CSRC
ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 2, NOVEMBER 2013

LINDA VALLEJO

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS

ON AUGUST 20 AND 25, 2007

Linda Vallejo lives and works in Los Angeles. She received a BA from Whittier College and an MFA from California State University, Long Beach, and she studied lithography at the University of Madrid, Spain. Vallejo's paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, and installations have been exhibited throughout the United States and are represented at the National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago; the Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, California; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Her papers are archived at the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, and reproductions of her work are archived at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

Karen Mary Davalos is chair and professor of Chicana/o studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her research interests encompass representational practices, including art exhibition and collection; vernacular performance; spirituality; feminist scholarship and epistemologies; and oral history. Among her publications are *Yolanda M. López* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2008); "The Mexican Museum of San Francisco: A Brief History with an Interpretive Analysis," in *The Mexican Museum of San Francisco Papers, 1971–2006* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2010); and *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

This interview was conducted as part of the L.A. Xicano project.

Preferred citation: Linda Vallejo, interview with Karen Mary Davalos, August 20 and August 25, 2007, Los Angeles, California. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 2. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013.

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THE CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

The CSRC Oral Histories Series publishes the life narratives of prominent Chicano and Latino figures. The life narratives have been recorded and transcribed, and the interviewer and interviewee have reviewed and corrected the transcriptions prior to publication. These oral histories are often undertaken as part of a larger research project and in tandem with archival collections and library holdings.

CSRC ORAL HISTORY SERIES PROJECTS

L.A. Xicano documents the history of Chicana/o art in Los Angeles with a focus on artists, collectives, and art organizations. The project resulted in new museum and library exhibitions, public programs, archival collections, and scholarly publications. These efforts were part of the Getty Foundation initiative Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980. The project received support from Getty Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and California Community Foundation. Related support includes funding from Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, AltaMed Health Services Corporation, Entravision Communications Corporation, Walt Disney Company, and individual donors.

A Ver: Revisioning Art History stems from the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a meaningful and diverse art history. This book series explores the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other U.S. Latino artists. The A Ver project is made possible through the generous support of Getty Foundation, Ford Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Joan Mitchell Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

The LGBT and Mujeres Initiative seeks to increase archival and oral history holdings that document the Chicano/Latino presence in LGBT and women's histories, the role of women and LGBT people in Chicano/Latino histories, and the importance of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in "mainstream" scholarly research and archival institutions. The project receives generous support from the Ford Foundation and individual donors.

ARTISTS INTERVIEWED FOR THE L.A. XICANO PROJECT

Judy Baca
Charles "Chaz" Bojórquez
David Botello
Barbara Carrasco
Leonard Castellanos
Roberto "Tito" Delgado
Richard Duardo
Margaret Garcia
Johnny Gonzalez
Judithe Hernández
Leo Limón
Gilbert "Magu" Luján
Monica Palacios
John Valadez
Linda Vallejo

INTERVIEW WITH LINDA VALLEJO

AUGUST 20, 2007

Linda Vallejo: It's great to be here. Thank you for coming, Karen.

Karen Mary Davalos: This is Karen Mary Davalos interviewing Linda Vallejo on August 20, 2007. Linda, I wanted to start by talking about your family, because from what I learned the last time, you have very interesting family experience. I'm very curious to know more about your father going to UCLA, and where you grew up.

LV: Well, I was born in Boyle Heights in 1951 at the Chinese hospital; it was razed a few years later, I actually saw an article about it in the *LA Times,* I need to look it up. I'm very proud of being born in Boyle Heights; to me that's significant. The heart of East LA, if you will: the oldest part. Right across the river from Olvera Street. My mother's parents lived on Record Avenue, which is just a stone's throw away from Self Help Graphics. And I spent much of my very early childhood at the house on Record Avenue. Actually, Ofelia Esparza grew up on the very same street and is a friend of my mother's, and knew my mother when my mother was a little girl—Helen Muñoz, her maiden name, Muñoz. And my father's family lived on Frasier, a stone's throw away from Garfield High School. You could see the school actually from the backyard.

And my father's father, Aniceto Vallejo, was a musician, a pianist, a violinist, and a percussionist and he was a lyricist, and I grew up in a house full of music as a little girl, on my father's side. And several of my great-aunts from México, in Tejas, played instruments as well. Electric violins and electric mandolins. And so Christmas celebrations were always filled with tons of live music in my father's home. His mother, Alvira, Grandma Vera, as we called her, worked—cleaned railroad cars for the Union-Pacific Railways, and my grandfather, Aniceto, also worked for the railways. There's a picture of Aniceto as a conductor on a train, and that's what he did as his day job, and then was a musician. I had [three] great-grandparents until I was eighteen years old, so I was very fortunate to know my great-grandparents intimately. I knew three great-grandparents on my mother's side, and my great-grandmother Lola on my father's side—

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: We're starting up again; we had to get that phone call. So Linda's telling me about her great-grandmother Lola.

LV: Yes, she lived right around the corner, actually right in front of Garfield High School, and she had five husbands. She was a very active woman. My father's mother's maiden name was Cabazos, so my father's name is Adam Cabazos Vallejo. And my grandmother—there's so many stories I could share about my great-grandparents. I have many stories about them that I'm very fond of. My mother's grandmother, Elena [Maldonado], was really a very strong and beautiful woman; she looked very *indigena*, in the sense she was very small, she had very long braids; she wore sort of felt moccasins and very long skirts. I grew up with her, actually, when my parents were very young—my parents had me when they were very young, in the back house on Record Avenue, and I spent many, many hours with her, and was I there when she passed away. I believe that a lot of my strength comes from her and her ability to make it through very difficult times.

KMD: So, she was like the caretaker for you while your parents were off at work?

LV: I had three mothers [on each side of my family]. I always say that: my mom, my grandmother, and my great-grandmother on one side, and then my grandmother and my great-grandmother on the other. So I'm surrounded by a lot of really strong women, which I think is sort of indicative of my character and my attitude. [My mother's family] came from very, very poor backgrounds, just like every other Chicana you ever met; they worked in the fields. My mother picked fruit as a young girl. She only had but one skirt and two blouses and one pair of shoes as a little girl, and two pairs of socks. They—

KMD: Did they migrate up and down the coast, or . . .

LV: I don't know whether they migrated or not, but I know that my mother was born in Concord, which is the grape capital, if you will. She was born in Concord, and when she was very small, they put her in a "*tina*" in the fields, wrapped in a blanket, and she got burnt from the summer sun, in the "*tina.*" It's like an old story of my mother's, because my mother's very olive-skinned, she's very dark like me, and she got the name after that as the dark one.

KMD: They called her *negra*?

LV: *Negra*, they called her *negra.* And she is *negra*, and my mother's an incredible, incredible person; she is just a great role model. My mom's fabulous. And so I have lots of memories of my great-grandmother and my great-uncles and aunts. My great-grandmother lost her two sons, Michael and Lawrence, in World War [II]; they're buried in Evergreen Cemetery. And their pictures are still on their gravestones, and I can find them. The majority of my family, all my grandparents and everything, are in Calvary [Cemetery], out by the mausoleum. My grandparents, my great-grandparents, a lot of my great-aunts are there. Yes, they're in Calvary and Evergreen. East LA. That's what's always so amazing to me about this whole Chicano movement thing. It doesn't seem to have so much to do with blood; it seems to have something to do with something else, and I've been trying to figure that out for a long time, because as far as I could tell, how could I be anything else but Méxicana? I mean, it's not really very likely. My family, like everybody is, came up through Juárez into Texas and migrated across to California for jobs.

KMD: And that was the great-grandparents generation that came over?

LV: Yeah, that's correct. I'm third, maybe fourth generation Californian at this point. And I'm Los Angelean, and both of my grandmothers were born in Texas, and both of my grandfathers were born in Mexico. My father was born in Texas, my mother was born in [Concord,] California. We're just basically Chicanos from way back when. And the house on Record Avenue was a really beautiful place for me in growing up. I was the oldest granddaughter on both sides, so I was basically treated like everyone's little princess. They used to call me *preciosa*; that was my nickname, *preciosa.* And I had handmade clothes made for me, and my aunts and my uncles used to take me everywhere. They took me to the Pacific Ocean Park, they took me to Disneyland—all the big places that you take little kids in Southern California. So I was like everybody's first little daughter, and I'm very close to my mother's sisters, Mary and Rosie and Patty, I'm very close to them. I'm more like their sisters than like their niece.

I went to First Street Elementary School as a little girl there, too, and actually started drawing there. That's when I had my very first [arts] experiences, when I was four. I was in kindergarten, and they gave us an egg shape on a piece of newsprint paper, with the drawing of an egg on it, and we got to finger paint for Easter. And man alive, did I like that. I just fell in love with the messy stuff, and oh, I just—I remember being on my hands and knees, you know how you have little kindergarteners, and they're going like this on their hands and knees spreading the paint out, and I fell madly in love with it.

KMD: The feel of the—

LV: Oh, the colors and the feel and the goopy, and ooh, this is fun. And when I went into first grade, Mrs. Johnson, who was my teacher, did this very interesting thing with children which has stuck with me my entire life. She would have us read books, and then she would have us paint, on easels, from our experiences of literature. And they were of course children's stories, but we would read a book in class, and then everybody would get up on their easels and paint. I was very astute at this point; I would walk around and watch everybody else's ideas, and then consolidate them all into one major painting. "Oh, look, he used

this; oh, look, they used some of that; oh, wow, I can include this and include that." Studying other artists is part of something that I understood a long time ago as a small girl, and I won many awards at First Street. My work was always up on bulletin boards. When [children] do well and they're accoladed for what they do, they tend to gravitate towards that. Music was [also] a very big part of my background.

My father sang on the radio when he was eight years old in Los Angeles. He studied *folklórico* in high school, actually did *danza, folklórico danza*, in high school. His sister—he has two sisters, Virginia, and—oh, my goodness—Velia. My Aunt Velia was a dancer, and did *folklórico* and *flamenco*. And my father's cousin's mother is actually the founder of La Golondrina on Olvera Street. The [de] Bonzo family is related to me by marriage, and their granddaughter, Vivian [de] Bonzo, [my cousin,] is my spitting image double. Nobody can believe it. When they meet her, they go, "my God." We look exactly alike. She's obviously my sister in some other incarnation. So Velia, my father's sister, used to dance at the Golondrina when she was very young. There's pictures of her, she was absolutely gorgeous, extremely petite and small and just beautiful.

KMD: So you were saying your grandfather had a day job—

LV: Working on the railways.

KMD: And playing music at night?

LV: Playing music at night, a musician, that's correct.

KMD: At the different—

LV: He did everything. He even did the strolling musician thing, you know how they have it in—

KMD: On Olvera Street?

LV: On Olvera Street, and also on what now is César Chávez but used to be Brooklyn, he did that. He used to go with his violin on the streets, just like everybody's—you see, that was my grandfather. I have some fabulous photographs of Aniceto, and I even have some music of his on tape that I took before he died as well, playing his own music. I have that as well. I'm saving that for big gifts for everybody.

KMD: Did you ever accompany—I mean, you're little, this is to when you're about four years old you've been talking so far, are you accompanying them to these events, or—

LV: If I did, I don't have recollections. My recollections are the house brimming with musicians playing until all hours of the night, all this really gorgeous music with violins and mandolins and pianos and drum sets. Followed by *las posadas*, and my grandmother Vera used to make [a] table of cookies, and just tons of food and ornamentation all over the house for Christmas, it was a very big deal. And she worked in the railways to help raise money for my father to go to college, and my dad went to UCLA and graduated in 1951—

KMD: He must have been the only—

LV: Yeah, him and the gardener, that's the joke. And that's no joke. He was in ROTC in high school at Garfield. My mother was in Garfield, that's when they met. They met when they were sixteen. And my mother was nineteen when they got married, and my father was twenty. And then had me when my dad was twenty-one and my mom was twenty, so my parents are only twenty years older than me, which—we go places, they think we're sister and brother. And they're very well preserved; they're amazing people. Great family to have.

So my grandmother Vera worked very hard on the railroads, cleaning cars. And I remember for Christmas, they used to give her clothes for her cleaning job. They would wear Levis rolled up and tennis shoe type things that they had then, like work shoes, and checkered shirts, I remember, and a little scarf around her to keep her hair clean, and she would go in the railroad cars and clean. And if I'm not mistaken, she was cleaning—she cleaned with some of my mother's family as well, that some of my great-aunts were also working with her at that time on the railroads, cleaning as maids on the railroads, because that was the big form of transportation then in the 1950s, late '40s. And my dad was in ROTC, and he entered UCLA, and graduated in 1951. And entered as a commissioned officer in the Air Force, entered as a first lieutenant. And I was three years old at that point, it must have been 1954 at this point, [when] we moved to Germany.

So I was basically brought up in East Los Angeles. My mother worked for Dr. Kartman. Dr. Kartman had a clinic. God bless Dr. Kartman, may his name appear in these records a memory to an incredible man who had a clinic on First Street, just before the bridges that go over into—

KMD: Go into LA downtown.

LV: Like Lorena, it's like Lorena and First Street, right on the corner there he had a clinic, and he must have had that clinic for thirty years, and my mother and her two sisters worked as physician's assistants there at his clinic. He was our family doctor, and he was my mother's general practitioner until he passed away about ten years ago now. He collected art, he had Picasso, and he had—you know, prints of Picasso and Rembrandt, and some very beautiful things. Small prints, nothing massive, in his home. But he lived in the East LA, Los Angeles area, and had his clinic on the corner there. I think it's still a clinic today.

KMD: Did you see—so you went to the home, you remember childhood memories of seeing that art, or later?

LV: Well, a little bit later, I remember going to his house. But I remember going to the clinic a lot as a little girl, and going on—remember when they used to have the trains that used to go down First Street?—going with my grandmother Quica, my mother's mother, Quica, Frances Renteria, and my grandpa Paul Renteria. My son Paul is named after my grandfather Paul, the most generous and kind man. I remember we went down there to pay bills and to go see Dr. Kartman, I remember those memories very well. On the corner also, on the corner there by Self Help Graphics, on the far east corner, there used to be a drugstore on the corner called Salas. I used to walk to the Salas Drugstore all the time to pick up things for my grandmother when we were on Record, coming back and forth [from our travels] to East LA. And I basically lived at the Record Avenue address for the first three years of my life with my grandmother and my great-grandmother as my father went to school and my mother went to work for Dr. Kartman.

And I have lots of memories of my great-grandmother in the back house, and of my uncles and my aunts, and even my mother's brother, Joe—Muncie, they call him Muncie Muñoz, Muncie—lived in the house exactly behind my grandmother on Michigan. Michigan's right there, Record and then Michigan. And I used to go see my uncle by crawling through the fence. There was a little hole. Crawl through the fence and go see my uncle and my aunt, my aunt [Maggie].

KMD: Well, I'm curious. I don't know if you would have heard these conversations, or maybe growing up you heard them, when you were older, the family talk, because my mother put my father through school too, and that was a negative thing.

LV: Your mother did? Or your grandmother?

KMD: My mother was paying for him to go to school. Basically, she was working and he was working part-time not bringing home the bacon. Was there any sense of that in your family? Or it sounds like everybody was putting—

LV: My dad [had an ROTC scholarship to attend UCLA]. Well, my dad is one of the hardest-working people you will ever meet in your life. I mean, not only did he graduate from UCLA in 1951, and end up becoming a full colonel in the United States Air Force, a diplomat in Europe, and working at the Pentagon, and also a Vietnam vet, he also has a master's degree in business administration from Syracuse University, and a master's degree in political science from UCLA, right? Not only that, but after he got out of twenty-eight years of being in the Air Force, he went back to UCLA, went to law school, finished law school, passed the bar the very first time, and had his own law firm for eleven years in Whittier.

My dad is a really dedicated, hard-working man. And his mother made him that way. He loved his parents, his family, so much, and his mother especially so, that he couldn't let her down for anything. He couldn't let her down; she had done everything, she had lived—I mean, they had a beautiful home, they had a nice home on Frasier. I remember it being very beautiful with beautiful furnishings, just one of those really middle-class Mexican American, Méxicano homes like this. Very beautiful, the *virgines* here and stuff like that, and the barbecue pits in the back and big parties going on and the whole thing. But my dad was just—everybody was extremely proud of him. I think the hardest thing for my grandmother was that he was always gone. I mean, he did—my father was gone a lot [because of his military service].

KMD: Well, you did go to Germany.

LV: We went to Germany, and then we came back to the United States and lived in ten different states. I went to elementary school in Sacramento, in Citrus Heights, at Our Family Catholic School, which I hated. I hated it. We had South American nuns. Oh, God, it was the Order of the Infant Mary. Oh, my God, they were so strict.

KMD: Really?

LV: Oh, my God. They were so horribly strict. I went to elementary school there, and my—the teacher that I had for many years, I think like six years while I was there, was—I'm trying to remember her name now. I want to say [Sister Gabriela]. It's funny that I wouldn't remember her name after all these years, I've remembered it for so long. She was an artist, a musician, a vocalist, and a painter. And so I was in classes from second grade all the way to sixth grade with a nun that was an artist, and was considered an artist, and was allowed to incorporate art into all of her classroom curriculum. And she would have us do the same thing. We would read books, and then we would create art images, and we would also do bulletin boards. She had these series of bulletin boards in the classroom, the ones that are like thirty-six by forty-eight vertical, and you would have to decorate them and do like a whole presentation of what you'd read, all the research. You'd have to research [a] topic, and then you'd have to decorate an entire bulletin board with all your papers and visuals and everything, which [was] right up my alley.

KMD: Installation art.

LV: Yeah, it was basically installation art, that's right. Multiple stuff coming from multiple arenas, which is what I love now. And we also had to [make] verbal presentations, in front of the class. We had to stand up and present our papers. And one activity that I did—I did a lot, I used to get a lot of accolades for my stuff, because you know me: I love to present, I love to speak, I love to sing. I love art in all of its forms, and I'm very lucky to have had teachers along the way that allowed it, and so I [did] well. Once we were supposed to do one on the Pope [and] what was happening at the Vatican. So I went home and I got a box, and I created a television set with two rollers inside of it, and I drew pictures so that I could pretend that I was a newscaster showing you images of the Vatican and the Pope. And I created a scroll that went through a series of images. I would just turn it, and then go, "Oh, now we're going to the Vatican and seeing the Pope as he blesses," and blah blah blah. And, "Oh, and here we are now inside the cathedral." I think I must have been maybe ten years old when I did that.

I got sent around to the whole school, all the little classes, they made me do it again and again, because it was performance art. [*laughter*] So we came back [from Germany], I went to school in Sacramento from second to sixth grade. I remember the Sacramento River; I remember that my dad at the time was doing [Air Force] weather reconnaissance, [flying] B-52s, those giant airplanes, from Sacramento to Hawaii to Alaska, to take photographs of the cloud formations for weather reconnaissance to be [used] from television to the war department and all kinds of things. And he did that—we were up there for, I guess it was seven years in Sacramento. Holy Family was [our parish and my school]; I had my first Holy Communion there. And it was one of the defining moments of my life, really, my first Holy Communion.

KMD: Really? Why?

LV: I had an experience as a seven-year-old in my first Holy Communion. I had an existential experience in church. After I went to receive the Host, you know, and you've got the veil on—they did it all nice, this is a Catholic school—and the whole thing with the white dress. It was like old-time stuff with the little [prayer book,] rosary, and the gloves, the whole thing. I felt this circle of light, with the Host, as it would be, [in the center of my chest]. I felt it, and I saw it, and I was like out of my body looking at it inside of me, or looking from above like down inside. I can still sense it now, it was like over my solar plexus, just around the heart area like in this. I was in the—I'm getting chills—and I was sitting in the aisle, my aisle after I went and [received] the Host, because you do it all in little rows. And I had this very, very—for the lack of a better word—mystical experience, and at that point, I realized that I had a spiritual core to me that was very important, and that I had to acknowledge that and work towards understanding it more clearly.

I remember we had doughnuts afterwards in the rectory. I remember that it was a very strict school where they segregated everybody by the sexes: the lunchroom, the playground, the confessional lines, the church. You weren't allowed to really communicate with boys, which is not a good thing.

KMD: Were you interested in boys at that age yet?

LV: No, I was always sort of an ugly duckling. I was always chubby, and a little too smart, and a little too hard working, and kind of teacher's pet because I appreciated teachers, I appreciated authority and knew what that meant. I was trained well.

KMD: And you delivered.

LV: And I delivered work, right. And so I wasn't like—I wasn't popular ever, until I got into college, and then I became very popular. So up through high school—well, my junior and senior year in high school, I kind of came out.

KMD: I'm curious about the experience you had during your first Holy Communion. Did you talk to your family about that?

LV: Yes, I did, of course I did.

KMD: And their response was?

LV: Well, you know, I've always exhibited special abilities in my life, and I'm the kind of person that acknowledges those special abilities, not as a way to tout myself, but rather to say, "this indicates that I have a responsibility to live up to something. I need to investigate this more fully. I need to incorporate it, or integrate"—that's one of the words I've been using my whole life, "to integrate it." When I was seven years old, I made a decision to have a spiritual center, to be an artist, to go to college, to get married, and to have children.

KMD: At seven.

LV: At seven. And I made this announcement at Thanksgiving. I stood up and I made an announcement that I've made up my mind, this is what I wanted to do with my life. I made these decisions, and I'm living them out even still today.

KMD: And your family's response?

LV: I don't think anybody was really surprised. I was really precocious. I was very outspoken. I am [the same] today [as] I was then. Even people see photographs of me as a little girl, and they go, "Oh, look, it's you; I wouldn't miss you in a million years." I go, "Yeah, I really haven't changed." I look exactly like myself, and I've always been who I am.

KMD: In addition to the music that's going on in the house, obviously they're raising you Catholic. How much are they reinforcing these things that you've chosen?

LV: Anything I wanted to take an interest in was open to me. My father and my mother always made—my father really appreciated the fact that I was inquisitive, and that I enjoyed studying, and that I enjoyed reading. I was reading Shakespeare and all kinds of stuff when I was a very little kid. I was—the story is that I was reading when I was three. That's what the story is. I don't know, I don't remember reading. Maybe the myth is bigger. If I said, "I'm really interested [in something], I just saw this article in the newspaper, it's about this thing that's going on over here, and I'd really like to go," we'd get up and we'd go. And so all of my intellectual curiosities were fed; there were no limitations. I lived in—all over the United States and Europe before I was fifteen years old.

KMD: Do you want to list some of those places? Before you were fifteen.

LV: Let's see. Yeah, let's see what goes on here. Let's see. Arizona, Missouri, California, Texas, Alabama . . . Before fifteen?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: And Spain.

KMD: Is that kind of the order, too?

LV: Well, it was Los Angeles, Germany . . . Okay, Los Angeles, Germany, Sacramento—no, Los Angeles, Germany, probably Arizona, Texas, Missouri, Sacramento, Alabama, and then Spain.

KMD: So I can understand Germany, and I know there's bases in these other places, although Missouri, I didn't—

LV: Malden, Missouri. There's an air base there. I have memories of . . . My brother was born in Germany, my brother Thomas was born—Tomás—was born in Germany in 1956, I have memories of that too. I have great memories of Germany. I painted Germany for ages, and I didn't realize it until I started thinking about it more carefully.

KMD: Really?

LV: Yeah, I was painting the mountainside with the trees. I mean, that's what there was in Germany. Think about LA at the time. Mountains with trees? Where's that? Texas, mountains with trees? Where's that? And when I look back, I look at Germany, and I see my paintings—I see Germany in my landscapes that I'm still even painting today.

KMD: Now, you're probably surrounded on these bases with mostly Anglo-European-American families?

LV: Probably. I would say you're probably right. But I had no sense of any of that. Little kids don't have sense of color. They just have sense of love and friendship and honor and loyalty and kindness, and the things that really matter. I didn't really know racial difficulty until I—well, no, I can't say that. In Sacramento, these Argentinian nuns, nuns from Uruguay and Paraguay, basically—

KMD: So the nationalistic hierarchy—

LV: Well, they're German.

KMD: Looking down on Mexicans. I mean, that's the reputation—

LV: It's interesting, growing—it was really real—I think I was the only Mexican in my classroom at Citrus Heights at Our Family Catholic School, but the Mother Superior was definitely *indigena*. She was short, she was really dark. And one other nun that was very quiet, what was her name? I could pull these out of my head, I know, if I had a minute. But there was another nun that was very, very quiet and incredibly docile that didn't teach; she was kind of like the maid to everybody. She was also very dark. Those two—oh, and there was one other nun that was dark, too, that taught eighth grade, that I only got to study with for a little bit. But other than that everybody in the whole place was white, and the majority of the nuns were of German descent.

KMD: And so that noticing of their skin tone came later in life?

LV: I didn't realize how come I had so much trouble there, but I had a lot of trouble in Catholic school. I didn't like it. I mean, I liked the art part, I liked the music part. But I didn't have any friends there; I was very much an outcast. I tried, but I was just too sensitive. I was a very sensitive little girl, and I had no context for understanding—like a lot of the girls in my classrooms were already taking the uniform and changing it a little bit so it was cuter or sexier, and having special kinds of shoes, where the rest of us wore those really dorky sort of tie-ups in the front—oxfords—and I had no context of what was going on. I was more interested in studying. King Henry VIII was like my biggest interest in elementary school. I read everything. I just loved that whole history of the English court.

I still have a big interest. I love all that stuff. But I didn't have any understanding of what it meant to be cute or popular and all that stuff, and I was just at the bottom of the totem pole. And I think my color had a lot to do with it, but I had no sense of it. And Father Mastrada—I won't forget that name—was an Italian, the Italian pastor, and that guy was mean. I think he wasn't a happy priest.

KMD: So you stayed in Catholic school up until high school, or . . .

LV: No. God no, help me, no. God, no, help me, no. To—I think it was like third grade through seventh. Third through seventh, so it was five years, about five years. I got kicked out once, for passing a note that someone else was sending to someone else. Someone else gave me a note. I took the note and passed it to somebody else, and I'm the one that got in trouble. And—

KMD: What did your parents say?

LV: Oh, my parents knew I wasn't a bad kid. They knew me well enough to know that it wasn't a big deal. I went home and I didn't get to go back, and then my father went and met with the nuns. I remember I heard them talking in the other room, and there was laughter, and the next thing I know, I was back at the

school. I did not like it. I didn't like the regimen. I didn't like the regimentation of it, I didn't like the constant silence where you had to be quiet all the time. You couldn't talk in the lunchroom, you couldn't talk in the lines, you couldn't speak, and it was very repressed.

KMD: This is basically—yeah.

LV: It's a Catholic school—

KMD: The Catholic school story that people tell.

LV: It's a Catholic school. It's very repressed. And I was very unhappy, and my parents kind of knew that. But I kind of got a good basis for—I got a good education there, at any rate, and I made very good grades. I was a little straight-A student, the whole thing, because I was very [*claps hands*] "Got to work!" Which is basically still me. But then I went to Montgomery, Alabama, when I was thirteen years old, and I started there at seventh grade, and I went to public schools. I went to Baldwin Junior High and Sidney-Lanier High School.

KMD: Is this the '60s?

LV: Damn right. It was ugly. It was ugly, Karen, it was really ugly. I was—a lot of the political pieces that I'm producing now, if you talk to me, because—if you talk to me, because my father was a diplomat, I tend to be very—I don't press my opinions on people unless someone asks [direct] questions and we're actually in a conversation about political beliefs. But I tend to be pretty—I have something pretty old-fashioned, radical ideas about things, and I think a lot of that came from what I saw. My high school was integrated for the first time when I was a sophomore in high school, and there was a hundred blacks [in a] school [of] twenty-one hundred students.

KMD: That's big.

LV: It was a big high school, the biggest high school in Montgomery. They brought in a hundred blacks the year that they integrated. And you could cut the tension with a knife. You could just—the fear of the poor black students was just immense. I mean, anything could have happened on that campus; all it would take [would be] three or four white students with a grudge, and you would have it. I mean, there was—my parents and I took a drive one night, just a drive, and we saw a burning cross. I saw stuff on the news where people were being hung and shot. It was the time [of] the marches from Selma, and the shootings, and the killing of the social workers, and Martin Luther King was all over the place . . .

KMD: Is your family talking about this at home, and giving you direction? Or are you putting things together where you know what's right and what's wrong?

LV: I'm just sort of watching from the outside, because I really was an outsider. I think out of the twenty-one hundred students, there was maybe fifty of us that were other races. I wasn't black and I wasn't white, so I was basically outside of it. I mean, black and white was really divided then. It was very specific. You were either an African American or you were a white person. And so I was sort of in the middle. I remember having a couple of very bad experiences with white-only bathrooms, white-only and colored bathrooms. I remember an experience in a restaurant which was very disconcerting, about—are we allowed to sit down? And [then] leaving.

KMD: Really?

LV: Yes. I remember crying, because I was only thirteen years old, and I had no idea what bathrooms to go into. If I went into the white bathrooms, some white person would beat me up. If I went into the black bathroom, God only knows what would happen there, I had no idea. Maybe a black person would beat me up. And so you're basically just sort of closed out. So I kind of looked at political things, and especially—you know, your parents are in the military, you're really not allowed to become involved politically, because it's your father's career. You're really supposed to be an objective outsider or an observer. And it was pretty grotesque.

We were—we got to live in white neighborhoods when we moved off the air base. We got to live in white neighborhoods. But I remember one night, we went to see one of my father's colleagues, who was an African American officer, and he had to live in shantytown. They wouldn't let him live on the base,

and they wouldn't let him live in white [neighborhoods] off the base. He had to live in the [poor] black neighborhoods. And what I came away with from Alabama was the injustice, the cruelty, of prejudice, the insanity of viewing people as lesser beings because of the color of their skin. And the mock—it was sort of a mock well-to-do or wealthy attitude in the South, in the sense [that] where you'd go down a major street, and there'd be houses, very nice houses, and very beautiful lawns, et cetera, et cetera, and you'd just take a left or take a right and go two blocks down, and what you would see—it was appalling. And illiteracy in the South is still rampant.

KMD: Oh, I see what you're saying. The different class divide—

LV: There was like a face—the class division was amazing. The face of the South was very different. And you know, Jim Crow was really very much alive when I was there. Language was very severe—I remember language being very severe about black students. I made friends with people who liked exotic girls, people who liked [my] exotic look, or the foreign look, or the international look. And I became a Girl Scout. That's kind of how I got a little bit of respite out of it. I was there for two years, and of course I was not popular again. Catholic school—I was at the bottom of the well because I looked like mother superior. [I] reminded all the German nuns of where they came from.

And in Montgomery, Alabama, of course there was no opportunities for me to be socially active, because I was the last person that anyone would invite, because they weren't sure what I was. A lot of the times, they thought I was Creole, because they didn't have any other context. They didn't think Mexican. There weren't any Mexicans in the South then. Now they're everywhere; now we're everyplace. And so it was a very painful time for me. I was pretty unhappy. When—

KMD: Are your parents aware of this and trying to help?

LV: Oh, yes. Well, they—I mean, basically I had—this is the story that I tell. I had a propensity towards being an artist. I wanted to be a musician more than anything, I would have loved—today I regret not becoming a musician. I would have loved to have been a musician, I should have done it. And I had this family, this massive family that surrounded me, that thought I was just this little princess, the most gorgeous little—and I see the little Mexican girls that look just like me, with the bangs and the long ponytail. I go, "Hey, that's what I used to look like!" You know the look? I looked just like that. Big brown eyes, pretty much the classic look for the little Mexican girl.

And they wrenched me away from my family when I was three years old, and moved me to Germany where I had my first boyfriend, Heinrich, who incidentally looks just like my husband. Short, blonde, blue-eyed, and that's what I married: short, blonde, and blue-eyed. Heinrich. I have a picture of him and me somewhere in my records. I had a maid named Heidi, of all things. I spoke German when I was in Germany, and learned to drink beer at a very young age.

KMD: You're only there two years, right?

LV: Yeah, two years, from three to five. And then I moved to Sacramento and [was] surrounded by these nuns that didn't really treat—I wasn't very happy there. And then I moved to Alabama, for criminy's sake. I told my mother not too long ago, I said, "You know, Mom, I think the reason why I wasn't a really happy kid when I was little was because I really missed my family a lot." And if you saw me with my aunts today and my uncles today and my cousins today, you would see. I love my family very much, and they love me a great deal. My aunts are my moms, they're all like my mothers. I don't know what I'm going to do when the next generation goes. I'll be very, very lonely. And I had my painting, I had my drawing book, I had my crayons, I had my pencils, I had my pads. I had all this stuff, and art became my invisible friend. Painting became my way to have my own world, to paint my own world, as it were.

KMD: Do you remember what you were painting?

LV: I remember a tree. I remember doing a tree. I remember painting erotic things when I was a little kid.

KMD: Really?

LV: Yes. I did erotic paintings when I was discovering myself as a girl. I was painting myself as a girl, an erotic girl. Nothing X-rated, of course, but pretty racy for a fifth grader. I remember too—I had a memory when

I lived in Sacramento that I used to be an entrepreneur when I was in grade school. I could always draw a crew; that's one of my major abilities. I wish that I had been given more opportunity to be a leader in this life, because I'm a natural leader, because I don't carry a lot of self-propelling, or self-justification. It's more for the group. Let's make a group. And I've always drawn a crew. I can draw a crew today. I have crews, as a matter of fact, that people don't know about.

And I gathered all the kids on my block, and we designed a performance with skits. We wrote skits, made costumes, and wrote commercials. We sold tickets and we divided the money equally amongst all the players. And we did them in my garage, and we had chairs [for the audience]. It was kind of like a Spanky and Our Gang kind of a thing. That was one of my efforts to—I think I would have been a great—I think I would have been really good at running a production house, doing theater.

KMD: Was some of this inspiration coming from television, or just something fun to do?

LV: I just always liked performance. I always liked to perform. I'd be singing, doing skits, I'd have—we'd be writing things, we'd have commercials. They were funny commercials. There was like little funny skits, there was ridiculous skits, there was serious things going on in the plays. All kinds of stuff. Little one-acts of all kinds with little kids from the neighborhood, and all the parents would come, and everybody would come. And then we'd collect our three dollars and fifty cents and divide it amongst everybody.

In Sacramento, when we lived in Citrus Heights, there was a huge field behind the housing development. It was a giant almond field, [an] orchard, and I started a business where we would all go together and collect almonds. And we shelled almonds, and we bagged almonds, and we sold almonds by the bag. So I was a entrepreneur, and a producer, a director, and a writer, and a painter [*laughter*] in grade school.

KMD: It's not because your family needed the money; you just had this idea, and you're going to sell the almonds.

LV: Yeah. I just was just like, "Well, let's get active. Let's do something productive here. Let's do something productive. I've got an idea."

KMD: Were you enlisting your brother too?

LV: Oh, yeah, my brother was involved, my sister was involved, everybody around the neighborhood was involved. I drew a crew; I always had a crew. "Okay, Linda's got an idea. Let's do that, that sounds like fun. Okay, let's go!" We'd all go together—

KMD: Actually, my sister did the same, my older sister.

LV: Yeah. It's kind of natural to leaders, just a natural leader, [to] have ideas for groups to do. And you're good with getting people to do things, and everybody seems to get along okay, and everything's divided up equally, so everyone feels like an equal part of the partnership. So Alabama was tough. I didn't like it. I learned a lot. I learned to cry a lot. It was miserable; it was really bad. Seeing that kind of hatred, for a thirteen-year-old. And then you're just becoming a [young] woman, and you're seeing all of this around you. It's just very, very wrenching. And I was a poet, everything hit me like poetry.

When I was twelve years old, actually, that's when I started playing guitar. I played guitar from twelve to twenty-one, and I played it seriously. I wrote music, and I performed regularly in all kinds of venues everywhere, all through junior high, high school, and college. I wrote protest songs; Joan Baez was my first goddess. And I listened to rock and roll and I did blues, and I have tapes of all that stuff. I have tapes of music still that I've saved.

KMD: Were you doing this alone, or in a—

LV: I did it by myself. I was with groups on and off, but mostly I was by myself. I wrote many songs, I wrote a lot of music, I produced music and sang a lot in talent shows, all different kinds of auditorium things, gigs—

KMD: Through the schools and the church?

LV: Through schools and through the church, yes, through the church too. I sang for Mass, I did that for years. And I sang my own songs at Mass. As a matter of fact, I was discovered in Whittier when I was at college, singing for Mass in Whittier. I was on television for a couple of years with a morning Catholic program for young people that was aired every Sunday. [So] I sang on television—

KMD: You'd go to the studio every Sunday?

LV: Yeah, and we'd go out and we'd tape all over the place. I sang, and we recorded music, and I was on television and everything. It was all very natural to me. I basically just sang all the time. And Bob Dylan is still a great—he's a god to me, man. I love Dylan; he's great. I've got to see him before it's too late.

KMD: So this is entering—this is post-Vatican II, so the music in the church is more—

LV: More open.

KMD: Contemporary.

LV: That's right. I used to sing all kinds of songs, and have my guitar—I still have a guitar upstairs. I don't play anymore, I haven't played in a long, long time. I would have been a musician, but I—

KMD: But? Yeah.

LV: I wanted to be married and have children, and I didn't want to live . . . If you think the visual art world for women is hard, you ought to try the music world.

KMD: And you had a sense of that at an early age?

LV: In college. I mean, I was looking at what happened to Janis Joplin. I was looking at what was happening to everybody, and I said, "You know what? If I go into that world, I'll be lucky if I come out of it alive. And I'll probably end up being abused by many men, and knowing how sensitive I am, emotionally sensitive to abuse …" I think Alabama was the beginning of that—to abusive language, to abusive behavior, to just uncouth and unkind people. I said, "I don't know, I just don't know. I don't think I can make it." And I really wanted to be married and have kids, because I know who I am.

KMD: Well, you said it at seven. [*laughter*]

LV: Yeah. And so I gave it up at about twenty-one. I still sing at my New Fire New Year party. If you come to my New Fire New Year party you can hear me sing.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos again, and Linda Vallejo. We took a quick break, and we're back. I wanted to ask Linda to elaborate on a few things that she's mentioned about her early childhood. Your family is obviously growing up Catholic. They're taking you to Catholic school, and you're getting your sacraments attended to. What other ways are they attending to your spiritual life?

LV: My parents are Catholic, but they're not really devout Catholics. I mean, everybody was married in the Catholic Church, baptized in the Catholic Church, had confirmations. People are still being married in Catholic churches in my family, although we have a lot of newborn Christians these days. But more than that, my family wasn't real devout. We went to Mass on Sunday, and went to the bowling alley and had pancakes afterwards. That was our family ritual. But other than that, they really—I mean, I did catechism.

KMD: Did you pray at dinner, or . . .

LV: We did the whole "Thank you God for these thy gifts I'm about to receive," da-da-da. "For [your] bounty," whatever. But other than that, it wasn't really a religious house; we didn't really do all that stuff. We were really American. We were very American in everything that we did in my parents' house. We didn't have *las posadas* like my grandmother did when I was a little girl, with a baby Jesus and everybody kissing the feet and the whole thing—

KMD: You're living away from the family then, so it's kind of hard to do.

LV: Yeah, right. And we're on the air base, and we're trying to be American. We're trying to fit in; my father is working to fit in. No, we didn't really do that much that was religious, although I was pretty spiritual as a little girl. I enjoyed spirituality a great deal, but I didn't really like the Catholic Church. I found it to be too guilt-ridden.

KMD: So already, you talked about the experience you had when you were seven. Are you already distinguishing between religion—

LV: And spirituality?

KMD: And spirituality? Is that happening?

LV: Yeah, because, you know, I'm seeing all different kind of cultures, and I'm seeing all different kinds of people with their religious beliefs, and I'm very aware at a pretty young age that there's differences between people. There's different languages, there's different customs, there's different ways of living, and there's different types of spirituality. My spirituality was really more ingrained in ancient cultures when I was little, because of my experience in Europe, and cultural places were really more interesting to me than contemporary Catholic religion.

KMD: What do you mean, "cultural places"?

LV: Oh, you know—well, this is more like high school at this point, more like high school—but Stonehenge, the caves, the painted caves in Spain, the Roman ruins.

KMD: Had you been there?

LV: Well, in high school. That's when I started seeing all of those things. As a little kid I guess my only real orientation was the Catholic religion, because I had—there was nothing else that was really shown to me—Jesus and the Bible.

KMD: So you go to Spain when you're—

LV: Fifteen.

KMD: Fifteen, so that's high school age.

LV: That's high school, yeah.

KMD: And you're seeing—

LV: Different things all over the place. I traveled through Italy, Portugal, Spain. I went to Paris a couple of times.

KMD: Is this family vacations, or . . .

LV: Student travel and family vacations. And I also studied in college; I studied in Europe in college as well. My parents—we took a beautiful, beautiful trip on the train from . . . My parents lived in the Costa del Sol [in Spain], by the Mediterranean. I have a lot of beautiful memories of the Mediterranean. And we traveled all over Spain in cars, and I studied all over. I saw all the old Roman sites and the aqueducts and all the things that you see on the History Channel. And of course every museum, we went to every museum. I wanted to see everything. I've seen all the major museums of Europe, many of them as a very young girl.

