and being in this – having this big event. It wasn't usual for – or common for Austin. If there was cultural events they were in the community and it was the Mexican-American community going to those events. This was downtown Austin in a major corporate space that was supported by a major corporation, developers.

MS. CORDOVA: Did that give your organization some added support within the community? Were you suddenly much more recognized as an institution following that?

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, but that was just the first thing we were doing. I mean, we did a lot of stuff after that. I mean, we had a lot of energy and we had a – Pio wasn't – had never suffered any kind of discrimination so he didn't have that – sometimes – well, growing up and you feel inferior, you're scared or you're shy about doing something. He would just go do it and so – well, I was pretty courageous too because – I mean, but he added a – and plus there was two of us. And then there was – we had this – all these artists also that helped us and people were excited and so it just kind of started happening.

MS. CORDOVA: And so the "Día de los Muertos" exhibit, you followed it up with this "Realidades Mexicananas" exhibit?

MS. OROZCO: And I have a little catalog somewhere I'll show you, but from the very beginning we also involved the Mexican consulate's office and I have a picture in the catalog. We did a little catalog and so it also gave us also legitimacy, I guess, because we were associated with – we were already – we were connected. We weren't just connected to the community in East Austin, we had – our roots were – we were grounded in something deeper and more fundamental and had stronger roots. And I think that's probably real important in our development, and we have always maintained that relationship because we are also – we're not just about Latino and Chicano we are about Mexican – our Mexican roots and our culture because I think that's what gives strength to what we do. It makes us understand who we are.

MS. CORDOVA: And by that maybe – just to sort of understand better, you mean not just what's happening within the borders of the United States but also exactly everything that has been happening within Mexico and its history and its contemporary situation?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.] And I think it goes back to my thinking. I can't understand something unless I understand where it comes from, like the paint. The paint is the same thing. I couldn't relate to the paint because I couldn't understand it. What is this? And what does it come from? And until I understood that it was pigments plus the glue and you do this to it and you do that to it and then I understood. The same thing with the culture; when I see the Virgin de Guadalupe, well, why does she look like that? And what – I understand now where she comes from and the whole history and that's real important. And we can't just take things from the surface, right. We have to understand the roots and then that gives us knowledge and also security that you're on – you're grounded.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, you – but, I mean, you had worked with Pio in Mexico establishing this school and Mexic-Arte was a sort of an evolution from that school but did it have a school component to it initially? Was there an education component?

MS. OROZCO: Here? Yeah, we had education from the very beginning. We would – I remember we would – and I have the pictures in that little catalog, it shows – we went and did workshops even with the senior citizens at the – [inaudible] – recreation center they made little flowers and then I'll show you this other thing we made.

It was a teacher's guide – we did teachers reception, teachers' in-service workshops. We had 100 teachers and they were sitting on the floor in the Arts Warehouse and I would teach them how to make little piñatas or Mexican masks or all these different things and we made little lesson plans and the little patterns of the papel picado? The papel picado, our patterns – you can go into the schools now and they use them. I mean, they've been using those for 20 years, the same ones and we made those a long time ago.

MS. CORDOVA: And at that moment the schools were especially receptive to what you had to offer?

MS. OROZCO: Oh yeah, they were over receptive. After we realized – we'd do 20 or 30 workshops during May for Cinco de Mayo and it's like okay, there needs to be more of us or something. So that's why we started teaching the teachers because too many teachers were calling us and we just can't do that many, right. So if you teach the teachers than they teach the students and they can reach more of them. So that was our – and we use the slides to do the history of Mexican folk art. Yeah, we always have had an education component.

MS. CORDOVA: And – however, your time at the Arts Warehouse only lasted for about three years?

MS. OROZCO: Three years. Yeah, from '84 to '87, I guess.

MS. CORDOVA: And you left it because –

MS. OROZCO: It closed.

MS. CORDOVA: It closed.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, the economy went bad and they had to sell the warehouse.

MS. CORDOVA: I see.

MS. OROZCO: And, well, Pio said I'm not leaving anything so he took it apart, our little house, our little gallery and what's sitting outside is some of the walls from the original building with the windows.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, I know the murals never – or the mural never got made but were some of the designs that you were proposing to put on the Arts Warehouse?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I had a mural the year before that. I wanted to paint a mural in Mexico for CONACYT, which was about technology and how technology – how we use technology to advance the human race and that was one that I was designing on. The mural outside of the Arts Warehouse was Pio's designs that were more based on kind of Miró, more kind of that kind of images, more abstract.

