

Art Gallery Publishes UCLA Undergraduate's Research on Artist Patssi Valdez

July 19, 2018 by [Robin Migdol](#)



Rocio Sanchez-Nolasco. Photo by Chloe Hourdequin

Fourth-year art history major and digital humanities minor Rocio Sanchez-Nolasco is about to have her original research published by a southern California art gallery, all because of a photo her proud professor shared on Facebook.

Sanchez-Nolasco will write a total of six essays about photographs taken by artist Patssi Valdez that will be published on the internet-based Sanguine Gallery's [website](#) every other month beginning in September. In her writing, she intends to discuss the historical, social and cultural contexts of Valdez's work and analyze the photographs' portrayal of Chicana femininity.

Charlene Villaseñor Black, professor of Chicana/Chicano studies and art history, is Sanchez-Nolasco's honors thesis advisor. For the past year, the two have met weekly to discuss Sanchez-Nolasco's interests and hone in on a research topic for her thesis.

After becoming interested in Asco, an East Los Angeles Chicano artist collective during the 1970s and '80s, and doing research at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, Sanchez-Nolasco stumbled upon photographs by Valdez, a founding member of Asco who is more well-known for her brightly-colored, avant-garde expressionist paintings. She decided to make Valdez's photography the subject of her thesis.

"I was blown away that she identified this as a topic that needed to be researched," Black said. "No one has written about [Valdez's photographs]. It's a completely new topic."



Patssi Valdez, "Pyrah." 1980s, mixed media photo collage. Courtesy Patssi Valdez

Sanchez-Nolasco admired the photographs' distinctive style and was surprised no one had examined them on their own, not just within the context of Valdez's other work.

"I thought all these images were so beautiful and so amazing that I couldn't think of a reason why no one has written about them collectively," Sanchez-Nolasco said.

Sanchez-Nolasco presented a poster about her preliminary research findings at Undergraduate Research Week this May. Black was so proud of her and all her undergraduate advisees that she posted pictures of them on Facebook, including captions about their accomplishments and projects.

To her surprise, later that day, her picture of Sanchez-Nolasco standing in front of her poster at Undergraduate Research Week received a comment from Thomas Canavan, arts administrator of the Sanguine Gallery and creative arts and special projects manager of the Millard Sheets Arts Center in Pomona, Calif. Black met Canavan recently after she participated in a talk at Millard Sheets.

“Is it possible to get a copy? We’d love to publish it!” Canavan wrote, referring to Sanchez-Nolasco’s poster about Valdez.