We took a train across Nice, France, all the way down to Rome, and spent a couple of weeks in Rome. And of course we did the Vatican, and we did the catacombs, and we did all the cathedrals, and we did all of Michelangelo, and—

KMD: So your family is saying, "Let's take a vacation," or they've got some time and everybody's just—they're going to see Europe.

LV: They're going to—my parents still do it. My parents travel regularly. They go all over the world, and they spend a good deal of time traveling. We've done an enormous amount of driving in the United States. We used to drive from Alabama to Los Angeles for vacations, so I saw the whole southern part of the United States.

KMD: When you're doing that, you're coming back to vacation with family.

LV: With family, that's right, during Christmas and stuff like that.

KMD: Oh, really?

LV: Oh, yeah. We drove all the way across—we drove across the United States from Sacramento to Alabama. We drove, and we stopped and saw all kinds of things.

KMD: Does your family go on back to the Southern California base for vacations, for Christmas or something?

LV: Yes, yes. We used to travel regularly and go through El Paso and visit Juárez, and did that whole thing at the border. We visited [my dad's] family in San Antonio and [drove] through Arizona, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California.

KMD: Is there any certain car trip that you remember specifically?

LV: Oh, I remember many. I remember tons of that. I [was] inspired [by] everything, landscapes, everything. I remember driving through Texas once, and it was the night before a storm. And you've seen any of my skyscapes, the sunset before the storm—I don't know how many of those there are; there's tons of those.

And we're driving through Texas, and we had a station wagon, and I used to lay in the back and have that big panoramic window and look out the back. I'd be reading, and I'd be looking. And I kept diaries when I was little. I remember the clouds were massive. They were just gigantic cumulus clouds, these big cotton-ball things, giant things. You could see what appeared to be one hundred miles into the future and one hundred miles back. It was the sunset before the storm, and you know Texas has those great storms, with the lightning and everything like that. The colors were absolutely heavenly; they were just purples and oranges and bright reds and just all of the colors in my paintings. And that has stayed with me all of my life. I don't know how old I was, I might have been eleven or twelve or thirteen.

KMD: So it's not drudgery, driving across the country—

LV: No, no. Oh, no, I'm looking. I still look. It's what I do. I study the landscape. I still study the landscape, I still study the sky. I remember one time—because I was pretty erotic, I was an erotic little girl. I had erotic tendencies. I think that creative beings do have erotic tendencies.

KMD: What do you mean by that?

LV: Well, the body is beautiful thing, the body is a gorgeous thing. And I remember seeing bodies in landscapes, which is pretty much what many people see, but people don't really talk about it. And I think it's archetypal—part of the collective unconscious—because you see many, many artists that paint the same type of imagery, where the body is somehow buries in it or made of it or coming up from it. I remember going across mountains and thinking—seeing profiles, and seeing arms and legs and breasts and bodies, multiple bodies—and thinking, wow.

As a matter of fact, on one of those trips I decided that nature was as close to God as we would ever become. That if we could appreciate nature, that that is the closest mirror that we had, as if God were looking in a mirror. This is what we're seeing here, that nature is indeed sacred, and so is our connection to the cosmos, in a very physical and real way. And I had that thought when I was a very young girl, and I've stuck with that thought through my whole life. I love nature; nature belongs to all.

KMD: Is that something that your brothers and sisters are sharing, or it's just—

LV: Well, I'm five years older than my brother, and seven years older than my sister. So by the time my brother was born, I was in school; by the time my sister was born, I was already making my decision to be a painter, and all these other things. So my brother and my sister kind of grew up closer to each other, and I was sort of brought up like an only child. My mother lost several pregnancies. Helen lost several. I think she had six or seven pregnancies, and only had three children. And my birth was pretty amazing. What is that Mexican thing about the umbilical cord tied around your neck makes you an artist? Well, mine was wrapped around my neck pretty good. I was born blue, and the myth goes that my father was given a choice between me and my mother when I was born. It was a very difficult birth for my mother, and after that she had many others.

Maybe I was the problem; maybe my birth was what started the whole thing for my mother and her many losses. So they had me, and I think they lost two, and then they had my brother when they had given up. So I was brought up like an only child: everybody's hope, everybody's little princess. And it makes sense, after you lose two and you've had one. It doesn't seem like you're going to be able to do it. And then she had two more. So my brother and my sister were kind of with each other, two years apart, and I was sort of this very precocious child that was sort of brought up as a loner, very serious loner, by circumstance. I don't think it would have been that way for me if I had stayed at home with my family, but being taken to other cultures and stuff… The good news was that I was very inquisitive, so everything was of interest to me; everything was of great interest to me. I remember driving across the United States and having some very, very wonderful thoughts, and I was really—you know, my minor in college was philosophy and religion.

KMD: I didn't know that.

LV: Yeah, and it makes sense when you start thinking about me. I like to consider myself an intellectual. As a matter of fact, I think that's what artists are supposed to be. Am I wrong? So I think artists—yeah?

KMD: So you go to college in Europe, though.

LV: No, I go to high school in Europe, and then I come back to Whittier College, for four years at Whittier College.

KMD: Oh, that's right. And you're living with your grandma?

LV: I'm living with my mother in Whittier, and my father's in Vietnam. Yeah, my father went to Vietnam when he was forty. Really, really devastating, very devastating. I learned a lot about war from my father. I was always anti-war anyway, with Joan Baez and everything like that. I used to write anti-war songs. I'm making anti-war pieces now. I was thinking about it this morning. There's no justification for children, women, and elderly to be killed because men can't come to a solution. There's no moral justification that I can think of. Not one, not one.

And I'm really, really tired of this whole macho tendency towards domination and destruction. I just don't understand it. And it kind of dawned on me when I had my own sons, and just the thought of them going to war—I said, "No, you're not. If it comes to it, we'll move. I'll pick up everything I have, and we'll move to Mexico, we'll move to Canada. I don't care, you're not going to war." Because I saw what it did to my dad, it ruined him. He was very depressed for many years, like I presume many veterans—you know, after seeing … He told me a couple of stories that are just hideous, absolutely hideous. Heinous, heinous stories of death and destruction that actually happened, that have no logic to them at all. Just people being killed mercilessly.

KMD: I would imagine with his rank, he's the one giving orders.

LV: Actually, my father always chose other places; that's why he never became a general. He was never given—I always say because he wasn't ruthless enough. You have to really believe in war to become a general. My father never believed in war; he still doesn't believe in war. He's the original Chicano, the anti-war Chicano—that's my dad. Instead, what he did was he flew [0-2s], which are really small aircraft, like very small aircraft, to view locations to say whether or not they could or could not be bombed. So he was looking for—

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: This is side B, and Linda's telling me about her father's experience in Vietnam.

LV: Yeah. So he flew the [0-2s], the fairly small aircraft that perused locations that would then be bombed. And he was shot when he was in Vietnam. He was lost in action when he was in Vietnam.

KMD: Do you remember that?

LV: Oh, yeah. It was really terrifying. It was very intense. He volunteered at an orphanage and did a lot of work for an orphanage, and I remember that we sent toys and things like that.

KMD: While he was serving?

LV: While he was serving there, because my father's really not—he's not general material. He never became a general. He never could go across that line.

KMD: Was that—I would imagine that would be a kind of risky thing to do.

LV: It was very risky. He almost lost his life. He saw many other people lose their lives, close people to him. He saw the murder of children and women.

KMD: Did you have a sense that your father was taking a risk, doing that volunteer work, when—or did that come later?

LV: That came later. I mean, hell, I was a hippie. What did I know? I was just some artist-hippie type.

KMD: So at Whittier College, you majored it—

LV: Well, we should do Spain first, because I was in high school. We should do that first, because that was fun. That's the first time I ever had fun in my whole damn life.

KMD: Really?

LV: Hell yes.

KMD: Because of the Catholic school, and then Alabama, and—

LV: Oh, Jesus. When I was fifteen I went to Mass on base. I remember I went to church, went to Mass. I got into church, I sat in the back, and the priest said, "Thank God that you're a Catholic, because you get to go to heaven. Nobody else gets to go." And I just said, "You know what? I give up. You guys are ridiculous. I can't believe *that* after experiencing cultures of different kinds." When we were in Alabama we always had people from other countries come and stay with us. People from China came and stayed with us. People from South America came and stayed with us and taught me how to play a *samba* on the guitar. We had people from all over the world visit us. My father always loved other cultures. He's a big—

KMD: And that's because they're doing—

LV: They're coming and—

KMD: As military—

LV: Families, military families, to study. My father was a teacher at Air Command and Staff College, so he taught commanders, he taught commanding staff. He was a teacher there for the four years that we were there, three and a half. And so my dad was always interested in other cultures. They've gone to Europe and done Europe a bunch of times; they've been to Australia … They go everywhere, my parents go everyplace. They just love other places. I'm a lot like my dad, I'm very much like my father. And he had a very big influence on me, he still does. So I experienced a lot of different cultures. African people, we had people from Africa come and stay with us, that were definitely not Christians, or Catholic, for that matter. And when I went into the Catholic Church that day… I was fifteen years old in Spain. I went to a private school on base; my family lived away. I went away to boarding school. I'm a preppie. Didn't you know? I even went to—when we were in Alabama, I remember I went to finishing classes for girls.

KMD: How did that decision come about, to go to boarding school?

LV: Oh, my dad offered me the opportunity, and I bit it like—

KMD: Really?

LV: Oh, man, he's told me, he said, "Well, you can stay at home and do that send-away school stuff," where you do classes on your own and you send in the tests and stuff, "or you could go to boarding school." And I didn't even think. I said, "Boarding school." And I left. Man, I was so ready, I was fifteen years old. I loved it.

KMD: The independence, the—

LV: Oh, hell, yes. The partying, the art, oh, everything. The music, the everything.

KMD: And what kind of kids are at this boarding school?

LV: From all over the world. Kids from everywhere, all over the world. American kids and non-American kids whose parents were like oil magnates. Their parents lived in India, their parents lived in Africa, their parents lived all over Europe, all the foreign countries.

KMD: What's the name of this school? It must be famous.

LV: It was called Torrejon, *T-O*-double-*R-E-J-O-N.* And it was an English school on an American base, and they actually had barracks that were turned into boarding schools. They had a girls' floor and a guys' floor, and all kinds of shenanigans went on there, man. It was like going to college when you're fifteen years old. And I was voted most talented when I graduated. I graduated in the top twenty in the class.

KMD: How big is this school?

LV: It was really small. Really a teeny school. I think there was—I don't know what. I can't even remember now. I know there was thirty people that graduated in my class. It was really, really small.

KMD: So each class, about thirty or forty.

LV: Yeah, something like that, with three grades or something like that. It was so much fun. I had such a great time. I traveled all over Europe, I saw all kinds of art in museums. You could go—you know, in Europe there's no—twenty-one isn't the age, sixteen's the age. So at sixteen you could basically do anything you want.

KMD: So you're experimenting with—

LV: Alcohol, mostly. [*laughter*] 'Cause nothing else was really available. This was pretty early still, this is '67, '68, and '69. I graduated in '69. I designed clothes. I had a seamstress that actually worked for me. My parents allowed me to hire her, and they paid for that. I designed all my own clothes, and I used to wear clothes that I designed myself.

KMD: Could you describe some of those?

LV: Yeah, I designed these clothes that—I remember one—there was a series of dresses. I had a bunch of drawings. I don't even know if they exist anymore. I had a portfolio, and I took them around to designers when I was like sixteen years old. I thought maybe I would design clothes. I did some beautiful double-breasted dresses.

KMD: What kind of fabric are you working with?

LV: Oh, there was all kinds of fabric. I used to go to the fabric stores and buy all kinds of things, beautiful things. I had one dress that I really liked. I used to do a Nehru—Nehru collars with … There was a dress with short sleeves, and it was pre-hippie. So, mini-skirts. And they had an empire waist, dressed with a belt around under the breast rather than just a seam. It was like a belt, like you have with pants, but was like a belt. And I had the belts made, dresses made, and [a] series of dresses made.

I was on the production staff of a magazine that I know I still have in one of my boxes. We made a magazine. When I graduated from high school about four of us were on the [magazine] production staff. [It was] a beautiful magazine that was basically about fashion and art and poetry and stories and photography, and we did all the layout and everything and printed that out ourselves. In the meantime, I was writing music. I was notorious for being nude, in bed, and playing music. Everybody on the floor would go to sleep to my music. I wrote a lot of songs, I produced a lot of music, I sang a great deal. I painted a lot. I was in the art department. I was allowed to go into the art department [any time], so that I could continue doing my work.

KMD: Are you not—I mean, you're doing multi—all of the arts.

LV: Yeah, I'm doing music—

KMD: So you hadn't really narrowed yet, or—

LV: No. I was always painting, but I did music, a lot of music.

KMD: But the designing of—

LV: And the designing of clothes, and being on the staff of a magazine, and doing all that printing work.

KMD: Are you going home at breaks?

LV: Yes, I'm going home for breaks and stuff like that. I even did all the artwork for my yearbook, for my senior yearbook.

KMD: Oh, wow.

LV: Yeah. That's who I was. And in Europe, of course, there was no color, and you had people from all over the world speaking multiple languages, and talking to their parents in Swahili and stuff on the telephone. And I became a pool shark. I used to play pool to make my money. I had a very good tutor. He was a very good pool player. He taught me how to play and make five dollars a game, and that's how I made extra money.

KMD: What'd you need the money for?

LV: Oh, golly, go partying. Go partying. The nightclubs were incredible. I got to see flamenco at its very best. When my parents . . . During summer breaks, we would travel all over Spain, and just go to castles and see all kinds of architecture and all kinds of spiritual sites. I must have seen every cathedral that ever existed. And the caves again came in—oh, it was just so much going on, it was just—I mean, we had a riotous time.

KMD: It sounds extremely rich.

LV: Oh, it was fabulous. It was just wonderful. I was there for my junior and my senior year. I just produced a lot of artwork. I was free to do whatever I wanted to do, creatively, and I took the ball and I really ran with it. And I'm still kind of known for that, I'm very prolific. That's why people always allowed me to do whatever I wanted, artistically. They just said, "Oh, Linda has her own vision, and she's going to work really hard, so give her the keys to the room." I always had keys to art departments.

KMD: So are there specific teachers that are encouraging you, or is it just like everybody?

LV: Well, everybody's very encouraging, but I had a couple of art teachers that were very encouraging to me too. I'd have to look up their names now. [Mr.] Gilcrist, I believe, is one of them.

KMD: And this is in the visual arts, but also in music, or—

LV: Well, they had all kinds of talent shows. It was constantly going on, performances. I mean, the guy who taught me how to play pool, his brother was a concert classical guitarist of the first caliber. And the guy used to give concerts in the auditorium on the campus, and everybody would come and listen to him play—what's the name of that very famous Spanish . . . Segovia. [He] played Segovia's work. This was a level of artistic [expression in my] high school.

KMD: So you're not getting a sense that being Mexican is somehow negative.

LV: No. No, there's nothing there. There's nothing left. I am not anything, other than Linda Vallejo, the proud daughter of Adam and Helen. And that's it. And that's where my being was really brought up, where religion was suddenly wiped away, and culture took its place. And Europe was just a hotbed of a million things going on. Work . . . Goya, Greco—I saw one of the largest collections of Goya in existence at the Prado, I don't know how many times. I saw the biggest collection of Bruegel in the world. I'm telling you, room upon room of Bruegel, and I studied Bruegel. I got to go to London and go to the natural history museum, and to see all of Greece.

KMD: So this classical training, I'm curious how you see it influenced your work. I have some ideas, but I'd like—I mean, that's a really classical training.

LV: Well, I'm a purist in a lot of ways. My paintings are very purist. I think the landscapes not only come from my experience of nature as a young girl but also from Leonardo da Vinci's greatest works [which I saw] when I was fifteen and sixteen years old. I saw Montagna, all the great Italian painters with all the beautiful landscapes, everything with the flowing colors. What I've said recently, which makes more sense to me than anything, is that my focus as an artist has been to somehow or another coalesce influences from a barrage of sources. And not just from books, but from [the] actual experience of seeing works across—what, *siglos*—across centuries, across race, creed, and color, across—[from] modern work to ancient work to Renaissance pieces.

KMD: I mean, when I think about—you talk about looking out the back of the car driving through Texas. I can see that influence on some of your skyscapes. I'm thinking, with your—partly with your palette, it's very rich.

LV: Yeah, all those Renaissance colors.

KMD: A very painterly artist. Now, I know you're doing some three-dimensional work and some multimedia.

LV: Yeah, now I'm being influenced by twenty-first century New York, Paris, and Amsterdam, which I'm loving. I like to get new influences as well. What occurred to me when you were asking that question was that when I was… So I went to high school in Madrid, but I went back to Madrid again after I came back to the United States—after Whittier. But what just occurred to me was that I—and this was something that I had said previously—is that I have always been interested in the horizon line. And, I think, from [my] travels. I've always been interested in this horizon line for some reason. This curlicue horizon line has always drawn me—the form of the line.

And for years I was doing religious work, from my influences in Europe. I was doing copies of Michelangelo's statues and the great Bernini works, and angels. I did many religious pieces as a very young artist [including] angels [and] demons. I did Dante's *Inferno*. I was reading these books and I was looking at the imagery and studying [William Blake's *Songs of*] *Innocence and Experience*. The watercolors, the small etchings [and] poetry. They have them all at the Huntington Library. *Innocence and Experience.* So I was doing lots of horizon lines, with the devils below and the angels above. And I have many of those pieces, that are saved in my archival stuff. And so the European work really did influence me a great deal.

And Goya is probably one of the [artists] that I've held onto the most . . . with his images of the very idealistic picturesque versus gory war. [I saw] the Desastres and the Capriccios in New York a few years ago, and I sat down and cried right in the museum, I was so happy. It was like going home. I couldn't

believe it. I didn't want to leave the Met. I never want to leave the Met, but this time it was just incredibly fabulous. And also, don't forget, when I lived in Spain, Picasso and Dali were on television.

KMD: [*laughter*] You're right.

LV: They were on TV. They had like three channels in Spain. Well, you could see Picasso or Goya practically every week on television. They would go and do like [a reality TV show] with them. And so Picasso, of course, is my eternal god, he is my eternal god, and—you know, putting aside all the misogynist stuff and all the macho stuff. Because, I've read all those books, but the fact that he could change from one style to the next, to the next, to the next, has really empowered everything that I've done. I believe the most interesting thing about being an artist is that you can change styles and media. That is the most interesting thing of all. If you just do one thing over and over again in the same media, after a while …

KMD: Were you and your friends watching him on TV? I mean—

LV: Oh, yeah. We used to watch Dali on TV, and his giant eggs and his backyard and his little moustache, talking crazy stuff on television. It was really fun.

KMD: So your Spanish must have been very good.

LV: Yes, by that time my Spanish was really good. I've lost quite a lot of it, because I haven't been back to Spain in so many years.

KMD: Well, you grew up speaking Spanish, because grandma—

LV: I—well, yes, when I was very little I spoke Spanish, or the rudimentaries of it. How much does a child before three speak anyway? Then I moved to Germany, and I learned to speak German, because I had to speak to the maid who took care of me and I had to go to school. Then I came back and I learned English. My parents didn't teach me Spanish. My father and my mother were both punished in school for speaking Spanish, that same old story, the beating on the hand with the ruler. Then when I [studied in] Spain, I learned how to speak Spanish in the taxis. I took Spanish in high school, of course, and French. I spoke French and Spanish in high school. And I learned how to speak by just asking people, "How do you say?" "*Como se dice?*" And I remember I realized I could speak Spanish one day when I understood the Spanish sense of humor, which is really different from an American sense of humor. And I dreamt in Spanish.

KMD: You do?

LV: Yes. If I'm around people who speak Spanish, I can get right into it very quickly. My sister and my brother both speak Spanish very well. Of course, my father spoke six languages in his lifetime, including Russian. [My father is] a whip. And my mother was the very dutiful and helpful diplomat's wife that was always dressed to the nines and had the beautiful table setting and all the fabulous food. I used to cater with my mother for her parties. And I actually worked as a chef and as a waitress through grad school and college. So I always liked kitchens, and you know me, I'm always cooking.

So I spoke Spanish in Spain. And, oh man, I remember the music. The flamenco was so good. I miss Spain desperately. I think I'll miss it all my life. Before it's over with, I'm going to do Spain a little bit more. I have a chance to go and maybe live there in the next couple years, and I'm hoping that I'm going to do it. I really grew up there.

KMD: Obviously. I'm fascinated by the contrast between most students, who become interested in the arts or learning it in a book, and you're seeing not only the real thing, but the artists right there in front of you.

LV: [Spain] was [so] alive, it was living. [Artists] were stars on TV, and they were really interesting personalities, and they had fabulous ideas. I still go to Washington, DC, every other year. Every time I go I make a little pilgrimage to go see *The Last Supper* by Dali, which is one of my favorite paintings. And I went to [Florence and] Rome two years ago in December for the Florence Biennale, where I went to see [the *Birth of Venus* by] Botticelli.

KMD: Yes, Botticelli's—

LV: Botticelli's *Venus.* I'd never seen it before. You see it published a million times if you're studying art. And I remember, I walk up specifically to the paintings within four inches, [to] look at the strokes. And [it looked like a cartoon with a very graphic line surrounding the figures and forms].

KMD: Now, you're doing that now. That's what I'm asking. I'm imagining you saw it then—

LV: I'm still—

KMD: I'm not sure if you were aware of it, but—

LV: Oh, no. I have a memory in high school where I went to the Prado and I went to see Goya's paintings. I looked [at *The Third of May 1808*] from across the room, and—I'm getting chills thinking about it now, it's such an amazing painting—and it's just devastating. And I walked right up to [it] and one of the faces of horror—it's made with three strokes. The paintbrush is just, basically, dot, an eye; dot, an eye; swirl, a nose and a mouth. It's just like that, boom, boom, pow. And there's the whole face. And it's very Lucien Freud, it's very Rembrandt-ish, in the sense that it's very pasty, and very—there's a lot of paint, and the brush was really loaded. You walk away, and it's an [exact image] of this face. And you come up close to it, and it's this total abstract object. I remember seeing that in high school and being devastated by it and thinking, "My God. To be able to do that. Unbelievable." [I was] very, very impressed by it.

So the stroke, the stroke of the paint, the use of the brush. I got to see the Sistine Chapel. I've seen it twice in my life. [The first] time when I was there, I made a point . . . The first thing I did was to sit down on one of the benches and to memorize the blue. I said, I'm not leaving this room until I memorize the blue. I have the blue in my head, I know what color it is. I can [reproduce] it. I [also] learned that if you hold your hands behind your back the guards will allow you to step closer to paintings, because they [know] that you're not going to touch. I walked up to the corner of the altar in the Sistine Chapel, where on the left-hand side you can literally walk up and [see] the painting [close up].

KMD: Right, less than a foot away from you.

LV: Yes. It's feet. [Amazingly,] it looks like a cartoon. Botticelli's *Venus,* when you go up to it, you can literally see that he's taken a terracotta-colored line and literally gone around the entire figure of the form. And when you step back from it, you don't see this cartoon, but when you step up to it, you go, "My God, it's just paint, and there is the line going around the body." [I found] the same thing with Michelangelo's bodies. I was looking at them and going, "My God, they're cartoons." And yet they look so alive.

And the same thing with [the] Goya. It was just this immediate sort of cartoon line that reads as a human being with serious emotional intent. So you can't see that, studying paintings, studying lines, studying personalities, coalescing architecture. I need to say it for myself today that I find myself doing coalescing all of these different influences, this mirage of influences that come from many different cultural [and] historical basis, movements [and schools] of different kinds. I could go into multiple stories about the museums that I [have visited] and all the things that I've been "fed," as it were. I've had to take these [multiple] influences and "make" them into a statement that makes sense for me [individually]. [I believe] that an individual statement comes from individual experience. A unique statement comes from a unique experience. And my experience has been very unique. And we haven't even gotten into becoming a Chicana yet. I'm still [integrating those influences].

So my whole life has been a matter of [integration] across—and the good news is that I liked . . . Oh, Kim Abeles came recently to my studio, and I love Kim. She said, "You know, Linda, your paintings are like puzzles. They all kind of fit together. It's like these little pieces that you kind of go around and you make everything fit together." And I really like that, because I do see paintings like puzzles. I see shape that fits into shape and color that fits into color, and line that fits into line, and it all comes together like a puzzle.

KMD: Well, I see part of it as the disjuncture between the experiences, too.

LV: Right. Oh, yes.

KMD: You know, Alabama compared to Los Angeles compared to Sacramento compared to Germany compared to Spain. I mean, it's—

LV: It's overwhelming.

KMD: Yeah, it's not just that it's a life's experiences from many places, but their relationships are thin. Certainly your father is taking the family, but—

LV: Absolutely.

KMD: What can you use from Alabama that will help you survive in Spain? Or what can you use from Los Angeles that helps you survive in Germany?

LV: Or what are the threads?

KMD: It's like you have to invent each place.

LV: That's exactly right. And I think that's the why I had a minor in philosophy and religion. [I've been asked], "How do you come up with all these ideas? Where do you get all these ideas from?" And I [respond], "I have a very active mind." I think that this very active mind came from this desire to draw the threads between these experiences into an artistic vision and statement, which is what I've been trying to do all my life. I have so many ideas I have to write them down in [journals]. There's just so much work to be done. And I love the whole—the complexity of the mind is something that I've always enjoyed. I think my education helped me to investigate and to analyze. I love analytical thought.

KMD: Did you get any of that in college?

LV: Yeah, I got a lot of it in college.

KMD: Well, I guess the minor, yeah—

LV: But you know, I was a hippie in college.

KMD: Really?

LV: Yeah. I have pictures to prove it. I basically sang my way through college. I performed constantly. I was on the piano all the time. I was painting. I had keys to the [art] department. The people in the department were fighting over me—"Linda, please take my class"—because there was only—there was no people. The whole school was, what, fourteen hundred, sixteen hundred people? I was like, the art major of my year. I graduated as the only art major from the art department.

KMD: Were you doing—were you focusing on a media at that time?

LV: I was doing a lot of silk screen, because I had a teacher, Ernest Lacy. Ernest Lacy's still in Whittier; he's still a very close friend of mine. He's probably the art teacher that I admire the most, because he's still an active painter in his life. I had a nickname in college. I was called Matti, *M-A-T-T-I.* My confirmation name was Matthew, and I decided to remake myself, an entire personality, which is what I've done all my life. That's an answer to one of your questions—I "remake" myself. I'm always reinventing myself. Moving [a great deal as a child forces] you [to] reinvent yourself so it's like a clean slate. [I've re-invented myself through my artistic medium as well; through silk screen, painting, and etching, as examples.]

KMD: And you were Matti.

LV: And I was Matti, and I was singing [and painting]. I went to a reunion twenty years later at Whittier College, and one of the guys came up to me and goes, "Weren't you the girl that was always walking around campus half-naked?" And I said, "Yeah, that was me."

KMD: So what do you mean half-naked? A lot of leg is showing, a lot of stomach, midriff?

LV: No, they didn't do midriffs or stomachs then; what they did was backs. Remember the backless tops? I had these Spanish shawls that I brought from Spain, the little triangular shawls with the fringes on them and the roses and everything all over them. I got those little rings that you put around your neck, and I would safety one on the top in the back, and tie it around the back. And that was basically me in college, with hip-huggers with holes all over them and patches all over the place, and barefoot. And then I did a thing where I did sort of a Jean Harlow thing, where I went to the second-hand stores and bought the negligees, and basically went around in a pair of panties and a negligee to class.

KMD: Okay, you were ahead of your time, because that's—

LV: I was totally out there—I had a shag, I had a beautiful shag haircut. It was gorgeous, I had hair down to my waist, and I shagged the whole thing, it was all shagged. I was not only painting and singing, but I [also enjoyed] the theater. I was in eight productions in college. I won awards for my acting. I really enjoyed the theater. I designed props, I designed backdrops. I wrote music for plays, I helped to write plays. And a lot of my dearest friends from Whittier College are my friends from theater, and I'm still in touch with them and they still remember me as Matti. They come to my house and they say, "If anybody can do this, it's

you, Matti. If anybody could make this happen, it's you." No one from my college years is surprised; no one from my high school years is surprised. They e-mail me and say, "Oh, God, you're just doing wonders. We knew that you were ambitious." [I have learned that] ambition [can be] a good thing, if it's done for the good of many rather than just for the good of one.

I'm an artist. I tell people I didn't become an artist in high school or in college [as a response to a] political or cultural [movement]; I became an artist when I was four years old, doing hand painting [in Kindergarten]. [Painting has] been my "language" all my life, so [ambition isn't] about "me better than you." [It's about my] personal best. It's whether I can become a better artist in every painting that I make. That's why I enjoy [traveling to new places.]

KMD: And you're living with—

LV: First I lived with my mother, because my father's in Vietnam. Then my father comes back, and they move back to Alabama. And I stay in Whittier, and I live off campus, which was pretty disastrous. And then finally, my last year, I lived on campus, because they didn't really know what else to do with me. And—

KMD: You mean your family, or—

LV: Yeah, they didn't know what else . . . They said, "You got to live on campus." I was pretty much a wild child, but I graduated with, what, a 3.3—

KMD: Not bad.

LV: [During my studies at Whittier] I [was in several plays and] produced a great deal of music [as well as] paintings, [and] etchings. I was in eight plays, and I had the respect of everybody on the campus, all the leadership respected me. [My professor let me do my own thing. I was] prolific and produced a ton.

KMD: Any favorite roles that you remember?

LV: *Night of the Iguana*, [where I] played Ava Gardner's part. It was perfect for me, just perfect for me, in the sort of highly sexualized girl. And I did what hippies did in the '60s, although I didn't protest. I didn't do any protests because my father was still in the military, and I was acutely aware that I couldn't be—they already had an FBI file on me.

KMD: Really?

LV: Oh, yeah. They have FBI files on all the military's—

KMD: Oh, because—the military family.

LV: [Because my father was in the] military, I couldn't [participate in any political activities] that would harm my father's career; I supported my friends [involved in protests, but personally I couldn't become involved].

KMD: Did you feel frustrated by that, or—

LV: Yes, I did. I wanted to, but I waited until I was independent, and then I could become more political. But even then, I didn't become "political"; I became spiritual instead. All of the sudden, politics didn't make much sense. Politics still doesn't make a lot of sense, unless you take it in the ancient formula. Then it makes sense.

KMD: What do you mean by that?

LV: In terms of the Native American [and indigenous] worlds. And this is what's been taught to me, [that] politics [is] an everyday part of life. It [isn't] separate. You didn't have the politicians over here and the citizens over here. The leadership was political and was also citizenry. Politics [is] considered [a part of good] leader[ship]. [In indigenous thought] being "political" is like a parent who is focused on the well-being of their child, on the opportunities that are available to that child, but this "politician" is never divided from the parent. A good parent is political; they have to be political. [A good leader is "naturally" political and a responsible caretaker.]

KMD: Make wise choices.

LV: They have to make wise choices, in terms of schools and sports and educational opportunities. If you have a child that's exceptionally intelligent as a political being, it is your responsibility to make sure that the child is in the right school with the right teachers and the right opportunities. That's how leadership [and

"the political"] in the ancient world was seen. It isn't like ["politics" today]. Politicians don't know who we are or what we want or what we need, and [they make decisions] regardless of what the people want. They are not integral to the community.

I learned something very interesting from one of my teachers, Robert John Knapp, *K-N-A-P-P.* A very excellent teacher. I'm very fortunate to have had many Native American teachers who have trusted in me and [shared many teachings with me]. [Robert John has shared that] the Constitution of the United States was built on the Iroquois Confederacy, a gathering of nine [Northeastern Native American] nations that had [united to] create a Congress, [to] stop [war and share resources]. I asked Robert John, "If the Constitution of the United States was built on the Iroquois Confederacy, and that was so successful for many generations, why is ours not working?" He said, "Two reasons. Number one, the Iroquois Confederacy could not make a decision unless [there was a] 100 percent agreement." There was no two-thirds vote; there was no majority vote. So they talked forever, and consensus was very slow [and] change was very slow. Secondly, the women [selected the men who participated in] the Confederacy. The women raised the boys; they knew who was greedy, they knew who was kind, they knew who was intelligent, they knew who was incapable. They picked the best and sent him as their representative to the Confederacy. If [their choice] messed up, they could yank him at any time. So the women were taken basically out of the [American] Constitution.

Politics [are] a very important [element of] life, and politics as it functions in the twenty-first century really is pretty corrupt and upside-down.

KMD: So you stayed away—

LV: From politics.

KMD: You felt comfortable staying away from some of that.

LV: I was frustrated by it, but I think everybody's frustrated. Even people who get into politics get frustrated by it. Instead, I went towards the spiritual [community] instead.

KMD: So you finish with a bachelor's—

LV: Out of Whittier College.

KMD: And do you jump right into . . . Like, you need more, you want the MFA, you want—

LV: I took two years off, and I said to myself, "If I'm going to be a painter, I'll know. If I'm not going to be a painter, I'm going to know." So I went back to Spain and continued to make art, continued to go to museums, continued to do all the art I wanted to do. And thought, "Yes; I do want to be an artist." So I applied to graduate school. But they kept getting me wrong, they kept thinking I was European. I kept getting refusals to colleges because I was European.

KMD: Because your address is—

LV: Spain.

KMD: Right.

LV: So from Whittier, I moved to San Francisco. And the biggest mistake of my life was that I got into the San Francisco Art Institute and I didn't go there. One of the biggest mistakes I ever made. And Ron [my future husband] was living . . . I met Ron in college when I was a senior in college, and we've been together ever since. What [is] it—thirty-five years ago. I moved to San Francisco, [and I] lived off of Polk Street—right off of Polk Street—and worked as an omelet chef on Union Street. I lived there for almost a year. And then I went to Spain to be with my parents and do Europe again, and that's when I went to the University of Madrid and took lithography classes. [I] really enjoyed that. They didn't want me to leave because I was really prolific and [we] really liked [each other]. I really enjoyed [studying at the university.] I [completed classical] drawings from [antique statuary.]

The Academy was a good learning experience. [I] missed Ron [my future husband], desperately. [I] came back [to the U.S.] through Pittsburgh. Ron was at the Duquesne University getting his master's, and I waited tables [and] modeled for art classes. I taught art to little kids and saved all my money. I came back for graduate school at Cal State University Long Beach in 1975. [CSULB was an excellent experience.] Teddy

Sandoval was there, John Valadez was there, David Starr was there. You probably don't remember him; he's from old Self Help Graphics days. David Starr said [that] they [were] looking for somebody to [work] at this place in East LA. And I said, "Really? I could use a job." At that point I was doing factory work [to make ends meet].

KMD: Oh, okay. Widgets.

LV: I had all different kinds of ridiculous jobs, to get myself around the world, traveling and going places. [David Starr] told me that they were looking for somebody at Self Help Graphics. I didn't know what Self Help Graphics [was].

KMD: I want to back up just a bit.

LV: Sure.

KMD: When you're living in San Francisco—

LV: Yeah.

KMD: That's the early '70s.

LV: That's 1972, '73.

KMD: So that's a period where there's still—

LV: Haight-Ashbury.

KMD: Right, Haight-Ashbury.

LV: Oh, you mean the Chicano movement?

KMD: Yeah, in terms of the Chicano movement. So that's not on your radar yet? No.

LV: No.

KMD: But Haight-Ashbury—

LV: What was on my radar was walking down Polk Street and sticking my head into gay bars and checking out what was going on.

KMD: So you'd seen many cultures, religions, nationalities, languages, but—

LV: Now, I was checking out the San Francisco gay scene at its—this was before AIDS, so it was amazing. I mean, what you saw in bars . . . And I was so brazen that I would go into bars. I'm really amazed at the stuff I would do.

KMD: So were you, did you ever have a sense of—

LV: Nothing shocked me.

KMD: Not a shock.

LV: Nothing shocks me still, really. I've seen too much.

KMD: So it's not shocking. It's not ugly. It's—

LV: It's interesting. I [produced a lot of work]. I lived in a small apartment, and my sofa was my bed. And I would—Ron used to make a joke, because every time he'd come to my apartment, it would be a studio. It wouldn't really be an apartment. There would be like—I'd put a sheet on the floor on the rug with my TV set, and I still watch movies when I paint even today. I have a massive movie collection. I'm also an American movie buff. Ask me anything; I could win a trivia contest. I'm telling you, I know all about American movies. I watched them all again and again and again. I would have everything out on the floor, and I was doing lino prints. I made lino prints when I was in San Francisco.

KMD: Where are you doing that?

LV: In my apartment in San Francisco. So I was working as omelet chef during the day, and then at night I was going home and doing lino prints on the floor of my apartment.

KMD: Okay. I guess I don't understand the technique. I thought you needed a lot more space and stuff.

LV: No, you don't need anything. That's why I did it. You just need a block of lino and some cutters and some brayers and some paper, and that's it. That's all you need.

KMD: And down the other end of San Francisco, they're doing the same kind of thing at Galería and . . . It was actually Mission—

LV: The Mission, yeah. I found the Mission District later, in my travels up through California as a *danzante*, going up and down to Sacramento and back through San Francisco. I did that several times as a *danzante*, and that's when I found the Mission District and Galería de la Raza.

KMD: Okay. So you're doing this work in a small—

LV: Really small.

KMD: And are you showing it, or are you—

LV: I'm not showing it, but I'm selling it.

KMD: You're selling it?

LV: Oh, I always sold everything. I sold everything out of high school, I sold everything out of college, I sold everything out of grad school. I sold everything. I've always sold my work.

KMD: How were you doing that?

LV: Asking people. Putting things out. In grad school I put out all my prints, and I put prices on everything and just waited around. And people came in and said, "Wow, I'll take that one, I'll take that one." That's how I [raised the funds] to go back to Europe. Selling art, for me—like a lot of people say, you know, "It's my children, I can't sell them." No, no, no. Get pregnant and have a baby, and then you'll suddenly realize that your paintings are not your children. And there's always another painting coming, and you have to believe that. I always tell people, "You know what? If you've only painted a hundred pieces, you're going to be very protective of them. But if you've painted two, three thousand pieces, you won't even remember them, and it won't matter that much, and you'll be happy to sell them."

KMD: Is that true? You don't remember some of the earlier—

LV: I don't remember some of my work. People say, "Oh, I have a painting of yours." I'll go, "Explain it to me. What does it look like?" And I'll go, "Hmm," and then I'll go, "Oh, yeah, yeah, I remember that one." I've always seen art as like a craft and a livelihood.

KMD: So when did you start the documentation, though? Because obviously—

LV: Right away.

KMD: Oh, you were documenting these things.

LV: I always documented. I had a sense of documentation. I documented everything out of high school, I documented everything out of college. I have documentation of everything.

KMD: Were you taking slides?

LV: I have slides of everything that I've done.

KMD: Amazing.

LV: Yeah, I have them in my closet.

KMD: So you could get rid of them if you needed to go—

LV: Yeah, they were my way to get to my next place. And somewhere in my storage unit, I have all my old college [etching] plates.

KMD: So you're selling them on the street or something, like the hippie artist is—

LV: Yeah, I had stuff laying out on the grass, and I'm selling stuff to people. I was pretty infamous in college: everybody knew who I was. I mean, with a campus of, what, twenty-one hundred people, eighteen hundred people, everybody knew who I was: Matti. I used to have concerts on campus and the place was packed. I sang at the local coffee shops and won prizes.

KMD: So you're getting rejections once you go to Spain and you're deciding to do . . . Well, I guess that's a question.

LV: What's a question?

KMD: Why did you decide to go to the MFA?

LV: Because I figured I wouldn't be able to get anywhere without it. I was a woman. How in the hell was I going to make a living as an artist if I were not a man? I had to have this as much as—

KMD: How did you get that awareness then? This sort of feminist—at least I'm thinking, that women are going to be treated differently?

LV: You know, I was always [a] post-feminist. I never really jumped on many bandwagons. You can imagine somebody like me, who was brought up with so many different influences—why would I join a bandwagon? First bandwagon I ever joined was the Chicano movement, and that in itself has been a struggle from the very beginning. It's been so difficult. Almost impossible. I just realized that in order to be able to get ahead, you had to have credentials, you had to have experience, you had to have a portfolio worth its muster, you had to prove your talent [and] your capacity. And because of Picasso, I believe that being a prolific artist is the first thing you've got to be. I'm not really one of those people who believe that you produce twelve good paintings in your whole life. Let's talk about two hundred good paintings in your whole life, out of a portfolio of maybe two thousand. Let's talk about that. For me, being prolific is very important. I like being busy, I like being active.

KMD: But you said you knew, as a woman, you needed to have that. I'm wondering where that sensibility is coming from. I mean, if you're not part of any feminist movement, or identifying with that—

LV: I don't know where it came from. I'm not really sure. I believed in education, I believed in getting degrees. My father—

KMD: Because your father ends up with several.