MS. CORDOVA: What was your technology mural like?

MS. OROZCO: The technology mural? Well, it had lots of machines and, I guess, kind of like man over machines or man using machines. That was kind of neat.

MS. CORDOVA: I actually – I wonder, I know you said that this mural was Pio's but you were involved in the mural that was in the Chicano Culture Room [at UT, Austin], right?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit even about the evolution of creating that mural, like how it was decided to be created and –

MS. OROZCO: Well, that was a commission –

MS. CORDOVA: I don't have an image.

MS. OROZCO: That was an image of – well, Charlie – and I forgot his last name – he was the chair of the Chicano Culture Committee. He passed away, so he's – and he was – see, people who were interested in the arts or activists in the arts, they would always find us. And they liked what we were doing and so he got money from the – I guess, the Chicano Culture Committee – I think it was like $2000 – for this mural and his canvas was stretched and it's based – it's really influenced by Camarenas', Jorge Camarenas' mural.

And this is – I think that the name – this is the evolution of – from pre-Columbian roots and it goes to colonial and

the magué is kind of like the center of the universe, center of – the Ombligo, the bellybutton of Mexico and then all of this, the spirit. This is a spirit coming out and with the jaguar and then the guy, he has a – like he graduated from the university and he's – I think this is the name of the first Chicano that graduated from the University of Texas and then you have the different flags, the Mexican flag, the Texas flag and the U.S. flag over here. And then here's the battles, the battles of the Spaniards and the indigenous people but also, I think, there's some reference to battles of the Alamo and so it's kind of like a mixture of stuff.

MS. CORDOVA: Did the University seek out – you to do this – or –

MS. OROZCO: Charlie

[END OF TAPE TWO]

MS. CORDOVA: – was this strictly from the Chicana Culture Committee.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, the Chicana Culture Committee?

MS. CORDOVA: I see.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, he knew our work and what we were doing and his girlfriend was a dancer and she participated in a lot of our – in some of our events, our "Day of the Dead," and so did he, he was a dancer for a while and – so I think that continues to be the Young Latino Artists and we have an exhibition even called that now. They're attracted to the museum because there's activity here.

It's kind of interesting, there's different – they don't understand where it comes from, the Mexic-Arte. They're like what are you all and where do you all get funded? And what is this and what is that? But, anyway, that's what that is.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. I'm – because we're getting close to the end of this tape I'm going to stop it and just start with a new tape.

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right, we're recording. This is Cary Cordova and I'm interviewing Santa Barraza – I mean, I'm sorry, we've just been discussing Santa Barraza but I'm interviewing Sylvia Orozco here at Mexic-Arte on February 2, 2004, Monday and this is session two, disc two.

And I've actually just had the pleasure of seeing multiple images of your work. In fact, more images of your work than I've ever had a chance to see before and, I think, as a result my first question is why aren't more images of your work in the public realm? And maybe you could talk a little bit about that even as you work as a curator and one of your responsibilities as a professional is introducing other people's work to the public.

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think probably several reasons. One is because – I don't know, I think my work is real – is private and I guess I try to – I love muralism and murals but I think I love them academically but not so much as to create them because it's something very public and I get more private in my own work and what I want to make – my work for the public realm would be, I guess, more the museums and the programs that we produce and just things that are more, I guess, educational or academic. But things that are more interesting to me or that are more intimate, I think I'd rather keep private.

MS. CORDOVA: And that would be your artwork?

MS. OROZCO: Right, because everything that I do is so public, right? And all my life is public and so I think that keeping the art for myself and not even – it's not even in my family too much. I mean, there's a few works – there's some works in my mom's home but I think it's one thing I've kept back.

MS. CORDOVA: Is there any fear in that? Any fear of sort of exposing yourself to the public?

MS. OROZCO: Well, probably a little bit in that I think because I haven't had enough time because that all the time that – I spend 12, 15 hours here every day and it's not painting or drawing. It's grant writing or emailing or accounting or administrating or dealing with the physical aspects of this building so you don't have as much time as compared to people who have – spend 8, 12 hours in their studio. So maybe I haven't really – and if you do look at my work someone might say well, you're kind of like all over the place because I have from abstract to conceptual pieces to installation. It's like little dabbing in here and there and I think I have been – or I am exposed to a lot of art because I see a lot of art and going to museums or reading magazines or reading books. Also, very close and being able to visit artists' studios.

