



CSRC
ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 19, MAY 2021

WAYNE ALANIZ HEALY
WITH PATRICIO VILLAGOMEZ
INTERVIEWED BY ROBERTO TEJADA
IN JULY 2007

Wayne Healy and David Botello cofounded Los Dos Streetscapers in 1975. They painted two major murals under that name, *Chicano Time Trip* (1977) and *Moonscapes* (1979), then realized that they would need more artists for their public art team. In 1980 they expanded and adopted a new name, East Los Streetscapers (ELS). Since 1975 ELS has produced over one hundred works of public art, including seventy-five major multimedia installations.

Patricio Villagomez is the project manager of East Los Streetscapers. He joined the organization in 1993 after a career as a technical illustrator and publications project manager in Southern California's aerospace industry.

Roberto Tejada is a Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Professor at the University of Houston, where he teaches in the Department of English. His published work includes *National Camera: Photography and Mexico's Environment* (2009) and *Celia Alvarrez Muñoz* (2009), volume 3 in the CSRC's *A Ver: Revisioning Art History* series, and he is co-editor of *Modern Art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (2013). He has contributed essays to exhibition catalogs and is the author of five collections of poetry. Tejada is the recipient of a number of fellowships and grants, including those from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fulbright Foundation, and, in 2021, the Guggenheim Foundation.

This interview was conducted as part of the *A Ver: Revisioning Art History* project.

Preferred citation: *Wayne Healy with Patricio Villagomez*. Interview with Roberto Tejada, July 2007, Rosemead, California. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 19. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2021.

CSRC Oral Histories Series © Regents of the University of California, 2021. All rights reserved.
Interview © Wayne Healy and Patricio Villagomez, 2007.

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 transcription 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 IN THE CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

L.A. XICANO

Judy Baca	Margaret Garcia
Charles “Chaz” Bojórquez	Johnny Gonzalez
David Botello	Wayne Healy
Barbara Carrasco	Judithe Hernández
Leonard Castellanos	Leo Limón
Roberto “Tito” Delgado	Gilbert “Magu” Luján
Dora De Larios*	John Valadez
Richard Duardo	Linda Vallejo

A VER: REVISIONING ART HISTORY

Carmen Herrera
Joe Holguin*
Juan Sánchez*

THE LGBT AND MUJERES INITIATIVE PROJECT

Laura Aguilar
Dan Guerrero
Monica Palacios

*Forthcoming

INTERVIEW WITH WAYNE ALANIZ HEALY AND PATRICIO VILLAGOMEZ

JULY 2007

Roberto Tejada: This is Roberto Tejada, I'm here in Rosemead at the studio of Wayne Healy, at East Los Streetscapers. So I thought I'd begin, Wayne, first just asking you to say your name, and the address of where we're at. And then maybe you could tell me a little bit about how long you've been at this studio, and what the process was at the time you moved in here, and how, perhaps, even the neighborhood has gone through developments and changes. And then we'll begin to—I'll begin to ask you questions about your work and your life.

Wayne Healy: Okay. My name is Wayne Healy and my public art team is East Los Streetscapers. We are currently residing at our studio at 9050 East Garvey Avenue in Rosemead, California. We have been at this studio for thirteen years, and East Los Streetscapers is thirty-three years old. We started in 1975. And this studio has been the longest—we've been the longest here than anywhere else. We've been in several places. Rosemead is a great community for us, especially since our last studio was in the downtown loft district [1317 Palmetto Street, Los Angeles.] And the beauty of it, other than the grand size—this is the largest studio we've been in, six thousand square feet. And that's only inside. We have ten thousand square feet outside. And the most beautiful part about the studio is its alleged remoteness. 'Cause we were right in the crosshairs downtown. People could stop by any old time. "Hey, what's going' on?" And it got to be entertaining versus doing, getting the job done. So when we announced we were moving to Rosemead, everyone thought, "Ohh, oh, this is confidential, by the way." Why is it confidential? Get out of here. Are you gonna interview him?

RT: Yeah, we'll definitely get to Patricio. *[laughter]*

WH: *[laughter]* This is confidential. That's right, we're not supposed to say this, because then everybody will say, "Ohh, that's—"

RT: Keep it a best-kept secret. That's right.

WH: Yeah, it's our best-kept secret.

Patricio Villagomez: You've gotta watch what you say.

WH: And I love Rosemead 'cause it's got a grand variety of restaurants. It always works out real cool how we go to war with these countries, and then all these restaurants start popping up. So if you want Vietnamese food, man, Rosemead's the place. And anyway, we're waiting for the dreaded day, since this whole complex was sold about two years ago.

RT: Is that right?