LV: My father ends up with several, so I have this great influence. But he also told me that—I remember my father also told me that I should get as many degrees as I could, because that way, if nothing else, I could become a teacher. I tried to become a professor for many years, but I hated the politics of art departments. The politics of art departments were grueling. It wasn't based on how you good you were with students, it was on how much you kissed up and how backstabbing you were to other people. I've taught a few times, and I enjoy teaching people. I like sharing. I have no trouble with sharing technique or style or opportunities. [I don't have an] "May the best painter win" attitude. I was intent on getting an MFA very early. I made that decision when I was young, to get a master's degree. I regret not getting a PhD in art history. I would have liked to have done that, and I should have done that. Because I'm a writer, I would have loved—I have all these ideas about writing. But who has time?

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: So we've taken a little break [for] lunch. This is Karen Mary Davalos interviewing Linda Vallejo on August 20, 2007. And at lunch we were talking about the artistic process, and I was wondering, Linda, if you could share that with me now—how you work.

LV: I like to read biographies of famous painters and writers, and compare lives, and look at what people were producing during certain times of their lives. I also [read biographies of] actors and actresses, and I have a very big interest in women artists through the centuries, which in many contexts are courtesans. I do all the study of women who were very independent and artistic, and that led very free lives, in comparison to structured society. Especially European and early United States history, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, early twentieth century.

KMD: Can you tell me some of the ones that stand out in your mind?

LV: Well, I did all of Georgia O'Keefe—her whole bit with Stieglitz and the American gallery. I've seen three or four national [exhibitions]. I've been to [the] O'Keefe's museum [as well]. I've been to D.C. and seen a whole collection of the American gallery artists. Marsden is one of my favorites. I read several books on [O'Keefe's] relationship with Stieglitz, and I know all the gory details about their love affair, even when he was married and how his wife paid all their expenses, and about how all those fabulous photographs of her were taken [post coitus]. And about her whole history and what she did and how she made it happen. I think one of the things that I've gleaned from that is that very famous women artists are generally attached to very famous men artists. That's basically what my research has told me: that to become an extremely, extraordinarily famous artist, as a woman, the best way is to be closely affiliated with a very important American male artist.

You have Lee Krasner with Pollack. I read the Pulitzer Prize–winning book, and then I [saw] the movie. I even bought the book of his psychological drawings when he was in therapy. You'd be really interested in those; they have a lot of Mexican and Native American Indian influences that historians don't get. He must have been on the reservation and [seen] ceremony. Of course I [love] Ana Mendieta. I just read three books, [and] I saw [two] fabulous shows of hers in Washington, DC, and New York. I got on my knees and thanked God she was at the Hirshhorn. They had ten rooms; it was everything. The whole estate. All the videos, all the photography, the wooden sculpture. I bought the catalog. I buy all the catalogs; I love the catalogs. And I was deeply, deeply moved. For me, [a major part of] the process is about the study.

KMD: You haven't mentioned a thing about paint or water or canvas.

LV: It takes a lot time [for me] to get there, because you have to have an idea. You have to have formulated a statement. You have to formulate a reason why you're painting—this is what I believe. There's a poem that you're presenting. I consider painters like poets, more than anything. Intellectuals and poets. And to me, being an artist is going to museums and going to galleries and seeing work, and dissecting. Oh, I saw the Sargent show, that just came up to my mind. I saw Sargent at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art], what was it, two years ago? Oh, I was in tears. I thought—when I left that show, I said to myself, "Why am I painting? It's been done by Sargent. I don't need to say a thing." I mean, I was just awestruck by his brush, by his technique. It was just wildly insane.

I saw a show of Titian at the National [Gallery] in Washington, DC. I spent a whole day just sort of walking through the show over and over and over again, just being fascinated by the light on the cloth. Oh, the detail, and those lines were . . . There's pearls, but they're just little blobs of paint, but they're pearls. There's so much, I love. This is the part that I love the most, the preparation for the paintings. Painting itself is really hard work. It's really difficult to be a good painter. I [have] spent eighteen months on [one] painting. I always have so much work that I don't have to rush paintings for shows. I always try to [be working on several paintings] simultaneously. I could have three or four shows simultaneously at any time. Completed work.

KMD: Wait a minute. You must be painting—if it takes you months—

LV: I'm painting on six pieces simultaneously.

KMD: Okay. And that's because you work in oil?

LV: I have multiple things going on right now. I have oil on canvas. I have a silk-screen print at Self Help Graphics that I'm doing right now, one of my electric oaks. And I'm doing a series of inter-media, mixed-media political and environmental works, some gender pieces, which are funny [and] very sardonic.

KMD: So wait a minute. I'm thinking that you're working in a series. I don't know if you'd call them a series or a suite or . . . For example, the electric trees. Let's say you're doing six of those? No, you're telling me you could be working on a couple of electric trees, but then some—

LV: A couple of landscapes, a couple of digital works, a couple of digital sculptures, a couple of post-production pieces.

KMD: Do you eat? [*laughter*]

LV: I'm really disciplined.

KMD: You wake up early in the morning?

LV: I wake up about six o'clock. I make breakfast for my husband, I pack his lunch. I go to the computer and I teach. [Then I go to the studio to work.]

KMD: Makes that possible, yeah.

LV: I quit anywhere between eleven and two o'clock, depending on how much I have on my plate. And then at two o'clock, I go to the studio, and I last somewhere between . . . Oh, let's say on a good day I'll go to the studio at noon, and I'll last 'til six o'clock, and then I'll come up and make dinner. And then after dinner, I go back to the computer. And interspersed I have—I do my reading and I do my exercise, and that's pretty much my life. And on the weekend, I [complete] my ceremonial obligations and my family obligations. So I put in about between sixteen and forty hours a week on painting. And I have multiple ideas all the time.

I mean, I have ideas in my head right now that I haven't even started, that I'm waiting to start. I'm doing a whole series called Earth's Altar, which I'm really excited about. I'll show you some of that today.

KMD: The process, what you're describing, it starts with research.

LV: It starts with research. It starts with reading and seeing the shows, and coalescing all these multiple influences, just like my life. Some of them may be Chicano, some of them may be Latin American, some of them may be German, some of them may be from China—I went to China two years ago—I've been coalescing all that information.

KMD: So wait a minute. So far, you're talking about other people's lives, other people's works. Are you doing research on . . . For example, you painted the electric trees. Are you looking at trees in books or out your window? Are you—

LV: Yes, out my window.

KMD: Is it the topic or content of the work, is your study mostly—what else is out there in the art world?

LV: Everything and above. I'm looking out my window, I'm experiencing things in the ceremonial and spiritual community. I'm going to museums and gallery shows. I'm going to other artists' studios. I'm reading books, I'm reading the newspaper, I'm watching documentaries, I'm reading poetry.

KMD: And before, you had said that you have American cinema playing?

LV: And then I have movies playing pretty much nonstop.

KMD: They're just going in the studio at the same time—

LV: Mm-hmm. I can basically quote dialogue on a lot of moves. I watch a movie, I actually watch it. And then I'll watch it and I won't pay any attention to the primary figures, I'll be watching the figures around them to see how the supporting cast is doing. Then I listen to it for script, and then I listen to it again for score, and then I might watch it again for props and costuming and lighting. I think I would have loved to have been a screenplay writer; I would have loved to have been in film. I really would have liked that a lot.

KMD: So is this same kind of—I want to say, did that investigative, dissecting process—really kind of tearing things apart, deconstructing them in all their different components—you're doing the same thing with art.

LV: That's right. And I'm allowing the music to influence it and the poetry to influence it and the reading to influence it and the shows to influence it. So, just like my life, which is made up of multiple influences, my art is also made up that way, too. I focused on the . . . What I do is, I have an idea, and I follow that idea to its logical end. And generally speaking, any idea will have multiple [components] if you allow the idea to progress and to grow and to open and to formulate, with additional influences put into it. Let's see, there's several different examples I can give to you. I got involved in ceremony, and I'm still involved [after] thirty years, a thirty-year dedication. The spiritual world's a really interesting place to go. [This community contains many] symbols and signs.

It took me twenty years to coalesce all [this] experience into one type of painting, and that was the landscape. I boiled down my experience in the spiritual world to four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. And I decided that if I just painted that, that that would be enough. I [have] painted earth, water, fire, and air, and I've been painting it since 1995. So I have—what is that, seventeen years of earth, water, fire, and air. [These paintings are] based on my experience in the spiritual world, combined with the influences from sitting in the back of the car as a young girl and watching the landscapes, combined with all of my research and interest and study in European painting, and the horizon line. So all of those influences came together and coalesced into a very simple concept, which [is] the landscape. And what they called it—I guess you call them these fantastic landscapes, or magical landscapes, or electric landscapes, right?

KMD: Right.

LV: The [Electric Oaks began when] I looked out my door [to] see the trees.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos and Linda Vallejo. We're on tape 2, side A. It's August 20, 2007. And Linda was talking about her work with the trees.

LV: One of the central icons of the sun dance is a tree. It's a cottonwood. There's actually cottonwoods out here. They're native to this land, which is really wonderful. I love native things; native things are a big interest to me. That's a whole other conversation.

And I decided that I would start . . . Oh, and we went to visit—as a part of some ceremonial work—we also went to visit some great oaks in the Tahoe and El Tejon pass. And I took some photographs of the trees there, and I've taken some photographs here. And I thought, gee, I've been painting the sky for the last seven years. I wonder if I could paint trees and paint the earth. And it's a whole other thing you've got to learn how to do; it's really hard to paint landscape. Very difficult process. Looking at Georgia O'Keefe's stuff was really very instrumental in helping me understand how to do it.

KMD: What are some of the difficulties?

LV: Making it look like it's believable. Like a lot of times, you paint landscape and they look kind of cartoony, or they look kind of plastic, or they don't really look like they're alive. They look flat and kind of non-alive. I wanted my stuff to look alive and [to] have wind, because I'm doing earth, water, fire, and air, right? I want the wind; I want it to look like it's breathing, somehow or another. So there I am with all these photographs, and I'm on the computer every day, and I'm very adept at the computer, I'm very agile at the computer, I'm very good at it. I've spent a lot of my life on the computer. I mean, I had a computer in 1985.

KMD: Wow.

LV: Yeah. I mean, I love jumping on technology.

KMD: Were you using—

LV: Really old-fashioned stuff where the lines came up, where you typed in the lines and stuff.

KMD: Yeah, so you had a PC.

LV: Yeah, it was just some old PC. And you know how you can digitally alter photographs?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: Well, I'm constantly digitally altering photographs. And so I have digitally altered the trees. The trees are really like digital paintings, in the sense that I'm treating the tree as a digital object.

KMD: So you work from this digital composition?

LV: That's correct. I blow it up on the screen, because every one of the trees is a portrait of an actual person, the tree, the special tree. And then I don't paint it in its normal formula. I paint it as if it's been—like you take a photograph on the computer, and you change the exposure and you change the lighting, and you do a wah-wah on the color, and you "blow it out," that's what I call it. I coined a phrase called "blowing it out." I'm blowing out the landscape. Now I'm going to show it to you. I'm blowing it out now, too. And so the trees came from a combination of the spiritual work, actually being in nature, and working on the computer. And it just kind of happened.

KMD: How long have you been—are you working in something like Photoshop?

LV: I work in Microsoft Digital. I work in Microsoft Digital; I like that one. I've been doing lots of digital stuff on it. I have tons of new digital work.

KMD: You've been with computers for a long time. I don't know how long they've been allowing people to do digital images, but you talked about working from photos. Do you always work from photos, or—?

LV: No. When I do the skies, I don't work from photos, I work from memory. The skies are all based on memory. Like the little one that you have, it's a memory of a beach scene that I saw myself. And what I do is a sit and memorize. I stare, and sit, and memorize. Just like I did in the Sistine Chapel, where I sat and memorized the color of blue. That's what I wanted to do. I sit and memorize stuff so I can see it in my head, and then I try to recreate the emotions and the feelings of what I saw.

KMD: Wouldn't it be easier to sketch it?

LV: You mean on a piece of paper?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: I have this thing about not doing the minor works, because I don't have a lot of time. I don't have a lot of time left. I have to do paintings, I have to do major works.

KMD: No, but to catch the idea, to—

LV: No, it's easier to look at it. It's easier to memorize it. It's like memorizing my face and then drawing it from memorizing my face.

KMD: You're right.

LV: And it's just easier. I think it comes from laying in the back of that station wagon and memorizing those clouds in Texas. And just looking, looking so desperately at paintings like the Goya, and looking so desperately at Botticelli's [*Birth of*] *Venus*. When you're a painter, your eyes are like everything. I see a lot of stuff that other people don't see, because my eyes are trained to see. And one of the very first things I trained my eyes to see, as a painter, was to see peripherally. I don't just see in front of me, I see this. And when I look at my paintings, I don't look at it straight on, I look at them peripherally. So a lot of times, people go, "Gee, these paintings make my eyes wobble, my eyes seem to be moving around." It's because when I paint, I'm looking at things peripherally. I've taken the whole view of the painting.

So let's see. I went to—some of the digital stuff, the new one's called *Censored,* where I take newspapers and censor them and digitize them, and manipulate them and do all kinds of crazy things. I'm hoping that that's what I'm going to show at the L2k [L2kontemporary] in January. That's what I proposed. I went to China, and I was leaving China, and I was getting on the airplane. And I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm leaving China, I'm never going to come back." And I looked around the airplane, and there was all these Chinese newspapers all over the chairs. I madly started collecting these newspapers, not knowing why I did it. I had no idea why I was doing it. And all of the sudden, I found myself collecting newspapers, not knowing why I was going there or what I was going to do with it. Then I went to a show in Pittsburgh at the Carnegie Mellon, and I saw another artist that was using newspapers as the canvas and painting on them. And that coalesced, this whole idea of digitizing and doing the newspaper pieces.

KMD: Now—you've described two processes now.

LV: Yes.

KMD: One is spontaneous, without any sense of where.

LV: Right.

KMD: And the other was this deliberate research of reading and seeing.

LV: And the other is photography, where I blow it up on the screen. Because where I blow it up on the canvas—when I do the landscapes, specific landscapes—they are actual locations. And what I tell myself is that I want to be true to the monument, so I shoot up the rock form itself, because I want the rock form to be exactly what it is, and then I make up the sky and I make up the colors.

KMD: So are you saying that certain of these techniques that use this process you have for creation depends on the work, the project? Or you might use that for other things as well.

LV: I never really know which way I'm going. I never have anything thought out completely. I'm not one of those kind of artists. I do problem solving all on the canvas itself. I believe that every step that I take creates a solution and a problem. Every time I put up a new shape or a new color, it creates a puzzle, this puzzle idea where it creates a solution. But it also creates this problem-solving situation. So I'm constantly weighing the solution with the problem solving, and that's how decisions are made for me. I sit and I stare at canvases, and I go, "Well, I could put . . ." And I can see it. I'll go, "Well, I'll make this red," and then I'll see it. And then I'll go, "No, that doesn't really work. What about if I made it orange?" And I look it up and I see it, and then I say, "Okay, that's where we're going to go," and I give it a try. And then it's either—it's always a solution and it's always a problem-solving situation. And every painting's like that. It's just a series of puzzles, of decision-making processes.

KMD: Do you ever run yourself into a corner?

LV: Always.

KMD: Always. [*laughter*]

LV: Always. If I don't run myself into a corner, that means I'm not pressing it. And you have to press it. That's another thing I believe, that artists should be prolific, and they should press the point as often as possible. Just press it as much as possible. Because the creative process is really about personal best, pushing yourself to new extremes, just like in everything else. I believe an athlete would say the same thing, a historian would say the same thing—new material, never pre-researched areas. People say, "Do you use this, do you use that, do you use this, do you use that?" Unfortunately, I have to tell them I use them all. I used everything in my bag of tricks to get it done. The trees at this point are almost a formula; they've almost become a formula, the trees.

KMD: How's that?

LV: Well, because you have the same. The shape is there. But the coloration always causes me a lot of consternation. I think I paint on a canvas, which I hear is normal, I paint on canvas one-third of the time and stare at it two-thirds of the time. So I sit, and I have the image of Rothko sitting in his chair with his cigarette, staring at a painting. And that's basically my icon for what I do in the studio. I have a very comfortable chair. I sit in it, and I stare at paintings. And then I say to myself, "Okay, I think I'm going to do this with that one, I'm going to do this with that one, I'm going to do that with this one, and I don't know what to do with that one, let's just forget it." And then I get up and I do it and I see what happens. And I wait a long time before I do the next process, because I don't want to make a mistake.

KMD: Wait a minute, so they could be spread out in the studio—

LV: They are.

KMD: And you've thought, you've had your thinking and looking time—

LV: Right.

KMD: And then you go from—

LV: Painting to painting. I go from painting to painting.

KMD: It doesn't give you a headache.

LV: No. It's the way I work. I've always worked on multiple canvases simultaneously, and now, I'm working on multiple medias simultaneously, too.

KMD: That sounds quite impressive. I'm trying to figure out how you stay sane, but that's just my interpretation.

LV: Well, maybe I'm insane and [I] just don't know it.

KMD: Exactly. But I doubt that's true.

LV: It's like anything. Think about being a woman and being a multitasker. It's just like being a multitasker.

KMD: But if you were working in all the same color palette, the same media—

LV: Never happens.

KMD: Never happens. So this has been going on before the . . . You said you've been doing the—

LV: The Los Cielos since 1995. I always worked on multiple pieces regardless. On occasion I have done complete suites with all the same coloration, but those are basically—those are the ones on paper most of the time. Those are the ones—I was working on paper for about ten years, I did nothing but paper. I sold all of those. I only have a few left. I sold them all out of the Galería de Las Américas.

This is how I like to work, because—you know why? Because when you go into the studio—and here I am with my little notebook, and I've gone to shows and I've been reading books and this that and the other, and all this stuff is going on in my head and blah blah blah, and I'm going, "Oh, boy, I'd love to do one of those. Jesus, I have so many ideas, I'd love to do one of those. Oh, God, I wonder if I have time to do one of those." I'll go in, and one painting, I'll look at one painting, and I'll go, "I don't know what the hell to do with that." I don't know where it's going, I have no idea what's going on, I couldn't tell you if you paid me. But then I'll look at another one, and I'll go, "Oh, I know what to do with that. Let's do that today." And so if you have six of them up, there's always one that appeals to you. So you're always working. The idea of being in the studio with one painting would drive me insane.

KMD: Yeah. You're right. If [that day you had] what we call writer's block, right?

LV: Right, you're working on article, you're working on a novel, you working—

KMD: And you can't get anything, your whole day's gone.

LV: Your whole day's gone. So you're working on a novel, [and] you go, "Well, I feel like working on the novel today; I have some ideas about that next chapter." And so my head's always doing this thing where it's processing paintings in my head. I dream about painting, I see suites in my head. And I'm always—

KMD: Now help me to understand "suite," because I was using the word "series," and that might not be the same thing, I don't know.

LV: Well, series is the same as suite, I would give you that. I call them suites myself. That's just because I like to coin phrases and coin words. I'm always coining things, like "blowing things out." That's my new phrase—I'm going to blow it out. Yes, a series is like—well, you might say that the Los Cielos was a series. And now I have—the landscapes are a series. And then I had a series of thunder, lightning, and rain. Then I had a series of water. I decided, "Okay, I'm going to do water. Let's see if I can do water." And that's where I always start. I ask myself, "I wonder if I could do that. I wonder if I could do that." And invariably, it's harder than I ever imagined it to be.

KMD: Have you ever started one and then said, "No, I really can't do it," and you just don't show it, you don't—

LV: No. I finish everything. I make myself find the solution to everything I start. I make myself do it. And if it's hard, if I can't figure out what the solution is, that just means I'm going in terms of uncharted territory, and I have to give myself—I have to be more patient with myself and give myself more leeway. So I give myself more leeway.

KMD: You can live in instability; you can live in ambiguity, huh?

LV: I moved all my life. The whole first twenty years of my life, I wasn't in one place for more than—what, Sacramento was the longest time I was ever anyplace. I was always in boxes or in suitcases; I was always in hotels or dealing with new kinds of people and new kinds of situations. I was forced to be inventing, inquisitive, and intellectual. And so I like it. To me, it's invigorating. To me it's interesting, it's what makes it interesting. For me to have—what do you figure, three suites that I paint in my entire life? I would quit. If I only had three ideas, I would quit, I wouldn't bother. I'd go back to music, or become the writer that I would like to become before it's all over with.

KMD: Can we take a pause so I can get a sense of, like, this training you got, that maybe gave you some foundations for those experiences?

LV: Sure.

KMD: And I'll probably want to come back to describing the process, because I find it fascinating.

LV: Yeah, I love it.

KMD: Because you're throwing me for a complete loop. I would not have imagined you saying those things at all.

LV: Oh, man, yeah. I love the process. It's my favorite thing about it. The painting is just the final result. The process is what makes you an artist. That's what makes it interesting to be an artist—it's the study that makes it, the ideas themselves. I make the paintings just because it's technical, because I'm technical and I want to have technical expertise, so I do it.

But the ideas are more interesting than anything. I think I could live on sketchbooks for the rest of my life. Ana Mendieta's show had tons of sketchbooks, and ever since then I've been doing all these little drawings and all this stuff based on what I saw at her show. All these little sketches of these little ideas with these little notes sticking out among these little corners. And they had them in the boxes, in the museum boxes, and I went, [*gasps*] "I want this!" And I came home and bought a bunch of books, and I've been doing it ever since. I just love it to death; it's more fun than anything. It's a lot more fun than producing paintings. Painting is hard work, painting is tough.

KMD: But that's all part of the process.

LV: That's right. And the process is the fun part.

KMD: So you were doing that in graduate school, if I could take you there for a moment.

LV: Let's see. I went to—I walked to Cal State University, Long Beach. Dick Swift was the head of the printmaking department. I always hated Dick. I always loved Dick, and I hated Dick, because Dick had a fabulous

lithographic studio that he never used, and I hated him for that. And I told him to his face once. I said, "Dick, this is a sin, that you have this studio." You wouldn't believe it, a million-dollar studio in Sunset Beach that he never used. He just used it as a place to attract young women. I was just disgusted with him. "Dick, shame on you."

KMD: So you had said that you were turned down from schools because they assumed you were a foreign student.

LV: Yeah. I ended up at Cal State Long Beach. And I was happy to come back to LA. I made a purpose of it, because I needed to come back to my family. I wanted to be back here while my grandmother, my mother's mother, was still alive. I wanted to be here with my aunts and my uncles and my cousins. I really wanted to come home for a while. I'd been traveling all over the world, and I really wanted to come back and set some roots. You know, you mature a little bit and you want to set some roots.

So I had the portfolio that I submitted to get into graduate school, it was the etchings that I produced at Whittier College, and all the linoblock prints that I produced in San Francisco and when I was in Europe. And they accepted me into the school. I got into the school, and I started producing right off the bat. And it was the same story as always. They would give us an assignment, and I would do the assignment, and then I would do ten others. I'd go, "Well, you can manipulate it like that, you can manipulate it like this, and you can turn it over like that. Or you could flip it over, over here, like that. What if I did this to it, blah blah blah." And so eventually, everybody just leaves me alone. They just go, "Leave Linda alone. She's got her own vision, she knows what she's doing. She's going to produce twice as much as you need for her to produce. Everything will be fine." And I got out of the school with a very good grade point average and an MFA.

And it was funny, because in the end of—I mean, I had the whole lithography studio. Cynthia Osborne was the head of the lithography department—Osborne with an *E.* I think she's still there. The lithography department was really wonderful; they had stones and giant presses. The etching studio was fantastic, they had etching presses and they had all the intaglio, all the intaglio works, the dustbins, everything. The hard ground, the soft ground, everything.

KMD: Are you specializing then at that institution?

LV: Yes. Printmaking is my MFA. But I kind of did it on purpose. I became a printmaker first, because I figured I wouldn't be able to do it for very long, because it's very physical. It's very arduous work to be a printmaker. It's really, really . . . So I figured, I better do that while I'm young, because I probably—after the kids are here and everything like that, I won't have the strength to lift the stones and the plates and all this stuff. So I did that first, and then I became a sculptor second, because I figured I'd only have one chance to be able to get that done. And then I became a painter, when my kids were here and everything like that. It's easy to paint in a very small location. So I've had it all set up so that I could get it done. Like I'm painting large now, because I figure in ten years, it'll be really hard to paint large, so I've got to paint large. It's now or never. And I figure when I get old, I'll paint small and do some writing. Maybe write some music or something. So I have it all set up, my whole life. I've been one of those people with the five- to ten-year plans.

KMD: Yeah?

LV: Yeah. I've always been like that. I think it's very important. I've told people many times, "I've made all my major decisions; there's no more major decisions for me to make, I've already made them all." Now, I just have to fulfill them. I'm all of seven: "I'm going to go to college; I'm going to become an artist." So I got into school, and I produced a lot of prints, and I was still doing Christian sort of orientated imagery, and also Egyptology. I was very much into Egyptology at that point.

KMD: Like the—

LV: Book of the Dead, and all of the Egyptian symbols, and the Egyptian gods, and the kings, and Ramses, and the whole thing. Oh, the pyramids and the whole thing. Remember me, I'm the one who lives ancient culture. I love ancient cultures, I love ancient sites, I love anthropology, I love historical investigation. I love biographies of important people, I just love to study the whole thing. I think I would have made a good historian, because I really love it. And so I was doing a lot of stuff with Egyptology, symbols of . . . Oh, and

also, when I was in Spain, I took some—when I was in high school, I took some very . . . Look how long it took. I took some photographs of Alhambra. And I went to Alhambra and to Granada, and I went to see flamenco with my mom and my dad. What a wonderful, audacious time we had.

And I remember when I went to Alhambra, I had a little camera, just a little camera, and here I am, what, sixteen, seventeen, and I'm taking pictures of the glyphs on the walls really close up, these glyphs, the line. These glyphs that I didn't know what they meant, but they were these beautiful, swirly lines. And it took all the way until graduate school, when all of the sudden I started doing pyramids with all these squiggly lines all over them. And when you're doing printmaking, of course, everything comes out backwards. So I had this whole formula where I would do this writing—what did I call it?—I [called it "conversation"]. It was a special kind of writing; it was like automatic writing.

KMD: Right.

LV: It would just come out. You could maybe see a word—maybe not see a word, but it looked like language somehow. And so I was doing lots of prints, including pyramids and formula, and I also was in the ceramics department at that point, and I was doing sort of mythic gods in hand-built clay.

KMD: What size were you working?

LV: Well, they varied. I mean, I did little ones—my brother has them all; he fell in love with them. He's going to give them back to me. I did sarcophagi—

KMD: So like two feet, one to two feet?

LV: Well, I'd say thirty inches high by thirty-six inches wide. [A] big head—I called it Zeus. I had little gods that had the kind of swirly lines like the Alhambra—these little pieces of clay, hand-built, that kind of made S's—and these strange little shapes, and sort of this . . . They were human, but they didn't look human. They were sort of humans in transformation, which might be the subtitle. [That will] probably end up in my epitaph: "A human in transformation." Constantly transforming, constantly reinventing itself. And I made a series of those heads. I got an A in ceramics. I made sarcophagi that were like little bitty sarcophagi that had glyphs on the side and dancing figures. I was really into the human form; I did a lot of stuff with the human form. I can hand-draw the human form.

KMD: Yeah, 'cause most of your work is not—

LV: Well, I took human out of it, and now I'm putting it back in, I'm going to put it back in again. We'll see how it works out. I did human forms for I don't know what, from 1997 all the way to 1995. And then I took the human all the way out of it and just did the milieu of humanity, as it were. So I was doing Christian things. I was doing—I did the Twelve Apostles. I did Egyptology. I [made] these strange [sarcophagi].

KMD: So what do you think that this Christian emphasis was coming from, if you'd have—

LV: It was all the spiritual orientation, and it was all coming from the European stuff, because that's what I had. It was all from Leonardo da Vinci and El Greco.

KMD: But you're not having a relationship—well, you're having a spiritual relationship, but not necessarily a religious institutional—

LV: No. I stopped going to church a long time before that. I got involved with African American spirituality for a while, in the sense that I was really—I'm still very attracted to Gospel music. I really love Gospel music, it can make me cry. In Alabama, when I was there, I got into listening to big choirs. I can still cry over that stuff, it really moves me a great deal. I would love to be in a choir like that. I would love it; it would be just great.

KMD: You talked about some of the—well, what were the musical influences at the time in graduate school, then? What were you listening to and playing and—

LV: Oh, I'm watching Japanese movies. I'm watching all the Japanese films, all the samurai. I'm watching all the samurai films, one after the other, over and over again. And I'm in the studio constantly; I'm there until two o'clock in the morning. I used to drink shots of espresso coffee.

Let's see. I'm just producing a ton of work, and I'm—my final MFA exhibition was actually monotypes I made into sculpture. I took monotype pieces of paper, leftover prints, stuff that gets thrown away, and I

dyed them in Procion dyes. I bought a big tray, and I would put the paper—I would draw on it with matte medium in that writing glyph stuff, then I would put them in these big trays of Procion dyes, and dye them blue and dye them orange and dye them all these colors. And then I would take them out and paint on them again if I wanted to, and then I would fold them and make them into three-dimensional sculptural objects. I made a whole series of those that ended up in Plexiglas boxes that I think is some of the best work I've ever done in my life.

By that time I was involved in the Chicano community, and I was basically just going right over everybody's head. I just basically got up and went all the way on top of everybody's head. And that was basically the beginning of the end for me as a Chicano artist making Chicano art, because I had no context for the *barrio*. I had no context for urban life, in the sense of the *barrio*. I didn't have [it]. The context that I had was this eclectic international mix.

KMD: But you had your family, the one you came back to California for.

LV: I knew what it meant to be proud of one's family, I knew what it meant to be proud and in love with one's neighborhood. I knew what it meant to feel love and compassion and respect for one's cousins and aunts and uncles. And they were—loved me so deeply that they allowed me and welcomed me to be anything and everything that I wanted to become. So it wasn't enough to have been born in Boyle Heights, to be a third-generation Californian, to be born of Chicano parents. It wasn't enough. There was something that I was missing, and I think it was the cultural viewpoint. I didn't have a "quote-unquote" Chicano cultural viewpoint at that point, [at least] in the view of the people that I met and knew. There was a few people who could wrap their brain around what I wanted to say, but [for] most people, there as no context for them to understand what I was doing. Carlos Almaraz was one of the few people who didn't seem to care. It was kind of like, "Wow, this is some good shit. Yeah, this is some good shit, go ahead and do this."

KMD: What year are you getting your MFA?

LV: Let's see, I came into town in '74. I graduated in '77. And I started at Self Help Graphics in early '75.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: Okay, we're starting again. Linda was talking about her MFA years.

LV: I had John de Heras, who is still out there and working. He is a Chicano who was on my committee. He was doing videos at the time, of really esoteric stuff, truly out—just really esoteric things. I remember one [that] comes to mind. He was doing the back of somebody's head, reminiscent of Salomon [Huerta]. And it was shaking, the head was just shaking. Like if you took the camera and just kind of—it was a video, at that point it was all video. It wasn't digital; it was all video. And so I had John on my committee, and I had no trouble with my committee. They never said . . . And my thesis was on Egyptology. My thesis was on Egyptology. And I was doing a series of pieces called Microcosm/Macrocosm. And it was all about this idea, it was all about this concept about if you look at something that's very small in a microscope, it begins to look like something that's very large. It takes on the same kind of a feel of a planet. If you look at a cell or any small object, it looks like a planet with moons going around it and stuff like this. And I was just very enthralled with that whole spiritual concept of, you know, you and I are ants, these little ants sitting out here; we're specks of dust.

And I really still love that idea a great deal, that that's how life is for me. You and I, our conversation today is very important, because we're here with each other and because I'm able to share my story and because you're such an attentive listener, because the project is such a wonderful project to be a part of. But in the full picture of everything in the world, it becomes a very, very small speck. And I really, really like that, because I think it's a spiritual orientation that allows you to really appreciate the microcosm, right, but to understand the macrocosm of the world, and what actions really mean. How meaningless things can be, and yet how important every little speck is.

KMD: So you were working in what media for this project?

LV: I was doing lithography monotypes. By the time I was done, I was monotyping. I was monotyping everything. That's why I don't monotype today, because I already did all my monotypes, I did hundreds of them. I sold them all. I don't own any of them anymore. They're all gone. I have pictures, though. And I made all these monotypes, and I wrote this really esoteric paper on Egyptology, and the triangle that I was using, and the symbols—all these symbols I was using and the writing and the whole thing. I have it. I saved that too. And my committee—I don't remember any trouble with my committee. I don't remember having to go back and rewrite or go back and do this or go back and do that. Once again, they just said, "Let Linda go. Just let Linda have what she wants to have."

KMD: Were there any classes that honed your technique, or gave you different ideas, or—

LV: Well, etching is an amazing process. I'm a great lover of etchings, and that's what I collect. What I collect—as a collector, I collect etchings and lithographs by Mexican masters. My dream is to have a Roualt as well, and to have a very good Picasso before it's all over, which I will have. I love lithography. If there was someone who still worked on stone, I would love to go back to that.

Just makes me think, I went to the Getty the other day, and I'm doing all this research on Grecian and Roman vases and ceramic work. [And] I saw Picasso everywhere. I said, "Oh, this is where he got it." I saw Picasso everywhere. The noses, the lines, everything. It was amazing for me to draw that line, because I'm always trying to draw these inferences into a fine point. So, I enjoyed the rollers, the roller techniques of intaglio and the grinding of the stones and the justification of the paper to the stone and the mixing of the colors and the hand tools that you used in the copper and in the zinc plates. All the work that really—you know, your hands just turn into mud—and all the fine line work, and I love the studios themselves.

KMD: So you're doing things that your other classmates aren't doing?

LV: Yeah, I was monotyping; nobody was monotyping. There was nobody who was monotyping. I did a piece with [Lita] Albuquerque at that point where I was monotyping her naked body. Did a series of monotypes for her. And they gave it to me because I was doing monotypes at that point. I was just going in and drawing on stones and pulling paper. Drawing on stones and pulling paper, drawing on stones and pulling paper, and having stacks and stacks and stacks and stacks of paper. I love paper. And that's what kind of led me into watercolor, because I love paper so much. And the sculpture is all made out of paper. I just love paper. The whole—it was only three years. It wasn't very long to be . . . I did some wonderful etchings at Whittier College. I did some very nice lithography at the University of Madrid.

And then I spent three years at Cal State University Long Beach. I didn't continue in printmaking because it's just so damned expensive, and that's one of the reasons why I did it in graduate school. Painting's nothing in expense compared to etching. The presses are very expensive. You have to have enough locale for them. The inks are very costly. [And] the fumes are incredibly toxic. You end up with all kinds of brain damage if you don't have the right kind of ventilation. There's a lot of rules and regulations. But what I learned from the process was how to look at etchings, and how to look at lithographs, and how to appreciate really fine work. I have a José Fors. It's probably my favorite piece in the world. I love that piece. It reminds me of Sartre, *No Exit*. And I just read—what is it, I just read the Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre papers—oh, do I love that. That was great fun.

And so there's like this literature sort of influence in looking at the piece. I'm influenced by writers and—it's gravure, man, that thing is gravure. And I did gravure and it is hard work. You have to have muscles like nobody's business. And not only technique, but precision. There's so much precision involved in that, in the cutting of the line. Oh, everything. I've become a real connoisseur or a lover of that, through that study.

KMD: So the artistic influence sounds like it's been going on for quite some time, and then you've been hinting at, you know, you get a job at Self Help and [are] introduced to a Chicano influence? You want to talk about that?

LV: Oh, yeah, let's talk about it. The beginning and the end of my life. So David Starr said go to Self Help, so I went to Self Help Graphics to meet with Sister Karen [Boccalero]. They were still at the 2111 Brookline

Avenue, in the middle of Boyle Heights. I'm not unaccustomed to interesting and foreign environments. I'm perfectly fine wherever I go. And I bring in three portfolios.

KMD: Three?

LV: Yes, three. . . . Richard Duardo was there when I had my interview, and he made a comment about it, "I never met anybody who has …" Well, I said, "This is my spring portfolio, this is my summer portfolio, and this is my fall portfolio," because I used to group things according to what I accomplished. And they were all works on paper. They were prints and watercolors at that point, and they were a combination of the heads, those heads that I was making—the ceramics—but now in watercolor, these really unusual sort of de Chirico the kind of surrealistic-looking things. And I showed Sister Karen all three of my portfolios and talked to her about the work. We actually talked about the work and the impetus and the driving force and the influences, and all these things which I like to talk about.

And Karen hired me for the job. I worked on the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio, and I taught silk-screen printing to elementary school East LA students for three years. I had a California Arts Council grant for three years in a row. I even read for the state Department of Education to review and critique proposals for arts education in the state of California at that point.

KMD: They had the grant, or you went out and got it once you had—

LV: They had the grant when I first came, and then I wrote the grant with them.

KMD: To renew?

LV: To renew, that's correct. And I learned how to write grants with Sister Karen at Self Help Graphics. And that's been my whole income for my entire life. I'm indebted to Karen for that opportunity, even though it was hair-rising hell, because Karen was pretty much a learn-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of girl. And that's hard. And we did the Day of the Dead, our very first [of the] Day[s] of the Dead. They were very old-fashioned, with the paper—the *papel picado*—and the very old-fashioned altars with the palm fronds and the bananas and the oranges. They were very, very old-fashioned altars, and we got together and had dinner together. We all brought food, and put pictures up of our grandma and our grandpa and everything, and it was very much a spiritual activity. And we actually said prayers before dinner, and it was done in a way that was . . . Mike Amescua was there . . . at the time, and he was involved in Native American ceremonial and interest, which he still is today. You can see the influences in his work if you look at his portfolio, not in his commission work. His commission work has taken him in another direction, which I know, personally, that doesn't make him as happy as he is doing his own imagery. Who wouldn't be, right?

KMD: Right.

LV: And so Mike Amescua would be there doing the—with the sage and the circle of prayer, and Sister Karen would be doing her—

KMD: Catholic—

LV: Her Catholic thing, but she was very accommodating and very open to prayer of any kind, and she loved artists. And the reason why Karen, I think, liked me was because I was smart, I was prolific, and I was very hardworking. Even though I was pretty "hippified"—I was still pretty much out there half-naked, partying pretty hard. I wasn't married yet, so …

KMD: You were working the mobile studio. That's a part-time job while you're going—

LV: Yes. What I did was, I worked for Self Help Graphics, and then I created a folder with samples of the work I produced and a paper on what I produced with the children, like a whole paper, with samples of everything I did. I submitted it to the art department, the education department, and the Chicano studies department, and got three classes' worth of credits for working at Self Help Graphics, plus I got paid. So I had more time to produce. I had more time to just be in the studio.

I think I worked at Barrio Mobile Arts Studio Tuesdays and Thursdays, and basically I handed all that in for all my credits. And everybody just said, "Oh, let her do what she's going to do." And Sister Karen—well, Mike Amescua and Sister Karen together had this idea, which was the excellent idea. I think if the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio was still alive today, Self Help Graphics would have an income. The income-generating

idea, right, to incorporate Mexican, pre-Columbian, specifically, [into teaching kids.] But they also had a colonial work, and *folklórico* kinds of work. Alfredo de Batuc was there then, Richard Duardo was there, John Valadez was there. To incorporate that into the curriculum in teaching kids.

KMD: Was that the first year they were doing it, or the second . . . They started that way?

LV: I think they started that way. I think it was going one year before me, and then I came in. And Mike was there one year before, but everybody was there before. Carlos Bueno. I can't remember the photographer's name, I'm sure we could look it up right now. And Cecilia Castañeda-Quintero was there—her name at that point was Cecilia Castañeda. They were there the first year, then they all left, and they left for different reasons, of which I never really bothered to study out, 'cause the politics really didn't interest me. What interested me was going to graduate school, having a job, and working with the kids was fun.

KMD: You did enjoy that?

LV: Oh yes, I did, very much. I used to take them through meditation practices before we'd start painting. We'd sit in a circle and breathe deep and imagine things, and then go work. It was really kind of fun. They liked me, and I liked them a lot. And we produced a lot of really good work. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I donated all the work to Self Help Graphics. I donated everything to them, and I'm praying that the archives will remain intact, because I gave them everything I had. Photographs, silk-screen prints, slides—

KMD: All the stuff you did while working at the mobile studio.

LV: Everything, I gave them everything, figuring that was the best place to give it, right? Figuring that was the best place to put it. So what they had installed in the curriculum was to study Mesoamerican symbology, which of course was right up my alley. It was another ancient culture, it was right here, and it was mine. Wow!

KMD: Was there a surprise for you? Like, "Oh, I come from this—"

LV: I had no idea that Mexico—I discovered the pyramids, I discovered the gods, I discovered—everything that I discovered in Europe, I discovered in Mexico. Everything I discovered in Egypt and Europe all of the sudden was open to me in Mexico. And Mexico was right here, I could travel to it, my husband was interested in going. And so I started collecting books. I started reading. I started going to museums. I started traveling and going to all the [Mesoamerican] pyramid sites. I've been to all of them multiple times. And incorporating that into the curriculum, and talking with kids about the history of Mexico and stuff, which . . .