And so I see a lot and a lot of that also influences my work. If I see something and it might influence me. So I

think that yeah, it's probably –

MS. CORDOVA: One of the pieces that you showed me, which is wonderful but that you mentioned was destroyed was the sort of the portrait of the couple, the sort of – I guess, a Chicano and Chicana couple with the, I guess, almost to the point of traditional symbols of the Chicano or Chicana person, and it was surprising to me to see you creating that work while you were living in Mexico. What was going on to inspire a work like that there?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think that – okay, I did – I remember having that book, that 400 years of Chicano history, and looking through it all the time, looking for images and I think that picture was probably – that painting was probably influenced by one of the pictures in that book but I changed it in adding color and, I guess, make a little more expressionist or whatever. But I think that all artists from the period that I grew up in struggled with the idea well, am I a Chicana artist? Do I do Chicana art? Or what am I doing? Or what is Chicana art?

And then even in going to Mexico, then well, that's another whole identity crisis. [Laughs.] Being all of a sudden in Mexico and us bragging that we're Mexican in the United States and then you go to Mexico and all of a sudden then they call you gringa and so it's all these – trying to relate to all these different situations. So I think that was kind of – all of a sudden I was Chicana and so I had to make my Chicana art.

MS. CORDOVA: You were perhaps Chicana there than you'd ever been here maybe, I don't know.

MS. OROZCO: Right, but I think that I – I kind of came in and out of that but I think that my work is mainly just me and I try to always stay away from like stereotyped images, I guess, or what people expect.

MS. CORDOVA: And, yeah, I just – having seen so many images, I guess another piece that I didn't see but that you mentioned was you did a death spectacle at the Paramount Theatre upon your return to Austin. What was that about?

MS. OROZCO: Well, that was – actually that was an event – not me as an artist but the museum – I mean, well, we weren't even a museum – we went through also transformation of the name because we were Mexic-Arte or Mexic-Arte then we were Mexic-Arte Muliticultural Works, Women and Their Works again that was an influence there then to The Museum. Then we captured the word museum but I think the – going back to the question about the thing at the Paramount, because we believed and Day of the Dead is a multidisciplinary event that involves visual art, music, dance, poetry, folk art, all the disciplines we decided to do a multidisciplinary show and so all of a sudden we were producing and directing – [laughs] – this two hour show, variety show at the Paramount.

And we got artists and actors. We wrote a play. We did the script and we wrote music or we got music and we got break – skeleton breakdancers. It was like a big variety show, all these different things –

MS. CORDOVA: What year was this?

MS. OROZCO: – with the theme of Day of the Dead. In '86. It was very hard to do.

MS. CORDOVA: A lot of work.

MS. OROZCO: It was a lot of work and we did both stage production, I mean, set designs, the costumes, everything that goes into doing a theatrical performance. I think we did it twice and that was it.

MS. CORDOVA: Was that work at all inspiring for your later installation work that I know you did? Or are they completely –

MS. OROZCO: No, I think it's totally different. That was more performance. It was dance and music.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you come into that work, the installations?

MS. OROZCO: The installation work? Well, because people were doing installations and so you see – I saw a lot of different work and so I was influenced by that.

MS. CORDOVA: Like what did you attempt to do first? Or what was something that stood out for you?

MS. OROZCO: I think the first piece, and I think maybe when I saw Celia [Alvarez] Muñoz's – some of her work and how she painted on the wall and I liked that. I liked it and how the subtlety of it, and so then I had just taken a class, a Nahuatl seminar and I learned about the words in Spanish and English and Nahautl and I thought just the words in themselves were kind of interesting and so I did the first one by making this big list of words of foods that were from the Americas. And I think, I'm not sure, but I think we used that piece when we did the "Counter Colon-ialismo." I think that was – I put that up for that – for that.

MS. CORDOVA: So you put up that installation for the “Counter Colon-ialismo” exhibit in 1992?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And –

MS. OROZCO: Because it was painted here on the wall.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: And then I also did an installation, it was a receiving piece that was downstairs in a little room that had pine needles on the ground and pine needles, they’re used by the indigenous people in the churches because they let off a beautiful smell and so they were on the floor and then there was banners that were hanging. They were kind of paper that was supposed to be like amatte paper and then the flower of – the cempasuchil flower, which is also a welcoming flower, and then the words that were in Nahuatl, it was one word that was all around the room and it was about describing a glowing bird that actually was supposed – I think was describing the Virgin of Guadalupe because she was in the air and like glowing. And it was kind of a word making reference to that, the beauty of that.