WH: And so some cat has some development plans on the burner, and we called to the real estate guy a couple of times, and I just called about a week ago. He claims, "Hey, you guys are good for another year, two years."

RT: *[laughter]*

WH: So it's been going like that. So it's apparent that some time we're gonna have to leave this place. And I think I'm just gonna—in my advanced age—chain myself to the building when the bulldozers come, and they can knock me and the building down. *[laughter]*

RT: You have a lot of projects going on here as well. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what kinds of work are done here. What are the technical facilities that you have to produce that work?

WH: Okay. We started off in the Chicano mural movement. Even before East Los Streetscapers, I painted my first mural in 1972, and David Botello, who is a co-founder of East Los Streetscapers, he painted as early as 1970. So we did that for twenty years anyway, pretty much exclusively. And then we got into other

projects, other mediums. And so today we do tile, steel sculpture, concrete, cast concrete, relief, terrazzo flooring. We do many, many disciplines, not just mural painting. But of course we will always be mural painters. And we have a mural on our painting wall right now, and that's going to be installed in December at Barrio Action Youth and Family Center in El Sereno, California. [*El Sereno Barriocosm*, 2007, Barrio Action Youth and Family Center, 4927 Huntington Drive North, Los Angeles.] And that's where my two-month-old grandson lives.

RT: Is that right?

WH: Yeah. [*laughter*] Well, not at the Barrio Center, but in El Sereno.

RT: Right. [*pause*] And what was it like here in Rosemead when you first moved in?

WH: Well, when we first moved in, I fell in love with the place immediately. The place we had downtown was also six thousand square feet, but its ceiling was like eleven feet. This one, the peak of this roof is twenty-seven feet, and it just breathes. And also, our yard downtown was this little thing. And downtown has its issues, and—so we were in a situation where cars were getting broken into all the time, and I was embarrassed to invite people down. Out here, this is country, man. It's like—it's been great. So coming in here was, like, this huge space. It just seemed bigger, just 'cause it was open. And we came here—we were already working on a job that we started on . . . What was the street? Palmetto. We were on Palmetto, just south of Fourth Street. And we completed that job here. [*aside*] Three minutes?

PV: Three jobs.

WH: We had three jobs here, excuse me.

RT: [*laughter*]

WH: What were the other two jobs?

PV: We had San Jose.

WH: Oh, San Jose.

PV: And LAPD.

WH: And LAPD, no kidding. [*cross talk*]

RT: So you had those already in progress—

WH: We had those in progress.

RT: When you found this place?

WH: When we moved. And moving in the middle of a job is, like, precarious, and I did not want to move.

RT: Right.

WH: The reason that we moved is that there was another artist [Alejandro de la Loza] who wanted to work with us, but he was a bronze casting sculptor, and—he bronzed, he welded and ground a lot [*indistinct*]. Well, the place in LA was all wood, and wood and welding don't lend themselves together. So he said, "I want to work with you guys, let me look around." So he found this place, and he says, "Oh, I found a place," and I go, "Oh man, I don't want to go over there." So I went over there. Went over there—went over here, and I went, "Man, this is really cool." And it was a better deal on the rent than we had downtown.

RT: Do you know what it was before? Its prior use?

WH: It was a rug place. Now I don't know if they washed rugs, or dyed rugs, but there was some peripheral equipment [that's] still here, where they had—they were hanging these rugs [*indistinct*]. So that was here. And we've had, over the years, somebody come looking for the rug place, and it's gone. So I'm not exactly sure, but it was, sort of, carpets. And maybe linoleum. I don't know what they did.

RT: Now, I'm imagining thirteen years ago there were probably not as many retail, or—stores here on Garvey. Or were there?

WH: Well Garvey's always been a retail place.

RT: A commercial center.

WH: But you see new ones going up all the time, and they're all headed towards Vietnamese. A lot of Chinese, and maybe the majority is Chinese. If you cross Rosemead, then you're in El Monte. And if you go down Telstar, you'll see the Chinese Cultural Center. As far as I know, there's not a Vietnamese Cultural Center.

And I know there's Little Saigons everywhere. And so—but that's been the biggest change. There's a Vietnamese mall right on this corner. And I remember going to that restaurant within the week that we moved in. And it still operates. It's changed hands several times, but it's always been Vietnamese. And now we have an old folks' center—

RT: I saw that.

WH: That wasn't there. Right now they're making the bridge wider because this is a parking lot. Garvey's a parking lot.

RT: Right.

WH: Coming home time. So now they're widening this bridge. I suspect widening that bridge is not good news for us with this place here. 'Cause one time I heard [about] a mall, and I'm going, how could they possibly have mall traffic when just regular traffic shuts the whole street down?