The colonial stuff never really interested me. I'd had enough of the Christianity at this point. And I just kind of had enough of all the religious stuff, that religious stuff, all the gold stuff, even though when you see the new stuff, you'll have a laugh. I'm actually going back, I'm making a whole trip back. And I really enjoyed that a lot. It was really a lot of fun, and I learned a lot about the different gods, and I learned a lot about the different pyramids.

KMD: Were you making a connection, a cultural—

LV: Artistically?

KMD: A cultural connection, at that point?

LV: I was trying to. I was really trying to. I was trying to find my way, but unfortunately . . . You know, I was in love with Ron, who's an English American guy. I was pretty much dedicated to him, and we've been married for thirty years, so there's got to be something there that's working. At that point, there weren't very many interracial marriages. In 1977 there weren't very many interracial marriages of any kind, really. Black certainly didn't marry white; black didn't marry Asian. We have this today a lot. And Mexicans didn't marry white people. There was this whole thing about it.

KMD: Were you getting that from your family, or just other folks that you—

LV: No, I didn't get it from my family. My family knew better. "Let her do what she's going to do; she'll be fine." This is what everybody gives me. "She's a hard worker. She's got her mind on it. Just let her go; she'll be okay." I'd already raised all the hell I wanted to raise. I was done raising hell, I was tired of raising hell. Raising hell takes a lot of energy. I married Ron in 1977, and actually I finished my degree in 1978, now that I

think about it—the spring of 1978. And I got a lot of flak. I got a lot of flak, and it pretty much destroyed my confidence in my marriage, and—

KMD: Who is this coming from, I'm curious?

LV: A lot of different people. A lot of snappy remarks. Not from within my family, but just from contemporaries. It didn't do me any good; it hurt me quite a lot. Ron and I were pretty much on shaky ground for about seven years, and we stuck it out. And it was very difficult. In the meantime, I was going through major surgery for polycystic ovary syndrome, and having two miscarriages, and then finally having two C-sections. In the meantime, [I was] becoming involved in the Chicano *indigena* movement, which seemed to be much more interesting to me than the Chicano art movement.

It was . . . Sister Karen was really very open. She could see beyond the *barrio*. I think I was very misunderstood by a lot of people. I just didn't—the vernacular just was not mine. And I remember it was a very painful process for me. It was a really painful series of years, where you're young and suddenly you're finding—you're meeting people who are saying, "Well, you're not doing it right. You're doing it wrong." And, you know, young women in their twenties are really pretty malleable. And I became malleable for the first time in my life; I became malleable. Not to my own mind and to my own experience and to my own sense of things, which was just great, but to this exterior force called the Chicano art movement where there was a [prescribed] set of symbols. There was a way to talk, for Christ's sake. There was a way to dress. There was just this whole, full-blown cultural community that had its own vernacular, its own symbology, its own way of producing its own symbols, everything.

KMD: So you meet face-to-face with this rigid—

LV: Well, it looked rigid to me. To them it wasn't rigid.

KMD: Yeah. And that's through Self Help, the people you're meeting through Self Help.

LV: Yeah. Ron and I sort of weathered it all, and I was just floored for, I don't know what, maybe seven straight years. I was floored, for the first time in my life not knowing who I was. For the first time in my life, not knowing who I was, and going through a new marriage to a white man that was obviously outside of the context, to going through trying to begin a family, and taking seven years to produce my first son, and then having a second son, by a miracle, what is it, twenty-one months later. After that, everything settled. After that, everything's finally settled back down again, and I kind of came up with, well . . . At Self Help Graphics, because of the context of what we were learning, and the whole Mesoamerican thing, it was interesting to me and I enjoyed it a great deal.

And traveling to Mexico was really wonderful. This was really great. I didn't know that many people even in the movement that were going around Mexico, going to all the sights and checking everything out. They were painting, but they had never been there. Mike told me about a ceremony called the sun dance ceremony up in Sacramento, and one day, I told my husband, I said, "I'm going to go up and check out this ceremony." I heard . . . one of my dreams as a child—this is going all the way around—was to make it to Africa before tribalism was dead. I said that when I was maybe twelve years old. I really want to make it to Africa, to the Congo, before tribalism's dead. I've got to see tribalism before it's wiped off the face of the planet. I want to see ancient culture living. The shards are beautiful, the ruins are fabulous. But I want to see the living culture. I love ancient culture. Living ancient culture is one of my very favorite things on the planet, besides twenty-first-century digital art. And when he told me about the ceremony, it was Native American, it was Dennis Banks—he was in that movie, *The Last of the Mohicans*. Dennis was my chief. Hold on, I think I'm jumping ship here.

KMD: Did Michael—did Mike Amescua go—

LV: I went alone. I drove up to Sacramento all by myself, not knowing where I was going, with a tent and a little canister, a cook canister, not knowing what I was getting into. Really. And some freeze-dried vegetables and stuff, having no idea where I was going. Ron let me go. This is my husband, he goes, "Okay, go ahead." I jumped in my little Toyota. I got in the car with my sleeping bag and my little tent and drove to Sacramento. And on my own I was going, "Do you know where DQU [Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl University]

is? Anybody know where DQU is?" And I drove into DQU, and I got there ten days before the ceremony started, which is exactly ceremonial correct, It's correct action to come in ten days before the ceremony, because there's a series of purification days. I got there ten days before the ceremony, stayed the entire time, and was there in time for the women's circle talks and to help them set up.

KMD: And they just welcomed you right in?

LV: Totally. Completely.

KMD: Was that when you started—

LV: They were more welcoming to me than anyplace else I had found in California. At this point, Sister Karen was very open to me, and certain members of Self Help Graphics sort of . . . They were curious about me and kind of appreciated [that] I was coming from someplace else. But the Indians just said, "Come on in." At that point the movement was so young that they needed any able body. But look at me. At that point, I had hair down to my waist—

KMD: You look Indian.

LV: I look Indian, for Christ's sake. I don't open my mouth and I could get in anywhere, and that's basically what happened to me for thirty years in the Indian community. I was welcomed everywhere. I ended up at all kinds of areas of responsibility. Drawing crews and getting crews to go places and doing things.

KMD: Now, are you meeting other Chicanos who are also finding that spiritual path?

LV: That's what I've been trying to tell people for the last thirty years, and then nobody's listened to me. The Native American community is one-third Chicano. It's a third Chicano-Méxicano-Latino. It used to be mostly just Chicanos, now it's Chicano, Méxicano, Latinos, Centro Americano. It's from everywhere; it's a whole continent. And it's over all there. [A] third of the doggone population is there. You see Spanish speaking everywhere. It's amazing, it's unbelievable. It's incredible, it's wonderful.

So I went up to Sacramento, and I stayed the whole time. And I fell in love, deeply in love, with an ancient culture that was my Congo. And I loved the symbology, and I loved the old songs, and I loved the intention of it. And what I might say is that art, the art world, has a variety of intentions. And the purest is to create image and statements, and the least pure of it is for career and to become mega-stars, kind of like Hollywood. In a lot of ways, it's very similar. The spiritual community has its own variety of personalities, and they're not all there for the right reasons. I don't want to be too altruistic about it; it's like any other spiritual community. You have the true believers and then the people who are the opportunists. But generally speaking, what you find is a lot of people who believe in something greater than themselves, and the truth of it is a very, very beautiful thing.

And Native American ceremony, North American ceremony, is exact to ceremony throughout the continent. If you study North American ceremony, you will understand Mexican ceremony, Central American ceremony, ceremony coming out of the Amazons. You'll understand it all, because it all has the same basic list or grouping or family of symbols and signs. It's not real difficult, once you get into it. You have to stay in it for a while to be able to gather it, because they don't allow you to write notes and things like that. So I ended up going to a ceremony one time where the Flores de Aztlán were presenting. [This was] a dance group that was run by Josefina Gallardo. Ana Luisa Espinosa, [and] Cui Cui Rangel—a very well-known Chicano vocalist, very renowned and respected—and Norma Pedregon [were members of Las Flores] at that point. Cecilia Castañeda was also [working at] Self Help Graphics. I saw them dancing, and I just had to do it. I just had to do it. So I entered into what I considered to be the heart of the Chicano movement, the soul of it. The heart and soul of the movement. Not the peripheral stuff, all the peripheral things I was getting tripped over by, and all of these things. And I felt that I belonged because of my spiritual intention, my desire to have personal spiritual growth outside of the Catholic Church. And my interest in ancient culture and symbols and songs and music, in all of the things that make ancient culture so interesting.

KMD: So this group had been in formation for a while, or—?

LV: Not very long. They'd only been around maybe for—I couldn't swear to it, but I'd say maybe two years. Maybe two years.

KMD: And you become a member of the group.

LV: And I became a member of Flores de Aztlán.

KMD: Now, where were they located?

LV: In LA. We met every Monday night for seven years, and we practiced. We wrote . . . Josefina Gallardo choreographed everything. Cui Cui Rangel made all the costuming, and we all made jewelry and little other pieces that we had that we wore, all based on all kinds of heavy-duty symbology.

KMD: Where did you do your rehearsing?

LV: In East LA.

KMD: A studio there?

LV: A house, a private home. In the backyard of a private home. Around houses. Ceremonies all over the place—that's another thing people don't know. There's circles everywhere. I'm involved with circles now, and they're everywhere. One of the circles I'm involved with is in East LA, right off of Whittier Boulevard, around the corner from where my Aunt Rosie lives. I go see her after ceremony when I go out there.

KMD: So the group is—

LV: Centered in LA.

KMD: Centered in LA and doing performances—

LV: *Danza*.

KMD: *Danza*.

LV: We did *danza* in universities, colleges, Native American ceremony and Chicano ceremony. And this is [the] early 1980s.

KMD: And that's normal to you, that there's the Native American and the Chicano communities.

LV: Side by side.

KMD: Right.

LV: But there was also specifically Chicano ceremony. There was the Day of the Dead in Los Angeles, there was Fiesta de Maíz in Los Angeles. There was Chicano Park Day in San Diego, there was Fiesta de Colores in Sacramento. And so we were this traveling troupe, up and down the state. And we presented at all different kinds of colleges. We did teachings of all kinds. We did teachings of all kinds. We called it teachings and presentations. And we basically wore beautiful, beautiful dresses and gowns—

KMD: Are you making any money off of this, or is it—

LV: No. No, there's no money. There's no money in the Native American traditions. There's barter and there's donations, but there's no money.

KMD: So this comes out of a spiritual—

LV: A spiritual place, that's right. It's like doing volunteer work at your church. And we did sweat lodge ceremony, and we went to [the] sun dance, and Josie Talamantez [from Sacramento] was a sun dancer, one of my sun dance sisters. She danced at DQU. I was there to support her; that was ages ago. And I danced in Sacramento, and I danced in South Dakota, and I danced in Arizona.

KMD: And this is with children?

LV: This is before children, with miscarriages, with children, after children.

KMD: So are you taking on different roles, or . . . You said that certain people did the choreography, and someone else did . . . Are you taking on other roles, or—?

LV: This is an interesting point, because I was in the Flores de Aztlán, and they would need drawings done for fliers, and they wouldn't choose me. My work was declined by everyone in the group on more than one occasion, because the work didn't fit.

KMD: Didn't fit how?

LV: I never understood it. In the middle of all this, I'm curating shows for Chicanos all over Southern California. I have a list of shows that I curated, including all the major players, all over Southern California, on my own, sometimes with pay, many times without pay, picking up work and driving it all over the place, shows all over Southern California in small city facilities and non-profit facilities, curating shows at Self Help

Graphics, putting up work there, and just doing everything that I knew how to do in my life, if you'll excuse my expression, to prove to myself and to everyone else that I was a Chicana. And that's why I'm where I'm at today.

KMD: So this sounds like a really—

LV: Difficult time.

KMD: Difficult period, because no one's accepting you, and yet you're accepted by certain communities—

LV: Giving, giving, giving, giving. And my husband stood around and watched me do it, and he's just been waiting for me wake up, because it became—you know, there's always those questions of, "What is Chicano art?" Well, I came up with an answer recently that I thought was a pretty good answer. Chicano art has more to do with community than anything else.

KMD: So if you're part of that community—

LV: Then you're a Chicano, and you make Chicano art. Alfredo de Batuc is not Chicano, he's Méxicano. But he's become a part of the community, because he's chosen the community. So he is Chicano. If you choose the community, then it is yours. It's about the people that you surround yourself with. You're Chicano because you go to Avenue 50, because you go to Tropico de Nopal, because you go to shows, because you support the artists and the community because you're friends with them, you know what I'm saying? This is what makes you Chicano, not what you produced, not where you were born.

KMD: But you're partly pretty much involved in the community, if you're doing *danza* at these major events. I mean, if you're doing Day of the Dead, one of the first Day of the Deads, and I'm pretty sure you must have done it each year?

LV: Oh, yeah. For eight years, I was at Self Help. For eight years.

KMD: Oh, so three years with—

LV: With the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio, and then five years after that. My husband designed and built the first lighting system for the gallery, Galería Otra Vez. Mike Amescua and I had the first exhibition at Galería Otra Vez for the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio at the old place. I helped Karen and Mike and the whole crew move Self Help Graphics to its new location. I went with Sister Karen to look at sites to decide where we were going to move.

KMD: Really?

LV: Yes.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: Linda was telling me about her work she did with Self Help Graphics in the '70s.

LV: Yeah. In the '80s, late '70s and early '80s. And there was a CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] building out on First Street. It's still there, it's a white building. It's like on a little bit of a hill on the south side of the street, but all the rooms in it were triangular, little "itty bitty" triangular rooms. I said, "Karen,"—I remember this specifically—I said, "Karen, we can't come here because there's no place to do anything. You can't have a studio in here, it's too small. You can't teach, because it's too small." And it was all divided up into these little itty bitty rooms, kind of like cells for nuns and priests. I said, "We got to get rooms that are bigger than this, or we're not going to be able to do it." And I remember her taking me with her and us boxing everything up, and I created a—I put A's on everything that belonged in one room, B's that belonged in another room, C's, everything was marked C, so we'd know where to put it. Then we had the schematic of the building and we moved it all down there. It was hell—it was just absolute hell. This is in the middle of *danza*, marriage, miscarriages, becoming a Chicana.

KMD: Now, the work you did after the Mobile—

LV: I was doing all the sculpture during this time, all of the sculpture, all of—

KMD: Oh, that's when you're doing—

LV: That's when I was doing all that sculpture, metamorphosis with nature.

KMD: Were you using the studio at Self Help?

LV: Oh, no. They tried to give me one, but it was really too scary for me. I had one on the bottom floor for a while, but I like to have music or TV running, and I was—I liked to be there late or at odd hours, and a couple times I had strangers like banging on the door, and I got scared. And so I got a studio—I had a studio in Long Beach—one, two, three different studios in Long Beach. I've always had a studio. Always. The only time I didn't have a studio was for I think about three years when I had Galería de Las Américas, because I couldn't afford a studio. And I painted out of my house, which was very difficult. But I managed to have two one-woman shows based on what I could paint in my children's toy room, where I pushed all the toys to one side and put up an easel and had a cup of coffee and watched TV 'til the wee hours and painted. And I did pretty well, considering. But then, you know, I'm the kind of person that can paint or produce regardless of the circumstance. Nothing stops me. How could you?

KMD: So what other roles did you play then at Self Help?

LV: Let's see. I was—I helped curate in the gallery, I helped with Barrio Mobile Arts Studio. I was an administrator for a while. I administrated and wrote grants.

KMD: Right, you talked about that.

LV: Yeah. Mike and me and Sister Karen were basically running the place for quite some time. And Sister Beth was there, and Sister Pius was the bookkeeper.

KMD: And this is—

LV: And we did the Day of the Dead—

KMD: This is a paid job?

LV: Yeah. And we did the Day of the Dead. We had a role of activities. And we had—what else? Oh, I know. René Acosta, that's her name now. René Acosta was there, only her name wasn't René Acosta [then]. It was Virginia [Torres]. She changed her name, and I never got it—but it was Virginia. We had an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant to study the Day of the Dead. There was no material at all. That's one of the reasons we went to Mexico: I went to Mexico to collect books. I went to Mexico with my husband to collect books.

KMD: So you helped create this program then?

LV: Yeah. We were all together creating it, the Day of the Dead, for the first time. We brought down Teatro Campesino. They did that really big one at one of the high schools there in East LA.

KMD: And even though you're doing this work, you're not getting a sense that you're a member of this community?

LV: I felt like I was a member of the Chicano *indigena* community, and that I was a worker in the Chicano art community, but that I was not going to change my image for anybody.

KMD: Now, you're certainly able to speak Spanish then.

LV: I speak Spanish better than everybody. [*laughter*]

KMD: Did that influence your work then?

LV: The sculpture was influenced by all the paper that was left over from my degree in printmaking. And I came up with this cockamamie idea to make [handmade] paper, because people were making paper then. And I came up with this even cockamamie idea of collecting wood from downtown Los Angeles. I was in downtown LA with my studio there—I had this huge space, it was like two thousand square feet—and I would collect wood from all around town. I'd be driving around and see a piece of wood, and I [thought], "So all this is from what's left of the trees in downtown LA during the 1980s." And I had this cockamamie idea of putting paper on this stuff and creating these metamorphic heads that kind of look like the ceramic stuff that I was doing. And I think that was influenced by *indigena*, by nature—once again nature, once again the gods, as it were, the nature gods—by the study of ancient culture. I just think . . . I have cockamamie ideas that come from cockamamie sources, and I just put them together and see what happens. And usually they coalesce pretty well. They come together in a pretty nice little vision there.

KMD: I guess what I'm surprised at, in terms of the sculpture, is that I didn't realize it was downtown trees.

LV: This, I picked up this piece—there's a story in this. I used to hang out with the Streetscapers a lot. And they had a studio, if you remember, down there by Cooks Crating, and there was a huge lot down there. I was driving away out of their studio one evening. And I used to go over there to party with those guys, and hang out and look at them paint and stuff like that, and they were nice to me. They were like my—they seemed to appreciate me. And David Botello is still one of my very kindest supporters, one of my very kindest supporters to this day. And I think he's a good painter, and one that's been forgotten, unfortunately. He doesn't get what he deserves. And I think he's a good painter, and I think he does the Chicano—what I call the *la pura chicanada*—as well as anybody.

KMD: Yeah. The one you have here. [*referring to painting*]

LV: And so I was driving away from their studio, and there was this giant tree, beautiful pine tree. It was huge, it was giant. It had just been felled. It was dripping with sap all over it. And here I am at the sun dance, where the tree is a central icon. The tree of life. All this. The tree—I wanted to say something about the tree, too. And I went in and I scavenged and found this one branch that I could put in my car, and I picked it up and put it in the car. [This is] one of my favorite stories. It's a piece that's in my storage area. It's another one that I have that doesn't come out very often because it's so big. I was in high heels and stockings and a skirt, and I saw a huge tree, a dead tree on a street side in downtown LA. And I stopped my car and pulled over, and you can imagine me with this tree, in high heels and a skirt, running and putting it in my car. I had a van at that point, so it would fit. But that's one of my favorite stories. I used to hire homeless people to bring wet stuff that I'd have to leave in the studio for months so it would dry. So I think that the . . . it's interesting you would ask that, because I think the coalescing, the sculpture, which did not get shown, nobody would show it—that's why I have it all.

KMD: It showed once, didn't it?

LV: Where?

KMD: In the '90s, when I was here.

LV: Where?

KMD: Not the Woman's Building. It was—

LV: No, it was William Grant Still [Arts Center], yes?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: This crazy, cockamamie curator put them all up in one place at one time, which was insane. But no one would show them. The Chicano thing?

KMD: Right. No, that wouldn't match the—

LV: It was right over the top. Just like the formal paper stuff—

KMD: Looking back now, it's so spiritual. It's so oriented to the greater being.

LV: No, I have theories about it. My theories aren't fun. You know, the Mexicans don't like the Indians. I don't think the Chicanos like the Indians either.

KMD: And right now in the academic circles that I circulate in—

LV: They don't like the Indians either.

KMD: The native people are very angry with Chicanos claiming indigeneity.

LV: That's right, and I believe that they're right.

KMD: I would imagine you would know some of these things.

LV: I know all about it. I've been dedicated to *indigena* for thirty years of my life. And I believe that that's the reason why my work—one of the reasons why my work was never understood or accepted, because the premise of the work was ancient culture. And why wouldn't I come from my own ancient culture? What sense . . . Of course, it makes all the sense in the world. Why wouldn't I do that? I think that Mexicans don't like *indigena*, and I don't think Chicanos like it either. I think it scares the hell out of them. God forbid [they] would be called *indigena*, and they'd be put down like all the rest of the Indians.

KMD: But then on the other hand, there's a kind of—

LV: Reverence.

KMD: *Pura chicanada* that's very—

LV: About the symbols. But that's—they're not involved. They just appropriate the symbols. That's just another form of appropriation as far as I can tell. I mean, it's great to wear the *calendario* on your chest, but do you know what it means? Do you know what the four creations were? Do you know that we're in the fifth now? Do you know what the fifth sun means? Do you know what these glyphs means? Do you have any idea what this is? People don't study it, they just wear it. Not that everybody does it; I don't mean to say that. I know there's lots of students and academics who do study it and do appreciate it.

KMD: But the people you were meeting in the '70s and '80s—

LV: They were—no, they were about the barrio and the Catholic Church. I mean, if you look at the symbols of Chicano art, you'll find more—the Virgen, for instance. I don't do the Virgen. I go, "God, the Virgen's so overdone." Let's [make images of] Tonantzín, let's do somebody else. Let's do Earth Mother, which is what I've been doing for a very long time. But I think that's my theory, and I'm glad—thank you for agreeing with me, because it helps me to believe that my theory is correct. For me, Chicano *indigena*, as I said before, was the heart and soul of it. Why not go all the way to the source of it? Why not find out about it? I mean, I dove in head, line, and sinker. My children went to ceremony with me; my children danced with me.

KMD: They did?

LV: Yes. My sons danced with me for five years. That's what that stuff is up on the wall that I showed you up there. They sacrificed on behalf of the people and the traditions. And there's been this whole—there's this whole thing going on that's been going on for a long time, which is almost dead now, thank God. But what was happening was that the strongest Indian group in the United States at that point was the Lakota, the Sioux people. They were the strongest, they had the most numbers. They still had their language, and they had many of their ceremonies intact. Of course, you're talking about the early '80s, when everybody's pretty still militant. You've got the Wounded Knee, Leonard Peltier, and all that stuff going on, where you've got all this fighting with the government and people being in prison and stuff. So they were pretty intense about not including white people in ceremony. And things have changed in certain ways that I can explain to you if you're interested.

So my husband never went with me to ceremony, and never went with me to Chicano ceremony, because the Chicanos that were in ceremony were as much against having white people around as the Indians were about having white people around. I'm going, "Yes, but one of the teachings says that God can't see in the dark of the sweat lodge, so what are we talking about?" I was torn, psychologically and emotionally, emotionally and psychologically, between by life as a younger woman and this world that I was trying to find that I belonged to, that I was trying to find a way into, without abandoning my husband, without abandoning what my father had given me. I could cry. Without abandoning the incredible opportunities. They're always saying, "Well, why don't people get educated and come back to the community?" Well, good God and America, that's what I was doing.

And so there was sweat lodge ceremony around the Day of the Dead at that time, and there was a lot of Sioux influence everywhere, and the Sioux were very specific about what they did. Because they had it; they weren't making it up. This isn't ritual; this is ceremony. This isn't ritual. That's a whole other conversation.

KMD: I hear that distinction, yeah.

LV: Boy, there's a whole—there's a whole feminist—let's talk about feminist spirituality on this thing. I'd love to talk about it, because that's a real fun one. That's a good one. And so you had the Sioux, and they were coming into California. And Dennis Banks was doing the sun dance up in DQU. And DQU was really functioning then. They have a Chicano department, and they had all—it was like the first place where Chicano culture was actually being studied, and there was actually historical study being done and collection of materials and all the kinds of things. And I fit in because no one could tell what I was. I had very straight long hair, and I'm a chameleon. My father taught me to be a chameleon. I can go anywhere and just sort

of slide in. And before you know it, I'm looking like everybody and I'm talking like everybody. Not out of mockery, but out of respect for what I'm walking into. Never out of mockery, but out of . . . When in Rome, do as the Romans. We're going to a new country now, so we've got to learn to speak the language and enjoy the food that they give you. All the things that my father taught me about being respectful in different situations. And the California Indian Group wasn't even happening then.

Now there's a huge California Indian movement that started back in—let's see, my kids were little then. I'd say maybe fifteen years ago, the California movement started with the ghost dance. I went to ghost dance. I ghost danced. I sun danced, I ghost danced. I mean, I went into it, hook, line, and sinker. And I fit in and loved it, and it was just my cup of tea. I loved it. I poured water in the prison systems for fifteen years in California. I still pour water—

KMD: Now, were you doing that with a group, or was that—

LV: By myself.

KMD: By yourself.

LV: By this time, the Flores de Aztlán was a cultural group that was doing this wonderful teaching. I have some beautiful photographs, some wonderful, wonderful photographs. I called my girlfriends; we'd get tons of them. There's so much material. I've been wanting to do a historical piece on that alone. Because I think it's very important. I think we inspired a lot of woman that—they're still coming around.

KMD: Well, the group I went to last night.

LV: Yes. Yes, that's right. We were like way ahead of our time. We were like twenty years ahead of our time. Which is—that's where I like to be. Let's be twenty years ahead of our time. But then when I started going off into deep ceremony, what I will call deep ceremony, not to imply that the other isn't deep but just to imply further into the milieu.

KMD: A greater commitment.

LV: A greater commitment. Then I left my sisters behind. I was the first one to become a sun dancer. Ana Louisa followed behind me.

KMD: Did the group dissolve, or are you just saying—

LV: After seven or eight years, the group dissolved, and I continued with my commitment into it. And it was very easy to be there, Karen. That's the funny thing about it. It's much easier for me to be an *indigena* than to be in the Chicano art world. Today, I see the Chicano art world as riddled with a lot of difficulties that for some reason we're not able to coalesce or talk about properly. And as I think I've indicated, some of it is the market. People don't seem to be interested in discussing what that means. This whole bit about the pond never being big enough. Too many artists for too [few] institutions or studies. A misunderstanding of what the art world is even about, or the art market is really about. There's just so many levels of complexities. And it's not to imply that the Chicano community has a corner on these difficulties; it's everywhere. But the art world is just a really tough place for anybody.

KMD: So you're working with the Flores de Aztlán, but you're going deeper into your ceremonial commitment. What artistic work are you doing in the visual realm?

LV: I'm doing the sculpture, I'm doing the handmade paper on the tree fragments.

KMD: Okay. So it's that same time period.

LV: That's 1980 to 1990. I did that for ten years.

KMD: Ten years.

LV: I produced many of them, but a lot of them have been lost, because I couldn't lug them around anymore. They were just trees. They biodegrade, which is interesting. They're environmental pieces. I've been doing environmental work since then. Since 1980, I've been doing environmental work, which is very important for me, because I think the heart of my commitment to Chicano *indigena*, and to *indigena* as a whole, is care for the earth, which is about environmentalism. And that's the wave that I believe I'm catching as an artist, that's the commitment that I believe will take me into opportunities. Because it's just the right time

to talk about this, and I've been committed to it through culture and prayer and activity for . . . Since in 1980, I was doing a suite called Women of Love and Integrity. Did you ever see those pieces?

KMD: It sounds familiar.

LV: Women of Love and Integrity. There's a bunch of them on the website. And basically what they were was beautiful washes, very precise and controlled figures, glowing figures, with dark blue backgrounds and red edges, and these beautiful figures. I was very pleased with the work I was able to do. Nudes, quasi-erotic, erotic nudes, beautiful erotic. Not X-rated, but just Eros, amour. Just women—I'd birth, right, and so all this feminine stuff is just pouring out of me. Your first child is born, and you're in heaven. The hell with the Chicanos, I don't care; I've got my baby. You know what I mean? The hell with the art world; I've got my child. You know those feelings that you have, where life finally makes sense.

And I was doing butterflies on heads, flowers on heads, to talk about symbology. Why do we pick symbols? This is why we tell people when they looked at the paintings, why do we pick symbols? What do you collect? "Oh, I collect elephants." "Have you ever asked yourself why you collect elephants? What elephants mean, where they come from?" It's all about that symbology again, that comes from the study of ancient culture and all these things, right, antiquities. And so I was doing symbology in that way, and I created a—I would say in about—from 1990 to 1995, I probably created about—oh, I don't know, anywhere between a hundred-fifty and two hundred gouaches, anywhere from ten by fourteen all the way to thirty by twenty-two. And they were—most of them were female forms.

KMD: And you're working in the studio?

LV: I'm working in a very small studio in Long Beach. It was one room. It wasn't as much as this room here.

KMD: What is this, twenty by —

LV: Twenty by twenty [feet].

KMD: Twenty.

LV: Twenty-four by twenty-four. It was smaller. The room was smaller than this. And I had a table with a television set and my videos, and a window. And a bucket for water, because there was no bathroom, no sink. And my brushes and my paint and like a series of little boxes. And I produced a whole series of watercolors. I mean, just tons of gouaches. And I'd like to get back to gouache. I probably will before it's over, because I'll be too tired to paint after a while, I'm sure.

KMD: So you've had a child. And where is this child when you're painting, when you're in the studio?

LV: When I'm in the studio, the baby's sleeping, the baby's being taken care of by the babysitter, the baby's with my husband, the baby's with my neighbor. I had a wonderful neighbor who helped me take care of Robert for a while. Remember, I was pregnant eleven months after Robert was born. So I had—people came to help. My crew came forward and helped me so that I could paint, and I continued to make sculpture, and I continued to make gouache on paper. I made a really large suite.

And I not only did Women of Love and Integrity, I also did a series that I've never shown anybody that I would like to bring out someday that's based on my experience in the prisons, pouring water and doing ceremonial work with women in the prisons. I did that for fifteen years. It was some of the best work I've ever done in my life. I never had any trouble going in the prisons doing ceremony, never any trouble at all.

KMD: You're doing ceremony with all kinds of women, or mostly Native—

LV: No. When they invited me, they said, "Well, you know, Linda," because it's a whole Indian world at that point, it's mostly Indian and Chicano, but the Chicanos kind of hide a little bit. They're Mexican, but they just kind of become—everybody becomes Indian. They asked you, "Well, what tribe are you?" You say, "Well, I'm Mexican." And it's kind of like, "Well, welcome, don't be appropriating our stuff."

KMD: Right.

LV: And they said, "The only way that you can come in is if you agree that your group will be multicultural. We can't have you coming in here and saying that only Native women can sweat. It has to be women—anyone who wants to come that behaves themselves can come." And I was happier than ever in my life with that, because to me, multicultural, multiple languages, multi-ethnic groups.

KMD: Now, you had obviously advanced in the ceremony community to be able to do this.

LV: That's correct. I had a lot of experience. I took Yreina Cervantez to ceremony once, took her all the way out to sun dance with me one year. Took lots of people out there. I used to have a van, I used to caravan people out there.

KMD: Now, getting back a little to Flores de Aztlán.

LV: Yeah.

KMD: The accomplishments of that group, obviously going up and down the coast. Anything else I should know—I mean, they're everywhere.

LV: Well, let's see. I wanted to talk a little bit about RCAF [Royal Chicano Air Force].

KMD: Yes.

LV: Tell you a little bit about what we did. We used to go up to . . . I don't remember how many Fiesta de Colores that we did. I don't remember how many. I can physically remember three, but we may have done more, because they were every year for a series of years. And I know that we did it every year. I remember one year I didn't make it, because I was pregnant. I had just gotten in a car accident, and I decided that I couldn't go, because I had already lost two pregnancies, so I was scared. So I stayed home. And I remember everybody was all, "Tough it out, Linda." And I said, "You know what?" You know what I mean? All this Chicano toughing it out stuff, because it's there too, right.

And the Royal Chicano Air Force had the most beautiful ceremony in Sacramento called Fiesta de Colores. It was giant. It was in a park [whose] name I don't remember—I'm sure I could find out if you wanted me to find out. It was a really big park, and they had a central altar in the middle that was made into a pyramid, [with] boxes put on top of each other in a quasi-pyramid formula. . . . And it was covered with Mexican blankets, and much like the more modern Day of the Dead at Self Help Graphics. And I created some altars like this at Self Help Graphics too, later on. And at the four corners, of course, there was flowers, and at the top there was some sort of ornamentation that meant for spring. [All] the gods and everything surrounded it, and there was sage burning all around it, taken from the Sioux traditions at this point, because the California Indians really aren't up and running. They're up and running now; they're really up and running now. They got everything, including the casinos.

KMD: Oh, because of the casinos, you might say.

LV: No, they had ceremony before the casinos.

KMD: Oh, okay.

LV: They were functioning ceremonially before, but now they got money because of the casinos. And at the four corners of the—the outside, the four corners of the interior, then there's four corners on the exterior of the circle with a big circle in the middle, which is much like the sun dance. So the altar in the center, it's the tree. And the north was dedicated to—oh, possibly the elders, if I remember. I think Sacramento always sat at the north. All the guys from Sacramento, José Montoya was always present. Malaquias [Montoya] was always present. Juanishi Orosco was like chieftain at this point, with his wife—what was his wife's name? He divorced her after several years. I'll have to think about that, too, but I could find that out. And their sons were always present. And then we were always at the west; the Flores de Aztlán were always at the west. I believe it was the women on the west, the men on the east, and the children in the south. Or the women may have been facing the children and the men were in the south.

I'm not really sure of the exact way that they had their circle set up, but what they did was, they started at the north, and everybody made a presentation in the circle within the circle, this whole thing. And they had . . . I know the Royal Chicano Air Force always had something like a May dance, with the pole and the ribbons that went around and those dancers that go up on the big pole and do the swinging thing?

KMD: Right, right. They did that in Chicago.

LV: Yeah, I saw those. Those guys were amazing. I saw them twice in San Diego when we went down there for the Chicano Park Day. And everybody made all their own clothes, and everybody made *trajes.* We had our *trajes*. There was *Azteca* dancers there, of course, with *penacho*. There was . . . Everybody had . . . It was

kind of like the Wild Chapatulas. I remember listening to their music at this point. Do you remember the Wild Chapatulas?

KMD: No.

LV: They're out of New Orleans, and they're African American, but they call on their Indian heritage, and they wore these fabulous Indian costumes that they make. Oh, my God, they're so complex. They've got their own music, and they have their own dance, and they have their own language, and they have their own everything—that's kind of how this was. Somehow or another, it was art, because we were creating this as we went along. Not just out of a vacuum, but out of specific kinds of inferences from indigenous training and teachings. There was sweat lodge ceremony in the morning before the ceremony, there was sweat lodge ceremony in the evening. José Montoya usually poured water for the group—I've known José for years.

And so the Royal Chicano Air Force and Juanishi Orosco and Malaquias Montoya would come out and do it, and there would be a band on the bandstand that would be playing special music that went with whatever *danza* was being presented. And we had our own band, it was called Culculcan. And eventually the Flores de Aztlán would come out, and we would do a dance. There would be four of us, generally four of us at this point. It was Ana Louisa, Cui Cui, myself, and Josefina, and we would do beautiful dances to the spring. Very lyrical, sort of Mayan-influenced dances, rather than the Azteca with the hard footwork. And there's a whole political in that, a whole political conversation about that, with women included in *danza*.

And we had crowns on our heads with flowers, and beautiful dresses, and we were barefoot and had flowers around our wrists. I mean, we looked like little spring goddesses. And it was really very magical and wonderful and interesting and complex, and multiple. Just like I like it, right, multiple layers of meaning and symbols and personalities and stuff like this. And I was still very much different. I was still very much different. I still—I was there, I was happy to be there, I was involved, it was wonderful. But there was still—I still had more influences than I knew what to do with. And—what is it?—I ended up with the Flores for eight years. We did Day of the Dead over here really heavy. Did you ever go to Fiesta de Maíz in Los Angeles?

KMD: Yeah, as a child.

LV: Yeah, there I was. I was one of those girls who was dancing in the middle, there I was. And I have pictures to prove it. It was really a good time. I don't think that I could have made it through my miscarriages without this spiritual orientation. And the art community just didn't offer the kind of support that I needed. Everybody was too busy with their—

KMD: Well, did—the RCAF didn't know that you were doing visual arts as well, or they only knew as a—

LV: Yes. Well, yes, but they were in their Sacramento thing.

KMD: Right, there's very little—

LV: They had their own stuff. I mean, they had—all men—I mean, it's mostly guys, and they were like hot and heavy, and they were doing their own work. They were doing La Cultura Cura. They were doing the prints, La Cultura Cura. And they were . . . The Flores de Aztlán became involved with Solis, Dr. Arnaldo Solis, who was the driving force for this whole *indigena*—or one of the driving forces for this whole *indigena* Southern California Chicano *indigena* movement. And I was just one of the players, right? I was a dedicated player, but I wasn't like a big decision maker. And—who was it, Florencia Yescas?—the man who brought Azteca dancing to Southern California, and actually choreographed that whole Azteca piece that's in the Florida Disneyland?

KMD: Yes.

LV: He choreographed that whole thing and took dancers from LA over there to get it done. It's a whole other story. It's really interesting. There's lots going on.

KMD: So yeah, you obviously were very connected with this other community. Did you ever have that kind of relationship with Chicanos then?

[*break in audi*o]

LV: Well, I think the interesting thing about the *indigena* thing is that there are so many Chicano artists involved.

KMD: Right.

LV: I think that's what makes it very interesting. It's not peripheral to the movement at all. It's indicative of the movement. And a lot of the people who were involved in it, especially the Royal Chicano Air Force, all the artists out of San Diego, Chicano Park Day, this was like a very big event for them, to go to Chicano Park and celebrate the murals there, and to have traditions present, right, to have the *ceremonia* present, was very much indicative of it. And when I studied the Chicano movement from the videotapes and stuff that were created by Trevino, I saw that the *indigena* was originally included in the Chicano movement, alongside the political. And somehow or other, it just kind of—

KMD: There was a split.

LV: It just split.

KMD: And people have written about the split in San Diego.

LV: Yeah, there's a split in it, and it still existent, and it's still here, and it's still here today. There's still . . . When you go to Chicano ceremony, you're going to . . . When you go to *indigena* ceremony, whether it's California Indian, whether it's Lakota, there's now elders, Chicano elders, in the *indigena* movement of *ceremonia*.

KMD: Wow.

LV: Yes, there's now elders that have their own circles and have their own work. Unbelievably high-level *indigena* workers that are Chicanos living in East LA, [who] travel the nation to be involved in ceremony, who are teachers, who are social workers, psychiatric social workers, psychiatric social workers, all kinds of levels. And now you have this whole new level of young women and young men that are really into it, that are having kids, and they're tattooing the symbols all over their bodies, and there's all this whole other movement that's going on. And I think it's a part of the Chicano community that needs to be uncovered and talked about more openly, because I think it really is still a very important part of it, and yet, somehow or another, it's not being given the kind of attention that I think the complexity of it deserves. I'm not really sure I understand it all.

KMD: Well, I think you were saying something about the tensions between indigenous folks, native folks, and Mexicans, [and I think that] is part of it. And then I think there's also—I'm not a psychologist, but, you know, there's a lot of research on Chicano guilt with Spanish, people who don't—aren't raised speaking it and then have to learn it, or can't accomplish that fluency. And there's possibly—I mean, in the '80s, folks like Gloria Anzaldúa are writing about indigenous, spiritual things, right? So it's there, it's present, and yet not enough folks—

LV: Are going to study it.

KMD: Are going to have the knowledge, right?

LV: To study it, are going to study it, right.

KMD: So I think there's some guilt. There's just some social guilt, a whole community.

LV: About the way the Indians were treated, and the way they continue to be treated—

KMD: Right, and what is our relationship to—

LV: Well, take a look at us, for criminy's sake. If I can walk into a Native American ceremony and not be questioned, just walk in, people would go, "Are you Indian?" I go, "Yeah, I sure am. I sure am an Indian. Take a look at me, take a look at most of my *gente*. Walk through East LA and tell me if everybody there isn't Indian." I mean, we've got the *güeritos* for sure, but most of us are not *güeritos*. Most of us are short and dark with dark hair, and we look like Indians because we are Indians, for criminy's sake.

KMD: But those symbols, those traditions are not circulating in the Chicano art movement in the '70s.

LV: Well, that's what I was going to say. That's what I was going to say, is that I made a dedication to it, because philosophically, intellectually, and culturally, it made all the sense in the world to me to go from the studies

that I had been doing as a young girl and finding them here. It was just so easy to just walk from one world right into the next, not really going up or down a level, but just parallel, right into it. And then to find out that the quote-unquote Chicano movement was basically urban. It was basically an urban movement. It's basically about urban reality, it's basically about city life. And there I am speaking about stuff in my art all the way back to the first days of working at Self Help Graphics, dealing with the earth and dealing with ancient symbology.