MS. CORDOVA: That’s fascinating. I’m – and so had you thought of this piece aside from this exhibit? Or had this exhibit inspired this particular installation?

MS. OROZCO: Well, no, it was for the people – it was for the people in the conference. I did it because they were my friends, because it was the National Association of Artists Organization so all the art – because since I was on the board and all these organizations from all over the country, there were artists organizations that we had dealt with for the past five or six years. They were all artists trying to do the same kind of art programs in other cities. They were coming to Austin and so I wanted to do something special for them and so I made the piece for them.

MS. CORDOVA: So can you tell me a little bit about where the impetus came for the “Counter Colon-ialismo” exhibit? Did it start here at Mexic-Arte and then you worked with other museums?

MS. OROZCO: That was – we applied NEO, got a grant to – the idea was for organizations to collaborate and so because we had been going to NEO and there were other alternative Latino spaces which is MARS and the Center Cultural, they were part of that and so we thought of this idea that we wanted to do this exhibit that was – coincided with the anniversary – quintcentennial anniversary of Columbus coming to the Americas and so we got that idea.

And so then – I think that was my – the concept, that Counter Colon-ialismo, the title and then we did a little drawing that went on the catalog and then we went to different – we would meet – we would meet every now and then, or chat on the phone, and go choose artists to be in that exhibit.

MS. CORDOVA: And the exhibit was a very multicultural exhibit as opposed to being – maybe you’re focused typically on Mexican artists or Mexican-American or Chicano artists.

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think that also comes from, again, the nature of Mexic-Arte because in the very beginning we were all inclusive. We were multicultural, multiethnic, multidisciplinary. We were multi-everything. We were the world. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: We are the world. [Laughs.]

MS. OROZCO: Right. And that comes probably a little bit more from Pio than from me because I always just wanted to do specifically Latino but because we were co-curators or co-administrators – and in the very beginning I didn’t even want the title executive director. I was the administrator and he was the artistic director and eventually I think that became one of our major differences because we did exhibits that were not Latino at all. Like we did a major show of Derek Boshier –

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MS. OROZCO: – and, yeah, we did other retrospectives of artists like Danville Chadbourne and Daniel – Dan Allison and many shows. We did the Austin Annual, which is trying to follow the example of – in Mexico the annuals that were happening then. Pio, because he hadn’t grown up here in the United States, he’d grown up in Mexico, didn’t have that same, I guess, that feeling of oppression that we had felt, that we needed to just concentrate on us, on the Latinos and he wanted to approach art as more universal and – but when it comes to down to it, there’s so much resources and I think that it took a long time to make transition and to make that change that we were going to be very ethnically – very specific, ethnically specific.

MS. CORDOVA: How long did it take for that to be visible?

MS. OROZCO: I think it didn't – it wasn't until 1995, I think, when I came back from Hawaii because we still even had a program called Diversity and Emergence where we had all kinds of artists exhibiting. And I remember having one show of an artist that had – it was an Anglo artist and it was – I remember his name was Chad Marsh. He was a good artist but it was totally unrelated to anything that I was about and that – I mean, I do support artists but in terms of having money, resources. I just sat back and said why am I – because it was me staying here late writing grants, doing reports, getting money for the paint, doing this and how was I going to justify that to the community, right, that I was speaking for, that I was spokesman for – spokesperson for?

And then after – then we changed and it was even confusing to the public. I remember one time Walter Cronkite walked in here and we had an exhibition of photographs from Bosnia and they were very good photographs and I still support that – the artist but he said, "What is the photographs of Bosnia doing in a Mexican museum?" It wasn't a Mexican artist, Mexican-American artist or Latino artist.

And so each time we have refined our mission and our vision to be more what we – we're supposed to be and we still have that program – well, when we get funds for it but we do show artists that aren't Latino but the themes or the issues have to connect someway so that we can justify making the investment of putting an exhibition because it is about resources. And we have – again we have to be most – we have to be responsible to our – to the public.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you ever receive criticism from the public for that?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.] We received criticisms from the Latino community also, that why were we doing this and why we were doing that. And –- but I feel that we're in the – on the right – in the right road or whatever, it's going down the right path. It took a long time to get there – [laughs] – but I think it also comes with – maybe the maturity or thinking my – because I'm – I guess I'm the main one because we've had many board members throughout the years but I'm the one that's been here the longest.