RT: Well, even down on Whittier here, they're beginning to have new malls as well. There's this new cinemaplex, and you can see that there's—

WH: Yeah.

RT: That all that kind of development is beginning to happen.

WH: Right.

RT: And in a sense because the [State Route] 19 hooks, sort of connects—

WH: The 19—

RT: South, right.

WH: Rosemead.

RT: Rosemead, exactly. Connects the different districts, right?

WH: Right. When I go south, you know, I don't go to the [Interstate] 605, I go down Rosemead and then I'm on Beverly.

RT: Right.

WH: I take a left and then I jump on the 605. That's a short cut. *[laughter]* But anyway, it's a great—I love it here. I'm gonna cry and cry when they kick us out of here. *[laughter]*

RT: With that, knowing that, have you been thinking about what prospects, where you might look for . . .

WH: Well, I've thought about other buildings, certainly. I can't imagine getting a place.

RT: *[laughter]*

WH: Yeah, first of all, I thought, "I'll shoot myself."

PV: We thought of suicide.

RT: Exactly.

WH: And then I thought of buying a place. I actually bought a building in '85 in Boyle Heights because of having to move, with the studio rent going up. And I said, "This is bullshit."

RT: Right.

WH: Well, we lasted there about three years, and a neighbor—an industrial neighbor—said, "Hey, I want your building." "What are you talking about, man? This is our studio," and all that.

RT: Right.

WH: So, well, "What do you want from us?" And I gave him this ridiculous amount, and he said, "Okay." So I moved. So I've had that tenant now for over twenty years. Twenty-two years, as a matter of fact. Take it back, nineteen years, almost twenty years. Anyway, that would be, like, one option, but I don't know who's had a tenant that long, and I would rather try to find a place to buy again. But—because for the rent of this place, we'll never find one this size.

RT: It's become, I think, increasingly harder in the greater LA area to find—for artists—studio space, especially with the kind of projects and you and the team do.

WH: And not only that, but we have Rush Street, which is south El Monte.

RT: Right.

WH: And there is all kind of vendors there. We go there for graphics, to make film positives, to—

- RT: Transfer? [*cross talk*]
- WH: Screens. Or go down there for steel and bolts. So it's really—
- RT: Convenient here.
- WH: Yeah, it's really convenient.
- RT: So your purveyors of ceramics are also in the area?
- WH: There's—well, I won't say ceramics, but there's a place right on River Avenue, which is the very street here, where we've done bronze casting. And we've done that. [*interruption*] Hey, what's happening? Good to see you.
- RT: Hey, how's it going?
- WH: Excuse me. [*laughter*] Where was I?
- RT: The bronze, the bronze sculpture.
- WH: The bronze. This place they sell sculpture stuff. Foam, wax, plastic clay, and that kind of stuff. Right there. And we've done several bronzes. We had never done that before, and we got a couple of commissions, and, let's do some bronze. And so those people were there.
- RT: Have you completed those, or are those—
- WH: Yeah.
- RT: Yeah?
- WH: Oh yeah. Well there's one right there.
- RT: All right.
- WH: The city of San Jose commissioned—there's their bronze crew, working on the full-size clays. And there's a clay up there . . .
- RT: And what was the name of each project? I'm just curious.
- WH: This one is called *Grandpa's Little Slugger* [2005, Betty Wilson Center, Santa Fe Springs]. And that one is just called *Abuelitos* [2005, Gus Velasco Neighborhood Center, Santa Fe Springs].
- RT: And this was commissioned for . . .
- WH: For the city of Santa Fe Springs.
- RT: Santa Fe Springs?
- WH: And that one was Santa Fe Springs. I thought I had a picture of that, but . . . And then we did a recent one, right there. It's just a bust. You can see on that wall.
- RT: Oh yes, right there. And this was for a park?
- WH: That was for a baseball park. John Mendez. [*John Mendez Legacy*, 2006, John Mendez Baseball Field, 920 N Banning Blvd., Los Angeles.] John Mendez was a local good guy for the Fifteenth District. He was a deputy councilman to Gibson, John Gibson, who was a long-time councilman for the Fifteenth District. Anyway, he died five years ago, or something like that. It's kind of interesting, sculpting a portrait. I tell folks, I'm not really a portrait drawing [artist] or anything like that. So they wanted to sculpt the bronze—this guy's portrait—and of course I said, "Yeah, I can do that."
- RT: [*laughter*]
- WH: And anyway, the family thanked me at the dedication. "Thank you for doing that." I don't know what to say, but that told me, it must look like John Mendez. [*laughter*]
- RT: That they appreciated the resemblance, yeah.
- WH: Yeah, yeah. So yeah, that's—so we always look for trying to add something new. What haven't I done yet? What tool haven't we used, you know?
- RT: And are still some tools that—
- WH: Oh, yeah, there's—
- RT: That you've looked forward to.
- WH: There's neon. There are a lot of neon artists out there. We haven't done that. Or laser lights.
- RT: Was the kind of—I mean, I can see that neon would really work with the kind of figuration that you've been involved with.