And so it's kind of interesting that I was in a parallel [that was] basically not within the urban Chicano movement. And I'm still not in it. I ascertain that I'm one of the very few Chicano artists that is dedicated to *indigena* and *indigena* symbology and [producing] work of my level in both worlds. In the *indigena* world and in the art world. I look around, and I don't see anybody that is [at] my level of exhibitions and my level of involvement who is also involved in the *indigena* movement to the level that I'm involved. I don't see anybody. And I've been around for a long time, looking. I don't find any peers.

KMD: So is this causing tension then—obviously you've talked about what it was personally, but, like, what's that playing out in—

LV: My life?

KMD: Self Help—

LV: Oh, at Self Help? Well, Self Help was different. [With] Mike Amescua's influence and Sister Karen's openness to *indigena*, we kind of—all kind of went in that direction. I mean, Mike went into *indigena* in terms of his artwork. He didn't become involved in the ceremonial tradition as deeply as I did, but he became involved pretty deeply. Let's see, we had . . . Self Help Graphics had basically its own sweat lodge in San Pedro with Tony Portillo for, I'd say, a good ten years. And we had Chicano *ceremonia* that was in San Pedro with Tony Portillo at his home. Mike Amescua was integral to it, and I was integral to it, for ten years, and we brought our children there. I brought my children there. Those were the first lodges that my children were involved in.

I was also involved in a lodge at the home of Patricia Parra—who was closely related to, at one point, with Carlos Almaraz and the movement at the very beginning—who's now in Aldama, on Aldama street, where I think John Valadez lives at this point, in Highland Park. And there was another sweat lodge there that was basically Chicano, all Chicano, and I poured water there too for about ten years.

KMD: Now, I don't know if—I do know, because of my work as an anthropologist, there's some things you can't tell me. But I'm curious: you're pouring water at the prisons, you're pouring water at these other ceremony, the Chicano . . . This is on the weekends, on—how many times a year? I'm trying to get a sense of—

LV: Once a month.

KMD: Once a month.

LV: Once a month. And then going to ceremony two weeks every summer, taking people out, sponsoring people. It was a major dedication, and still is a major dedication in my life. But I'm not as intensely involved with it as I have been in the past—up until about two years ago.

KMD: What was the transition?

LV: I decided to return to art, and make it more of a central focus, and work on integrating, once again, all of my life's experience into a statement again. So I was painting and producing as I was involved in *indigena*, but I was on—I was always busy in *ceremonia*. And I was involved and busy because I wanted to take my children there and give them a spiritual core in life. I was given responsibilities that I did not want to shirk, because they were dear to my heart. And it wasn't a matter of voyeurism; it was a matter of being involved and dedicated to something that I believed in. Then, when I came to the canyon, I realized that what I wanted to do was to return to my original vision of my own life, return to my original vision of my own life as an artist and as a thinker, as an intellectual, as a poet, and [I] began reformulating my concepts for the art world. I was born an artist and I am an artist, and that's how I'm going to end it.

KMD: Well, that obviously gave you a lot of fertile ground for the work you did.

LV: Tons.

KMD: I mean, we've talked about the earth, wind, fire, water, air.

LV: Yeah. Earth, water, fire, and air.

KMD: I get them wrong every time.

LV: That's all right. Yes, it gave me a lot of stuff to work with. I have tons. And what I'm doing is I'm superimposing the Chicano *indigena* on top of my twenty-first-century sensibilities to create a new image.

KMD: So your technique is changing.

LV: My technique is changing. Well, the paintings are the same. The paintings are the paintings. I'm never going to stop doing the paintings. In 1984, 1983, 1984 . . . [In] 1984, I did the first Prayer for the Earth at the Carnegie Museum, in which I incorporated the sculptures from the '80s, the paintings from the '90s, with the central mandala, earth, water, fire, and air, into what I'm calling "full immersion environments." This was the beginning of this idea of creating sacred space with my paintings and my sculpture and what I had learned from *ceremonia*, right? Earth, water, fire, and air, all into one place at one time. And this was the beginning of environment work, creating environments, installations.

I had been traveling a great deal teaching grant writing, because I'm a grant-writing instructor. I told you, I teach at five hundred colleges and universities nationwide on the Internet for the last ten years. That's the greatest job I ever had in my life, boy. It's still the greatest job. And I traveled a great deal to teach, and I went to twenty-four states in two years. I went—well, not quite; maybe I went to fifteen, because I went to a few more than once. But I went to New York every year for four years, before and after teaching, in the middle of this whole thing, and I'm going to New York this year. And every time I go to New York, I'm hitting the [Museum of] Modern Art. I'm hitting it, and hitting it hard. I went to the Corcoran [Gallery of Art] last year and saw some stuff that blew me away, and I thought, "So this is what the world is doing."

I've been encased in Chicano art, I've been encased in *chicanismo* and *indigena*. I've been encased in my family, and producing work within this very small bubble, trying to drag in the inferences and all the study from all of my life into it, so that I can still create what I consider unique imagery based on my experience. Not on copying other people, not on following a movement. But following myself as an individual artist. And now I'm going out, and man alive, do I like what I see. And I'm dragging all that stuff into it. So now I've got everything that I learned as a young woman in Europe and in the United States, everything that I learned in *indigena* over the last thirty years of my life, going back into the international world and looking at what people are actually producing.

KMD: So what artists are those that you're seeing, the contemporary—?

LV: Oh, I saw a show; I have the catalog—let me go get it.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: We're back. Linda's showing me a catalog of exhibitions she saw in New York that influenced her.

LV: Actually, it was the Carnegie International [exhibition].

KMD: Oh, it was at the Carnegie.

LV: Yeah. Oh, man, this show changed my life. I was so grateful. When I was traveling, I saw Bontecou, Lee Bontecou. I must have seen four of her shows. One in Texas, one in Arizona, one in New York, and one in Pittsburgh. I mean, I saw her everywhere. And her stuff, if you know her work, is just phenomenal. She basically just closed herself up into her studio for, what, the last thirty years, and produced the work of a lifetime. And she really inspired me to just say, "You've done all this study, you've done all this work; you need go back to it and get it done now." And I'm trying to get there. Take a look at some of this stuff. Look at this catalog; it was so beautiful. The fifty-fourth Carnegie International. Here's the names of the artists here; they're from all over the world. A lot of them showed in New York. Japanese, American, German, Chinese, from all over. Spanish. Digital incorporated with everything—oh, there's Bontecou again.

KMD: Oh, yeah.

LV: They've even included [Robert] Crumb. Remember the fabulous cartoonist from the '60s? He got a part in it too. Some of his work was just—

KMD: Oh, this is very conceptual.

LV: Oh, yes. It was the most beautiful show I've ever, ever seen. I love this work here. This got me into the whole post-production stuff. Mangelos.

KMD: Mangelos.

LV: Mangelos. Oh, God, I just really loved it. There's a whole series of video work that came from this particular show, integration of all different types of digital imagery. I've seen this person's work, Senga Nengudi. He's all over the place—or, she's all over the place.

KMD: I'm really surprised that your eye is drawn to this very conceptual—I mean, your training as a younger person was in the classics. And I could say from the European classics, and then the Americas, right, the classics of the Americas. And this is—

LV: Way off the map.

KMD: Yeah. [*laughter*] This is—I mean, some of it, obviously, is avant-garde, even.

LV: Oh, this is my favorite stuff here. Isa Genzken, her work really, really shocked and amazed me. Look at this stuff.

KMD: Oh, yeah.

LV: Oh, God, this inspired all this new stuff I'm doing. I'm just so pleased with having seen this show, with the digital backdrop and this foreground. These pieces look like nothing when you walked into the room. They were just like these objects on top of these pedestals, and they really didn't look like anything in particular. But look at how they photograph. Oh, it's so spectacular stuff.

KMD: Yeah. Very rich.

LV: I—every city I went to, I made it a point to go to a museum on Tuesday, because I'd be there Sunday, Monday, Tuesday night. Every Tuesday I would go to a museum after class, and in my class I'd tell people that I was an artist as well, and I would always get free passes into museums after hours by curators. I had personal tours of museums based on educators that were in my class that took pity on me and said, "I'll get you tickets. Let me call somebody." They opened up doors for me and let me see shows. There was just so much to see. Oh, this painter you've seen a lot, Julie Mehretu?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: You've seen her around a lot. And all of the sudden, I start seeing what people are doing. I think what happened—

KMD: I'm really surprised that that's what your eye is drawn to.

LV: My eye's drawn to everything. My eye is drawn [to Philip-Lorca diCorcia's photographs of pole dancers].

KMD: Well, it's not painterly at all.

LV: No. This guy was at the Corcoran, too. His stuff's amazing. I wonder how many of these women he laid. All of them, I presume. Every last one of them, I presume. But there was one piece I wanted to show you, if I can find it. Oh, this one. Kathy Butterly porcelains. Look at these.

KMD: Wow. How playful.

LV: Oh, it's spectacular. I think what happened for me was that after, you know, I was pretty much settled into a place, a physical place, because I was married, working to make a family, and working to raise my children. And I know you know what that means. It's very time consuming to raise healthy children with capacity and self-assurance and vision for life.

KMD: Right. To do a good job at parenting.

LV: It takes a lot of energy. And I was dedicated to it. I didn't become a mother out of happenstance. I became a mother out of hard work and choice, because of my physical shortcomings. And I was dedicated to that. So I have spent the last twenty years of my life, between twenty-five and fifty-five—is that thirty years?

KMD: That's thirty years.

LV: Thirty years of my life involved in the Los Angeles Chicano community, the Chicano *indigena* community, my family, and producing artwork that is somehow or another connected to those things as well as to my childhood. Suddenly my children are older; suddenly they're going off to college, which happened—what is it, four years ago now. Suddenly I have a free rein. Give me a free rein, and I will go to town. It's what I was born to do, it's what I've been trained to do. So as soon as I had the chance to travel internationally and nationally, I'm out of here. I'm out of here. And I had the money to do it. That's what makes me unique. I'm not one of the artists that are strained by money, which most artists are. I have money.

KMD: Now, that money's coming from your work—

LV: My teaching.

KMD: Your teaching.

LV: My teaching and my contracts. I'm probably one of the top five Latin American grant-writing [fundraisers] in the nation. I'm considered executive level, and I raise a lot of money for a lot of people.

KMD: So other people hire you to write their grants.

LV: I have contracts, and I teach.

KMD: And you learned that at Self Help.

LV: I started out at Self Help, that's right. And I said, "My God, I learned how to write in grad school. I learned something in grad school. I learned how to write." And I learned how to write, and now I'm considered one of the best. And I'm proud of it, and I work very hard for it, and it's given me my home.

KMD: Can you talk about who your clients are?

LV: I'm working right now for Pacoima Beautiful in Pacoima, that's an environmental group. Wonderful environmental group. It's been around for ten years. It does really wonderful work with the community, Latino primarily. Pacoima has got to be one of the largest barrios in town, and they have a lot of environmental issues in Pacoima. Many, many, many, they suffer a great deal. Twenty-two percent of the children there have asthma because of all the pollutants in the air and everything that's going around. We've been successful in raising three-quarters of a million dollars this year, over a very small campaign.

I teach a course called A to Z Grantwriting. It's a seminar, a three-day full-immersion seminar that I offer in the Los Angeles area. Pacoima Beautiful and their wonderful founder and executive director, Marlene Grossman, and their new executive director, Nury Martinez, have hired me to help them through it, and man alive, we're just running like crazy. We're just moving it and pumping it. They're on the cusp of it, and I know they are. Environmental work is very important, and they're doing very good work.

I'm also working with the Los Angeles—the Southern California studio—the Studio for Southern California History. I work with them, and I'm helping them to build an opportunity for a campaign. We're working to develop all of the materials that are needed to be able to apply to foundations and corporations. One of the phone calls I got this morning was from somewhere who wants a grant writer, but I don't take on very many people. And I teach constantly online. And I just presented a workshop at another environmental group. It's actually a state recycling [program], in San Pedro. They had a big conference and I presented a workshop there. I'm also working—I just finished doing a workshop with Cerritos College, teaching a one-day [course] on how to [find] diversity funding sources, from government into foundation and corporate funding.

KMD: Grant writing.

LV: So I started traveling to teach, and you know, the Chicano world's a very interesting place. It's very complex, there is a lot going on. There's many people in it that I respect as painters. There's a few people that I respect as intellectuals. I have a list of about half a dozen Chicano artists that I really think are masters at what they do. And it's just a great place. I'm proud to have been born in Boyle Heights, and I love my grandmother and my grandfathers and what they've done, and my father is the king to me, and my mother is a goddess par excellence. But my world is not only the Chicano world, but the world at large. And I really am drawn to return to that, and I don't think that that makes me any less a Chicana than the day that I was born.

KMD: No. You're just enacting this theoretical thing we call hybridity.

LV: Yes. [*laughter*] I'm living it. I'm it.

KMD: [*laughter*] You're it.

LV: And so when it comes to opportunities to go to museums around the world, to go to Europe—I'm going to Europe next summer, I'm going to New York this coming fall—

KMD: And these are all—

LV: Art-related trips.

KMD: Art-related trips.

LV: Yes. To go to museums and go to galleries and take photographs and write in my little books and come back with more ideas and get back into that whole thing. My oldest boy is at Georgetown University Law, and my youngest has graduated from UC Santa Cruz. I've basically done the—not all of the work with children, as you well know, but the hard core of what I needed to do, in terms of emotional and spiritual, psychological and physical well-being, intellectual well-being. My husband and I have been very good at that; I think we've done a very good job. Now I feel free to go back and to investigate to my heart's content, and start reading a mirage of biographies and going to shows and—

KMD: What's on your bookstand now? What are you reading right now?

LV: I'm doing de Kooning. I'm [reading] the Pulitzer Prize de Kooning book. I really need to go back to that. I have the Rothko book, of course. [. . .] I just [read] Edith Piaf, and did the movie *La Vie en Rose*. And I have all these theories about what it means to be a great artist, and it's just really not a good story. It's really not good. I think it's better to be a working artist and to enjoy being creative than to be a great artist.

Everything I study tells me that great artists are basically destroyed by any number of machines. The money machine, the market machine, the museum machine, the machine, the machine, the machine. They're ground in the machine and made into pulp. Their whole lives are uncovered like exposés, and you hear all the terrible stories about when they get old and invalided and all these things. You just turn into pulp, they make pulp out of you. And they did the same thing to Edith Piaf. She made pulp out of herself, just beat everybody to the punch. Drug addiction, multiple relationships—it's like the music world, why I didn't go into it, right.

KMD: [*laughter*] Right.

LV: I think that you need to strive for your career. I think you need to show beautiful venues. I think you need to show as much work as you possibly can, the best work of your life. I think everything you show should always be the best work of your life. I think it's good to sell your work. I think it's important to see it is as a way to further your artistic goals, in terms of physical security and for your family. But I think the most fun of it is just living as an artist. I live the life of Riley. I get to be creative in my mind and read what I want to read, and find these crazy influences from other places. I mean, you asked me, why am I drawn to this, all of the sudden? I'm drawn to everything. I love art of all kinds. I just love the idea of the idea. You look at something and you go, "Wow! Where did they come up with that?"

KMD: So even if it's not in your style or technique, or even the topics that you're dealing with?

LV: Somebody asked me about this the other day. We saw—I went to the Topanga—what is it—movie festival. It was a film festival I went to in Topanga with some friends. And we saw a series of short clips, short films, little short films. Some really well-known actors in some of these short films, which was kind of interesting. And I was talking with a total stranger after the fact—that's one of my fortes, talk with total strangers. And [she] said, "You know, I don't really like the films this year. They're not uplifting" is what she said. She said, "How about you?" I said, "Well, you know, it isn't really about whether I like the films or not." I'm dissecting them into pieces, and thinking, "That's an interesting point. Oh, I've never thought of that before. Wow, look how they did that! Oh, look at the camera angle, isn't that interesting; it's coming from over here. Look how they shot the whole thing in blue light. Wow, why'd they do that?"

That's how I look at paintings. It isn't really whether I like it or not. That doesn't matter. Whether I like it or not doesn't matter. What it is, is [how this art work will] influence me. [Will it] imprint something in

my mind that will become part of this incredible mix that I have going that will somehow come out the other end and create this object over here? It's an alchemy. It's like alchemy, where you're just putting everything into it, and somehow [. . .] gold pops out of the bottom.

It makes me think of this show that I saw—where did I see that show?—it was in New York at MOMA [Museum of Modern Art]. It was in New York at MOMA. It was this very interesting video piece—oh, I can't remember the artist's name. I could look it up, I'm sure I could find it. A lot of times I don't really pay attention to the artist's name. I'm just looking at the object. And what he did was he hung a dead rabbit on a wall over a table, kind of like what a Northern Renaissance painting, like a Dürer, right, and videotaped it while it disintegrated and was overcome by maggots and dissolved into nothing. [. . .] And the videotape took you through the dissolution process, and then went backwards to the full rabbit again. And then he had another one where he had a bowl of fruit that he just put a camera in front of, and it turned to mold and then fell apart and then came back again, and I found those absolutely fascinating. I couldn't stop watching them.

And it wasn't that I wouldn't do it, it wasn't that it wasn't my style, it wasn't that I'm not a video artist. It was just, "What an interesting idea. I wonder what it was like to sit there every day? Boy, that carcass must have smelled like shit." You know what I mean? Like, this is how my mind is working. So it's really not about that. It's really—

KMD: So you don't need to see the line of the brush, as we were talking earlier. With—

LV: If I'm looking a painting.

KMD: The more conceptual installation stuff.

LV: No, it's that I'm looking at how they put it together.

KMD: So it's still technique.

LV: Its technique, its style, its statement, its inference, its use of unusual materials or psychological relationship between objects and items. Its process. It's all those things. Because I divide my work up in the same way, and that's what I like to look at.

KMD: Now, I'm hearing this kind of development of your consciousness as an artist coming through in the multiple places.

LV: Yes.

KMD: But folks are probably going to want to know, like, okay, when does the consciousness—you are Mexican, you are Chicana, you identify with *indigena*. Is that like all at once, or is it over a series of years, because of these boundaries that people are putting on you, and you have to keep coming back to it? In other words, people are making you feel like you're not part of that community, or you are part of this one, and you come back to it over and over again—

LV: What, the *indigena* or the Chicano?

KMD: Let's—I guess they are separate, huh?

LV: Well, they make them separate.

KMD: Right.

LV: I didn't make them separate; I wanted them to be together. I don't understand why Chicano and *indigena* can't be a part of it. I don't get that; that doesn't make any sense to me. Who's dividing it? It's not me. I don't divide it. People don't really—I don't really talk about it with people. I don't really talk about what I'm talking with you about with artists.

KMD: Oh, you don't?

LV: No. You don't talk about this. You don't talk about it. If people come to me and say, "I understand that you know about ceremony in Los Angeles. I'd really like to be able to come," I'd say, "Well, you know, you have to come by invitation only. I'm glad you met me. Why are you interested? What brings you here?"

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos and Linda Vallejo. This is tape 3, August 20, 2007. Linda was telling me—I'm trying to get a sense of her artistic development. It sounds like it starts very young, and you flourish and develop, and flourish and develop. Very few barriers are put on you. You said in school, over and over again, "Oh, there's Linda. Let's let her do her thing. Don't get in the way." I'm trying to get a sense of your other identities. Cultural, religious, spiritual—probably the wrong word, but spiritual, political maybe. Are those also kind of developing forward, or do they—[does] it goes back and forth?

LV: No, they're all simultaneous.

KMD: Like, "I'm not going to be Chicano anymore. These people are driving me crazy."

LV: No, no. They're all simultaneous, just like the paintings in the studio. They're all simultaneous, just like the six paintings in the easels in the studio. They're all simultaneous, just like the digital stuff that's going on with the post-production stuff that's going on with the sculptural stuff that's going on with the installation stuff. It's all simultaneous. I just live in multiple worlds simultaneously. And that is because it comes natural to me, and that is because that is how it's been presented to me. And you know the—I've been begging at the Chicano art door for a long time.

KMD: How did you do that? Let me have some specific examples.

LV: Well, I mean, the curatorials of the shows, the dedication to Self Help Graphics for the eight years, the curatorials of the shows all over town.

KMD: Where were [you] doing some of those shows?

LV: Where was it? We mentioned it earlier, William Grant Still. We [participated in a] show at Mechicano [Art Center].

KMD: So you've worked with many of these groups for—

LV: [And also] Long Beach City Art Gallery.

KMD: Many of these groups are no longer existing. Mechicano's gone, and East Los Streetscapers is—

LV: [And also] Santa Monica High School, Long Beach City Gallery, [and Barnsdall Art] gallery, [and] Orange County Center for Contemporary Art.

KMD: And this is all prior to your Galería.

LV: That's right. We haven't even gotten [there yet].

KMD: So you're getting the—

LV: Then I [opened] Galería [Las Américas], and I dedicated it all to Chicanos and Latin Americans and the *pura chicanada,* and I did that for eight years. I was totally broke and depressed for eight years straight with [a] list [of things to do] coming up in your head every morning. I mean, I really felt like I tried really hard to be considered. [*pause*] To be considered. And over and over and over again, my work was not considered Chicano.

KMD: Okay. So you're getting support from *indigena* communities, right?

LV: Outside of the art world, yeah.

KMD: Outside of the art world. And you're obviously selling work—

LV: All the time. Constantly selling work, to Chicanos no less. I also sold a lot of work to Peter Norton.

KMD: Peter Norton—

LV: Peter Norton bought five pieces from me. I was interviewed for that big show in Washington, DC. I got interviewed for that with the tree stuff. I got interviewed all the time, but there was just something . . . I wasn't refused, but I was just on the periphery, because there wasn't any way for them to understand what I was doing. They didn't have any—the curators that were working at that time, the historians that were working—as few as there were, there was very few—had a very small vernacular. Their lens was very, very tight. It was mostly male-oriented. It was very tight. And I was always on the periphery of it. I was in the community, people knew my name, I was out there, but somehow or another, I was producing stuff that just didn't fit within the genre.

And that's when I opened the Galería, because I needed to have some shows, for criminy's sake. I wanted some one-woman shows. I think I deserved it, I was producing a ton of work. And I wanted to do

what I called "full-spectrum," which was, there's a rainbow of different kinds of Chicano art and Latino art that's all on multiple different levels, on styles and techniques and everything, and it's all a part of this very large movement, the Chicano/Latino movement, that has a [mélange] of schools incorporated in it. There's the *Pura Chicanada* school, there's the urban school. You got the low-rider school, that whole school. You got the *vatos* and the *vatas* coming out of RCAF, right? You've got—what have you got . . . Then all of the sudden came up—the feminist school came up. There's the Chicano feminist school—

KMD: Right, doing imagery of women?

LV: Yeah, that whole thing. And there's the—oh, let's see. What else? How many schools can we come up with?

KMD: I actually have just a few of the things, because I have read all of the stuff that you did at Galería Las Américas, and I was surprised to see the eclectic list.

LV: Oh, of the artists?

KMD: Yeah. Well, the—

LV: Poli Marichal, right. Yes, she's still around. Yolanda Gonzalez showed, the Streetscapers showed. [Roberto] Tito Delgado, who I think is one of the unsung Chicano artists of the century. I think he's one of the best painters we've ever had, and he's probably one of the few intellectuals. I mean, he's the only artist I ever knew in my whole life that got two Guggenheims. I mean, Jiminy Christmas, what do you have to do be accoladed? Jiminy Christmas, holy hell, what do you have to do to be accoladed?

KMD: Well, you even did Carmen Lomas Garza, so there was folks who weren't LA.

LV: Yeah, we did Mexican masters too.

KMD: So that was intentional, this—

LV: Yeah. That's why I called it Galería Las Américas, because I was doing the whole continent.

KMD: You weren't going to focus on just figurative, not just expressionists, not just conceptual. I'm trying to think of schools that we know from art history categories.

LV: Good work was all I was looking for. Good work. And after seeing as much work as I've seen in my life, and going to as many museums as I've gone to in my life, I don't need to have a PhD in history. I've studied it all, and I know good stuff when I see it. And let me tell you, I saw a lot of it. People were always shocked. They go, "Where do you find these artists?" I go, "They come in the door." They come in, and I take 80 percent of what I see. Eighty percent of what I saw was really good. We were even in *ArtNews*, and they even said so, that my—they called it my "curatorial sense"—it wasn't my curatorial sense. It was just opening up the door to Latinismo, to all of us—Las Américas—and the work was absolutely dynamite.

KMD: Now, you've started off with Ramses Noriega.

LV: We started out—and I'll tell you that story.

KMD: I think I have it on my other tape.

LV: Do you?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: Okay. Yeah, Ramses Noriega and I opened Galería Nueva, and we were in business for a year and a half together, and then I went on my own and opened up Galería Las Américas.

KMD: So you're making the decisions for Galería Las Américas.

LV: I'm the owner, I'm the dealer, I'm the curator, I'm the installer. [My bookkeeper, confidant, and helper was Mari Cárdenas. She was Sister Karen's bookkeeper at Self Help Graphics for years and also a painter.]

KMD: And you talked before on the other interview we did in 2004, that the house took 80 percent, the artist took 20 percent?

LV: Nuh-uh.

KMD: Oh, I might have had that wrong.

LV: It was fifty-fifty.

KMD: It was fifty-fifty?

LV: It was fifty-fifty.

KMD: Well, that's really generous.

LV: Yeah, it was pretty generous, because I paid all the bills.

KMD: No, I mean generous to the artist, because I don't think—

LV: Yeah, I paid all the bills. I mean, I was broke for eight years. I'm telling you, I was broke and depressed for eight years, I couldn't make a nickel. And I was teaching and writing grants—that's how I kept the Galería alive, because I was working and putting all the money into the gallery.

KMD: Oh, just sinking it in.

LV: I was sinking three days of contract work into the gallery, every nickel I made. And all the sales went into it too. I had nothing at the end of the month. I was lucky if I had enough money to go to Von's and do one big shopping for my family, that's all I could. My husband paid the—

KMD: Yeah, you talked about that. So it was a good thing your husband had a job, right?

LV: Yeah, but he had enough. After eight years, he said, "So how much longer are you going to do this?"

KMD: Did you actually lose? Or did you walk away with just—

LV: I paid off my debts by selling my work, and part of my collection.

KMD: Wow. Can I ask how much in debt you were?

LV: I think it was about forty thousand dollars. Not too bad for eight years.

KMD: That's not too bad.

LV: I was a good businesswoman. I'm a pretty good businesswoman. But forty thousand dollars—I was in debt about forty thousand dollars. I paid it off by selling parts of my collection, selling my own work, and putting all of that money into the debt. And I came up out of it. But I was the only one, and now there's tons. And thank God there is.

KMD: What do you mean there's tons?

LV: Well, there's a few. And the community for-profit gallery kind of came into being.

KMD: Well, Mechicano started as profit-oriented, and they changed—

LV: Yeah, but they didn't last eight years.

KMD: No. And you worked with—you had—

LV: I had a show there, when Self Help Graphics and Mechicano were working together, we had shows there. I showed the big Zeus guy and all these sort of weird characters along with all the muralist work, which—I was there, but I'm not sure anybody knew what I was doing there.

KMD: Did you get any kind of reactions that people were saying things, or was this—

LV: I had a piece in a show, a Chicano show. A drawing, actually. It was a very good drawing that I gave away, unfortunately. All I have left of it is a photograph. And I got in *LA Times*—a bad review in the *LA Times* for the piece, but I was happy with that. At least they knew me. Nobody was publishing anything then.

KMD: No.

LV: Self Help Graphics' first opening didn't have anybody come.

KMD: Really?

LV: Nobody came to the first opening at Self Help Graphics.

KMD: And that was—the first show was—

LV: It was a Barrio Mobile Arts Studio show that we had. Nobody came. We just sat around and drank the wine ourselves.

KMD: So Self Help Graphics basically created the art market then. There was nobody—

LV: Started it. Nobody was doing it, and we had shows with individual arts there at the gallery for the couple of years that we were still at the downtown site. Then we went to Gage, the corner of Gage and Brooklyn at that time, and opened up Galería Otra Vez there. I curated shows there. I curated shows and hung shows there. I did a series of shows called—something to do with the sun, something that was *sol*. And everybody who showed had to bring a piece that had something to do with the sun. There I was a sun dancer, right? And I remember Magu was in one of the shows, and many other people were in the shows. The Streetscapers were in the show, I remember that. I have photographs of that, I believe, somewhere.

KMD: So you showed those folks at Self Help they weren't part of Galería Las Américas.

LV: Yes, I think what happened was that when I opened Galería Las Américas, I had so many artists come through the door that I didn't need to reach out to artists, and I was just sort of waiting for people to come. But nobody from the Chicano scene that I knew came to the gallery. They didn't come to openings, they didn't come to show me work. They were waiting for me to go and talk to them, which is kind of what's happening now. And that's not really how the gallery world works.

KMD: No, you've got to market—

LV: You have to reach out to people and show your work to people and present portfolios and be reviewed and be accepted and stuff like that. That's how the gallery world works, and that's because galleries are generally understaffed and don't have people that are going out and recruiting people. And when you're there and people are just walking in the door . . .

KMD: So some of these folks that you were mentioning before. You really didn't know Julio Martinez or Rene Vasquez or Poli or Isabel Martinez or Eric Montoya, this was a show—

LV: Yeah, they just walked in. They just walked in and said, "I'd like to show," and I said, "Well, bring some of your stuff in, and let's take a look at it." People would come in with work, and we'd line it up against the wall, and I'd say yae or nay, and most of the times I said yae, let's do a show. I gave people—my goal was to give people—one-person, two-person—I did a lot of two-person shows and one-person shows, because at that point in the community, what was happening, and the reason why I opened up a gallery to begin with was because the year before I opened up Galería Nueva with Ramses Noriega, I had eighteen group shows.

KMD: You?

LV: I was in eighteen community group shows. I was schlepping work all over town to be able to show pieces, maybe one piece in each show. The shows didn't have any press, the shows didn't have any catalogs, of course, most shows don't have catalogs—

KMD: No documentation.

LV: No documentation at all. There's hundreds of them out there. There's hundreds of them. And all you're going to find from them is an invitation, maybe, but no imagery whatsoever. And I was in mountains of them. I mean, I'm a working artist. That's how I see myself, like a working actor. I'm a working artist. I go out there, I produce, I show. And I got tired of being in all these group shows. I said, "This isn't helping me. I got to be in some one-woman shows." So I opened up the gallery to be able to give myself a show every other year, and to be able to give other people opportunity, other artists opportunity to have one-person and two-person shows that I thought might help their career along.

KMD: So you saw that solo show as the main strategy—

LV: One of the avenues. As a main—and I was wiling to pay for it.

KMD: And you're going to do that for everybody.

LV: And I was willing to pay for it. Because I could have opened up a vanity gallery and just done my own thing, but I wanted to bring a crew. Why not? I wanted a crew.

KMD: So what are some of the better accomplished . . . What were the successes, if you want to name some of those?

LV: Oh, well, we were in *ArtNews* in New York and Tokyo. We were in the *LA Times* on more than one occasion.

KMD: Now that's because you're doing the press release?

LV: I did press campaigns, man. I learned how to do press campaigns. Four quadruple hits, man. I worked like a demon.

KMD: Is some of that stuff you learned from—

LV: By hook and by crook.

KMD: Oh, really.

LV: And I also hired people or traded with people to teach me things. I traded with someone to teach me how to write a press release. I consolidated press lists myself, and with small assistance here and there, and sat by the fax machine all damn day because that's how things were done then. It was fax machine, phone.

And I just sat by the phone for two days and just faxed and called people again and again and again. I mean, we were in *Art Business News,* we were in *Hispanic Business News*. We were in *Saludos Hispanos.*

KMD: Were the shows selling?

LV: Mm-hmm.

KMD: You still can't make a buck on it, huh?

LV: No.

KMD: That's what's hard for me to understand. I mean, I don't know all the ins and outs of running a business, but do you think it's because of the fifty-fifty split, or—

LV: It's just—it's galleries. The only galleries that really make it for a very long time are people that have backers. And at that point, I was so ahead of the game that there were no backers. I had no Cheech Marin. I would have liked to have had a Cheech Marin but I didn't have one. I tried to get him to come to the gallery on more than one occasion, but it didn't work because—

KMD: He was collecting then?

LV: He was collecting, but he wasn't collecting a lot. He was—

KMD: Like he did in the '90s.

LV: No. And I had a lot of collectors, but I had a layaway plan. That's the only way I could survive.

KMD: Right, you talked about that.

LV: I had a layaway plan. It was very difficult to administer, but it kept the place going.

KMD: I wonder if we can switch gears a bit. We've been talking about your work with your kind of professional development as a curator in *ceremonia*, your development, working alongside either Self Help Graphics, other collectives that you became involved in. I wonder if we can turn just a bit to other influences or things that you said "no" to, because one of the stories you're telling is that you got this pressure from—to be the Chicano urban style, and you said "no."

LV: No. My image has not changed.

KMD: Yeah. But what about family? Once you had a child, you talked about the mother, that series.

LV: Well—

KMD: As the kids are growing up is there still—is there any influence there, or—

LV: Oh, you mean from my children?

KMD: Mm-hmm.

LV: I think it was more internalized than anything else, because my children were really about raising my kids and involving them in ceremony, so that was all pretty much like foundational work, then became imagery. But I didn't start doing portraits of my kids, if that's what you mean, and I didn't start doing portraits of myself either. I didn't start doing portraits of me and my husband or anything like that. It was more foundational influence that would then lead to other work. But by that time, I had boiled everything down to earth, water, fire, and air. I had boiled everything down to the least common denominator, philosophically, that I can find.

KMD: Did your work ever show with other indigenous folks?

LV: Not often, because I'm not Indian, so I couldn't be included in the Indian shows.

KMD: Right, you can't use that name.

LV: I can't be included in Indians shows because I'm not Indian. I'm not North American. I tried that, it didn't work. I [had a] show at the Woman's Building. I showed a lot with the Woman's Building. They were very kind to me. They gave me—I was in multiple shows.

KMD: Was it with Suzanne and [Nancy] Shapiro?

LV: No, it was Sheila de Bretteville brought me to the Woman's Building. I love Sheila de Bretteville, she's great, and I'm still in touch with her. Cherie Gaulke, Sue Maberry, Terry Wolverton. [Betty Ann Brown]. Jerri Allyn. They were all at the Woman's Building when I was there. They invited me. I was glad to be involved.

KMD: And this is 19—

LV: This is in the ’80s as well, early ’80 and on. I also did Madre Tierra Press there, it was [a printing project] through a grant. And I have a book, I can give it to you, where I published a book of Chicano artists, thirteen of them, hand-pulled lino prints. Beautiful books. I have a whole series of them, including poetry and imagery, and I oversaw that. That’s another one of the shows that I did for the Woman’s—we had a whole show at the Woman’s Building afterwards. It was a big project.

KMD: But you said earlier you didn’t really have an affiliation or an affinity with the women’s movement. Now, I understand part of it—

LV: Oh, I was on their board of directors, and I was the only quote-unquote non-feminist on their board of directors. I couldn’t call myself a feminist. I didn’t feel appropriated by it, because I hadn’t studied the women’s movement. I’m just now beginning to study the women’s movement and understand what feminism is really all about, where all the influences for that movement come from. It’s very complex. It’s a lot going on. I really didn’t know anything about the history, so for me to just jump and appropriate that name, just appropriate it, it didn’t make any sense to me.

KMD: So why did they gravitate towards you, then?

LV: Because I was a feminist without the name. Because I didn’t seem to care about gender. I didn’t have gender quality issues. I didn’t seem—I don’t mind the gay and lesbian community. I enjoy all people, regardless of what race, color, creed, sexual orientation. It’s all fine with me. Be as eclectic as you want. I respected them and they respected me. And they gave me shows. They had—I had opportunities to lecture with my work. I was given opportunities to show my work at the level, at the Woman’s Building, that I wasn’t being offered in the Chicano community. And so I jumped on it, because it was another opportunity to show. They let me show multiple works, present slide shows, do talks, do projects with them, be on their board of directors, be involved with some guerilla art fair. I did some guerilla work with the girls.

KMD: Such as?

LV: We did that cowgirl attack on LACMA one year.

KMD: You did?

LV: I was the one in braids. If you ever see the photographs, I’m the one with the long braids. The Indian at the front, that was me. And I didn’t mind, and I’m theatrical, so it wasn’t hard for me to be theatrical. Pull it out of a bag. We had masks on so nobody could tell who we were. I was a part of the art scene’s twenty-fifth anniversary at LACMA. I was one of the waitresses there, and hung out with all of my old friends from the Woman’s Building, and we had a great time catching up with what we did together and how we’ve worked together. Betty Ann Brown is one of the best supporters that I have to date. She’s helped me a great deal this last year to really expand my horizons into a bigger reality.

KMD: Did this group have any influence on your technique or style or subject matter?

LV: I don’t think so.

KMD: Just a support system?

LV: Just as another influence. And now, full circle all the way around, now I’m doing gender work. Now I’m doing gender studies, now I’m reading books, now I’m gathering all the information to be able to have a statement. And I have some new post-production pieces I’m working on that are all about gender, pornography, and sex slavery.

KMD: Can we take a pause and go look at that?

LV: Sure.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: We took a little break to look at some of Linda’s work.

LV: The new digital stuff—

KMD: Digital. And my head is swimming. So I’m trying to figure out how I can piece together this woman who does *ceremonia*, whose work that I know comes from that series that began with Los Cielos. The piece

that I have comes from that whole suite, so I understand that. But I'm having trouble threading together the digital. And what was the two urns? What do you call that piece?

LV: Oh, I call it, *A Postmodern Neoclassic Couple,* the guys and the gals. And that's a fun piece.

KMD: And the guys are the superheroes—

LV: And the girls are the sluts. [The series is] called Thugs and Hoes. Underneath it, in little italicized print, it says "Thugs and Hoes." Because that's what we've got in America, right, is thugs and hoes. What it is, is that—and I've ascertained this all along—is that Chicano, *chicanismo*, as it exists in Los Angeles, and California as a whole, and Texas, and Arizona, and Denver, Chicago, is all a part of the American experience. Edward Olmos said this himself, "I am an American." It is a part of the American experience. It is—it helps to make and create the American experience.

And even beyond that, it helps to create the twenty-first century postmodern experience as well. We cannot live in a bubble as Chicanos and assume that our world is disconnected from everything else, because that is the death of the movement. That is the death—that's the reason why museums aren't paying attention, that's the reason why major arts publications aren't writing about us, on and on, et cetera, et cetera, is because the strands haven't been drawn between how the Chicano art—how contemporary North American Latino art as a whole is a part of the American experience. A part of the postmodern twenty-first century experience. That is my goal. My goal is to draw all of this experience that I have from the international world as a child, *chicanismo* and *indigena* as a young adult, and now as an adult, back into the world experience, and make my experience as a Chicana, as a Chicana from birth, going through all my experiences, back into the world as a whole.

KMD: So the stuff you're doing now, with these neo-classical—

LV: Postmodern couple?

KMD: The columns and the church. It's like you're looking at the altar from a church, the shrine.

LV: Yes.

KMD: In miniature.

LV: Yes, that's correct. It's a Gothic, Catholic altar in miniature, covered in gold leaf, with images—digital images on canvas of my paintings, and paper dolls and other objects that are laid on the top of the altar. I'm reappropriating Christian sites for the sake of *indigena*, which I think is funny as hell.

KMD: Yeah, there's a lot of whip there.

LV: There's a lot, a lot—people love those altars. They come in and they just think they're fun, and they just love looking at them. I got the idea at the Pantheon in Rome. I went inside the Pantheon, the big circular building, and it used to be pagan. It was filled with the gods. Now you go in and it's got the pope and Mary and Jesus and Joseph and all the saints.

KMD: [*laughter*] She sticks her finger down her throat.

LV: Well, I'm just tired and I think we should come up with a new god. Jesus has been around a little bit too long. Two thousand years is a long reign.

KMD: Long enough?

LV: Yeah, I think we need to come up with a new god or gods. I'd like a pantheon, to be honest with you. And I thought to myself—I took photographs, and when I took photographs of it, I thought, "Gee, wouldn't it be fun to put the Earth back—to make it a pagan site again." It was pagan once, now they've appropriated it. Just like they appropriated the temples and made them into Catholic churches, I'm going to reappropriate this and make it pagan again. And that was my idea.

And I looked all over the Internet. I must have spent twelve, twenty, twenty-four hours, who knows, looking for replicas of ancient sites. And the only ones I could find were Egypt, Rome, and Greece. I looked for Mexico. I even called a friend of mine in Mexico and said, "Would you please go around and see if there's any replicas of the *pyramidas* that I could play with and have this idea with?" He said, "Well, there's nothing that exist." The little itty-bitty ones. There's nothing on Olvera Street. I went all over the place, it doesn't exist. I'd have to make it, which is really difficult. So what I've done is sort of just played with what

I could find, the post-production object, which is Rome and Greece, which worked out fine because I went to Rome and I had all the photographs of it and everything like that, so that's just fine.

KMD: How do you attach the image, the digital image, to this. I'm assuming it's a resin-based mold?

LV: Mm-hmm. With a glue, a special kind of glue that we found that works with paper and plastic. And then we spray them so that they are color-strong.

KMD: Now you say "we." Who's "we"?