MS. CORDOVA: And how long was Pio here? Or long were you married?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think we divorced in '93 and he was here until '93. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: Funny how that works. [Laughs.]

MS. OROZCO: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And did that have immediate changes for here? Was there any sort of question about who would continue here and who wouldn't?

MS. OROZCO: No, because basically – no, because the board had – now, we were also developing as an organization so the board was developing so we were getting people – well, even from the very beginning we had some lawyers and Gilbert was original board member, Emma Barrientos, Amalia Mendoza-Rodriguez, she was actually the notary republic who notarized our acts of incorporation. But the board was developing and they have to make the decision what's best for the organization and so that was the decision but we didn't ask Pio to leave. We asked him – I was going to – we were no longer going to be equal. I was going to be the executive director and he could continue but as – under me and I think he didn't want to do that and so he left on his own will. It was his decision.

MS. CORDOVA: But you guys have still worked together on certain things or no, not at all?

MS. OROZCO: No.

MS. CORDOVA: Not since then?

MS. OROZCO: No, I think, Pio wanted to – wanted to be in art and he's an artist and he continues to be an artist and he's succeeding at that and I think that – and he's doing well at that. And this – the museum, as it develops, it is not a vehicle for someone's career, to advance your career and I've been very – in my – the way that I deal with the organization I don't – I have very strong beliefs about that I'm not here to exhibit my work or to promote myself as an artist. I'm here to promote and show the arts of my – of other artists and of our culture but not – and so I think that if one wants to be an artist you need to go out and do that as an artist. And then he's doing that on his own.

MS. CORDOVA: Wow. That's quite a story. And so really you've been – actually, one question that I'm just about to ask you is the correct pronunciation for Mexic-Arte which is –

MS. OROZCO: Well, originally – it is Mexic-Arte –

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: – and Romelia Escamilla, I do have to credit her and I saw her about a year ago and I told her. "I remember you came up with that name". And she said, "Oh, I didn't think you would remember." I said, "Yes, I remembered." I remember the day it happened that we were like right – she was an arts commissioner, I think that was in the very beginning, in like 19 – what was it? In '84 and she also was a – she's a grants writer and she worked at the Guadalupe Cultural Center for many as the development director. And she came up with that name, coming from Mexica that was the Aztecs.

And I've used that name all these years but recently I've been saying Mexic-Arte because it's just easier and – or Mexic-Arte with more Mexican and – just to make it easier because after, I guess, 20 years of saying one way they still don't – people still don't get it. Okay, I want to make it easier for everybody.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] So it's more that you're being overpowered by the other linguistic tendencies?

MS. OROZCO: Well, one is more – it's just like Mexico. Mexico we pronounce it, that's a Spanish – Spaniard pronunciation because they couldn't Mexic, Mexica.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. OROZCO: So if you would pronounce Mexico, you would say Mexica or la tierra de last Mexicas, right?

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And so that was Romelia?

MS. OROZCO: Escamilla.

MS. CORDOVA: Escamilla. Okay. How about – at this point sort of in the mid 90s, I guess, Gil [Gilbert Cardenas] had his – actually there were a couple of other galleries, like Santa had set up her Diseño Studios, right?

MS. OROZCO: But that was in the '80s because then she left.

MS. CORDOVA: That's right.

MS. OROZCO: She moved to Pittsburgh.

MS. CORDOVA: That's right. And so you were basically of the mind that as many galleries as possible should exist in Austin? Or –

MS. OROZCO: Well, Gil's was a – that's a commercial gallery. That's totally different. That was not about – it was promoting Chicano artists but the objective is different.

MS. CORDOVA: And did you – your organization and Galeria Sin Fronteras ever work together?

MS. OROZCO: Yes, we worked together on – we showed Malaquías Montoya and we did a retrospective of his work and we actually also printed – he did print at the Serie Project. And that's another important part of the museum is the Serie Project with Sam Coronado. So we produced a print together.

MS. CORDOVA: And when did that begin, the Serie Project?

MS. OROZCO: They just celebrated their 10th anniversary so I guess '93.

MS. CORDOVA: '93.

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And – wow, 1993 was a big year. But it was always connected with the museum here? Or –

MS. OROZCO: The Serie Project?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. OROZCO: Well, yes informally but now we have a formal relationship. I serve on the board of the Serie Project and also we're the official archive of the Serie Project so we receive a print from all of the projects there and then we do an annual exhibition. It's usually in July, in the summer and coincides with our "Young Latino Artists" exhibition.