- WH: Yeah, yeah. The one cat I know that's done the most neon is Frank Romero.
- RT: Right.
- WH: You know. And, you know, to change his drawings into neon strokes—that sounds pretty exciting to me.
- RT: So maybe we can go back a little bit now, and maybe you could tell me when and where you were born. Can you tell me a little bit, perhaps, about the family environment in which you grew up? And then, perhaps the cultural environment as you remember it? Because much of this archive will involve the kind of ways that Los Angeles has transformed, and how its artists—Latino, Chicano artists—[have transformed] with them, with those changes.
- WH: Okay. [*indistinct*] Well, I was born in 1946 in Santa Barbara, California. And how did I get there? Or, how did my parents get there? My mother was born in Boyle Heights.
- RT: Her name?
- WH: Raquel Alaniz. And my father—my biological father—Robert Healy. He was born in Iowa, and he was two generations removed from Ireland. He came to East LA as a young person and checked out the scene, and said, “I want to be one of those guys, I want to be a Chicano.” And he became Mexican. He just reinvented himself and married my mom—my mom was seventeen—and they moved far away. I suppose to get away from the in-laws, or whatever.
- RT: [*laughter*]
- WH: Far away to Santa Barbara. That was a long way away. [*laughter*]
- RT: What did you—did work bring your parents there, or . . .
- WH: I don't know. I can only suppose that they wanted to just make some separation. I did that very thing myself when I got married. But the marriage didn't last, and I have a very few little glimpses of memory of Santa Barbara. But I left there when I was three or four years old. When I say I was born in Santa Barbara, people say, “Oh, you remember this?” And I remember nothing. [*laughter*]
- RT: Maybe pictures, when you were young?
- WH: I have photographs and stuff like that. So Mom brought me back to Boyle Heights, and my brother, my younger brother. And so we all moved in with my grandmother, who had this small apartment on State Street—on First Street, near State Street. And of course everybody else lived in it, so there must have been twenty people in this apartment. All uncles and cousins and stuff. I don't know how long we were there, but my mom got a job, and then she said—[*to Patricia*] I'm too much in the secret stuff.
- PV: That sounds so Mexican. [*indistinct*] I got audited for that, you know?
- WH: He's an [*whispers*] Ecuadorian.
- RT: Colombiano.
- PV: Oh, ¿sí? ¿De qué parte?
- RT: Mis padres son—mi padre es de Bogotá, mi madre es de [*indistinct*].
- PV: Mi sobrina es de Bogotá.
- RT: ¿De verdad?
- PV: Sí. [*laughter*]
- RT: So they moved to LA, and I moved to Mexico City. So they call me El Mexicano.
- PV: Aren't we all.
- RT: Exactly.
- WH: So my mom got a job, and then said, “This apartment's too small.” So she found a house. I don't know how many bedrooms. I think a two-bedroom house, still in Boyle Heights. Houston Street. So all twenty people moved to that one. But it was more roomier and there was, like, a yard. I remember playing in that yard. And I remember driving through, by the yard in the alley when I was in high school, just to check it out. And I said, “What happened to the huge yard we had? Somebody must have shrunk it into this little tiny place.” Anyway, so we were there a while, and . . . At that time, I started to pick up on cultural things. Still like five years old, six years old.
- RT: Did you have siblings?

WH: I had a brother, a younger brother, who was three years younger than me. So he was a real *mocoso*. And—I mean one thing, like, I’ll never forget. I have a picture of him. My Uncle Louie Alaniz used to like to sing in the shower, but it reverberated through the house. And he always thought of himself—or, his voice—like Billy Eckstine. Do you know who Billy Eckstine is?

RT: Sure, sure.

WH: [*singing*] “Blue Moon . . .”

RT: [*laughter*]

WH: So, music. And then, of course, there was all these guitars, and my Uncle Joe was a pretty good guitar picker. He could do requinto riffs, like the Los Panchos were doing, and he would paint, too. So from an early age, there—and I never knew my grandfather, he was killed before I was even born. But they talk about the artwork he did. He wasn’t really a professional artist, but he worked for Kelley Kar company. One of his jobs, my mom said, was just to take a brush, and he could do a pinstripe all the way around a Packard.

RT: Is that right?