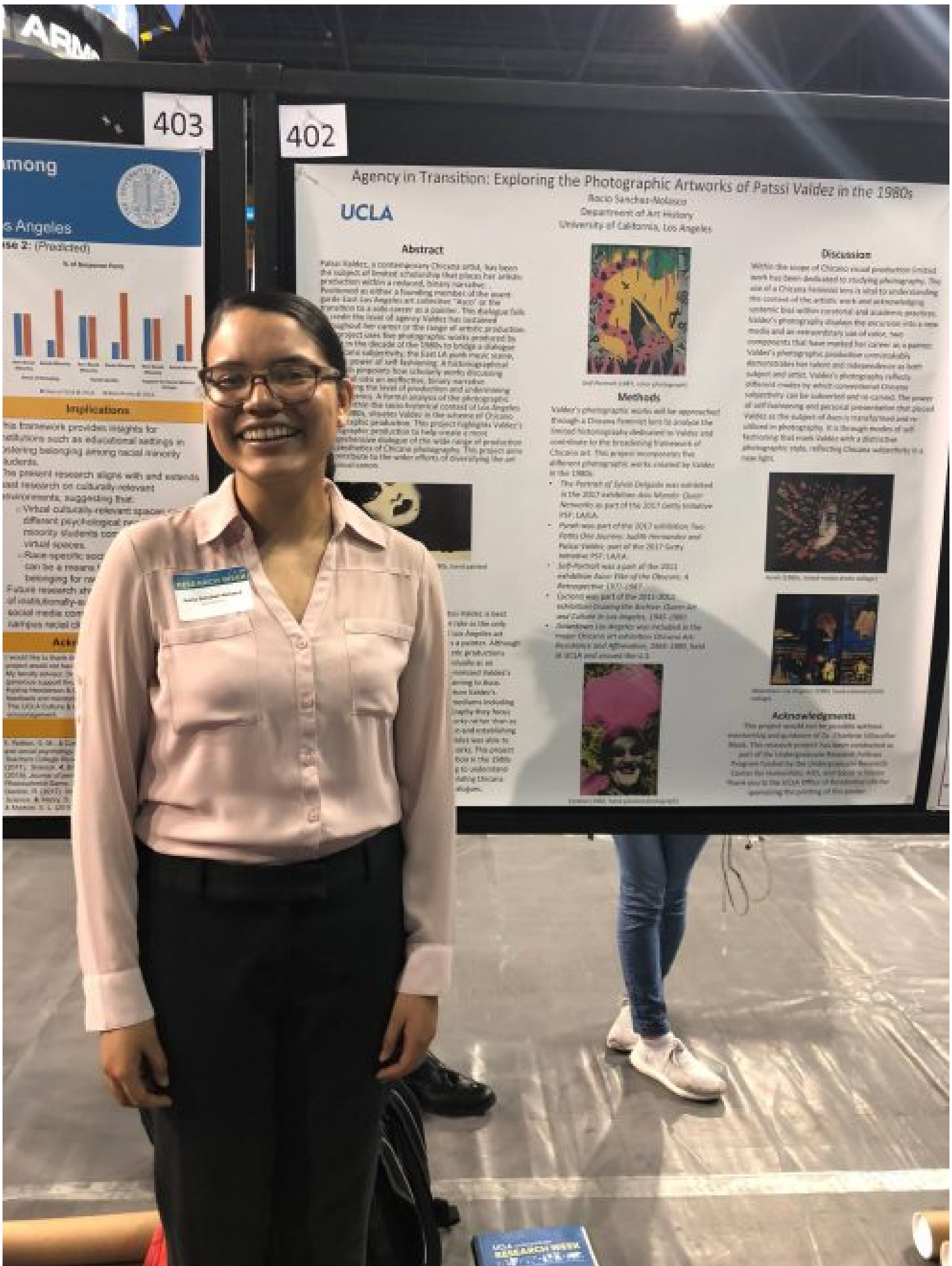
As it turned out, the Sanguine Gallery was about to launch a Valdez exhibition, and the gallery frequently publishes writing and other creative works on its website to accompany its physical exhibits. Sanchez-Nolasco’s research would be the perfect accompaniment to the Valdez exhibit.

Canavan said the Sanguine Gallery wants to provide a space for artists, creators and scholars of all ages and experience levels to contribute their voices and unique insights – even an undergraduate like Sanchez-Nolasco. It benefits everyone, Canavan said, since young scholars in particular may be more connected to certain cultural and artistic spaces that older people may not.

“We exclude younger voices and because of that, they don’t have the opportunity to express what they think,” Canavan said. “If we’re not listening to them, we’re missing out on an opportunity to learn more about what’s around us.”

Sanchez-Nolasco credits Black for supporting her research and for making her partnership with the Sanguine Gallery possible.

“I just thought my project would be a thesis and that would be the end of it, but it’s really a privilege and an opportunity to be able to share my research in this way,” she said. “It’s inspiring to see that this is an opportunity I can now pursue as an undergraduate student.”