And then we sometimes produce – we had a project – or we have a project called the Museum Print Project where visiting artists, we commission a print and it gets printed at the Serie Project and sometimes we also do

silkscreen workshops and we've hired Sam and some of the people over there to do workshops. And then we produce children's books from silkscreen. So we do a lot of – we still do a lot of collaborations together.

MS. CORDOVA: Are there any other organizations that you collaborate with a lot?

MS. OROZCO: Well, yeah, we collaborate a lot with the Instituto Mexico in San Antonio. A lot of the exhibitions have traveled there and then travel here.

MS. CORDOVA: So you've still maintained a lot of your connections with Mexico?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.] Well, and then we just – we even were getting even more connected we – I don't know if you know, we received – well, two things, we did two really important things last year or maybe more but we were designated as the official Mexican and Mexican-American fine art museum of Texas by the legislature. That was sponsored by Senator [Gonzalez] Barrientos and Senator [Eddie] Lucio and also Terry Keel on the representative side. And then also we – in June we signed an agreement with Mexico, with the National Council of Culture and the Arts, to bring long-term exhibitions to the museum.

So that when we do build our new building, if you can imagine like if we have, for example, seven floors, two floors will be dedicated to the exhibits from Mexico and they'll stay here for a year then they change. And we came up with concept of modules, that they would come in modules and then the modules change, not the whole exhibit but pieces of it. Kind of like a pretty innovative exhibit – I mean concept.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Some stays and some goes, constantly changing.

MS. OROZCO: And then we open our first exhibition in September from this agreement which is called "Mexico in Excellence" and we received a major grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for $198,000 to do this exhibition. So it's being coordinated now in Mexico and it'll open September and then it'll travel to five other sites here in Texas.

MS. CORDOVA: You've really grown as a grant writer.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah. Well, I think it goes back to that theory of – and Pio was always amazed because you – in Mexico they didn't have – they have now a few grant programs but very few, bekas [ph] I guess they call them. He couldn't believe that you just fill out a form and you put it in the mail and then you wait a few months and a check comes. He said make – do some more! And I remember the first times we did it, right? You fill out the form and you wait like a year or whatever, six months and then here comes a $10,000 check and it was like "wow." But it – I mean, it sounds easy but then you got to do the work and it's always a lot more than you bargained for.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, as we've been talking I've also just remembered that we have some wonderful images of work that you've done, not that long ago, in 1998 and it was in response to the Cuero flood. What happened in Cuero? How did this happen? Or what kind of damages happened? And maybe talk about the work that came as a result.

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think this – these are kind of neat little drawings and it kind of represents me in that they're not Chicano art or what people think is Chicano art or whatever. It's just about me and what happened to my little town. There was a major flood in October of '98 and the community that I lived in, in the neighborhood, was totally flooded. In some places it was 17 feet high of water and actually I was going to go home that day to pick up my mom because she comes to many of our events. We have an event called Frida's Fiestas, it's a dinner, nice dinner that we do in Fonda San Miguel.

But anyways, I'm going to pick her up and I turn on the TV to watch and CNN and there I saw Gonzales Street, the street that I grew up on, just the top of the street sign and the water was up to the street sign and then it showed cows on the top of the roofs and stuff like that and it was totally flooded. Our house is three miles from the river and – or maybe five miles, five miles but it goes up a little bit so we only got two feet of water in our house but most of the neighborhood, which was mainly the Mexican and African-American neighborhoods, were totally flooded and their houses were destroyed.

And so I waited until the water went down, which was just like one day or so and then drove to Cuero and what I experienced was pretty incredible because it was like all my childhood memories of my nice – the neighborhood where I grew up was totally topsy-turvy. The houses were in the middle of the highway. Some houses had been just swept away by the flood. There was people crying and everywhere you would go people would just break down and it was just total disaster for that little town.

And – but anyway, so that inspired me to do these drawings. So I went around and took photographs. I also have taken many photographs throughout my life. I studied – I took one class with Gary Winogrand, was a very well

known American photographer and loved street photography and so I am kind of like a amateur photographer and take photographs of my family all the time. But I went around and took photographs and then I used the photographs to compose images but the water was gone when I left, right? But the stories that I heard made me – inspired me to create the water, like the motions that – because I saw the things that had been dragged, like the – do they call – the tiers from the railroad track, which is two blocks away it ended up on our front porch and the dumpster from the Circle K was in our front porch and so all of this – so I imagined the water – so I drew the water.