WH: Like a waterline. So he must have been something. And I do remember seeing a couple o’ his art pieces. And then pretty soon, my mom met this guy who became my dad. And I remember the day I met him. His name was Bob Olea. Robert Olea. He also grew up in Boyle Heights, came from kind of a dysfunctional family. You know, I love my grandma and all that. I remember going over there, especially during the tamale parties before Christmases, and there was always some *chingazos*, you know?

RT: [*laughter*]

WH: But there was fun, and other stuff, too, you know? But he was, like, no-nonsense kind of guy. And—we’re gonna have to take a break here, ’cause I gotta give—

RT: Sure.

[*break in audio*]

WH: One thing that we’ve always had is young artists come through here. And a few of ’em have gone on to—

RT: To do their own work.

WH: Bigger and better things, yeah.

RT: That’s great.

WH: So unintentionally, we’re a bit of a school.

RT: Like a studio in the old—in the old sense of the word.

WH: Yeah, yeah, in the old sense of the word. With a—what do you call that—apprentice.

RT: Sure.

WH: Apprentice, yes. And it continued that way. And so, like, Raudel [de la Riva] has worked several times for Paul Botello. Paul is David’s brother. We hired Paul when he was in high school to help us with a mural in Culver City.

RT: Sure.

WH: And Paul is a monster now.

RT: Great, great. That’s great.

WH: So, and, you know, we still work together. We restored some old murals. It’s—what do you call it—extended family.

RT: Sure

WH: Extended family.

RT: And that must be really rewarding to see—having given them, you know, sort of, the opportunity to both work for the Streetscrapers and develop different skills, and to go take those out and do their own work.

WH: Right, exactly. It has been. And it’s Streetscrapers.

RT: ’Scapers. [*laughter*]

- WH: I have a collection of envelopes from the mail over the years somewhere. Just ones where they slaughtered our name. Sidescrapers, Skyscrapers, Sideswipers—some beautiful [*laughter*]. So I came up with that name in '76 as kind of what we do and how we do it, but it was a long mouthful that you weren't liable to forget. [*laughter*]
- RT: Mixing landscape, or the scaping of—
- WH: Right, right, right. So—
- RT: You were talking a little bit about your growing up in Boyle Heights. So this was the '50s. Maybe you might want to talk a little bit about, like, what was the visual—like what were you seeing around. Like in the—
- WH: I was seeing *Beany and Cecil* and *Howdy Doody*.
- RT: Sure.
- WH: That was when we first got a TV. Before we got a TV, we went next door to this lady's house one night to see—the first time I ever saw a TV. And this had to be '52, 1952, maybe. So I would have been around six. And my Uncle Louie was fighting at the Olympic. Uncle Louie was an amateur boxer, so we'd have amateur night. But he was on TV, and he lived next door, you know. He lived with us. So, all I remember—I don't remember seeing an image. I remember seeing this round light, but the room was, like, crowded with people, you know, from the neighborhood. Somebody had a TV, and they were there to see Louie, who was a local boy, do good. I don't know if he won or lost, but that was the first thing I saw on TV. Not too long [after], maybe a year, my mom probably bought a TV. Somehow, there was a TV there. And there was *Beany and Cecil* and *Howdy Doody*, and I remember watching them. And I remember, like, hiding behind the couch when bad things were gonna happen on *Howdy Doody*. What could happen bad in *Howdy Doody*, you know?
- RT: [*laughter*]
- WH: So this is my—these are images. When I met my dad, he sat me on his lap, and I said, "You look like Tennessee Ernie." So that was another image that was either on TV or—so Tennessee Ernie Ford was popular in those days. Because he had a moustache and all that, I thought he looked like Tennessee Ernie. So that was the—the thing. Some stuff I've even done artwork on. Another thing I remember about Boyle Heights is the junk man and the rag man. And Boyle Heights used to be—well, it's always been a multicultural place. It's probably more in uniform now than in the past. But when I was there, there were a lot of Jews there, a lot of Japanese there, a lot of Russians, a lot of—a real mix.
- RT: The *LA Times* did a piece recently where there was the last Japanese restaurant, I think, that they were talking about.
- WH: Uh-huh. And I remember the last Jewish clothing store, Zellman's [Menswear], was right there. It's not Zellman's anymore. That lasted into the '90s. So it was really fascinating. It was just a colorful place, a neat place to be. And afterward my mom got married, my dad moved us to East LA, and—so we lived on Arizona, then Kern, then back to Arizona. So we were there—I was on Arizona Avenue 'til after graduating from Garfield High School. In fact, I went to the spring semester at ELAC [East Los Angeles College] 'cause I graduated [in] the wintertime. I don't know if they do that anymore, graduate twice a year. And so from there, East LA, I moved to Pomona 'cause I was going to go to school. Actually, it was funny 'cause, yeah, the parents moved from East LA, but my dad had always been trying to move out of East LA and nobody would sell a house to him. He's not real *prieto*, but he's Mexicano looking. Once you met him, you'd realize he's a veteran of the Eighty-second Airborne Division, a very military kind of guy. So to see him, and see where he came from—he'll always be my hero.
- RT: Yeah. Do you remember where he tried to move?
- WH: Where? I don't know exactly where, but he was saying, they don't want to sell to Mexicans. And that used to piss him off.
- RT: I bet.