LV: Me and my assistant. I have an assistant, Sara Delgadio.

KMD: How long have you had an assistant?

LV: Oh, I always have assistants. I always have assistants, always. I always have somebody working for me. I have two people working for me—three people working for me at A to Z Grantwriting for my work. They help me with everything. They run errands, they pick up things, they help me with stuff so that I can paint. Because nobody can paint. I'm the only one who can paint.

KMD: That's a whole 'nother . . . Well, how does that get funded?

LV: I pay for it with my own money. And I write grants for myself. I'm waiting for a fellowship. One day my ship will come in.

KMD: These are art students that you're connecting with at Long Beach?

LV: Long Beach City College. One's at Long Beach City College, and the other one's at Brooks [College]. She just graduated from Brooks. She does architectural models.

KMD: Right. That would make sense.

LV: It's perfect—it makes perfect sense. So she sprays stuff and helps me glue things down, and I tell her where I want things, and I design and direct.

KMD: Well, this is the working artist. That's what working artists do.

LV: That's right, design and direct.

KMD: And the student that gets to learn—

LV: Right, gets to be in the studio and stuff like that. They deliver artwork for me, they pick up artwork for me. They do all the errands so that I can be in the studio more often than not, with my family more often than not, and still [be] involved in *indigena*, which is still very important to me, and that I'm still involved with.

KMD: So with this incredible kind of whole production going on here, and you've only been in this house, you said, for—

LV: Five years.

KMD: Five years. I'm wondering—

LV: How does it all get done?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: Well, I'm very strategic. I produce a whole series of work, and then I know that I have to take a break because I'm doing this and doing that, then I'll just show all that work. You saw how much work I have in the studio, I have tons of it.

KMD: So you were talking before about looking at what gets into museums?

LV: Oh, yeah. When I went traveling, I went to museums, went back again out into the world to find out what this Chicana could bring and take from the postmodern world. I saw—mostly what I saw was installations and digital work. I saw a lot of digital work. I did see drawings and I did see paintings, but not so much as giant photographs, video, digitally manipulated objects, objects made of postproduction items all over the place.

KMD: Post-production—?

LV: Post-production is a word that I've just learned, and it's basically when an artist takes something that's already been made, like the columns, and makes art out of it. It's kind of like, there's so much stuff being produced, why would I produce more? One of the pieces that I saw, I saw at the Hirshhorn, I saw—well, I love the Hirshhorn. That's one place where I'd like to show before I die. If I could show at the Hirshhorn I'd be happy. That would make me just fine; I'd be just fine. The Hirshhorn's just this great museum. It was this

beautiful—from across the room, this beautiful sort of swirling white tube that floated up to the ceiling. A tube that just kind of came down, sort of like [Wayne Thiebaud's] ice cream cones. [It] kind of fell on the ground, and moved a little bit because as the crowds went through, it shifted. This beautiful object, really nice—

KMD: Made of fabric or plastic?

LV: Well, when you came up close to it, what it was, was hangers, metal hangers. You know how cleaners will put the white paper?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: Well, they had taken those off and put on white, just plain white paper. They had poles across the ceiling like this, so that the first set of them were hung on the poles. Then they were hung to each other. You know how they have the corner of the hanger? The next hook wasn't here. And when you went up to it, what it was, was hangers. It was beautiful. Post-production. I saw clothes made out of stuff that you by at Sav-On's, and I thought, "Wow. What could I do with that?" And all of the sudden, all of these other ideas started popping up. All the digital stuff from Rome started popping up, and I decided—I made a creative decision not to look forward to the perfect object, but to look back at the perfect object.

And once I did that, it released the plug, and everything went. Everything goes. No matter what I decide, doing it is just fine. The giant earring, the dioramas with the digital stuff and the post-production stuff all mixed in. I saw this show, with an artist I don't remember. I didn't really—it didn't really matter to me who the artist was. I just wanted to see what they produced. It was in New York a couple years ago. And I went to Chelsea, and was walking—running through galleries is basically what I do. I run through galleries, literally. And I just stop at the ones I want to stop at. And there was this one that had . . . [The] gallery was giant, it was a giant room, just a huge room. And you walked in, and it was a cacophony of everything imaginable. It was a postmodern experience to—what's the word I'm looking for—quint—

KMD: Quintessential?

LV: Quintessential twenty-first-century, postmodern experience. There was flashing lights going on, there was videos going on, there was mannequins dressed in weird objects going on. There was used objects, sort of all put together—this weird conglomeration of found objects, sort of sculptural things. And every time you turned around, there was some other weird object that you were listening to. And as you walk through it, the lights would change. There'd be all these lights going on in a perfectly black space. It was all blacked out except for the lights that were going on. It was like a grocery store where they have one music at the back and another music in the middle and another music—you've seen that?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: I hate that. And the cacophony of imagery, the cacophony of sound, the cacophony of influences, the cacophony of references, the cacophony of all of that—I mean, old movies on screens, and all kinds of photographs laid out. Just like somebody had come and made a mess of the room. It was packed to the gills. The space was packed to the gills. Everybody in town was talking about this piece. I'd met somebody at MOMA who said, "You've got to go see it. Go down to Chelsea right now. Catch a cab and get it before it closes." I said, "I'm on my way," went down to Chelsea, and went to see it.

And it influenced me very greatly, not because, as we talked before, it was anything like what I produce, but because it posed a question to me that drew another strand about how to weave together all of the influences of my life as a twenty-first century postmodern American of Mexican descent, living within a Chicano community, being an *indigena*. What does that mean if I created cacophonic imagery? And from that experience of going to that gallery came much of what you're seeing downstairs, in terms of a cacophony of study, all in one place at one time. Postmodern statement. I'm working on becoming a postmodern person, and what I believe now, a neoclassic person, too. I believe we created neoclassicism again, we just don't know it. Thugs and hoes is what we get. That's our neoclassic god and goddess, if you can believe that mess. So that really helped me to draw the strands together too, in terms of, how do I bring together all of these experiences. And it was very, very helpful to me.

AUGUST 25, 2007

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos interviewing Linda Vallejo again at her home on August 25, 2007. And we're going to pick up some particular topics that were mentioned last time, and some new things. One of the questions I had, after looking over the material you had given me, that was kind of a list of objects you had—I shouldn't say objects, but paper—

LV: Objects are fine.

KMD: The paper that you gave to—

LV: Objets d'arts.

KMD: The archive—to CEMA [California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives] at UC Santa Barbara. I mean, from that list, it's very clear that you've been participating in the kinds of shows that people associate with Chicano art. The Day of the Dead, making *altares*, Cinco de Mayo celebrations and exhibitions up in San Francisco at the Mexican Museum. And then women's shows as well.

LV: Yeah.

KMD: I wonder if we could start with those, and then I'm going to ask you about the ones that you wouldn't necessarily classify as—

LV: Either one of those categories. I had this routine in graduate school where I would work all year long on prints and paintings, et cetera, and then during the summer when I didn't have access to the facilities, I would start going out and looking for shows. And one of the—actually these field studies classes that I had when I was getting my MFA was exactly that. You were charged to get a booklet, a journal, and keep a journal of all your efforts, competitions, actual shows, publications. And I kind of went wild with it and really enjoyed it a lot. And I started a routine where I would do that, where I would work all year on a large portfolio of work and then spend the summer promoting it, to be able to have shows happening. It's kind of like, you know, you're an artist, you have a product, you have a statement, and you want to share it. I mean, that's why you make it.

KMD: Right. Otherwise, sing in the shower, right?

LV: Right. Sing in the shower, or just roll everything up and put it in a closet someplace. But that's really not my style. I've really been working for many years to integrate a statement that I think is indicative of my life and what I've experienced. So it's important to me to share this. It's my blood, as I say. My art is my blood. You can cut off an arm and it wouldn't stop it.

KMD: So is this the early phase of starting the documentation of your work?

LV: Yes, it is. But I had documented before. I documented in high school, I documented in college as well. I always had a camera. If you look at art books and you read art books and you go to museums all the time, you see duplications of the image everywhere. The image is duplicated everywhere, for educational purposes, for study, for enjoyment, for enrichment. So it was obvious that there was duplication of image, so I just started duplicating it right away. And my teachers were really good about it, in terms of just saying, "Well, that's the right thing to do." I kind of went off on my own.

I've always had a marketing sense, ergo Galería Las Américas, ergo A to Z Grantwriting. I've always had a marketing sense, but this kind of gave me the breathing room, because I was getting married at the time. And this whole thing was happening and that was: I could stop producing, which is so intensive, and go into that. So I started searching around to . . . I was at Self Help Graphics at the time, and there was lots of things coming to Self Help Graphics. People were coming in and out of Self Help Graphics just like they had been throughout all the years looking for people to show, or hearing about things, and printed materials that are coming to us.

KMD: Who were some of the people that were coming in when you were there?

LV: Well, let's see.

KMD: Or least, mid-'70s, mid-'80s, right?

LV: Yeah. There's so many of them. I think you have my résumé. There must be a good hundred of them. I'd like to look at the list, and then that would help me to remember memories of the different shows. There's—golly, there was just so many. We showed everywhere. It seemed like there were small shows, group shows invariably, that were kind of pumping up the music at that time, so everybody was showing around. A lot of things were happening in the Southwest for the first time. Denver wasn't even happening then, and Chicago wasn't happening then either. So it was basically the Southwest and Southern California, and Northern California was happening. There was a gallery in—Galería Posada in Sacramento was there. You had Galería de la Raza, you had the printmaking shop in San Francisco. And you had Self Help Graphics, you had Los Four. Oh, and you had Goez, do you remember Goez?

KMD: Yes.

LV: And you had Mechicano. I remember we showed a few things at Goez. We just walked in with some stuff and it got hung up. I don't think we made any money off of that encounter, in terms of, like, selling. You put something in a gallery to make a little money, if nothing less for art supplies or gas. And—

KMD: When you say "we," was this with your work through Self Help, or—?

LV: That's correct.

KMD: So they were collaborating—Self Help was collaborating with other—

LV: Our artists. Well, basically Mike Amescua was a sculptor, myself at that time, John Valadez was around, Richard Duardo was around, Leo Limón was around a little bit later, right? And Los Four were cooking and booking in Highland Park out at Fifty-Sixth and Figueroa. And we used to—well, you know, I'm young, I don't have children, just newly married, but my husband knows that I'm often rocking in this new Chicano world that I suddenly, luckily, fell into, with all these very interesting characters.

I mean, Carlos Almaraz was painting, and I remember going to his Arco show in the Towers and seeing the car crashes for the first time. It's seven thousand dollars, and I was just astonished. And I thought . . . And now look what they're worth. They must be worth eighty thousand dollars. And I remember being very proud of Carlos and really amazed at his ineptness in dealing with galleries, especially a prestigious one like Arco. And I went to see him, and I remember he said—I said, "What should I do with the work?" He goes, "This is good shit." I said, "Thanks, thanks a lot. I really appreciate that coming from you." I said, "So now what should I do?" And he told me to go to the best galleries in town. he told me, like, to go to Ace. [*laughter*] And I thought, thanks a lot, Carlos. There's like eighty-three steps between here and Ace. Thanks for the confidence and everything, but he was—I bought a painting from him at his studio on Spring Street, which was just incredible. He had all the paintings in little boxes, and the boxes were numbers with the amounts. You could turn the painting over. And I bought a painting there, and I was always amazed by his tenacity to make the art be the vehicle.

And let's see. We—I remember printing for John Valadez. I was a silk-screen printer at that point at Self Help Graphics, and I printed for John Valadez. I remember I couldn't register the second image exactly perfectly, and John and I had a little row about it. But he's definitely one of my favorite painters. I think he's the best painter we've got.

KMD: So you had multiple roles in Self Help Graphics. I didn't realize that.

LV: I curated shows in the gallery. I helped to administer different kinds of programs, like the Day of the Dead, we did the Day of the Dead every year. It was a huge festivity. It had all kinds of artists coming in, it had workshop for the kids, it had the whole installation itself, and the collaboration of the artists in that. Ofelia Esperanza wasn't even doing anything at that point.

KMD: Right, no.

LV: And we did that, I think, for a couple of years downtown. And I remember that when the Teatro Campesino came, they did a big presentation in the back, a parking lot. There was a back parking lot that was about the size of the parking lot on Gage at this point. And there was a stage, and they did this whole thing, and we were—it was packed, the place was packed, and this was maybe 1976. It was rockin' packed. And the art show was upstairs. I was a teacher. I taught the kids the Day of the Dead stuff.

Mari [Cárdenas] Yáñez was there. That was another name that I wanted you to know. She's still here. She's in her late sixties or early—no, I think she's in her seventies. She still paints. I have contact with her. She was also my bookkeeper for Galería Las Américas and one of my collectors, and she was at Self Help Graphics, and she and I made a lifelong friendship. Mari is really amazing. She's very close to Patssi Valdez, they live in the same neighborhood. And Mari Yáñez was there. And she created—and I have copy of one of her masks. I have one of her masks here. She did the papier-mâché over the face, perfect, with the Day of the Dead on top of it. Very meticulous girl. With glitter, with the *calaca* on top of it in glitter. I have one. I may be mistaken—

KMD: Is this one of the early—

LV: Yes, that was like when we just started making Day of the Dead art objects. Before we did that, we were going from the books that we were bringing from México, right, and studying the Day of the Dead, because we had a national—we wanted to get a National Endowment of the Humanities grant, and we were doing all the research for that. And at that time, there weren't any computers, so we were going to libraries and looking at hard copies of things.

And that's when Virginia [Torres] was there, and Mari Yáñez was there as well, she was like Sister Karen's assistant for—I don't know how many years, until she retired. You could get some fabulous stories about Self Help Graphics if you'd like to. She knew all the players, she knew all the artists. She was in the inner workings.

And so we would bring back—after we found out that there wasn't anything out there—we went and looked everyplace, there was nothing—there was little paragraphs or something like this, that was it. No big books. So people starting bringing in books. I brought in books, other people started bringing in books from México in English. And we started having to literally travel to collect the information. And of course we went to—what's that big city that has the Day [of the Dead]? Oaxaca.

KMD: Oaxaca.

LV: We went to Oaxaca. All the photographs were [taken] at Oaxaca. And you had the big *cempazuchitles*, and you had the candles galore, and you had the decoration of the grave itself. You had the vigil, which has now become a big part of the *indigena* Día de Los Muertos. The vigil has become the thing. And the *danza*, of course. And what we saw, of course, was the ones that had the arc over the top of the altar with the oranges and the lemons and the bananas specifically. And the Catholic Church is present on them, and so is money and liquor and food. And then we began, of course, because of our Mesoamerican studies and Mike's real big emphasis—Mike Amescua, because he has a very big emphasis in his studies on Mesoamerican culture. He's read, I don't know, many a few hundred books on it. He's an anthropologist.

KMD: So you guys are—you're taking trips to Mexico, specifically to Oaxaca, to kind of see what people are doing.

LV: Correct, exactly. And then replicating them as closely as possible.

KMD: Okay. So the idea at that time was replication.

LV: Yes, it was historical significance. Because we were in the NEH. We weren't to the point where we could start manipulating it and making it what the Chicano Day of the Dead at this point. At this point it was a teaching practice, in the sense that we were doing research and we were presenting what we saw. And we had photographs there, and it was obvious that we were taking from it. And Sister Karen really wanted to do that, and as part of the National Endowment of the Humanities effort, it makes all the sense in the world. So we had the *papel picado* hanging from the walls above the *altar*, and it was all pastel. It was very much the traditional *altar*. But some people still produce.

And, let's see. So we did all the workshops with little kids and they were all from East LA, the East LA area, and we continued in the Day of the Dead workshops. They went on forever. I always thought that the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio and the Day of the Dead educational component were the strongest things that Self Help Graphics had, in terms of income from foundations and corporations, due to its educational focus and emphasis.

KMD: And were you writing those grants, or just—

LV: Yes, I was helping Sister Karen write those grants. We got money from the National Endowment of the Arts for the first time, for an exhibition and a publication that Sister Karen and I wrote. I can't remember all the grants that we wrote. There was just lots of paperwork flying around.

KMD: But you're right, this is the idea of access to funding through education.

LV: Culture is harder to sell, because culture kind of comes and goes. Like something's hot, then something's not hot, then something's hot, culturally. But in terms of education, you can always get money from foundations and corporations.

I always thought the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio was the perfect vehicle for professional development for artists in college to go into the professional world. It worked for me, it helped me. It was interesting travel.

Let's see. At this point, also, we were also printing, of course, so we had an atelier. The seeds of the atelier were already in Sister Karen's mind. She wanted to do an atelier, she was talking about doing an atelier. She was a printmaker herself. [. . .] The only work I ever saw of hers were silk screens, and I can't remember about etchings or lithographs, but there was prints.

She and I had this connection with each other, because I was a print—had a master's degree in printmaking, and we had a really good connection with each other that way. And Sister Karen always lamented that she didn't have time to produce her work. Corita Kent had a very big influence on her and her work. And she had [. . .] images of her work hanging in her office. She spoke of her often, and lamented to me, as a fellow woman artist who was a printmaker. And we had good conversations about that, because she would come to my work, and she knew that I could—she would give me constructive criticism on my work, or compliment a certain element of it that she liked. And I knew that she wanted to engage in the conversation about the process as well, and I welcomed it, because I felt for her. I never became the full administrator at Self Help Graphics, and I could have done it.

KMD: Yeah, it sounds like it.

LV: Oh, I could have done it, but I just didn't want to give up my art. I had to create a life that allowed me to have time in the studio or I would go mad.

KMD: Did she represent some of that for you, that this was an administrator who had to give up her art?

LV: For me, she did. And because of the conversations that I had with her about, "Gee, I wish I had time to paint too, it's been a long time." And then she did one print at Self Help Graphics, have you seen it?

KMD: Yes.

LV: She consternated over the last color. She just procrastinated over the last color. It just didn't go up, it didn't go up, it didn't go up, it didn't go up. And I now that I'm thinking of that particular piece, it has much of the same qualities as my work, in the multiple layers, the very thin veils, and the final color being what cohesifies the object. And that's exactly the kind of pattern that I must follow in my work as well. Printmakers, we tend to just do—we tend to do layers, and they tend to be transparencies and opaques. And I remember her being very, very frustrated about that. The artists—she was always taking us through professional development workshops. [*laughter*] Everybody will tell you this. She was always making us go to big ol' meetings that had like, "Okay, this is how you create a strategic plan," and then making us sit . . . You know, going through this whole process of devising where we're going to go.

KMD: Wow.

LV: Yeah. They were enormous. They were like seven days long, of sitting around and trying to devise where we're going to go.

KMD: For the organization.

LV: Mm-hmm.

KMD: Wow. The thing that I'm also amazed at is, how did she come across all the—you know, the machines that you need to do all this printmaking? Was that something she had as she started?

LV: No. Well, yes. When I walked in, there was a silk screen. There was—but there was only one table, and maybe, I don't know, a half a dozen screens. I presume Karen brought them from her school. I presume

when she was studying, she saved her stuff and brought it, and that's how it started. It makes all the sense in the world. She's in the department doing silk screens, she decides to start Self Help Graphics out of her garage.

And so she's got her supplies in her garage, and she invites a couple of artists to come up, and suddenly she's looking at her barrio. She's lived on that hill right above Self Help Graphics, right. I went to her home several times. Sister Karen's favorite movies were Tarzan. That's true, she told me that, and I saw her watching them myself. So it makes sense that she would bring them just into the garage and start working, and then it would go on.

And Sister Karen always, always received help from her order. Her order was always—has always been and continues to be very loyal to her vision, very loyal to her plan to help Self Help, *la comunidad Chicano,* at this point. It's amazing. It's really quite wonderful.

KMD: You mentioned that that starting with Self Help, it seems like a key opportunity for you as an artist, early in your career.

LV: Oh, it's a whole world. At that point, it was really underground. Artists were really struggling.

KMD: But at least it gives you some stepping stones, I mean, to not only the grant writing and that kind of professional development, but a sense of, okay, who's out there, what are the places, where are the galleries.

LV: Yes, it has . . . You know, the Chicano—being a Chicano is a double-edged sword for me, because where I come from is a very large community called the world. And the Chicano community is—it's very interesting. It has a series of very interesting paradoxes involved in it. It tends to be very provincial, and it doesn't see itself as . . . There's very few people who actually step out of the Chicano world and [. . .] remain—this is the thought that I had—remain a Chicano, and step out of the Chicano world and go to other places.

KMD: And that's been your goal.

LV: Well, that's been my goal, yes. The—in the '70s and the '80s, there was tons of activity going on, as you saw from the résumé. There was tons of small galleries that came up and went, there's shows in different places that were being curated by others. And I think that would be a really nice piece of research. I'd be happy to help you with that if you'd like me to, to find out not only the location, but the people who are curating. Maybe we could find a pattern at that point. I'm sure we would.

I was curating multiple shows, too, in the Los Angeles area, and there were other people. But I remember being invited by—I remember going into a lot of competitions, and I remember being invited by the Chicano art centers, as I said, in the Southwest. What was it, something—it started with an *M*. March? March Art Space?

KMD: Yeah, MARCH, in . . . Well, MARCH is, I think, in Chicago. There's MARS in—

LV: MARS, yes.

KMD: In Arizona.

LV: MARS in Arizona was doing some work at that time, and I remember being invited and showing at MARS for a Chicano group show.

KMD: Well, you were part of some really important early shows. *Ancient Roots and Visions* in 1978.

LV: Yes, Shifra Goldman was curating at this point. There were some shows coming up out of San Diego, too. The one out of San Diego, *Corazon*—but that was even later, that was even a bit later. I was still doing my paper work, so it was in the '80s. It was in the mid-'80s. Well, I was doing—I did the sculpture and the handmade paperwork in the 1980s, right during this very period.

KMD: So which shows would you think were historically significant, either for you or for this kind of building Chicano community?

LV: Well, I think the centers were the most significant. I think that the group shows are very good for Chicana historians, but in terms of the larger art market, they really don't hold a lot.

But in terms of Chicano culture, the fact that there was this whirlwind in the '80s of all these shows coming from the Southwest and California, which really solidified a lot of what was going on. I mean, Asco was just at this point a new group. I remember going to an opening with Patssi Valdez, and their studio

was incredible. It was, like, it should have been in New York. It reminded me of Andy Warhol. It was like a scene, like a total scene. It was fabulous. I absolutely thought it was just great. I mean, I was intrigued by some of the better forms that were being produced.

That's what attracts me, is the better forms that are being produced. Talent is what attracts me, ability. That's what really gets me going. And so I think the shows were helpful in building this ambience, building this—the catalysts were all happening at this point. It was popping like popcorn. And what I've been unhappy to see is what I was telling you before, is that that should lead automatically to galleries, and then to museums, and then to international museums. For the Chicanos as individuals as well as a group, [to] have a chance to really share the icons that have become significant to the Chicano movement. And there's a series of icons that are the hard and fast icons. They've been placed. And others that float around, like mine.

I'm hoping that *indigena*—I think *indigena* is making a comeback right now, as a matter of fact, because all of the new women that are involved in Chicano *indigena*. And I am in ceremony with many of them and I know them personally. And it's—I think it's a very good sign that *indigena* will make a good hit in the Chicano movement, which will at least open up a certain kind of icon and sensibility that will add to the rich texture of the movement. I think the idea of a movement must be something that's specific to the Chicanos, because I don't—although the Impressionists wrote letters to each other, and sometimes even painted in each other's presence, right, painted together, I don't think they ever saw themselves as a movement. I think they saw themselves as individual artists. And historians and curators have made them into a school or a movement.

KMD: Good point.

LV: But Chicanos are intent on making a movement. They're intent on it.

KMD: Did you think your work at—do you think the work you were doing with the Fiesta del Sol—the one up in Sacramento—

LV: Fiesta de Colores?

KMD: Colores. Did that open up opportunities for you to exhibit in Sacramento?

LV: Yes, it did. But at that point, the visual arts weren't as closely connected to the *ceremonia*. Dance was, like, the first—song with drum, song with flute, and music to back it up—plus what would be called the installation of the altar itself was paramount. Costuming. It's like a theatrical piece, rather than as a staid painting.

And so it really wasn't a big part of *ceremonia* at that point, but I did meet a lot of the key players who were painting. The RCAF, Juanishi Orosco—especially because he was my age—and of course José Montoya, I spent a lot of time with José Montoya. And he was a very interesting character that started the Chicano Studies department in Sacramento State. And he's like one of the heads of that particular effort, and [he] remains very connected to what I would call his *pachuco* roots. Very connected, not only in terms of imagery, but also in terms of thought and product, inspiration. And even in the '80s when I talked to him, because he was a maestro—this is part of the languages that were used [in] this particular group—and the sweat lodge ceremony was at his house.

And there was a lot of emotional, spiritual tension at this time in Sacramento, and at Self Help Graphics, and in San Diego. Well, San Diego came up a little bit later, because all of the *danzantes* came from Mexico, easily. So they had lots of indigenous Méxicano.

KMD: Well, that ends up having a split down in San Diego, between the kind of cultural-spiritual and the kind of political Chicano agenda. Did you see that?

LV: Yeah, but that's one of the difficulties of the movement, the concept of the movement. Because the concept of the movement is that everyone moves at once. And apparently, throughout the history of Chicano culture and politics, that's not really been a very good possibility. [*laughter*]

KMD: [*laughter*] Right, the reality.

LV: It seems like there's always factions and all of this that create all this political grind. But I think that my experience of it is that if it's political—if it's truly political in the true sense of what political means, which is watching out for each other in the indigenous way—that it would flow as one.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: All right, we're continuing.

LV: Yes. So I met some of the key players, in terms of the arts, but I was looking for artists in the Chicano-*indigena* community, I'm still looking for artists in the *indigena* community. People who have made the kind of commitment that I've made to the *indigena*, who are painters out there in galleries, in shows, in catalogs, all this kind of stuff, that want to make an impact in communities outside of my own. Of course, it's grown here, but the fruit is shared with many.

KMD: So do you see that some of the things that you were being involved in [were] helping you share that fruit? Or is it really coming from . . . I was trying to get a sense if you're working with people like José Montoya and Juanishi doing other kinds of work than *ceremonia*—

LV: John Valadez, Carlos, and—

KMD: These are their own separate worlds?

LV: Well, I'm very good at separate worlds. This is one of my—I was thinking about that even further. I'm very good at boundaries in separate worlds. I'm very good at giving one day to this and then giving the next day to that. And I've literally divided my life like that for a very long time with the intention of keeping them cohesive, so that I could do the integration myself, rather than allowing them to flow all over each other and create this big glob that I have to them press into some object. I've literally tried to keep them in a way where I could choose the threads that I wanted to have cross-ventilation, as it were, between the different interests. I kind of went headfirst into *indigena*, Karen. I went headfirst into it; I became a *danzante*. We were [in] rehearsal, like I told you, one night a week, every Monday, for seven years, in Flores de Aztlán.

KMD: Now, that kind of work, if you're seeing these things and separate and experiencing them that way as well—

LV: But I'm integrating them constantly.

KMD: Did you also document them?

LV: Yes.

KMD: You did.

LV: We had lots of documentation. I've been trying to bring it together and give it to a collection, because I think it's very important. And there's lots of photography.

KMD: Oh, really?

LV: Yes, there's lots of photography.

KMD: People are taking these pictures and giving them to you? Or you were taking them?

LV: Yes, both. Both. And—

KMD: Would there be paperwork as well, written things, conversations, letters?

LV: Not so much letters, but more like fliers and posters and programs and educational materials. Educational materials, that's the most important thing, because behind Flores de Aztlán—behind many things, actually—was Calmécac. And Calmécac was a group of psychologists, educators, psychiatrists, that came together—Chicanos—headed by Dr. [Arnaldo] Solis and Ana Luisa Espinoza. Becky Bejar was present. I could come up with a list of the main people if you'd like me to. And they basically were analyzing the bicultural experience and trying to do the integration between—remaining . . . Their thesis, their premise was that if you knew about your indigenous roots, truly knew about them and experienced them, that you could find a way to integrate that into twentieth-century life and become a bicultural person.

And they actually arranged and organized the Fiesta de Maíz. They were like the leading administrators, if you were. And the Flores de Aztlán were like their little work crew, and the—Florencia Mesias was

one of the collaborating partners that brought all of his *danzantes* and worked with Dr. Solis to choreograph and choose dances and music that were particular to a specific *ceremonia*. Maiz has its own songs, has its own dances, has its own gods, and the *altares* were built collectively amongst many people. Dr. Solis would put up the armature, and everyone would have their direction and be able to decorate their direction according to the symbols of their troupe. And educators were present, and it was very much an intellectual enterprise with a focus specifically on *indigena* spirituality. I mean, we were doing circles constantly, we still do circles constantly. There was constantly something going on.

KMD: So this—I wasn't aware that people saw it as educational, like that this is a moment for teaching—

LV: Well, that's how come the RCAF created La Cultura Cura. This was one of the objects that came out of this, this *colectiva*, if you will. It really wasn't, it wasn't flat, it wasn't bottom-up, it really had its players at the very top. It was very much a hierarchy. But people were allowed to be creative within the context of that hierarchy, which made it interesting.

KMD: What is La Cultura Cura? I know—

LV: They were the prints that the RCAF produced. They were a series of silk-screen prints. They weren't very large. They were like banners, little banners. And they basically had images of Chicano families, kind of *estilo de los streetscapers*, the family interacting with some indigenous symbols around, and a little phrase on it. That sort of a little moral of some kind, in terms of how *la cultura cura*, it cures the community, it cures. If we get into *cultura* in the sense of this connection between the ancient and the new, which is—this is what I like, this is what I like! Let's do some of this! And I was going through that whole thing of trying to make a child.

And so the spiritual aspect of my life was really needed at that time. I really needed to get through some really, really rough stuff. And so we had all of the accoutrement and the headdresses and all the jewelry and the goddess costumes. They were just fabulous, and we were just wonderful. And I painted anyway.

KMD: What do you mean "I painted anyway." You didn't think you would, or—

LV: Oh, no, I would. I knew I would. I paint anyway, all the time, regardless of all the—

KMD: Even though that wasn't the kind of arts that was being promoted there, you were painting it.

LV: Well, remember what I said, I never let anybody take my image from me. I can't. Its my first and last language. So there was a lot of intellectual and historical activity going on. Self Help Graphics was doing this NEH study where we had to go to México and figure it all out. I was traveling to México and going to all the *pyramides* and studying all the gods and taking photographs and everything. I went there on my honeymoon for criminy's sake. I got married in '77, right in the heat of all this beginning, and that's what we did. We took photographs and brought them back and used them as educational materials, and also used them to help us design our *altares,* as they grew for the Day of the Dead.

KMD: So were you making the traditional *altares* at that time?

LV: It started to become where we started to integrate. We started to make bigger ones, we moved to the other places. I made one that I have a photograph of, that was the whole—that's like the whole stage now, with it all coming out. I did that like in 1980, '81, and I have photographs of that. The one that fills in the whole dance area, right, the whole place. And it had a mixture of Catholic icons, pretty strict Catholic icons, as well as a lot of *indigena*. Like I got all my friends to lend me all their statues of the different gods, and those were all placed. And then suddenly, the central *altar* became very important to me. That was the sage, right, and images of the four directions. And I began integrating what I learned from *indigena* into the *altares* at Self Help Graphics. It actually caused a little bit of a split for Sister Karen and I.

KMD: Because it's not Catholic?

LV: That's right, it did. It caused—it was the beginning of my going on to other things than Self Help Graphics, because *indigena* had become very important to me. My children participated in ceremony when they were newborns.

KMD: So I'm wondering, did you go back to Self Help and see some of these Day of the Deads, even though you're not working there?

LV: Oh, yes. I'm always interested in Day of the Dead.

KMD: And you're seeing change.

LV: Change. Well, you know, Sister Karen's intention. [. . .] Okay, because the NEH, right. You've got the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio, and you've got the gallery which is showing the work from the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio—that's basically what you have going on. Study the Day of the Dead, and the Day of the Dead celebration, the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio, and the gallery. That's kind of the triangle that was there. And the little—and the atelier, there was a small atelier at the back. We produced some of the *indigena* posters that we have, and the Self Help Graphics atelier. I remember the Fiesta de Maíz. I remember cutting the plates for that. And the whole group of Flores de Aztlán and Solis and everything—Sister Karen let us come and print them there.

But when it became religious, that's when Sister Karen and I had our little misunderstanding. And I believe that it was more my fault than anything. Because I had taken a huge dive into this other world, and became somewhat of a fanatic. You know how when you're young, you're in your twenties, and you jump into something—it's kind of like what's happening right now in the lesbian feminist Chicana *indigena*—this real intense, whoa, man.

KMD: So you sound like you're being delicate about this fight. Did you have words, or was it—

LV: We tried to have words, but it was very difficult.

KMD: There was a tension.

LV: There was a very big tension between Karen and I at that time. But it never seemed to stop us. I mean, I made my choice, I went on to do other things. And—you know, you can only stay—I was there seven, eight years? That's a long tenure. That's a long tenure at any institution. And I grew and I didn't handle it as well as I could have. I regret that. But in the end, my relationship with Sister Karen was solid like a rock.

KMD: I wonder if you could just reflect, in the period after when you leave, it starts to become more— [*phone ringing*] Oh, we'll pause.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: We had to get the phone, and we're back now. I was asking Linda about, if she could reflect just briefly on . . . The *altares* were very historically trying to be—

LV: Accurate.

KMD: Treatment of what they had seen in Mexico. And then there's [the] moment where you start to expand and bring in your own spirituality, which is probably, I would say, happening in Mexico, too.

LV: Things were changing. Culture changes.

KMD: We know that there's an indigenous spirituality behind Catholicism in Mexico, so we're not surprised. But that infusion in the United States, specifically in Los Angeles, starts to happen, and you leave Self Help. In coming back, I would think, in the next period, wouldn't you be seeing more of the kind of artistic—I don't know if they're as spiritual.

LV: Yes. No, exactly, it's just a matter of . . . I was trying to think of what time that might have actually happened. It happened in the '80s somewhere. What happened was that people started putting up—Amalia Mesa-Bains is really the precursor of this. We had a show, I was in a show with Amalia Mesa-Bains at SPARC [Social and Public Art Resource Center], and they did *altares*, and there's a small catalog, as a matter of fact.

And Judy Baca was of course ever present and ever working. And that whole row between Los Four and Judy Baca and Judithe Hernández was, like, the big talk of the town. And Judy [Baca] established her own organization and just started to make her own history, which is fabulous. And Amalia had an *altar* which had—I think it was pink, if I remember correctly. It was light-colored, I'm sure of that. And it was

covered with—I remember it glistened, and I remember that it was tall against the wall, very much the formula, and that what you did was you put a person's name on it, and I believe you burnt it. She had a place where you could burn it, if I'm not mistaken.

And I was in the same room, and I did a corner tree, where I would go to a—much like the tree behind you, above the piece of furniture. I would find a dry, dead tree and prop it up, and put the *indigena altar* around it on dirt, much like a Prayer for the Earth today. The transformation is very obvious. I've been doing this for a long time. Then I would invite the community to hang things from the tree. Rather than creating [an] *altar* that was about personal icons or personal history or kitsch, a kitsch altar, or a Hollywood altar dedicated to like . . . Pick a movie star.

KMD: [Dolores del Río], is it?

LV: [Dolores del Río], something like that. I was still being influenced by my work at Self Help Graphics, which was the integration between—and with the Flores de Aztlán and Calmécac—to create this cultural item that was about the spirit, what I consider to be the spirit of *indigena*, which was that everyone makes the *altar*. It's this collaborative cohesive that comes together that makes this *altar*. There's of course a director, as it were. And I had people bringing mountains of things, so that the trees hung . . . I have photographs of that.

KMD: Just like you were saying, when you were doing *ceremonia* in Sacramento, somebody had the east, somebody had the west, somebody had the north and the south.

LV: That's correct.

KMD: So now just help me see this in my mind. This *altar* with the tree, as it's laying kind of—

LV: Focal point.

KMD: Focal point—in composition, is it anything like the *altar* that we know from Oaxaca? The three layers, the very symmetrical—

LV: The altar at the bottom has the symmetry in it, and the four directions were laid out very specifically in the symmetrical circle with the four points, much like the *calendario* or the sunstone. That's where you find the symmetry, and rocks were put all the way around the edge. It's much more indicative of what the sweat lodge ceremony is like than what it is like inside the church. And you know at this point, I had permanently given up the Catholic Church. I don't do the Virgen de Guadalupe.

KMD: No, but you've been in a Virgen show, which I was surprised to see on that list.

LV: Yeah, a long time ago.

KMD: In Downey.

LV: Oh, yeah. They put my work way, way, way at the back.

KMD: Because?

LV: All the icons were up front. Mine were like these images of the Virgen as just you and me. I mean, they were just like portraits of like you or me.

KMD: Did you do those deliberately?

LV: Yes, yes.

KMD: When were those pieces created?

LV: For the Downey show.

KMD: For the show?

LV: For the Downey show.

KMD: Oh, so you were selected for that show.

LV: Yes, I was. And my work was just really buried. It was really buried. That's what I found a lot, because my work was just on the periphery. It's always floating around the edges. That's because there's a hierarchy of icons. And mine is more—less focused on the Christian Catholic Church barrio urban connection. It's like a string all of its own. And mine's more the *indigena* nature, ancient Mesoamerican *indigena* culture as a part, as another strand.

KMD: So can you tell me just a little bit . . . By this time, you said you'd fallen away from the church?

LV: Oh, yeah. Totally. I'm not a Christian. I haven't been a Christian for thirty years.

KMD: Was that a subtle transformation, or—

LV: No, I'd been looking.

KMD: Okay.

LV: I had been looking for something that I could consider a spiritual home. Remember when I was seven, I wanted to have a spiritual core? Well, I found it in the Chicano movement, in the *indigena* movement. And because I'm a Chicana, I'm a Chicana *indigena*. And when I go to ceremony, I introduce myself as a Chicano from Los Angeles, because that's the language that they understand. That's actually the vernacular that's used.

KMD: This has been very helpful as fleshing out, like, the relationships between these different groups.

LV: Well, you know, San Francisco was still running really strongly at that point too, and San Francisco was doing the more political stuff. They were doing all the political posters. What's the name of that very famous—I believe he just passed away—I may be wrong, I'm sorry—the most famous printmaker.

KMD: Rupert García?

LV: [Yes], I went to see him in San Francisco.

KMD: Was it Mission Graphics [Mission Gráfica]?

LV: Yes, out of Mission Graphics. And they were doing lots of political things, and they had their shows, and it was really like, out of that came like all the protest work on the immigrants. There was all—the UFW was still very strong, and there was a lot of the iconographic stuff coming out of México.

KMD: Now were you aware of this at the time, or—

LV: I was traveling. I actually took a trip one time to ceremony. I was on my way to Sacramento for ceremony, and I took Self Help Graphics prints, and I went up the coast to all the Chicano *centros*, and visited everybody, and traded prints, and collected materials, and brought them all back to Los Angeles to show everybody what was happening in the state. You see how the NEH really influenced us, and the fact that I was getting an MFA and studying art history, and all of this really interested me. You said so yourself: the reason why we can talk is because I talk like a historian and an anthropologist. And I really am. I would have loved to have gotten my Ph.D., because I just love this stuff. So I visited everybody and learned a lot about what was happening, and saw the workshops and met the leaders. René Yáñez was there. I also wanted to remember that Alfredo de Batuc was on the Barrio Mobile Arts Studio.

KMD: He was?

LV: Yes, he was. And I remember him telling me the story, and I've recounted this to him recently, of his village literally being washed away by some kind of a water—like a flood.

KMD: [*phone ringing*] Hold on, we're going to pause for the phone.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: Okay.

LV: Mike Amescua made the trip up to Fiesta de Colores too. He made the trip several times. We made the trip several times, and I think that Joey [Rivera], who was the—he actually became a museum director; he was in museum studies—who used to present the indigenous part of the Mass for the Day of the Dead when [they] actually had a Mass at Evergreen. There was actually a Mass. And the priest took Communion, but the participants did not, because it was very—they brought in a table, they brought in all of the accoutrement that makes the altar complete. They call those—the saints, remnants—

KMD: The relics?

LV: The relics of the saints were brought in, and they had the candles, and the chalice was there, and we made a prayer for our ancestors, for our families, which was really a part of what the Day of the Dead—remember, the vigil became everything. And Joey would do the indigenous celebration before, by burning sage and *copal* in a *pepetero*. At that time we were using the ceramic *pepeteros*. Now a lot of people are using

conchas because of the influence of California Indians. And he would present the *copal* to the four directions and say a prayer in Nahuatl, and he also went to Fiesta de Colores with us. It was all the Flores de Aztlán, our band, the Culculcan, Mike Amescua, Joey Rivera.

That was kind of like the core group of LA that was kind of diving into this *indigena* world. And we were bringing it back to the *altares* at Self Help Graphics. It fit perfectly, because we had all of these photographs that we're using to teach, and, of course, many of the photographs were the Oaxacan Day of the Dead, which showed the *copal* and showed the *flores* and showed the *danza* and showed the people in *ceremonia*, and with a combination of the Catholic and the indigenous being present. So—

KMD: I'm really impressed with this range of activity that—I mean, we kind of take it for granted now, in Chicano art history, Chicano history, the role of *indigena*. But you going up and down the coast for both the group that you're with and also Self Help, you really kind of—

LV: Talks about it for the first time.

