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# The New York Times

Lens

## The Veteranas of Chicana Youth Culture in Los Angeles

Guadalupe Rosales started an Instagram account cataloging the Latina youth scene in Southern California in the '80s and '90s.

By Melissa Smith

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A party crew on 6th Street Bridge, in Boyle Heights. 1993. Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales

[Guadalupe Rosales](#) is a collector.

For an installation in art school, she built her version of a typical teenager's bedroom, covering the walls with fliers she'd saved nearly 20 years earlier, when she lived in Boyle Heights, a Mexican-American enclave east of downtown Los Angeles. The fliers promoted parties organized by local party crews. For Ms. Rosales's initiation into hers, a friend picked her up in a van and they rode with about 13 kids to a party — it was the first of probably 10 they went to that night. They sat on the floor of the van, as it had no seats, and shouted their moniker, "Aztek Nation," along the way.

Ms. Rosales was years removed from this scene when she began [@veteranas and rucas](#) in 2015, an Instagram feed dedicated to Latina youth culture in Southern California, mainly from the '80s and '90s, but sometimes dating back much earlier. "When I started this project," she recalled, "I always think of myself and my friends in front of my house looking at the world."

The site soon had so many followers that its content — largely by and about women — became almost entirely crowdsourced. Ms. Rosales had found that male-centric narratives about Latino culture were coarser, less well-balanced and intent on exuding a certain toughness. The platform's age-faded images show ladies standing in front of low rider cars, or in choreographed pose.



Guadalupe Rosales's cousin, Ever Sanchez, right, and an unidentified woman in East Los Angeles. 1995. Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales

Boyle Heights was indeed her entire world. At 20, Ms. Rosales had never traveled outside of Los Angeles. Then she bought a one-way ticket to New York City and spent more than a decade there dabbling with the idea of becoming an artist. She began *Veteranas* and *Rucas* while attending art school in Chicago, at a time when she felt she was neglecting a huge part of her life — her home in Los Angeles. Gentrification had changed her neighborhood while she was away. As an artist returning to East Los Angeles, she was in the crosshairs of an anti-gentrification campaign that singled out art galleries as unwelcome interlopers.

At the outset of this project, Ms. Rosales visited U.C.L.A.'s Chicano Studies Research Center, toting the resource material she had at the time: a few issues of *Street Beat*, a magazine she described as “Teen Vogue, but for Latinos.” She couldn't find much relating to her experience growing up. It may seem as if there is nothing particularly damaging about this — parts of all of our childhoods have been lost, scrubbed, forgotten. But Ms. Rosales's had been all but erased.

At the time, she was deeply involved in investigating her cousin's gruesome, gang-related murder: He had been stabbed repeatedly at a party, then dragged out and left for dead in a local playground. Her sister saw the whole thing.

His death traumatized them both, and contributed to Ms. Rosales's decision to relocate to New York. Researching his murder years later provided the impetus to reconnect with the culture and the home that she'd left.



The Hellsrebels crew in 1994. Courtesy of Desire Tostado





Cruising on Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles. 1995. Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales



Booker, right, from the “Together We Stand” crew and a friend from the “Mind Crime Hookers” crew in Whittier, Calif. Circa 1993. Courtesy Guadalupe Rosales and Eileen Torres

Eventually, she unearthed his death certificate.

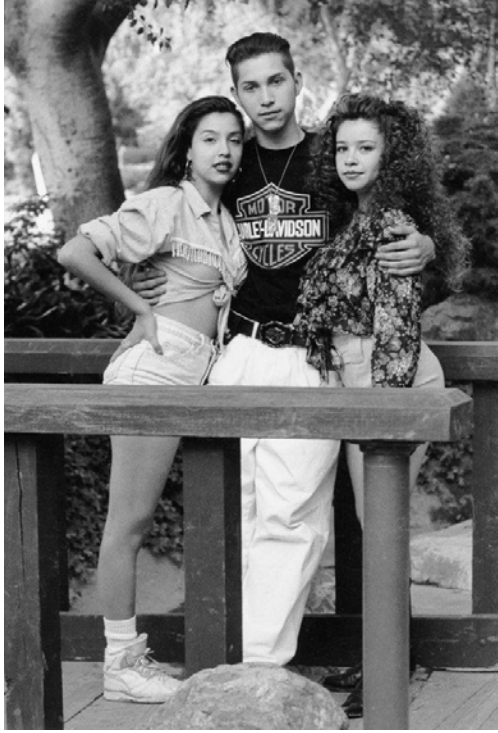
“At that time, I truly felt how physical material is so important,” she said. “And that’s actually what pushed me to start the archive. I wanted people to start looking at their images and materials differently, to value their collections — that material tells a story.”

Ms. Rosales also realized how much strangers’ materials could feel almost as familiar to people as their own. A digital repository like Instagram lends tremendous weight to a project like hers, encouraging cross-community sharing in which one person’s memory can act as a stand-in for another’s.

Now gravitating toward physical presentations, Ms. Rosales is currently showing her work in New York. “Guadalupe Rosales: Legends Never Die, A Collective Memory,” will be on exhibit at [Aperture Gallery](#) until October 20. For her recent show at the [Vincent Price Art Museum](#), Ms. Rosales made an altar for her cousin, using the items she had found that reflect on his life and death. Her sister suggested Ms. Rosales add lip liner; she had given hers to their cousin to hold on the night he died.



“Swing Kids” party crew from San Gabriel Valley. 1994. Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales and Deborah Meza



Booker and friends in 1992. Credit Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales and Eileen Torres



Maria Rosales, Guadalupe Rosales's sister, at Venice Beach in 1998. Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales

That's the thing about L.A. back then: Yes, there were gangs, but the party scene was just as important to its youth. And Ms. Rosales doesn't shy away from sharing memorabilia of both. If

she was ever torn about depicting gang life — people have accused her of glorifying “cholas” and “gangsters” — she thinks to herself: “Does that mean I have to censor my life story?”

Stories about gang culture in Los Angeles have been told and studied over so many years that it’s hard to fault people for assuming that only bad things came from its Latino enclaves. “The archive is not just photographs,” Ms. Rosales has said, “it’s archiving language and the way we relate to a photograph.” She felt other narratives demonized not only gang activity, but also those living among it. And the shame radiates from the inside out. People were hesitant to share material with Ms. Rosales that could betray an association with gangs. Especially considering that for a while, the party scene was somewhat insulated from much gang activity.

Ms. Rosales started curating a separate Instagram feed, @[map\\_pointz](#), in 2016, devoted solely to the Southern California party scene in the ’90s, largely because of this unease. “Party culture existed to remove ourselves from gang culture,” Ms. Rosales said about the resourcefulness of teenagers in finding a nonviolent outlet.



A shrine to Ever Sanchez in Guadalupe Rosales’s studio. 2018. Mike Slack/Courtesy of Aperture





A stack of images. Mike Slack/Courtesy of Aperture



The Delectables party crew in 1993. Credit Courtesy of Guadalupe Rosales

But by the late '90s, gangs had bullied their way in.



“I had a party at my house,” she remembered. “This gang showed up and they said, ‘Well, this is my neighborhood, I can do whatever I want. So if you guys don’t let us in we’re just going to steal your sound system.’”

Some distance helps contextualize why cataloging Latino history matters so much. Her archives are not simply scrollable time capsules; combined they make a rounded-out portrait of people searching for places of belonging. “We have to tell our *own* stories,” Ms. Rosales said, “Otherwise you have other people telling our story and it’s not as accurate.”

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*The archive was featured in Aperture #232 “Los Angeles” Fall 2018.*

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