- WH: And so in '64 they bought a house in Pico Rivera. And I think Pico Rivera is probably already well on its way to changing demographically. All the neighborhoods in Southern California are, and that's what makes it exciting.
- RT: Sure.
- WH: Rosemead—who would have thunk it—it's mostly, it's over fifty percent Asian.
- RT: Yeah, right. Do you remember billboards, or things like that, that might have also been part of the things that you were looking at? Cause it seems like in the '50s it might have been—
- WH: Well I remember on the corner of Brooklyn and Soto there was Currie's Ice Cream. And they had this huge—
- RT: Signage?
- WH: Ice cream cone, 3D, wired to the roof. And my mom would take me from Houston, probably six blocks, to walk down to that Currie's Ice Cream.
- RT: Was it still, or did it rotate? Was it one of those—
- WH: I—as far as I remember, it was still. I don't remember it rotating. Another thing I remember seeing is newspapers in Yiddish.
- RT: Oh, that's interesting.
- WH: And I used to be fascinated—on storefronts—and I said, "Wow, what is that? What kind of graffiti is that?" I remember seeing that.
- RT: What was Garfield like when you went to high school there?
- WH: Garfield was great. East LA was probably a little more country than Boyle Heights. Specifically, it was very country for me because we had animals. I lived next to a couple that was from North Dakota. The guy used to be a hog farmer, so he had rabbits and chickens. I had pigeons, even had a pig. And the neighbor on the corner on Strang had a steer and two horses. So I lived in the last remnants of agri—what would you call that? Rural East LA? Rural East LA.
- RT: About the time when it was becoming more and more—
- WH: Becoming more and more, right.
- RT: Urban.
- WH: So when we left—I left in '64 and went to school in Pomona [California State Polytechnic University–Pomona]. So—
- RT: Were there rural activities that were part of the high school?
- WH: Not—there wasn't like corn-shucking contests or anything like that, but almost everybody had animals. I'm old enough to be older than the freeways, 'cause I remember the freeways—
- RT: Coming up.
- WH: And that was a major thing. The old Alaniz homestead was on Echandia Street, the site of Prospect Park. And I remember going to see my Aunt Lucy, who lived there. I forget who was staying with her at the time. She was kind of a Mother Theresa of ours. But I remember, like, standing on Echandia and wishing I had a ball, 'cause I saw Echandia going right down there and it goes right straight to [Los Angeles County] General Hospital. There was no freeway there. My Aunt Lucy had goats in the back, and she would let me feed the goats, and there were chickens in there. I remember going there one time, and I—just looking in. The yard was huge, four hundred feet deep. And I'm looking out there—I don't have a tape measure at the time, but I'm guessing it was one hundred feet deep. What the hell? What's going on? Where are the goats? And I ran back there and I ran up to the edge, and there's Caterpillars and earth-moving equipment. I mean, this whole yard is gone, and I don't—I'm not too hip on geology, so I can't imagine what kind o' disaster would cause three quarters of the yard to go away. That was the end of rural East LA and the beginning of—
- RT: Of the freeways and highways?
- WH: Of the freeways and all that stuff.