And then these were also exercises because I'm also very interested in printmaking and especially when I lived in Hawaii I got into printmaking because that was also the idea that you could make multiples so if you sold a painting – like when you a sell a painting it just goes away, right? But if you have prints you have several of them so I decided to do printmaking. So these were exercises in black and white where I could study grays and blacks and whites.

And so I did several scenes of Cuero. So I decided I was going to do 12 of them and some day I'm going to – and Sam has offered – we would do a print, a little portfolio in his studio. Then I maybe would donate one to Cuero for their museum. And anyway, I like them a lot.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, they're beautiful. They have a sort of Alice in Wonderland quality to them of just seeing the topsy-turviness of the images. Though, of course, a tragic image and so that's the reason also that you didn't do them in color is because you were experimenting with the possibility of printmaking.

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And what about that? How has your printmaking experience continued?

MS. OROZCO: Well, the printmaking because – okay, when I was in Hawaii I did a – I took a etching. So I did maybe three etchings.

MS. CORDOVA: What year was that that you were in Hawaii?

MS. OROZCO: In '95.

MS. CORDOVA: In '95. For how long?

MS. OROZCO: For a year. I was there a year.

MS. CORDOVA: And this was part of what kind of a program?

MS. OROZCO: Well, there was no program.

MS. CORDOVA: No, this was you just –

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I decided that I had been at the museum 11 years and that was enough and so I was – I resigned and before I resigned, that December, I did 11 of these little retablos and it was like one for each year that I was here asking the Virgin for – to save us from these 11 different tragedies or 11 wishes that I had. It's kind of interesting.

MS. CORDOVA: Why had you had enough at this point in 1994?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I decided – well, one because I had a friend and I went to spend time with him and also maybe to do my art a little bit more, and so it was an opportunity to do that but when I was there I still continued to work for the museum. I was doing contract work. I was still doing some grant writing and then I did curate two shows from being there because there's a collection in Hawaii of Mexican art. Jean Charlot donated his collection there. And so I did the Jose Guadalupe Posada exhibition and I did a Jean Charlot exhibit.

So, and then I kind of – it was real interesting because I discovered several things when I was there. One is that well, that I'm an organizer and I like to organize events and people because we lived in the country and I missed being with people and organizing events. And then I also discovered how much I was attached to my Mexican culture and also Texas. I missed Texas believe it – and I never felt I was a Texan until I lived in Hawaii.

MS. CORDOVA: How funny, even after living in Mexico.

MS. OROZCO: Yeah, I just – because it was totally – and it was – all of a sudden I was immersed within Asian culture and Hawaiian culture and those are – they have their own struggles and they're fighting for sovereignty and my friend was an expert in Hawaiian religion and Hawaiian culture so I had a lot of – I was around that a lot. But I learned that –

MS. CORDOVA: Who is that?

MS. OROZCO: Jean Charlot, the son.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. OROZCO: And, well, anyway so he is a theologist and – but anyway he – so I learned about – and I – that experience was – it's invaluable because all of a sudden I learned about that and the Hawaiian film festivals and the Asian – I saw a lot of Asian movies and then I even got involved with the artists there and they wanted me to start an alternative space. I said no, I don't think so. But I – and I did do – was in an art exhibition, the Cargo Cult did kind of a Mexican-Hawaiian artwork.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was the piece with sort of all the leaves and –

MS. OROZCO: The bananas and the – yeah, and in the center is – there's codices. There's a codex; but it's how the Spaniards came to Hawaii. It was made-up, it wasn't really true but I made it all up. Like someone had found a codex that's showing how the Spanish did come to Hawaii and it was kind of funny.

MS. CORDOVA: Funny, and was it being in Hawaii that actually made you sort of start working with fruit in your art?

MS. OROZCO: Oh yeah, because we lived in the country and so I had a lot of opportunity to cook so I made also like Oaxacan tamales. I would go out and get the manna leaves – I mean, the banana leaves right off the tree and do my tamales and all that. And then just being around a lot of fruit and the papayas and there's papaya orchards and so – and then the fruit and the land are very sacred in Hawaii and so that kind of – the fruit is kind of like – became like people in lots of those works that I – I have one where the papayas are bleeding and they're suffering and I have another one with corn. The corn – so the corn was Mexican and the corn – that are having nightmares about the conquest. [Laughs.] They're funny but they're not funny when you look at them. They're kind of interesting.