KMD: Yeah. And this cross-fertilization that you're referring to. I mean, how do people respond to the posters that you bring back from up and down the coast?

LV: It's popping, right?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: The Chicanos there, [. . .] Goez is there, Los Four are there. Self Help Graphics is there. Any [mélange] of artists around are starting to pop off on it too. More and more artists were coming to Self Help Graphics, so everybody was seeing everything. Because at that point, Self Help Graphics was more of an educational institution. It had—with culture infused to its bones, right? There was all kinds of—

KMD: The programming is educational.

LV: The programming is educational. I think that's—Self Help Graphics did its best work, or some of its best work, I should say, some of its best work there. And the Galería began to flourish. We put in—my husband, I told you, built the lighting—the first lighting system, so we began inviting artists. I remember Anita Miranda. You know her, don't you?

KMD: Yes.

LV: She showed at one of the very first exhibitions at Self Help Graphics. She had a sculptural piece made of stone. Geometric, as I recall. And she was around during that time as well. I've known her for many, many years. Of course Yreina Cervantez, I met her while I was in graduate school at—I was a model, I was a model for art classes. It was one of the ways that you made a lot of money. Fifteen dollars an hour, as compared to a dollar ninety—that was minimum wage as a waitress at that time. And I used to do a Gauguin, where I had all these flowery cloths, and I [would] just sort of be naked and then drape myself like a Gauguin model with the flowers, and do like—with the brown skin?

KMD: Yes.

LV: It made everybody very happy, because they got to kind of like think of another painting, and allow it to influence their work, and stuff like this. And I met her—she was at Southwest College, if I'm not mistaken, and she was in the class, and we made a friendship there. She lived in Long Beach at the time, and I was in school there. I saw her many times. I was with her when she was making the artwork of her life. I said to Yreina, I said, "You know, Yreina, if you just keep painting, and I'll become your manager, we'll become very well-known and very wealthy," but she never took me up on my offer. We should have made posters and started selling them then. We should have been the first Giclée. And—let's see, John Valadez was in his studio with Carlos Almaraz and Leo Limón on Highland, in Highland Park on Figueroa. So everybody was learning at the same time. It was this very big alchemy of effects.

KMD: Now, you said at one point that you actually had a studio all the time, except for when you had the gallery, Galería Las Américas, or maybe even Galería Nueva.

LV: Oh, no, that's when I had a gallery.

KMD: I mean, you had a studio—

LV: Yes. The only time I didn't have a studio was when we moved into our first house, and my children were being born. And I didn't have a studio for about a year, and then I rented one in downtown Long Beach.

KMD: And about how big was that space?

LV: Pretty big. Twice the size of this room.

KMD: And you were renting it for—do you remember the cost?

LV: One hundred nineteen dollars.

KMD: A month?

LV: Yes.

KMD: And—

LV: There was all kinds of artists in that buildings. All kinds of Long Beach artists, all different styles and types and colors and creeds and nationalities, which is just my—just where I like to be. Influences of multiple sorts from multiple different vantage points.

KMD: Well, that was going to lead to my question. Did your studio influence your work?

LV: Location?

KMD: Location, size, light—

LV: Oh, yeah. Hell, yeah, everything. Everything influences your work.

KMD: So how do you fight . . . If you don't like it, if you wanted more, if you wanted bigger—how do you solve those kinds of problems?

LV: You manipulate the space to serve your means. You allow the space to influence what you produce.

KMD: You just allow to influence—

LV: Yeah. I mean, it does, naturally. I had one space that was smaller than [the] room in Long Beach. It was a carpeted space, I told you, without water in it. And all I had was my movies and a table and a chair, and a couple of buckets for water, clean and dirty water. And I produced all the gouaches in that particular studio. It was the perfect space for it. And the gouaches were pretty immediate. At one point, I told you I produced work out of the corner of my children's playroom, and I just brought a retractable easel in and worked on one canvas at a time. I had multiple canvases going on, but I would just bring in one, work on one at a time every night. I was producing—I had a technique that allowed me to produce paintings pretty quickly at that time, a blending technique, without all the detail and all the horror of the work that I'm doing now, which is so lengthy, and it's just so frustrating.

The Chicano movement is a big part of who I am, I'm sure of it. The *indigena* has made a huge impact on me, career-wise. The majority of my first thirty years of my career have been within the Chicano community. Sister Karen Boccalero and the atelier are responsible for the majority of all my music and exhibitions until last year. Yes, CARA [*Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*] is responsible for the other half. There's very few publications that come out of any of that. That's the double-edged sword. Because of the Chicano art—the Chicano art movement itself hasn't been able to dive totally into the twenty-first century, or let's say just twentieth-century computers. I meet a lot of people who don't have computers, I meet a lot of people who don't have e-mail. I meet a lot of people who don't utilize the technology to reach out to the wider community. Publications aren't really a big thing.

KMD: Yeah, I'm trying to remember, in those big major shows, the Self Help Graphics one that travels. It starts at the Laguna Art Museum, right, and travels, and then CARA has a catalog also. It's very difficult to mention the artists in—

LV: Well, there we have it again. What we have is these giant group shows, and that's exactly what I told you that led me from experiencing and knowing the Chicano community as this movement—these giant group shows. Suddenly I really said, "You know what? I'm producing twenty-five pieces a year. I've got to have a one-woman show. I need to have a one-woman show." So I opened Galería Las Américas, or Galería Nueva, with Ramses Noriega, who is probably one of the best painters anywhere. That's the reason why I became affiliated with him. He's renowned for his temper and his difficult negotiation technique, but nobody can ever say that that man doesn't know how to paint. And that's why I became involved with him, because

talent is what attracts me. And I did that because I really wanted the opportunity not only to drag the crew along and bring this movement along, right, and expand—but expand it. Expand the icon, and also to give myself a chance to show every other year.

KMD: Now, that's one of the things I want to ask about. You're showing at a gallery. Are the collectors coming in? Who's in the audience?

LV: We had to build the audience, just like Self Help Graphics had to build the audience. We were basically one of the very first for-profit, only fine art, galleries, without selling tee-shirts or hats or any side materials. We wanted to make it just a gallery. We had to build collectorship, and that was a technique that we had to develop. Ramses took me to visit Calvin Goodman, who is a very well-known and renowned art consultant. Calvin must be in his early eighties at this point. He's consulted with any number of museums and universities and individual artists worldwide, and he taught us the special technique about how to attract collectors and negotiating the process of actually selling a work of art.

And you know me, I'm a pretty quick study, and I'm a natural salesperson, so it came to me pretty easily to find people who were interested in art, show them what you have, give them the best service that you know how, in terms of helping them make the right decision, and then collecting the fee in a professional and polite fashion.

KMD: So how—what were some of the collectors that you were building at this time?

LV: I have that book. You want me to go get it?

KMD: Yes.

[*break in audi*o]

LV: By Mariana's handwriting, it's the first sales book for Galería Las Américas.

KMD: Wow.

LV: Some of the names that came to mind as I was looking for the book are Domingo Rodriguez. Domingo Rodriguez, everyone knows him; he's a very well-known photographer that does docu-art of the Chicano-Méxicano experience. Elsa Leyva, who's still a lawyer, works downtown at the defense department. Oh, gee, but there's all different kinds of people. Lynn Conrad, who's one of my sisters in *ceremonia*, and she lives in Santa Cruz. Josie Talamantez, who of course was with the California Arts Council at the time, bought art. [Judge] Deborah Sanchez bought art. Gabrielle Raumberger, who has a really beautiful design company called Epos here in Santa Monica, bought art. Rod Enterprise has bought some stuff from me, and actually bought the rights to use one of my images for a poster on Women's Month that included one of my images, for Women's Month. It went in Texas, out of Texas.

Let's see, René Marcuso, Armando Ramirez, [and] Armando Durón, of course. Deborah Sanchez, who is now the—one of the judges of the Superior Court in downtown Los Angeles. Andres and Norma Pedregón, who are also very close friends of mine in the *indigena*—they still are today—who are really good *danzantes*. I mean, they got married in all white in *charo*, in Veracruzana. All in white, with the big hat and the whole thing. So these were the people that I was—you know, people who were really into the culture from the roots up, those were the people I was involved in. Let's see.

KMD: Well, so far you've mentioned a lot of folks that you knew through *ceremonia*, and—

LV: Well, there was also educators. Some of them ended up coming through the gallery and ending up in *ceremonia* with me. They would meet me, they would find out what I would be doing, and they would be interested.

KMD: That was a list from '97, so—

LV: Yeah, it would go all the way back to '94. Ninety-four—I think that's as far as this book goes back. I didn't save everything. A lot of what I had I gave to the archives already. Larry Ortega. Armando Ramirez bought a huge . . . I keep calling that guy. He's the hardest man to reach. He's impossible to reach, what am I talking about? He bought a Carlos Almaraz from me. I actually sold some of the original drawings that a

woman from San Pedro had collected out of his studio one day, and I sold a piece for eleven thousand dollars. Becky Bejar, who is a teacher and a psychologist in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Mario Vazquez—Mario and Mona, I think it is, Mario and Mona Vazquez bought from the gallery. Isabel Martinez even bought some; she's an artist herself.

Joe Olgin was around and a very big collector at that time. He was married at that time to Anita Miranda. And he had a huge—he had a very nice collection of Barbara Carrasco and Gronk, as I recall. And he bought from the gallery as well. There was Carlos Chavez. Carlos Chavez was involved with TELACU. Elsa Marquez, Carmen Mesa—I'm still in touch with her.

KMD: Some of these folks are part of CACA.

LV: Yes.

KMD: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous.

LV: We built collectors, and the way that we did it was we had a layaway plan, because we were trying to convince people not necessarily—to buy a work, and a work we wanted to put at a decent price. We didn't want to underprice Chicano art, like part of what Sister Karen did, which was a mistake in terms of marketing the prints. She underpriced them. Everyone knows this. And we decided we really didn't want to do that. We wanted to sell work for what it was worth. And so we were selling work in the thousands. And—[*phone ringing*]

KMD: Hold on.

[*break in audio*]

LV: Yeah. So we decided not to undersell stuff, and we had the layaway plan, which was a good thing, and it was also a very tough thing. It was tough for us, and it was tough for the artist, because we all got piecemealed. Everybody got piecemealed.

But we built—I don't know, what do you figure?—a good three dozen collectors who are still collecting today, who I encouraged the entire time in the gallery that they should donate work, they should bequeath work, they should resell work, and they should re-buy. I said that there's four things you can do with your collection. You keep parts of it, right? Pick the pieces you'd like to give to your niece anyway. Invite her while you're alive. Don't let your executor do it, they won't do it right. Let her live with it. That way you'll have this relationship through the painting while you're alive and she's alive. Donate them to anybody, any institution that will accept them, and re-sell stuff that you've outgrown, or this, that, or the other, and use that money to replenish a new collection. And this was basically one of my educational routines. And we used to do—I was the Glory of the Talk, you can imagine, I did like—we were on television tons of times. I have all the tapes. I told you I have to change it to CDs?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: We were on all the Spanish language [television] because I could speak Spanish. We were on Univision. We were on KCET—no, not KCET. What is it? Its KMEX—the Mexican channel in Los Angeles—several times, even through Self Help Graphics. I was known as The Mouth at Self Help Graphics. I was on television countless times for Self Help Graphics in Spanish language.

KMD: Because you could speak Spanish.

LV: Because I was the only one who could speak Spanish, and who was Chicana and looked the part and could talk articulately about what we were doing, and the education, and this and that and the other. I'd worked on television when I was in college, so . . . I love cameras. [*laughter*] People come up—

KMD: So you're describing a wonderful accomplishment of the Galería. Could I get you to map maybe some of the transformations? Was there—did you see the change in audience with all this hard work?

LV: Yes, of course we did. We started out—Ramses and I started out, we had the gallery in my studio on Fourth Street. And the hard work was going places and meeting people and asking if they were collectors and if they'd like to come by. And slowly—I mean, we started out with groups of two—we actually started out

with an article in *La Opinión.* It was like a two-page spread in *La Opinión* announcing the opening of Galería Nueva, a big old spread on Ramses and his work and me and my work, and it was slow, it was slow building.

And then we decided to move to the factory place by the river, and we had a suite on the fourth floor that had like a three-thousand-foot patio. We shared with multiple places, but we used to have parties up there where the wine would be outside and you'd see the stars and you'd see the LA skyline from the east, as far east as you could go before the river. And we showed group shows, small group shows, two-person shows and one-person shows. And the place, after a while, was absolutely packed. It was just packed. I did the whole routine of serving food, having like a nice spread, and we did lots of press. And I learned how to do the press campaign at Galería Las Américas, Galería Nueva, and then Galería Las Américas. I learned the press campaign. I just . . . Ramses was pretty tyrannical in his difficult stage, and I just thought I needed to move on. I just needed to kind of go into another stage of this, and I made the dedication.

KMD: Well, are you both—have you invested money, or is it just your own sweat and tears?

LV: That's basically it. It's my space, and then when I moved to the other place, the ante went up, because I lost my studio and my money was going into Galería Las Américas. And we were inching to make sales, to be able to make the rent and make the payments and stuff. And Ramses is a good salesperson. He's one of the few Chicanos I ever met that was really good at it. He sells a lot of stuff, he always sold a lot of stuff. That's all our first conversation was about. How he would go to small group shows and actually sell pieces whenever he was in a group show. He would go to the opening and stand by his work and talk to the people and sell something every place he went.

And I was intrigued by that, plus the fact that he was a really good painter, and I knew that he could teach me a great deal about this certain business aspect. So I had a business relationship where he lived in San Diego and I ran the gallery. And so after a while, I'm like, "Well, I'm running the gallery anyway." I was there every day, five days a week, four days a week. I was running all the press campaigns, I was doing all the invitations, all the mailings. I had Marianas coming. I had volunteers coming in. Ramses came in on the weekends.

KMD: So were you also using this technique, so you're educating collectors. Did you also have to educate the artist on how to—like you were saying, standing next to the work and talking about it to the audience?

LV: Yes. All those things, where we had . . . People would come to the gallery. Television, newspaper, and individual collectors, and groups of students from—we had students from LACMA come. We've really functioned as a full—we were a full-fledged organization for eight years straight. And they would come in the door, and I would give them the grand tour, the docent tour, which I'm capable of.

I love to docent tour for friends. That's why I tell them, "Invite me to the show and I'll be your docent, and we can go to dinner afterwards." And [I] do this whole thing about appreciating the work, not only from symbols and signs and coloration and balance, technique and brushstroke and all these things, which—I love to talk about process, so there was a lot of educating going on, and there was a lot of educating going on, and there was a lot of energy in the place. There was many times when it was completely packed, and it was wild. It was absolutely wild.

KMD: So in that period, you're your own dealer.

LV: I'm my own dealer, and I deal other people's work too. I sold a lot of work for a lot of people. I sold a lot of work for many people.

KMD: So did that …

LV: Oh, the other person I want to mention was Mitch Friedlander. He was a very big collector of the gallery. He must have bought twenty thousand dollars, maybe more, of work at the time.

KMD: And he is—

LV: And I also wanted to mention Bill Reinbold. Bill Reinbold is a very important collector to Galería Las Américas. He invested thousands of dollars into Galería Las Américas. He lives in New Orleans now. He's a psychiatrist, and works in the prison systems in Louisiana. And he was there almost—he was there every week, several days a week, taking classes, helping us prepare for shows, hanging shows, and bought a lot of stuff.

KMD: What do you mean, taking classes?

LV: We offered classes too. Ramses taught painting class. I tried to teach painting classes, but the very small number of clients I got, I just couldn't handle that on top of everything else.

KMD: Yeah, that sounds like a lot of work.

LV: It was a lot, on top of the kids and the *ceremonia* and all this stuff. Let's see, that was 1990, and, let's see, my children . . . My son is twenty-three, and so in 1990 he would have been—that's seventeen years ago. He would have been six. So I was still very much into *ceremonia*, doing the prisons every other weekend, once a month. And going to big sundance ceremonial, and still working very deeply with the Chicanos in my *indigena* community.

KMD: Now, from what I can gather when you were reading those names, I get the sense that you're still in connection with these collectors?

LV: Yes, many of these people are friends of mine, still continue to be friends of mine. And [friends] that I see. Sara and Rodrigo Palacios were two artists that we carried that bought a lot of work from the gallery.

KMD: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about—

LV: Oh, Rosamaria Marquez, too, bought some stuff, and now she [owns Rock Rose Gallery in Highland Park].

KMD: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the . . . You know, you have this—you're developing a very strong sense, as you said—you know how to sell. So how are artists, who I'm imagining, and also from what you've said and other artists I've interviewed, they don't have a very—they don't have a lot of information. So were those negotiations then difficult, or . . .

LV: Yeah, well, it's one of the reasons . . . It's the dealers. It's the crux of being a dealer, is you get to deal with—and this is putting it in the most crass fashion of all—you get to deal with really crazy collectors. Like some of the collectors I had, literally, you became therapists to them, you had to talk to them for hours—you can imagine this—before they'd pay you. And then you have artists that have maybe a skewed view of what it means to have your work sold through a gallery, making demands on the gallery and the gallery space, the collection of money and how that really happens. And the fact that most gallery owners, unless they have sponsors, are broke all the time, and live on this edge that is just aggravating and stressful and very difficult. When I closed the gallery, I got a note from Ana Louisa Espinoza, my Flores [de Aztlán] *comadre:* "Well, at least you don't have to deal with those artists anymore," because I had people show up on the day of an opening to bring their work, where I had to hang the whole show without them, and then suddenly hang their work. I had people who all of the sudden, for like no good reason whatsoever, demanded all of their work back. I mean, you're paying them, and it's the layaway plan, so everybody was pretty frustrated. But how do you build a collectorship out of individuals who had never collected before, and whose pocketbooks were very small, and you're trying to encourage them to start buying major paintings, not just little drawings or little prints? We wanted to get out of that. We wanted to move up out of . . . Not to say that the atelier was little prints, there was actually little prints being produced by artists on their own in their own studios, right? And I think we did. Like I told you, we got in major magazines internationally. We got—I believe that I really did help to build . . . I know that I helped to build a few careers, and that was one of my goals. Not only to take myself there, but also to help take others there. We had reviews, right, we had a major press campaign. We had a major press campaign. And we were being included in a lot of different very important listings and opportunities, and I think I did a lot of really good work in eight years. But after eight years, I had just basically given my bit to the Chicano art world, in the sense of not focusing on my own career.

KMD: Your own creativity.

LV: On my own career. And I felt like I—what do they call it?—I completed my obligation. I went twice around the circle of the four points, which is a number that's used in the *indigena* community when you take on a responsibility. And I felt like I had done a pretty good job overall, because I'm pretty organized and stuff like that. And my husband just said, "How long are you going to do this, Linda? We can't afford to do this forever. This is ridiculous." I literally ended up with not enough money to buy groceries.

KMD: So most of the artists didn't then have a sense of how things could work. So you go—

LV: How difficult things were. How difficult things are for dealers. I think that's what artists don't know, is how the dealer functions.

KMD: So you take that knowledge to the dealers that you . . . Well, I guess I should start with, do you then get a dealer for yourself after this, at the end of the '90s?

LV: No, at the end of the '90s—in 1990 I went straight to the studio, and I started painting, and just said, "You know what? I'm going back to the studio and I'm going to start painting," and that's when Los Cielos started coming up. I gave up the gallery in 1996, and I showed my first Los Cielos—I did fifty paintings between then and 2000, and I showed nineteen of them at SPARC. That's what I decided. I didn't decide to go into business for myself—into this next step, this next series of steps that I'm working on to share the work. I decided I needed to really go to the studio and just buckle the fuck down.

KMD: So when you do get a dealer, it's your first relationship with Patricia?

LV: Patricia Correia. Yeah, Patricia. Patricia did the Chicano scene, I heard she was doing the Chicano scene. I started going to a lot of the openings. I really like Patricia, I think she's really a great girl. I think she's mustered up under a lot of stuff. And I think that the Chicano community as a whole owes her a debt of gratitude for all of the careers that she not—she took careers to a totally different level than I ever did, that's for damn sure. And her and Cheech Marin together really brought some focus. And you know, the movement is so big, there are so many artists, and there are so many schools—and I think we agree on that—that Patricia, as a dealer, has focused on a particular school, and it's the strongest iconographic school. It's at the top of the pantheon at this point.

KMD: What—how would you describe that, what she focuses on?

LV: I would say the urban Chicano experience.

KMD: And when you—

LV: You know, it's city, and LA loves city.

KMD: When you go into—you know, you already have all this knowledge, so I'm wondering, does it make it easier, are there still challenges—

LV: There's always challenges.

KMD: You once told me that she didn't necessarily want to show an image you had done of a woman's body.

LV: Well, you know, we're talking about the *indigena*-Chicano movement here for like the first time that I've ever actually put this much detail on tape, or talk to anybody that has a historical interest in this. Most of the art world is not into this kind of imagery, right? It's finding its way in now, it's finding its way, finally. It's been a slow growth, but it's happening out there. And I think we mentioned that beautiful weaver from Texas?

KMD: Yeah, Consuelo Jiménez Underwood.

LV: Consuelo. Her stuff is just magnificent, and I know that she and I could have delicious conversations about this particular aspect of the Chicano arena. It's an arena. And so Patricia—Patricia has been very kind to me. I think she appreciates the paintings themselves. Just for the paintings themselves. I think she loves the work. And that's good enough for me at this point. I know where I am in the Chicano hierarchy. When I was at Self Help Graphics, I used to say, I'll be glad just be a duchess. If they will allow me to be a duchess, I will be happy. I don't need to be queen, I don't need to be prince, I don't need to be any of these things. I don't need to be directly connected to the royal families, as it were. I'm happy to be a duchess, as long as I'm invited to court. May I be in the court, please? And that's the thought that I had twenty-five years ago, and that's basically where I'm at. And I won't let anybody take my experience or my image away from me.

KMD: So you had mentioned, okay, so if Patricia doesn't want to—sees differently about a particular—

LV: Aspect.

KMD: You bring her your portfolio, and she says yes to some and no to others.

LV: Mm-hmm.

KMD: How—

LV: Then she invites you into a show, she picks the pieces she wants to show.

KMD: And you're okay with that.

LV: Yeah, I have tons of work. It's fine. If I have one piece I really want to show, I'll say it. I thought that Patricia—I thought I was lucky to get into the Correia Gallery. I make the joke that I dated her for five years before she included me. I make that joke with all the love, Patricia. And flowers and all the lovely things of dating someone properly. I went to all the openings. I still go to the majority of the openings, because I appreciate what she does. I appreciate the gallery. I'm—my mentors tell me that I should be very pleased to be in a gallery in Bergamot Station. They tell me the realities of the gallery world, where one . . . I think I mentioned this to you earlier. I have personal knowledge of an artist who's involved with one of the most important galleries in Los Angeles who does not get paid. And so I'm fortunate to have a gallery. She told me another—my new mentor, Astrid Preston—a really fabulous naturalist (I hope she doesn't mind me calling her that) with Craig Krull—told me that she knew someone who quit a very good gallery for any number of personality and political reasons, and now they can't find a gallery. Galleries are not that hard to come by. It takes a lot of work to find someone that's dedicated to you, who believes in you. And you don't want to burn those bridges. I mean, you may move on and have other galleries, there's nothing to stop you from that, and that's what you should do, as a matter of fact. You should have more than one, and that's what I'm working on now.

KMD: So your other—the other gallery that you're working with now is Metro?

LV: Metro [Gallery in Silver Lake] and Quintana Galleries in Portland, Oregon, although I'm on the periphery of that, too. And, let's see, I [curated] the OCCCA [Orange County Center for Contemporary Arts] show this year, [*Echoes: Women Inspired by Nature,*] with Betty Ann Brown. Dr. Betty Ann Brown, my very good colleague and friend. And an excellent curator, excellent historian, fabulous girl. Wonderful to work with, just fabulous. Our personalities mix just beautifully. We're both emphatic, but flexible. "If you really feel that way, honey, if it's really got to be like that, then you must have something that I don't see, go right ahead with it." And we did that, we acquiesced to each other on central points and came up with a fabulous show. That was one of the high points of this year, really, was working with Betty Ann Brown at OCCCA. And Betty Ann Brown at the Barnsdall [Art Center] for the panel "Revealed: Women, Art, Life, Success" [in conjunction with the *Multiple Vantage Points: Southern California Women Artists, 1980–2006* exhibition]. And working with Suzanne Lacy at MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] for the dinner that she did in collaboration for the *WACK!* show. Kind of venturing back into the feminist world, as you would, and finding that I had been somewhat forgotten, because I'd been so deeply enmeshed in the Chicano art world and the *indigena* art world for so long. Hi—

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: We [took] a quick break. I wanted Linda to talk a little bit more about the ease or difficulty of negotiating the art world or the art market, and working with dealers.

LV: Well, you know, the movement has kind of come and gone out of popularity, and galleries have been open to showing Chicanos and then less likely, and I think it kind of follows the *LA Times.* You know, the *LA Times* for a while did a lot of Chicano stuff. They had *Nuestro Tiempo.* So there was all this opportunity for Latinos to be able to have interest, to gain interest. And a lot of it was happening in the barrios of the United States, and in East LA particularly. When I had the gallery in downtown Los Angeles, I had—all the Spanish language channels were interested in me. Once I moved to the Westside—I had one year in the Westside with the gallery—all of those Spanish language things just sort of flaked off, and the *LA Times* started paying attention to me. The *LA Times*, for a time, when Self Help Graphics was young, and I was there with Sister Karen, we worked with the *LA Times* a lot. Self Help Graphics was listed regularly, the shows and the Day of the Dead were listed regularly. There were supplements for the Day of the Dead at one point. And now things have changed. And I think that the opportunities for Chicano quote-unquote artists to get in

and out of the Chicano milieu and show in other locales is actually connected to and influenced heavily by the media and how the media perceives it.

KMD: Well, you're also talking about location.

LV: Oh, location was it.

KMD: Location, location, location.

LV: That's what it is: location is it. Location is it, and how it's perceived. Its location is how it's perceived. And now how an artist goes to a gallery is, basically, they prepare a portfolio. They ask if they're looking at work, they take a portfolio, they show their work, and they are selected. It's the same thing with an agent, from what I'm learning in my newest experiences. You contact them, you tell them that you'd like to show them a portfolio, they have you send a series of images, and if they're interested in an interview, then they meet you. And galleries, of course, there's thousands and thousands of artists in Los Angeles, and not enough galleries to hold everybody. The competition is fierce. The competition is just absolutely fierce. You have gallery owners that have their own aesthetic, their own focus, their own mission, whether it's abstract or whether it's installation, or whether it's Chicano or whether it's European, or whether it's antiquities.

KMD: So it's obvious why you picked Patricia Correia, because she had this—she's developed this focus on Chicano art.

LV: Yes, of course. So I went there to again try to get a promotion, like I told Patricia. "Patricia, I need a promotion in the Chicano movement. I need a promotion. I've worked very hard for this promotion. I'm here to be evaluated and to be given a promotion." And I'm still struggling for that promotion now, and that's what's led me to go into getting an agent in Los Angeles and an agent in New York, because I believe that for myself personally, the Chicano art movement, although I'll always be in it, and always be included in different levels of it, that it's limiting me, in terms of sharing the object and being remembered in historical documentation of the art world, in California and the United States in the twenty-first century. I would like to be remembered. I would like my work to be remembered. I think that's what all artists hope for. And the Chicano art movement because of its group shows, which don't allow for singular shows, and its singular shows, which are focused on the top of the pyramid, in terms of what I'm calling *la pura chicanada* and the icons that exist there—I'm consistently on the periphery. And although everyone agrees that the work is good, it's just something that—I refuse also to give up my past. I don't believe in that, I don't believe that you chop off your nose to spite your face. I believe that integration is what you have to do in a life to create a unique voice. I believe that that's—

KMD: So I guess you're saying there is this pressure for you to create these icons, these images, that sell really well, but you're saying no.

LV: I won't do it. I sold a lot of my work to the Chicanos, but I think that I could have sold a lot more work if I would have suddenly take on some of the icons and painted them. But I didn't want to do that, because it wasn't a part of my internal experience. My internal experience at that time was integrating a worldview with an indigenous view.

KMD: So do you want to talk about the agents you have? The two—

LV: Yes. Sylvia White in Los Angeles and Katharine Carter in New York.

KMD: And the goal there is to get into—

LV: Museums.

KMD: Museums.

LV: And universities.

KMD: And universities.

LV: Yes, yes. And I'm told by both of my agents that my work is very strong and has very good possibility, and now we're going to go out and do the portfolio and do the whole thing, and present the work and make proposals. Because you propose—

KMD: And hopefully also, I guess, the scholarship, too, right?

LV: That's exactly what I need. I need to have one-woman shows with catalogs and critical review of the work itself. Just as the art. I mean, I'm sure some of the historical stuff will include the Chicana and the *indigena*,

my background in all of these things, but more importantly than anything is just the critical review of the work itself.

KMD: So you're looking for formal analysis, right?

LV: That's exactly correct.

KMD: Composition, line—

LV: Yes, yes. Integrity, the whole thing, yes. Artistic integrity, the whole thing, yes. Idea. The most important thing to me really is the idea itself. The concept itself is very important to me, and I work very hard to develop concept, and then formulate them into three-dimensional and two-dimension objects. And I've been painting for many years. And now, because of my visits, as we went through yesterday, with all of the museums in the nation, I noticed that there's—installation is what's happening and has been happening in museums. So I'm finally going in that direction, because now I have the space and the time and the energy to be able to integrate all of my experiences on another level, and incorporate three-dimension objects. I was a sculptor and I was a painter, so it's very easy to start manipulating that and making . . . Going back, as it were, to the first things that I was producing out of grad school, those folded, very complex folded monotypes, sculptural forms, and Plexiglas boxes looking like something from outer space.

KMD: So the art market experience, for you, has been fluctuating the whole time?

LV: It fluctuates for all of us, even the ones that are the most well known and who apparently sell a great deal. That's what the art market does, is it fluctuates greatly. It's feast or it's famine, that's how it is in the gallery world. Either you're selling a lot or you're not selling at all, and you're scraping to make ends meet, and they just go tail after tail. You can't really—you're never really flying high for a long time. And the bigger the gallery and the more you're making, the more expenses you have, and the more people you have the divide the pie up to. So you see a painting that's selling for a hundred thousand dollars, but you don't realize that there's four people that share in that pie.

KMD: And who are the four, the—

LV: Possibly the person that's reselling it, the first dealer who went to that collector, the second dealer who's actually making the sale, and the artist. Plus the overhead for shipping and crating and conservation, and so suddenly you're not looking at a hundred thousand dollars —people imagine it, the money, being differently than it is.

KMD: Well, I actually had a question about that. Do you ever get a sense that sometimes—you know, it's not necessarily eye, because we know that all dealers have their own eye, but do you ever fee like, oh, the space. They're not going to be able to display the long, thin, narrow pieces, or maybe—I'm thinking Metro, how many large pieces can you get into Metro?

LV: Yeah, no, that's absolutely true. And you sacrifice on those kinds of levels quite a lot, and it's really a matter of, am I going to paint what they have space for, or am I going to paint what I planned to paint?

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: We took a break and we're back, and Linda was going to talk a little bit about—

LV: Some of the details of the process. With Day of the Dead, at Self Help Graphics, in the early '80s and mid-'80s, all the way through the '80s. Especially right at the beginning, in 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, Teatro Campesino was a very big part of the Day of the Dead. They were doing these funny sketches of *campesinos* and what it was like to be—political sketches, what it was like to be prejudiced against in the fields, and prejudiced against at work, and they had their skits that they were doing. It was a lot like vaudeville, with very funny costuming, and they were bringing a great deal of people to Self Help Graphics. I would say that they were one of the driving forces that really started bringing the crowds to Self Help Graphics.

[*break in audi*o]

LV: You had the one with Linda Ronstadt? The big one the came out with Linda Ronstadt?

KMD: *Canciones con Mi Padre*?

LV: No, that was her album. She did that piece of Luis Valdez's women of the revolution.

KMD: Right. Right.

LV: I don't know why I'm drawing a blank. I'm drawing a blank, it starts with a "C." And there was—my girlfriend Cui Cui Rangel even auditioned for that and we went for the audition with Luis Valdez. And I think Teatro Campesino, Luis Valdez with Moctesuma Esparsa, and that whole production team was working on the next level of the Chicano level impact on a nationwide—statewide, nationwide. And of course you had Edward Olmos, who became a very celebrated movie star from that catalyst. When we brought Teatro Campesino to Self Help Graphics, they were doing very big performance pieces that were drawing very large crowds of people. And I think that's what ignited Day of the Dead into becoming what it was going to become, which is a region-wide celebration that was celebrated by many people in many different forms in many different ways. And of course, the more people you involve in a process, the more likely a process is to evolve and culture starts taking place—culture is built and starts taking place, which means it's changing.

KMD: Right.

LV: So you went from your question before with the more indigenous, historically correct altars, into altars that were made by artists that were drawn together for the Day of the Dead. And you've seen what it's become, it's become this mega cult California, Southwest, Denver, Chicago phenomenon, where every year there's Day of the Dead celebrations of all different types, all different kinds, every kind of manipulation and formulation that you can imagine to interpret the Day of the Dead, all the way back to what Ofelia Esparza is now doing, to what we were doing at Self Help Graphics then, which is the traditional, what they would call the traditional altar, which heralds back to what Self Help Graphics was doing in the early '80s in terms of the *altares* itself. So I think that that catalyst . . .

And there were any number of artists going through Self Help Graphics at this point. They were just all over the place. And they were working in the hall. The tables were laid out. Tito Delgado worked there for weeks, weeks and weeks. I remember doing all of his cutouts on the tables and all of his feathering. He was also shown at Galería Las Américas and got an article in several magazines for his show. We sold pieces for him, too. There was a lot of different kinds of input going on at that point. Mike and I were pretty much studying the indigenous stuff and incorporating it into artwork. And then there were people who were . . . Oh, *Chismearte* was there at that point.

KMD: That's right.

LV: *Chismearte* magazine, I was on the cover of the first issue, I believe it was the first issue, *Chismearte*, along with Emilio Vasquez. And so there was like this upcoming of magazines and cultural—Bill Bejarano was there at Self Help Graphics at that time with his magazine, which name I can't remember right now. That's a shame too. I know it's in the bibliography.

KMD: Right.

LV: So he was there along with—Leo Límon was there really heavily at that point. He was already painting and doing lots of prints at Self Help Graphics. The Day of the Dead workshops were taking place. We had a series of curriculum that we were working on at that time and teaching kids. Lots of artists were being hired to do that as well. Sure, from the histories of Self Help, you have a list of all of the artists that were all present. We were just in a whirlwind of activity at this point. And Sister Karen [Boccalero] was very interested in incorporating as many people as possible. She really believed in building the masses. Let's see . . .

KMD: Do you remember any internal debates at Self Help about . . . Explain how you felt your work was on the margins of—

LV: Sister Karen believed that Self Help Graphics was a leader and should be treated as a leader. I remember her speech. Los Four was very big at that time and I remember her saying, "That's one group, we're the

other ones, we're leaders too." So there were really sets about who was going to get to show at the museum next and who's going to get to sell their work. Sister Karen was an artist, she understood the idea of competition and the idea of career and the idea of moving forward in terms of that. She really selected people who I believe that she had a respect for as painters and artists and people who had vision or a mission statement that they wanted to share. I guess… [*pause*] You know, there's always this underlying stuff that goes on, who's in and who's out and who's up and who's down and all of this stuff.

KMD: Do you think it was beyond personality? Did it have to do with style?

LV: No, I think it had to do with a misunderstanding of the process. I think if you know how the art world works, it's much easier to maneuver in it. It's kind of like if you have a map of the river, it's easier to maneuver. But if you don't have a map, a lot of times you find yourself stuck in little corners or bumping along the sides rather than flowing down the middle of the river.

KMD: So when you had your gallery—I'm going to skip a little—you certainly seemed to have a map. What kinds of artists were you showing?

LV: I was showing tons of them. I'll flip the book and mention some names and see what we find. Of course we have Tito Delgado, Carmen Lomas Garza.

KMD: And how did you get Carmen, because she was in Texas at the time—no, she was in San Francisco.

LV: She was in San Francisco. Ramses contacted her, if I'm not mistaken. I didn't know her then. Ramses contacted her and she came to the gallery. We got an article for her in *La Opinión* and the *Downtown News*. She got a cover in the *Downtown News*.

KMD: Right.

LV: We got some very good press, because we were collecting collectors, because we were a for-profit gallery rather than a non-profit. The non-profit formula—we were going out of that and trying to enter into the art world itself. That time I had a one-woman show or a show with Ramses Noriega as well. There's Juanishi Orosco, Judy Baca. Oh—

KMD: What did you show [for] Judy Baca? Because in the '90s, I imagine—

LV: *Dimensions of Realism: Mensaje, Expresion, Espacio*. Judy Baca, Gloria Longval, and Ruben Benevidas. And we had a lot drawings because I loved her drawings. We sold her drawings because they were all so saleable. Because they were on the wall, you could sell them, we sold pieces for her as well. [*pause*] We got a lot of press, as you can see. Oh yeah, we also showed Daniel Martinez, who unfortunately of AIDS in the 1990s. We showed East Los Streetscapers, Mike Amescua.

KMD: How did you show the Streetscapers? They're known for muralism.

LV: We showed their paintings.

KMD: Okay. Did you show them as a group together?

LV: Well, at that point David Botello and Wayne Healy were working together as [East Los] Streetscapers and they both had their individual artwork. [*pause*] We showed some of our artists at *Exploring a Movement: Feminist Visions in Clay,* [which] was at the José Drudis-Biada Art Gallery, Mount St. Mary's College. Yeah. That was a nice show. We showed also Efraín Novelo.

KMD: Now, as you're going through the book, [I see that] a lot of images of your own work [that] were picked up for the review, or the announcement, [were] figurative.

LV: Yeah, we had a lot of figurative work because Ramses [was] figurative. He was figurative, and at the time I was figurative too. I was woman of love and integrity, so I had all the female heads and female bodies and all of those gouaches that I told you about.

KMD: Now, you said before that you didn't work from a model.

LV: No, I didn't work from a model. Models are expensive and [its] hard [for them] to hold still. But then you have to remember that I had been drawing the form ever since my work in Europe, and it was just part of the process. You study the nude for years and years and years and years and years.

KMD: So what kind of woman did you imagine? I mean, I could describe her, but I'd rather hear you describe—

LV: What is it, the full woman, the mature woman, the mature woman who's taking good care of her body. Someone whose body has seen life and experience, not a young body and certainly not an anorexic form, but really a voluptuous female form that is sensual and nurturing and giving.

KMD: And then the face?

LV: The face is always the *indigena* face, or at least the big nose, which implied ancient culture, whether it's Greek or Roman or Mayan. I like the very large nose and the very large lips. I painted women who looked like you or me. That's why I used to tell people, they go, "Who is this?" And I go, "Well, it's a little of you, and a little of me. Your cousin might be in there, or your *comadre*. It sort of looks like all of us—it's sort of a composite." And then the dark hair, the dark skin. Oh, Teddy Sandoval was with the gallery.

KMD: Oh, really?

LV: He was a very important supporter of the gallery. Karen, it's very important for me to show this. He showed with us on several occasions. We sold several of his pieces, and he was one of the Chicano artists who had been at Self Help Graphics and understood and was interested in the gallery world, who very much supported the Galería. He came to all of the openings. He showed several times. He was in the final catalog as well. I included him in the final catalog as my goodbye to him. He died three weeks after he took his final photograph. See, like we had giant group shows, too. Here's some here. David Botello… Rudy Torres was one of the early artists that we sold a lot of work for. Vocos Pose, Yando Rios, Tony Ortega, Wayne Healey, Leo Limón, Julio Garcia, Jorge Pardo, Jose Luis Sedano.

KMD: Now, let me ask you a hard question.

LV: Okay.

KMD: In that group show, it's mostly male names. Was there attention to gender balance at the . . . or was it . . .

LV: I want to say that—I don't know, let's take a look at this book. [*pause*] There's three women out of six, nine—there's three women out of twelve, so it's about 25 percent. I'll tell you how that worked for me. The artists that came and supported all of the shows, and some of them helped me hang and some came and helped me do the small help with volunteering. It was like sticking stamps to things and stuff like that. These were the artists. They had good work and they were also interested in helping with the gallery's efforts. They were more likely to be included in everything.

KMD: So, people who are contributing to this process as a whole?

LV: That's right. I think that's happened in the gallery world as a whole. Artists who have made good work and who are committed to their dealer through all of the changes and everything are cordial and polite and understand a little more about the business world are more likely to be in included. There's Rodrigo and Sara Palacios again. Isabel Martinez did a lot of work at the gallery. Julio Garcia, Isabel again, Poli Marichal, [Yolanda Gonzalez, Judy Baca, Yreina Cervantez, Dolores Haro, Gloria Longval, and Carmen Lomas Garza]. Dolores Guerrero-Cruz.