- RT: That's incredible. So after Garfield is when you probably began your art training, and you've probably been—
- WH: I have always been doing art.
- RT: Right.
- WH: And I've never had art training, other than tips from my Uncle Joe. Especially my Uncle Joe. I'll show you a picture of my Uncle Joe right here.
- RT: Oh, oh, great. That is an amazing car. Do you know what it is?
- WH: It's a '54 Merc.
- RT: Merc.
- WH: Yeah. He used to have a '49 Merc. And he's the guy that I blame for—
- RT: For you becoming an artist?
- WH: Being an art—yeah, for learning anything, you know? 'Cause I saw him—and he also was a firecracker. He gave me my first guitar. He was dead at thirty-three. Thirty-three years old.
- RT: How did that happen?
- WH: Yeah. Puro pisto. But he was—you know, I probably have glorified him already in my memory, but he died when I was at Cal Poly, so . . . Sixty-seven, I think he died.
- RT: Did he draw or paint?
- WH: He drew, he painted, he played guitars, and he did posters.
- RT: *Bohemio. A bohemio.*
- WH: Yeah, yeah. And he actually worked with my dad. They were partners. I don't know if they really got along that well. They were brothers-in-law. But I would see him draw or paint, and, you know, "Oh, man, I want to do that," you know. And he'd give me a tip or something like that. "Do it this way." So, technically speaking, he's my art educator.
- RT: Do you remember what kind of images that he—like, what kind of scenes? Were they—
- WH: He did stuff like—I remember one painting was a bullfight painting. So he didn't do really political art, or anything like—
- RT: Or urban scenes.
- WH: Urban scenes, as far as I remember. And his painting—not as much painting as his drawing—his drawing was always faces and figures. You know, women and all that. [*whistles*] So I'm trying to draw an eye here, and, "No, look man. Do it like that, give it a strong stroke." I love his drawings. And I have a cousin—his son, my cousin Danny, gave me an envelope of some of his original drawings.
- RT: Recently?
- WH: Well, recently, I don't know. Fifteen years ago, or ten years ago. But, I mean, you can see, he had bold strokes. And I kind of like to draw with bold strokes, so I think it stuck.
- RT: And when you saw your Uncle Joe producing these bold strokes, what were the images that you started—that you tried to emulate?
- WH: Well, I'd keep doing the nose. He'd do, like, studies.
- RT: So starting with the figure?
- WH: Yeah, so, it was hands and eyes and noses and things like that. You know, maybe a puppy dog, or something like that. I know he used to collect the Walter Foster artist books. I don't know if you've ever seen those before.
- RT: Sure, I do know those.
- WH: Yeah, so he had those. And I used to look at those and go nuts and copy out of them.
- RT: Because those also gave indications of how to produce certain effects.
- WH: Yeah, right, right.
- RT: That's interesting.
- WH: So that was my art, because in school, I really didn't take art. But I was a math and science guy.
- RT: Which you became. You studied engineering, right, later on?

- WH: I studied engineering. I didn't know anybody that made a living as an artist. I didn't go to art gal—I didn't know what an art gallery was, or an art museum. So art was something you did on your own. You just did it, and then you had to go get a job.
- RT: Right. Did advertising ever, sort of, come into, sort of—
- WH: No, no. [pause] I guess one thing that was, like, when I was in school at Cal Poly, I became a double major. I found out I could get two degrees by taking fifteen more units. And I got a degree in engineering—aero-space engineering—and one in math. And that pretty much eliminated any electives you had. 'Cause at one time I thought, "I wonder what it'd be like to take an art class?" But when I decided to go with a math double, that eliminated—you know. And for some reason I was in a big hurry to graduate. And once I graduated, I was like, "I don't know what the hurry was." [laughter] So art was just somethin' you did. And when I was in school, I did it the least in my life. And yet I did a few art projects for, like, a school club or something. Or I had just some doodles in my margin. After I graduated, moved away, got married, and all that, then I set up a little room. 'Cause I went to grad school—
- RT: In Ohio.
- WH: In Ohio. But also, I was painting. And I started painting over there. And that's actually where I started selling paintings.
- RT: Could you tell me . . . Do you remember how the first paintings started to sell?
- WH: Well, people knew I was always drawing their work. I mean, I was—I could talk, and my pencil could draw, and it seemed like on autopilot. [laughter] So I had this artistic thing. And then somebody one day asked me if I could paint a kid. [pause] "I guess. Do you have a picture of your kid?" "Yeah, here's the kid." And I did it, you know? "How much?" "Thirty bucks."
- RT: [laughter]
- WH: And some people asked me to paint their dog. And then some folks started asking me, "I have this dining room, and I'm trying to make it Louis XIV," or something, "and I would like pictures of my kids, but I want them dressed up like royalty." So I started getting more involved, you know. These little commissions, and stuff like that.
- RT: Were these oil paintings?
- WH: Oil paintings, yeah. So I told the guy, "You're looking at a hundred bucks here, buddy." [laughter]
- RT: Especially if you want the Louis XIV.
- WH: "A hundred bucks, huh? Well, okay." Shit!
- RT: [laughter]
- WH: So I left the Midwest in '72 with two babies born in Ohio, and there are probably thirty paintings in somebody's attic in Ohio, or around there, of the kid or the dog. [laughter] But I was also doing Chicano paintings over there for myself, just reminiscent.
- RT: Were they street scenes?
- WH: Yeah, street scenes. Vatos hanging out, stuff like that. During my sojourn in Ohio, I picked up the Cincinnati *Enquirer* one day, and I look at this headline: "East LA Riots." [pause] I was shocked, I was dumbfounded. And I'm reading and I'm going, "Why are they doing this now, and I'm not even there?" That planted the seed that it was getting time to go back home. It was '70, August 29. I came back in '72, and my brother-in-law, Flavio, said, "Hey, Wayne, you're an artist. Let me take you to this place, man, it's really—there are a lot of artists in there." "All right." I had never palled with artists, I had never painted with artists. All my pals were drinking and football and basketball playing. I played all the sports. So he takes me down, and takes me to Gage and Whittier Boulevard. The Mechicano Art Center. And I walked in there, and I said, "Shit!" I was blown away. [The center moved from 4030 Whittier Blvd. in East Los Angeles to 5337 N. Figueroa St. in the Highland Park neighborhood of Los Angeles in 1975 —ed.]
- RT: What did you see? Do you remember the first images?
- WH: I remember one painting, and it was taken from a photograph, 'cause I saw the photograph later of a young lady. Sort of Brown Beret style. [indistinct] And that was painted real—I thought that was a big painting,