MS. CORDOVA: Very dreamlike, too. Did you stop doing the fruit work when you left Hawaii or did that continue?

MS. OROZCO: No, I did a little bit more here but I think I'm finished now with the fruit.

MS. CORDOVA: And so, going back to this retablo that you made to save – what were the things that you were hoping to –

MS. OROZCO: Oh, I have another one. My sister got that one. It's to protect Mexic-Arte from disasters and I have an airplane that crashed on the roof and there's fire coming out and there's graffiti on the walls and then there's – [laughs] – there's – but the Virgin is like protecting us from that, right? So none of that will happen because she's protecting us. It's real funny and I have another one for there to be a lot of people and have little people going all around the block waiting to get inside.

MS. CORDOVA: And so when you came back to Austin did you already know that you were coming back to Mexic-Arte or –

MS. OROZCO: Right, yeah, I did. When I was gone Herlinda [Zamora] was the interim director and – but see we were so – I was always still communicating with everyone and then I just said I decided I wanted to come back and the board said fine and I was hired back.

MS. CORDOVA: What was it like to come back?

MS. OROZCO: Well, it was exciting. I had to like – I had to start all over again because I had taken all my stuff over there and that was too expensive to bring the stuff back. Oh, and then – oh and then other things got destroyed going across, my paintings because – well, no one ever told me they were going to go on a boat so the things go on a boat and they're on the boat for two weeks and there's – they got mildewed and so a lot of my abstract paintings ended up getting mildewed.

MS. CORDOVA: But they can be saved from some of that, correct? Or did you consider them destroyed?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think they're destroyed but I still have some of them but they have mildew. I guess if you pay somebody to restore them.

MS. CORDOVA: There might be some hope for them yet. So we've covered a lot of territory. Is there anything that I've been missing that you think we should include in the discussion?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think that about the building. That we bought the building in – two years ago? Two years

ago we bought the building. So we're owners of the building now.

MS. CORDOVA: Of this building?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And what – but is this the building that you were planning to redesign then in hopes of creating a better space for yourselves?

MS. OROZCO: Mm-hmm. [In agreement.]

MS. CORDOVA: And so what is the status of those plans –

MS. OROZCO: Well, we have to raise between $12 and $20 million but to me that's not – because I know how much museums cost, museum buildings. It's not a lot of money when you see some museums costing $30 million – $300 million or $500 million. So I think ours is a modest sized project and I think the good thing is that I'm patient and I – we can – we have a good board and we have a steering committee.

Unfortunately, we had the 9/11 that no control over and the economy went down but we're – time will heals all wounds and we're coming back and I think eventually – the city already has already said they've – that we're an important institution by giving us the support to purchase the building. I think they probably need to make – we're still waiting, I think the whole community's still waiting for the city council to make a real commitment to the arts because we're probably one of the largest cities in the United States where the city doesn't really participate in the arts in terms of funding from whether it's a general fund or from other sources within the city. We get funds from the tourist dollars that come in from the bed tax, that's not city of Austin money, that's tourist dollars.

So we don't – we still don't have a major museum whether it's Mexican or non-Mexican. The Blanton is just being built but that's the university museum. We don't have a major performing arts center either. So I think that we're kind of growing at the same time, simultaneously with the other major institutions and hopefully little by little we'll be able to build our building, our museum. And I think that's when I feel I've made a major accomplishment. I think that'll feel pretty good.

MS. CORDOVA: I think this recording can vouch for that. [Laughs.] I'm – maybe, I think, we've sort of come to the end of our interview and I think I'll close it out but maybe we could end just by what you see as the future for Mexic-Arte in terms of curating or what you hope, I know you hope for a new building and that's clear, but do you – are there any other hopes or anticipations for the future?

MS. OROZCO: Well, I think that we can be a vehicle for all the good things that are in museums, and in research and learning about museums I have found that they can be a place for artists, a place for community, a place for business, a place for international exchange, a place for excitement, a place for fun and I think we want to be all of those. And I think that we're – through our experience we've learned that all those things are possible, you have to just get – be at the right place at the right time, have the right amount of money, I guess. And I think it's going to happen.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I think you're good at all those things so I think that's a good sign, and with that I'll just say thank you so much, Sylvia, for this interview. It's been really wonderful and I'll end the tape here.

[END]

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