KMD: Dolores Guerrero-Cruz, she's also not well known in the Chicana—

LV: Yeah, we haven't been able to find her, we don't know where she's gone.

KMD: Oh no.

LV: At one point Beto de la Rocha was with the gallery. Yolanda Gonzales showed at the gallery—Rene Vasquez, Eric Montoya.

KMD: Now, some of these folks are kind of your generation and some of them are younger.

LV: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

KMD: So, the younger folks, do you get a sense that you're mentoring them through their careers? Is there still some relationship with some of those younger artists?

LV: Everybody's dispersed a lot. Everybody's pretty dispersed, a lot. Nik Fernandez is another artist that was included. The art world, even the Chicano art world is so big—oh, also Linda Arreola. I was the first person to show Linda Arreola.

KMD: Wow.

LV: That makes sense, doesn't it?

KMD Yes, it does.

LV: She has this way out stuff.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: I was one of the, the . . . See, she had a show, Sandra Ramirez. Yeah. It was just more likely for me . . . If you had good work, if you had what I believed to be good work and you were cordial to me and respectful to me and everything I was trying to do and how hard I was working—I was working like a banshee over here—you were more likely to be included in more shows and gain more opportunities. And I think that's true across the board. If you are a pain in the butt—

KMD: "Do you play well in the sandbox" is what I call it. [*laughter*]

LV: Yes. Rafael Alletes Escarzaga. So, let's see, Esau Andrade.

KMD: Are these other Latino artists? I actually don't know those names.

LV: Yeah, they're Latinos because they were Galería Las Américas. So we had Chicanos and Latinos, and the idea was full spectrum. It was just about good work.

KMD: So you didn't have an emphasis on figurative. You didn't have an emphasis on conceptual. You didn't have an emphasis on—

LV: No, we had an emphasis on Latino, Chicano. That was our emphasis and full-spectrum was our guide. We don't look at it—I mean, I could look at something and say, "Well, that's not what I would paint." But more likely, I'd look at it and go, "Wow, that's interesting, what's that about?"

KMD: Did you get these collectors that you were building to come to the range of shows, or did they start to—

LV: No, the collectors bought the range of what I had.

KMD: Really?

LV: Plus we had Mexican masters, too. We had Cuevas, too. We had all the Mexican masters prints as well. We sold Mexican master prints. So the collectors, if you go back and look at the collectors of Galería Las Américas, what you'll find is they have an eclectic Latino, full-spectrum collection.

KMD: Which would be very counter to what the discussion is now, though.

LV: Not counter to it, it's just on the periphery of it again. I think we're going in that direction. I always thought that if the Chicanos could connect themselves to the wider Latino world and still remain Chicano, that it'd be much easier to move the quote-unquote movement along. If we could consider ourselves part of the conversation in terms of the entire continent, then that makes our world that much bigger. It doesn't mean we have to give up what we're doing. It just means that we have a conversation which tries to draw inferences from other influences.

KMD: Well, you have an experience of being able to do that. Most folks don't have a language for remaining true to what you are and taking in. Because the American narrative is assimilate, assimilate, assimilate. In other words, give up what you are.

LV: Well, I think that's an oxymoron. I think that's the antithesis of the American experience. I think the American experience, in its final formation is the eclectic, twenty-first-century, postmodern experience, where it is indeed the salad. It's not the melting pot, it's the salad, where there's all kinds of vegetables in the salad, and they go together just fine, put some dressing on it and you're happy. I think that's more like the American experience. I wouldn't say that I'm wrong. I think we see it in fashion. I think we see it in the way we live our daily lives. I think the mirage of the information that comes from media and for pertinent materials and from the home life and from the work of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah has created this incredible cacophony of cultural experiences. I think that that, indeed, is what the American experience is about, not assimilation at all.

I think that there's people who function very well in the twenty-first-century postmodern life on all kinds of levels and are Hasidic Jews. [*laughter*] There's people who function on all kinds of modernistic, technology-based, blah, blah, blah worlds, that are, that come from Russian immigrants who have managed to keep their Russian Jewish background and identity. I don't think it's an impossibility. I don't think it's the two sides of the same coin. I think it's multiple sides of the prism itself. It's a wonderful place to be. The postmodern

world can be very confusing. I think it can be very intimidating for people who are accustomed to one world view, where the one world view is very tied and closed and very complete and very—

KMD: So, in that sense, do you think your travels, living in fifteen different states, has served you well?

LV: I have been brought up to be a postmodern person. Look at me, I'm reading the biography of Lucretia Borgia, where the hell does that come in? I've got feminist—I have a feminist pair of lenses. I have a Chicano pair of lenses. I have an *indigena* pair of lenses. I have the Chicano *indigena* pair of lenses. I have an American pair of lenses. I have a European pair of lenses. And sometimes I put them all on simultaneously. It's kind of like being in a 3D movie.

KMD: So let's talk about when you finish with the gallery.

LV: Yeah, I'm done. I'm done!

KMD: So what happens after 1996?

LV: Well, let me tell you. My husband said, "I think it's over with." And I said, "Yes, honey, I think it is." And ninety days later I closed the gallery, and I lost only one small paper piece. I had over four hundred pieces in the back of the gallery and I managed to give them all back to all of the artists in ninety days and have a final show. The only thing that was left in the gallery at that point was my stuff. So I put everything up that was my own work, because it was all that was left—I was going to drag it out last—and called it quits. Had a big party. Had a closing ceremony. Josefina Gallado and Debbie Castro, my good ole time *indigena comadres* and *maestras*, came and did a closing ceremony where everybody gave me a flower to thank me for all of these years of dedication that I had given to the Chicano community. That's how my *indigenas* saw the gallery, that I was doing a sacrifice and making an offering to the community that had been so much to me, right? My parents came—oh, you know what? [There was another woman artist named] Angelica, Angelica …

KMD: You can fill it in later if you want.

LV: Eriberto [Oriol] and Angelica [González], they had a space downtown, too, at that time. They were trying to put up shows, too. They were always very good friends. And I should look that up for you. It's a shame, it's just too many details in my head all at once. So I closed it up. I had to go in a truck and take all the furniture and the shit from it myself. I drove this U-Haul with stick shift. I was practically crying by the time I was finished. Several of the artists from the gallery . . . Luis Ituarte. Luis Ituarte was this friend, this cultural friend that came out of the woodwork and helped me move the gallery on two occasions. And he's a very well-known intellectual, historian, and teacher. Right? And I brought down and put it all in a storage unit in Long Beach. [*pause*]

KMD: You put it in a storage unit?

LV: I put it in a storage unit. I gave away bunches of stuff and put it all in a storage unit in Long Beach, put the whole gallery in a storage unit in Long Beach.

KMD: When did you go deal with that?

LV: What?

KMD: Is it still there?

LV: Oh no, oh God, are you kidding? Not me. Not me. And then I got a big studio in—at the time I had the gallery, I had the one room where I was doing the watercolors. Then I had this moving studio in this office building where they would give me any room that was available for one hundred dollars a month. And I moved from one room to the next, so I could have a studio for one hundred dollars, because that's all I could afford.

KMD: Right. Right.

LV: Then, when I closed the gallery, I got a big studio, it was about twelve hundred square feet, right there off of Del Amo in Long Beach. Had fourteen-foot ceilings, and I started painting [the] Los Cielos [series]. And I started Los Cielos dreaming about going to an island—started seeing blue waters of the Caribbean or something. I started seeing blue, blue, blue waters in my dreams. I was swimming in them and shit like this. I said, "You know what, I think I have to go to an island. Let's go to an island." We hadn't been able to

afford any vacations. We could afford nothing. Galería Las Américas sacrificed, my children sacrificed, Ron just sacrificed. Everybody sacrificed for this institution. We went to the Hawaiian Islands. We went to the big island, and then we went to Kauai. And I made friends with and reconnected with Elsa Flores—

KMD: Right.

LV: Who was my old friend from the LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions] exhibition. With her and Teddy [Sandoval] and Carlos. We did a show at LACE, where Elsa at the point was doing performance pieces. She did performance pieces. I walked into the gallery and went, "Somebody is doing performance." Performance hadn't been happening really, performance wasn't even really that big.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: And there was Elsa [Flores] doing this little performance piece and there I was trying to wrap my brain around it and really enjoying it a lot. And I had my folded paper pieces in the Plexiglas boxes, and Self Help Graphics bought one of the pieces. Teddy Sandoval had these pieces that were zip-lock bags—at that point, they didn't have zip-lock bags—they were like little sandwich bags, filled with sand at the bottom, with little—you buy them at the store—palm trees and little cowboys, and his little cowboy things, and little notes written on little paper stuck in the sand all hanging up on the wall, and this shower curtain, which I've seen duplicated since then, I don't know how many times, where he'd put images on the shower curtain, and it was all cowboy and Hawaiian and very kitsch and very perfect. Carlos had his work there and his paintings. And John Valadez, if I'm not mistaken, was in that show too. I mean, it was heavy, it was really great.

So I reconnected with Elsa, after all of these years, and then stayed at her home [when] Carlos passed away. Kauai—for the next ten years my family and I went, and I went this year as well, to her home on Kauai, which is where Carlos lived his last year and died there and was buried on that island. And I always felt close to Carlos. I always liked him a lot. He had no—it wasn't really about anything except for this shit is good, this is good shit, this is good shit. He wasn't really about the personality or the gender or anything like that. So, I started going to the islands. And I went to the islands and went, "Son of the gun, I'm painting the Hawaiian skies." I've already started the Los Cielos series.

KMD: Right.

LV: I go to Hawaii and I start seeing what I'm painting. I cried. I cried and cried and cried and cried and cried and cried buckets for the beauty of Kauai. I was devastated by it. I felt like my—after I came back from Kauai, because I would go there, my dreams would pick up and I'd start seeing things and, oh, it was so fabulous. You know, the Hawaiian Islands are living. They're living! There are parts of the islands that no man has stepped on. It's like the moon or something and it just affects you. The colors or so brilliant and so lovely. I just kept painting Los Cielos.

And as I was painting Los Cielos, I realized I was painting ceremonial grounds. When you go to ceremony, you're standing on a flat piece of ground and all you're looking at all doggone day is either the ceremonial circle and the players in it or the sky. And you're rising at the sunrise and you're going to bed at the sunset. You're watching the sun as it arches across the sky. You're watching giant cloud formations in Arizona, like my memories of Texas as a small child. It's just this giant sky that we don't have in New York and we don't have in LA. One of my first contentions was I'm painting the only thing we have left with the hopes that one day you'll look at it one day and remember what we have. And I still have collectors come to me and say, "Every time I see a beautiful sunset, I think of you Linda." I'll stop my car and take a look and remember how beautiful it is. And that's really my intention. Please remember the beauty of this planet. I'm not Christian, I don't believe the planet's the dominion of the devil, for God's sake. I think nature is the closest thing we have to God. It's the mirror, it's God's face, it's his reflection, her reflection. The original Godhead has both sexes together.

KMD: Right.

LV: Coatlicue has the two snakeheads that face each other. I mean it's male and female that created the whole big bang and the whole thing. That's indigenous, I mean it doesn't just go back to Genesis. It goes all the way back to the stars and the first big bang. And so I was just—I painted big, man. I got big.

KMD: You had fourteen-foot ceilings, so you could.

LV: I did. I had giant easels in there and I just painted. My children were in grade school at that point and I'm cooking every night at six o'clock. And I'm the homework mom and I'm the dentist and the doctor mom. And I'm the big birthday parties with the piñata and the matching cake and all the kids from school and the games and my *tios* and *tias* and their grandmothers. You know, the big thing.

KMD: Right.

LV: I'm at the barbeque doing the hamburgers.

KMD: [*laughter*]

LV: I made tostadas for a lot of the parties because it's very easy to make and inexpensive to serve. Everything's easy. So I'm doing all of that and going to Hawaii every year and just soaking in this incredible sky and meditating on it and making friends with the indigenous people of the islands. I found that if I wore my earrings, my indigenous earrings, around the islands the Hawaiians would approach me. That if I showed them that I had indigenous sentiments and sentimentalities, that I was trustworthy.

KMD: Right.

LV: And I met [the] leadership of the indigenous community of the Hawaiian islands of Kauai, Jeff Chandler. And I met Helena, his sister, Helena Chandler—but I'm not sure of her married name—who was the queen of Kauai one year and invited us to the *ceremonia*, and invited us to the big luau afterwards. So they had *ceremonia y cena*.

KMD: Wow.

LV: And the *ceremonia* was exactly what we do in the indigenous Chicano community. I understood the iconography of it, I understood the passing of one object to the next. You know, they take the *concha* and they blow into the four directions, for crying out loud.

KMD: [*laughter*]

LV: So I had things that I could talk to them about. So I sort of involved myself with my children. The painting, on a new level of larger work, that took me out it, that took the person out of it, and just let myself go straight to nature. At this point, my children are sun dancing with me.

KMD: Right.

LV: At this point, I am doing a big ceremony in California, in California Indian circles. And that's almost everything that's been for me in the last few years. And the California Indian was really beginning—they got their language back, a lot of them got designated as tribes, they began dreaming their songs. They began dreaming their songs and dreaming their ceremonies. The bear dance was beginning. My husband and I and my children went to Kern, to the Kern Valley to attend some of the very first bear dances statewide. And we went to two or three as a family and stayed up and watched the dances where the California Indian people—I could cry very easily at this point—one night, we were up very, very late, because everything is done around the fire at night with the bear dance. The bears are up at night and watch the bears circle around the fire.

This is *Californñano*, this is a new phrase I've come up with: "I'm a *Californñana*." I like that. I like that, right? There's something about that I just really, really connect to. And so of course, the California Indian tribes are just a lovely interest. They're just so wonderful, there's so much there. And this group of *danzantes* came out—they don't call themselves *danzantes*, I call them that, right? The dancers came out, and they were wearing those headdresses made out of reed.

KMD: Yeah?

LV: The ones that stick up. They look like a pyramid on top of their head, like a reed.

KMD: Yes.

LV: And the grass skirt. This is a man. California Indian dancers are men. Lakota style, there are women dancers. Azteca style was mostly men, and the women had to break through, right?

KMD: Right.

LV: The women had to break through that. The man stood up and did these dances for us and sang these very old songs that they had taken the very detailed time and energy to gather from their fathers, their grandparents that were still alive, in an effort to pull them forward over decades like this, to remember what they could remember. And they were literally gleaning and piecing together this culture that had been disintegrated, literally just finding chunks and pulling it forward and sticking it. Beautifully done. And of course, this gentleman told us this story about how he was a recovering drug addict and how he had lived a very lonely life. And this is a story of much of the indigenous community. And how the culture, the cultural traditions brought him back to life, and how he was in touch with his traditions, *la cultura cura.* Which the RCAF understood completely.

And I remember, I can see him dancing, I can see him standing with the glow behind him. Which then, if you look at my paintings, with the glowing figures, this is where it all emanates from. And I never talk about it because they're very beautiful and they're very inviting and people find them very enjoyable and they say, "Oh, they have this spiritual quality about them." And it's very difficult to go into the minute memory and the processes of ceremony to describe what I gleaned from it. But there's many, there's hundreds of memories there, between Hawaii and Europe and the ancient sites and the gods and the horizon line.

KMD: I'm wondering if your interactions with Elsa also influenced your work.

LV: Oh, Elsa's already there. Elsa's already this hippy quasi-spiritual person. She loves the *indigenas*, she understands all of this stuff, but I'm more of a traditionalist.

KMD: Okay.

LV: I'm more of a traditional indigenous person that has elders, and study with elders, and practice with elders. And then they present opportunities to me and then I practice myself and then I go back to my elders. But, Elsa, yes, is a very spiritual being. She's a very spiritual being. She's one of the kindest people I've ever known in my life. She's very genteel and she's very worldly. And she's of course, very dedicated to Carlos's memory. That's a big focus of her life, Carlos's memory—God bless her. She's a lovely person.

KMD: She had to leave LA.

LV: Why?

KMD: Wouldn't you put it [that way]? That's one way of thinking about it. She had to become fully who she is, she had to go to another place.

LV: Well, Carlos took her there. They bought that house in Kauai when Carlos probably sold some of his big pieces out of Arco. Out of the Arco show. They bought their pieces for very little money considering what it's worth today.

KMD: Right.

LV: Carlos was a worldly person. Obviously Carlos was a spiritual, worldly person, and Elsa was also the same. So they got together. And Elsa and I connect very, very nicely. I remember her from the LACE days when LACE was downtown in this loft, down on Spring Street.

KMD: I was going to ask you about the LACE exhibition, because that seems to me like a place where your work could have really flourished.

LV: In LACE?

KMD: In LACE. The show that you're describing is—

LV: The folded paperwork. Well—

KMD: Which by then—

LV: Well, I jumped off the folded paper stuff into the trees with the paper. I started milling the paper. And that's where my work fell off everybody's radar, I think. I think Earth works at this point were a little early.

KMD: Right.

LV: I think they were a little early and people were perceiving what I was doing as masks.

KMD: Right, you had those masks.

LV: They perceived them—they're not masks, but they perceived them as masks. So they were seen as, what, folk art?

KMD: Yeah.

LV: Having a folk art edge, so I kind of fell off the map with everybody with the Earth stuff. Except for, of course, with Peter Norton, who bought several of those pieces. Now, all the sudden, my environmental edge from the 1980s, as it's coalescing into my environmental punch of the 2000s, you know.

KMD: Right.

LV: I think I have made a very—a good attempt, a solid attempt. [And] I'm proud for myself that I've stuck with my intention and my imagery, and I think I have successfully integrated my indigenous experience and my international experience into the new imagery, including the new digital sculptural work, and the 3D sculptural work into the environmental issues. But you can see that it has been—what is it now? We've been talking from 1975 to 2005. And that's a thirty-year period of artistic, creative, spiritual, market and exhibition, and family cycles, which have taken me through the last thirty years at a pretty rocking pace, it's been a pretty rocking pace. And I'm not quitting yet, I still have my plans for the future.

KMD: Oh, I'd imagine. You're at the peak. Not at the peak in terms of—

LV: I understand.

KMD: The downhill. But you're going up.

LV: I'm going—

KMD: Your thirty years of work is—

LV: I'm praying so. I don't use that word lightly. I'm praying so, because I think that it's a worthwhile thesis and statement. I think it has historical value. I think that my dedication to the Chicano art world has been one of [a] steep learning curve and one of a choice of personal integrity regarding personal imagery and the focus of my life's work as it contains Chicano, rather than allowing Chicano to contain me, right? And I know that my involvement in the indigenous world has added great value to me and my family and to my children especially, because my children have a very good sense of choice.

KMD: Yes.

LV: And good judgment and dedication, based on the sacrifices that they made as little boys in the ceremonial circle. You know, you go without food and water at the ceremonies. That takes a lot for a child to make those kinds of sacrifices. And they had to dedicate their sacrifices to their family, to their animal life, to things that matter to them. And now, I'm sort of just blowing it all out. Just like the paintings, I'm blowing it all out. I'm reaching much farther now than ever before. I was at the Biennale two years ago in Italy.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: And that was the beginning of my new dream, which is to follow my work around and to show quality at smaller museums and universities, with the hope of making it into some larger museum opportunities before my life is over.

KMD: Following your work around, you mean—

LV: Traveling with my work.

KMD: Going with—

LV: Oh yes. I love to travel. Why not have a reason? That's all—

KMD: With so many group shows, though, how could you keep up with all of them?

LV: Maybe it won't be that many.

KMD: But in the past you had a lot.

LV: Yes, I couldn't travel. I couldn't travel. And with small children and everything in tow?

KMD: Right.

LV: Well, I travel to ceremony. Rather than travel to shows, I travel to ceremony.

KMD: I was wondering if you could talk more about Los Cielos at SPARC.

[*break in audio*]

KMD: So, I was asking Linda about the SPARC show.

LV: Well, you know—

KMD: If you could reflect a little bit about—

LV: Judy Baca invited me to teach for her at UC Irvine while I was at Self Help Graphics in the 80s, or was it … I was making a print at Self Help Graphics at the same time I was teaching there. I taught there for her for I think a year and a half. She invited me to be her, what, stand-in professor. At UC Irvine.

KMD: She had gone on sabbatical, or something like that?

LV: She was actually going through a serious illness at the time.

KMD: I didn't know that.

LV: It came out okay. They thought that she was going to lose her eyesight.

KMD: Wow.

LV: And it didn't turn out that way. Judy is a very lucky and gifted person. She has a great deal to do, so the fates have been kind to her and saved her from several small health crises. I was very pleased there for her. I was very honored to be asked by her. She only had to ask me once.

KMD: What was it like teaching students in a university?

LV: Oh, I loved it. I loved it. "Let's talk about everything!

KMD: [*laughter*]

LV: "Let's bring in the books, let's study." Oh God, "Where'd you go, what show have you seen?" Blah, blah, blah, I loved it.

KMD: So you're doing studio classes in …

LV: Drawing.

KMD: Drawing?

LV: We did everything. We did conceptual stuff. We did installation stuff. We took photographs. We did drawings, we did everything, bits and pieces of everything, drawing and all of it is mirage, right? Taking it all the way out, drawing all the way out. My students were always, in the class I taught, extremely prolific. When they took my class, boy people just started making stuff, left and right, because the door was left open.

KMD: Really?

LV: Yeah. Technical style was at the key, technical capacity was at the key, but you could do whatever you needed to do.

KMD: Really?

LV: It sounds like me.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: I had a wonderful time at it, I really appreciate her offering me that opportunity. And Judy Baca had been one of the people who had really been willing to be a mentor to me when I was going through the Chicano community. I really felt her friendship all along and her deep support. And her belief in my abilities and her belief in the work I produced.

KMD: Is she about the same cohort as you? I figured she got her degree before you.

LV: She got her degree before. I think Judy is five years older than I am.

KMD: All right.

LV: I think she's sixty. I think she's sixty. We hit it off right off the bat, because I'm one of those high-powered girls that Judy likes.

KMD: When did you first meet her?

LV: I'm sure I met her at Self Help Graphics.

KMD: Self Help?

LV: I'm sure I met her at Self Help Graphics, because I'd like to know the chronology of the Great Wall and exactly what was happening in the '80s during the time of the Great Wall and what she was doing. I know she was establishing SPARC. It's always been the same location. I'm sure that we shared—

KMD: I think the first summer is late '70,s and then they really get going in the '80s.

LV: The '80s, so it was during that same time period. I know that she was in several of the group shows that I was involved with at that time and that whole chronology as well. So I was running into her artistically, seeing her work, aware of her very strong opinions about gender in art and her experiences with the Chicano male component. You know, what they call, what they still call "The Boy's Club."

KMD: I didn't know there was a boy's club.

LV: That's what they call it, "The Boy's Club." That's what the feminist Chicanas call it, "The Boy's Club." It's probably the underground statement but everybody's probably heard it. And Judy had, of course, had her own falling out with Los Four and had decided to go her own way, and one of the first things she ever said to me was, "Linda, if you don't create your own history, nobody's going to create it for you."

KMD: So that would match a lot of things that you were already doing.

LV: That's what I was about. Making my own career. It's my art and it's my career, that's what I'm doing. I took her word for it and went for it. And then also, I was also involved with Women's Building during that time. And there was a lot of radical feminist performance coming out, political performance. I know that Judy was involved in that on different levels and was very much part of the feminist community at that time.

One day, I ran into Judy after many years and encounters—friendly, artistic encounters and social encounters. I ran into her at Self Help Graphics. And it was right around the time I finished the fifty pieces for Los Cielos, and she said, "Linda, this coming year, we're going to do a series of one persons at SPARC. We're going to do Willie Herrón, [he] is going to one of them." I said, I put my hands together—I went like this—and I said, "Judy, please think of me. Please, think of me. I have a whole new suite of paintings that I'm dying to show." And the next thing I know, I have a phone call and I have a date. And that's how Los Cielos came about. And after Los Cielos was produced and shown, I did two Day of the Deads at SPARC as well, where they had Day of the Dead shows, and I did the *ceremonia* for the Day of the Dead.

KMD: Right. Right.

LV: And I brought in California Indian crew, the Flores de Aztlán crew, Colores—which is another Chicano indigenous circle, out of Highland Park—I brought Colores in, with Patricia Parra, at her home on Aldama [Street] and all the women in that group. And we did *ceremonia* for the Day of the Dead, based on all of the indigenous traditions, which fit right into everything and kind of brought together Self Help Graphics, Day of the Dead, and everything kind of came full circle into bringing the *ceremonia* back into, and the vigil back into, the Día de los Muertos.

KMD: Now, from what I understand, you sold quite a bit—

LV: Oh God, they're all gone.

KMD: Yeah, fifty. Did they sell at that location or afterwards?

LV: Before and after.

KMD: So there's a pre-sale.

LV: Yeah, I was selling them as I was going along. I was selling as I was going along.

KMD: Wow.

LV: So the show didn't include too much of the stuff from '95, '96, '97, but more '98, '99, and 2000, when I was getting really big, when the stuff was getting really big—bigger and more complex and stuff like that. I have very few of the early ones left at all. I had some smaller ones that I did as tests. And they are all gone. I wish I had done more of those. Yeah, they all sold. I sold to the Chicanos who had been the collectors from Galería Las Américas and to people who I invited to my studio to see the work, who took an interest in something. And I still have my layaway plan from Galería Las Américas days. Now, I don't sell as much because I'm trying to hold on to the work as much as possible for my museum opportunities.

KMD: Right.

LV: And also I have galleries that are representing me, so I don't sell out of the studio very much at all, unless it's like out of town.

KMD: Right.

LV: Or a piece that's been excluded by either one of my galleries. I show them the pieces first. If they don't take the pieces, then I feel free to sell them myself. If they accept the pieces, then obviously they have them. And that's that.

KMD: I imagine, as I'm starting to learn more about this, and you're at this—you have the intellectual capacity and the experience to realize that this is a difficult thing selling from the studio because you don't want to undercut your own—

LV: That's right, your own career.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: That's right. And it's always a struggle for artists, because it's money. You give 50 percent to the gallery, and that can be a lot when you're selling something for ten thousand dollars and you get five thousand dollars for it. But you have to realize that the gallery is your stepping stone to larger exhibition opportunities. And if you cut that hand off, you can end up back in the studio, pretty much stuck in a small community, right, and not really moving forward. Like serious exhibitions with critical acclaim is really where you want to go, or critical review is where you want to go. And to be included in projects like this, historical projects like this, [is] obviously a very large stepping stone for a career, and for the possibilities for more people seeing the work and understanding what it's about.

KMD: You've done a very nice job explaining what I would think are some of the, you know, the impetus, behind the work. I wonder if you could talk a little more about the impetus behind your current installation?

LV: Oh yeah. Sure. It's my new stuff, I love it. I'm doing some really strange stuff.

KMD: Well, I call it strange only because I'm so used to the painterly, I'm so used to the classical—

LV: Realistic.

KMD: Yeah, realistic. This is very conceptual—

LV: Figurative.

KMD: Yes, figurative. So, all of those things, and then we have—

LV: And then we have this stuff.

KMD: You said earlier you're drawn to rubble.

LV: Oh, I love rubble.

KMD: [*laughter*]

LV: I'm really into rubble, I have to get into rubble more . . . If you let the flood gates open, and allow all of the influences to come to you, you can come up with some pretty interesting objects. If you were a chef, for instance, and you decided you had been cooking Mexican food all your life and all the sudden you decided to taste cuisines from around the world, suddenly you'd find yourself doing fusion. If you were a musician and you were into Cuban all of your life and suddenly you started being influenced by jazz, suddenly you find a fusion that takes place. Fusion is really one of the underlying terms of the postmodern experience. We're fusing cultures, we're fusing races, we're fusing religions, we're fusing art. Everything's always going through this fusion process. And there's cuisines named after it, you know? Asian fusion, right?

This is basically what I've allowed to happen in my artist sensibilities, is to allow the fusion of international influences into the new work, starting with the idea of doing the installations. But of course, my mind has to come up with different ideas, ideas that are indicative of itself and its own influences. And a lot of times, what happens when you allow things to flow completely without any stops of any kind, you'll end up in places where you aren't really sure what the influences are.

KMD: Right.

LV: You'll end up making projects or product that you'll go, "God, where did this come from?" And sometimes you can draw strands between things to say, "Well, part of this came from this, and part of this came from that. But I don't know what this part of it came from at all." One day I was just doing it, and there it

was. For instance, just to draw on one piece, just to show you … I can go through more than one piece if you'd like me to explain the process to you, as far as I can understand it at this point. For instance, one of the funny ones is the new chalice pieces. I'm doing antiquities, well, mock antiquities. And of course, the antiquities come from all of the antiquities I've seen in all of my life. I was surrounded by antiquities for the first twenty-five years of my life, I saw antiquities.

KMD: Right.

LV: Architecture and ceramics and sculpture and all of these things. And in a contemporary basis, I've been reading books on feminism to understand more about feminism now that I understand that there's a chasm between the women and the men in the art world. That there are really much fewer women that are represented, that there really is a difficulty for women in the art world. I have a couple of jokes that aren't so funny about that.

KMD: [*laughter*] Tell them or not? [*laughter*]

LV: So, I've been doing studying on feminist—reading feminist books. And then I went into this who mirage of reading about courtesans, which I've told you about, and reading biographies of movie stars and great twentieth-century writers and painters and presenters of all kinds, and finding out what their lives are really about, how artists really live. It's not a good story. It's not a pretty story.

KMD: No, you said the last time we talked, you said you wouldn't want your kids to become artists because of that.

LV: Oh, the work. It's very difficult lives. There's not a lot of security in the life, there's a lot of mental illness. There's a lot of alcoholism, a lot of drugs, a lot of bad affairs, a lot of abortion, a lot of loneliness and misery. You name it, it's just a very difficult to be a woman artist, apparently, in any century.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: Well, what do we have, the last two centuries are all we really have in terms of women artists who are actually known. And in terms of biographies you can actually read.

KMD: Right.

LV: Right. And who have papers written on them and studies that you can do on what their work was about, etc., etc. So, I'm reading about all of this, and I'm formulating these ideas about courtesans. And I have these—I have this—I'd really like to present a paper on all of my work as a matter of fact. I'm told by my historian friends that it's not a bad idea to . . . I'm drawing a parallel between actual courtesans of European, turn-of-the-century tradition—a geisha from the late nineteenth-century tradition and twentieth-century actresses, who were taken through the studio world, where they took a girl from abject poverty, gave her dancing lessons and music lessons, and everything to be able to become a megastar and then had the whole paparazzi built around her and built an entire career where she no longer owned herself. Much like courtesans, where you have George Sands, who dressed like a man and tossed lovers back and forth and dated the most well-known musicians of her epoch and what modern women in the United States actually live like.

I believe that we live like courtesans. We want to have our own money—courtesans were the first to have their own money. Married money didn't have anything, they couldn't have anything. They were dominated by the male. [Courtesans] had their own property. They wrote their own books. They wrote music. They presented. They were artists. And they had sexual freedom—sexual freedom, monetary freedom and intellectual freedom, which is something that did not belong to women.

KMD: No.

LV: And even in the geisha world, it did not belong to them, they followed a tradition. Their bodies were for sale to very high bidders. I mean, for a geisha—you couldn't have a geisha for nothing. If you paid, you paid through the nose for the geisha. Same thing with the high courtesans. And I believe that we live this way, that women live this way today, as courtesans. And the image of it is the girl in the half-naked clothes everywhere.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: But that's the girl, right? That's the icon.

KMD: Right. Right.

LV: So I came up with this crazy idea [for a sculpture called "The Super Heroes and the Supermodels"]. I saw this ad in *Sports Illustrated*—it wasn't an ad, it was a photograph, of the highest paid basketball players, most of them African American, very tall, standing in front of a stadium, with Supermen suits on, to the nines, boots with the pointy tops, all doing their little stance like a Superman stance, showing their muscles and everything.

KMD: Puffing out their chests.

LV: Yes. I thought, "Isn't this the perfect icon for the postmodern, neoclassic couple?" Which is this idea I have. We've come up with this neoclassic couple, and the man is symbolized by the multimillionaire jock, Superman.

KMD: Right.

LV: I think American culture, that's what everyone wants to be, right?

KMD: Right.

LV: Multimillionaire is key. A jock, the sports and the whole thing, and it's Superman. And what does the girl get? She gets this icon of the courtesan—sexually available, has her own money, and these images of her, she obviously doesn't want to be married or whatever. She's free, she's a free agent, as it were. So I made these two—I came up with this idea, to make antiquities, based on the neoclassic. Right, I'm doing neoclassicism, with the girls in their underwear [*laughter*] and the guys in their Superman suits. So I have an urn with the guys—Superman, Batman, the Thing, and I think Cyclops—on one. And the girls, I have the Kewpie doll and the lingerie.

KMD: Right.

LV: I've got the cheerleader, I've got the vamp, and I've got the S and M girl.

KMD: Oh, yes.

LV: Can't go without the S and M girl. And they're on kitsch Grecian vases that I got at Michael's, and they're actually going to stand on Grecian pedestals that are going to be covered in a photomontage, another digital sculpture. I went to Rome. I started photographing all of Rome because I couldn't help myself and I found myself photographing pedestals. I started coming back and doing digital montages on these pedestals and different architectural forms.

KMD: And what are you using when you say "digital"?

LV: I'm taking photographs and manipulating them and combining them together and putting them into a picture where they're all put together but they weren't originally in that formula or format.

KMD: Okay.

LV: Because I thought to myself, I work on the computer constantly to teach, I know how to manipulate the computer, why don't I start manipulating image? So I started manipulating image on the computer.

KMD: Right.

LV: And I was collecting photographs for *Prayer for the Earth* at Carnegie, with all the images, the pollution, the indigenous culture. So I have this cache of photographic images that I continue to collect. I have hundreds and hundreds of photos that I've collected on the Internet. I have all different types of photographs I've collected, ranging from nature to war to gender issues to pollution, all of the topics that I'm talking about.

KMD: Right. So, when you say you have a range, its the topics, but are they in different styles?

LV: They're just photographs. They're just photographs.

KMD: Very documentary photographs?

LV: Some of them are just documentary photographs of war dead. Right, because I did the mandala photographic piece as a part of the *Prayer for the Earth*. I did the mandala as the part of the *Hope in the Midst of War, Death and Destruction* at Tropico de Nopal. So I included all of the war deaths. I'm collecting all of these photographs. Then I'm going to Rome and collecting photographs from Rome and Florence, and I'm going to China and

collecting photographs from China. Then I'm traveling all over the United States and seeing all of these conceptual shows and collecting photographs from places. I have all of these photographs of interiors of airports and airplane windows that I'm still waiting to do something with, from traveling all over the United States.

KMD: Right.

LV: So, I don't know where I came up with the idea, and I'm not sure how it happened. I'd probably have to think about it for a while to remember what the process was specifically. *Ferris Wheel* was one of the first three original to actually include the flags with the digital imagery on it. And then the photographs found their way onto the platform underneath. So I started gluing the photographs down to the base of the Ferris wheel. Then I started incorporating the photographs in montage form on the newspapers for the censored pieces, because I'm collecting all of the newspapers. Then the next thing I know, I'm going to Rome and seeing the architecture of Rome again, taking all of the photographs, coming back with the photographs, doing the montages of the photographs with all of the architectural elements, and then buying the actual architectural element as a postproduction object and gluing the photographs to it.

KMD: That's a great project.

LV: It was, really. It's taken, I think, the last four years to coagulate it. The first pieces are actually coming out now, finalized pieces are coming out now. *A Prayer for the Earth*, [and the] Earth's Altar [series] came out of all of that.

KMD: Right.

LV: I love Earth's Altar. The whole idea of reappropriating Christian sites. They appropriated us. Let's appropriate them right back. If that's not an indigenous joke, I don't know what is. When I tell my friends, "I'm just appropriating it." So now I have an altar formula, a Christian altar formula, that I'm taking Jesus out, I'm taking Mary and all of those things [out] and putting nature back in, putting the mother earth back into it, and doing these feminist, environmental and political pieces that I think are right on the cutting edge of the environmental movement. And I like that very much. I'm just kind of jumping over to the environmental movement. And interestingly enough, I believe I have a thesis, or have a theory. It hasn't developed into a thesis yet because I don't have time to think about it.

KMD: [*laughter*]

LV: A theory that women, part of the collective unconscious of women, is environmental issues, is environmental formula. Because if you go out there and start curating a show for OCCCA, like women inspired by nature, the women are coming out the woodwork.

KMD: Yeah.

LV: There's just more women than you can include. I could do a series, I could curate a series of shows with new women every time at least six times in a row, with all of the women that came forward that are doing environmentally based, nature is beautiful, devastation of nature is a sin, all of these things.

KMD: Right.

LV: So, I feel like I'm on the—I've sort of followed that trend without really even knowing it, that I'm also part of the female collective unconscious, that's doing this environmental, spiritual work. So it's been four years in the making now. I'm still painting Los Cielos. Although, this year marks a decided change. I will be going back to the very difficult and laborious Los Cielos series and the landscape series. But for now, I'm blowing them out, like I'm blowing out the oak tree. And I'm blowing everything out for the next six months. I'm not going to be painting any of that for a while. I'll be surprised if I paint that within the next six months.

[*break in audi*o]

KMD: This is side B, and it's August 25, with Linda Vallejo. And she [was] talking about the process of what she expects to be doing for the next six months when we ended on the other side [of the tape]. So you're blowing out?

LV: I'm blowing out the paintings and making them like the electric oaks, where they become . . . René Garcia, from the MOCA education department, came out to see me in regard to Suzanne Lacy's installation and dinner

for the survivor's piece that she was doing as part of the *WACK!* show. I showed him the new paintings and I showed him the oaks. And he said, "Gee, these look like digital paintings. Like you've taken the painting and the digital image and manipulated it with all of the different things you can do in Photoshop, and that's what the paintings look like." And when he said that to me, a little light went off. And I said, "Of course, that makes sense, I'm going backwards." I'm going back and forth between the technological image, the digital image, and the painted image. I'm going back and forth between this and incorporating one . . . That's the other—I've actually had several ideas about incorporating the digital into the painting, but I'm never willing to mar the painting. If I work that hard on a painting, I don't want to mar it with a digital image, it's just something I can't do. But I have some ideas about how to digitize the entire thing, which I'll probably be doing the next year.

So I'm dedicated to doing the painting. I'll never stop being a painter. I think it's very important to hold on to that. I hold on to just about everything as you can tell. I don't like to let things go, I'd rather integrate them. And really letting myself run hog-wild into this three dimensional, digitized sculpture, political, environmental and spiritual statement. And I am having the time of my life. I am having the time of my life. This is more fun than I have had in a slew of Sundays because there's no restrictions to it whatsoever. And why should the creative process have restrictions to it? It's the one place where you can just about do anything you want.

So I'm not tied down by any of it, not by the feminist movement, not by the Chicano movement, and not by the *indigena* movement either. Right? I'm basically producing what I need to produce to coalesce my life and my experience and my statement into a visual image of integrity, which is very important to me, that they be well crafted, and obviously well thought through, studied and prepared and all of these kinds of things—a sophisticated statement. And I have notebooks. I can't stop thinking of ideas every day. "Wow, wouldn't it be fun to do one of those?" "God, can you imagine if you did it like this or like that?" And the ideas are moving are faster than I can produce them. I have two studio assistants now that help me put things together now because there's just too much. I have one suite that I'm working on that I'm very excited to show. I hope I get to show it soon. I'm going to get to show the diorama at the L2k in January.

KMD: Right.

LV: And they're going to let me show the censored newspapers, which everyone tells me is the best work ever. They think, "Wow, this is incredible. This is incredible." Everybody says it but no one has been interested in showing it yet, because the galleries are more interested in the paintings because they can sell them.

KMD: They can sell them.

LV: So I've been looking for more alternative museum spaces where they're not worried about selling.

KMD: Right.

LV: You can show more outrageously, artistically creative things, rather than trying to fit your image into something that sells so that you can work with and help to maintain the gallery world, which we've talked about. And I've been collecting Styrofoam. Makes sense right? I'm an environmentalist, I'm a naturalist, and now I'm an environmentalist. People say, "How did you get here?" This makes sense, doesn't it? I worship nature. Obviously, pollution would be an enemy to me. The pollution is the devil himself. And I've been collecting Styrofoam, and I've been making these little sculptural television sets, as it were, or frames of some kind and they look kind of technological because they have these odd frames in them because they actually have case machinery in those cases.

KMD: Right.

LV: And hanging digital shower curtains in them. What I call shower curtains are Mylar, prints on Mylar, and creating these little translucent TV sets. And my hope is to be able to get a wall where they would let pin it up from floor to ceiling, a multitude of them, a hundred of them, with their little shower curtains hanging, and then you'd have a whole wall of recycled Styrofoam with these images of pollution and devastation inside of them.

KMD: What a great project. Let's take a pause there. That's a great place to end.

LV: Thanks.

KMD: Thank you.

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