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Agency in Transition: Exploring the Photographic Artworks of Patssi Valdez in the 1980s

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Abstract

Patssi Valdez, a contemporary Chicana artist, has been the subject of limited scholarship that places her artistic production within a national, binary narrative. Positioned as either a traveling member of the avant-garde East Los Angeles art collective "Aficio" or the transition to a solo career as a painter, this dialogue seeks to re-evaluate the level of agency Valdez has exercised throughout her career or the range of artistic production she has used. Five photographic works produced by Valdez in the decade of the 1980s to bridge a dialogue of her subjectivity, the East LA youth music scene, her career of self-education, a following of her work's reception from culturally specific worlds discussing the level of production and underwriting. A formal analysis of the photographic work within the socio-historical context of Los Angeles, California, allows Valdez to be the heroine of Chicana artistic production. This project explores Valdez's artistic production to help create a more comprehensive dialogue of the wide range of artistic practices of Chicana photographers. This project also contributes to the wider efforts of diversifying the art world canon.



Patssi Valdez (1981), *Color photograph*

Methods

Valdez's photographic works will be approached through a Chicana Feminist lens to analyze the gendered/heterosexualized understandings of Valdez and contribute to the broader framework of Chicana art. This project incorporates the different photographic works created by Valdez in the 1980s.

- The *Portrait of Sylvia Delgado* was exhibited in the 2007 exhibition *Art, Music, Queer Networks* as part of the 2007 Getty Initiative PAF, LAFA.
- *Portrait of Don Juanes, Judith Hernandez and Patssi Valdez*, part of the 2017 Getty Initiative PAF, LAFA.
- *Self-Portrait* was a part of the 2011 exhibition *Asian Film of the Division: A Retrospective 1957-1967*.
- *Lesson* was part of the 2011-2012 exhibition *Chicana: The Mexican American and Culture in Los Angeles, 1941-1980* and *Chicana: The Mexican American and Culture in Los Angeles, 1941-1980*.
- *Lesson* (Chicana) art project was included in the *mean (Chicana) art collection: Chicana Art Revolution and Beyond*, 2006-2009, held at UCLA and around the U.S.



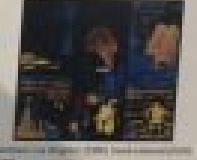
Patssi Valdez (1981), *Self-Portrait photograph*

Discussion

While the scope of Chicana visual production limited work has been dedicated to studying photography, the use of a Chicana feminist lens is vital to understanding the content of the artistic work and acknowledging systemic bias within cultural and academic practices. Valdez's photographic oeuvre the occasion into a new mode and an interdisciplinary use of color, two components that have marked her career as a painter. Valdez's photographic production unambiguously demonstrates her talent and independence as both subject and artist. Valdez's photographs reflect different modes by which contemporary Chicana subjectivity can be understood and re-crafted. The process of self-education and personal presentation that placed Valdez as the subject of Agency in Transition and re-visited in photography. It is through modes of self-fashioning that work Valdez with a dynamic of photography, style, reflecting Chicana subjectivity in a new light.



Patssi Valdez (1981), *Mixed-media artwork collage*



Patssi Valdez (1981), *Mixed-media artwork collage*

Acknowledgments

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Implications

the framework provides insights for institutions such as educational settings in addressing belonging among racial minority students.

The present research aligns with and extends past research on culturally-relevant environments, suggesting that:

- Virtual culturally-relevant spaces offer different psychological benefits for minority students compared to virtual spaces.
- Race-specific social media can be a means for belonging for minority students.

Future research should explore the role of social media in social media communities for unique racial identities.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Christine Hiltbrunner-Bloch, for her guidance and support. My family, especially my mother, supported this project. I also thank my friends, especially my friend, for their support. The UCLA Office of Undergraduate Research is also thanked.

E. Valdez, C. M., & C. M. (2018). The role of social media in addressing belonging among racial minority students. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 51(2), 1-15.

The photo that Black shared on Facebook. ugeducation.ucla.edu/2018/07/19/art-gallery-publishes-ucla-undergraduates-research-on-artist-patssi-valdez/