you know? I had been painting these little paintings, like this, you know? And I remember another painting in there. It was a goat that was, like, rotting. A dead goat rotting back into the ground. And that was John Valadez.

RT: Is that right?

WH: Yeah. And—

RT: Was it in his—already in his style?

WH: Different. Not as photo-real.

RT: Right.

WH: Not as photo-real. So I don't know if he had projected that [onto the canvas] or not. Because he paints [*indistinct*]. And I met artists there.

RT: Who did you begin to meet?

WH: Well, the cat that seemed to be in charge, it seemed to be two or three guys. One was Leonard Castellanos, one was Armando Cabrera, and another one was Rea Tilano. I saw Armando—I saw Leonard many years ago.

[*break in audio*]

WH: And then Rea . . . Trying to think. I haven't seen him in years, but I know he's around, 'cause someone—Frank Martinez—said he saw Rea. I guess he lives in the Valley now. Armando? He disappeared, as far as I know. I don't know what happened to him. Anyway, Mechicano was this print shop, screen print shop, even though there were paintings and stuff. And that's where I had my first one-person show, [in] 1973. [*laughter*] So Wayne Healy, one-man show. And—

RT: Did you produce—these were paintings and prints?

WH: Paintings, prints, drawings, any *cochinada* I could think of [*laughter*] to put up there. And damn, I sold a piece. A little drawing, about that big. And the cat that bought it has bought other pieces over the years, and it was a guy I went to college with, in Pomona. The funny thing about Pomona, I went to school when Chicanos didn't go to school. I knew I had to go there. I had to go to some school or my mother would kill me. So I was driven. [*laughter*] And Cal Poly—I don't know how people go to school these days. Cal Poly, well, East LA College cost me six dollars a semester. Six dollars.

RT: Incredible.

WH: In—

RT: This is 19—

WH: Nineteen sixty—

RT: Sixty-eight?

WH: Sixty-three, '64, I went there. And then Cal Poly cost me thirty-five dollars a quarter. Then you have, like, books and stuff like that. But I had a job. I worked in a sheet metal factory. I worked in an explosives factory, and then I worked in a sheet metal factory. I must have made—the highest I made there was probably, like, two dollars and ten cents an hour. I had a car, I had five bucks in my pocket. You know, I was on top of the world. [*laughter*] I was on top of the world. But the thing was, there might have been fifty Chicanos at Cal Poly, and I was a member of a group called MASA, the Mexican-American Student Association, and there was like thirty of us. So the other twenty didn't get involved with MASA. There was no MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán], there was no Chicano studies. But there was César Chávez, and—

RT: And was MASA politically active?

WH: Mildly.

RT: Mildly.

WH: Mildly politically active. Our real mission, or whatever the statement said, was to tutor kids. And we tutored kids in Pomona, which were mostly Black kids. So there were not many Chicano kids that we tutored. And so I remember talking to this one kid who was an engineering student. He went to

Westchester High School. I went to Garfield High School. And one day we started talking about it. And then . . . [laughter] He said something about [the Ephebian Society, a citywide honor society]. I was an Ephebian. “Get out, you were an Ephebian?” “Yeah.” “What was your grade point average?” I said, “Like, 3.2” “Get out of here, you were an Ephebian?” I said, “I was. There’s a picture of me in the yearbook.” A 3.2 would have got me about one hundredth place in Westchester High School. So I was a genius among not-so-genius people. And so—I mean, that’s like—in Cal Poly I learned math, I learned aerospace engineering, and I learned Black people and white people. Because I never really knew Black people or white people.

PV: I had this guy—just yesterday—who was telling me that when he left East LA, it was the first time he realized that the United States would trade itself as white.

RT: Would trade itself?

PV: I didn’t realize that I live in a white country. [laughter]

RT: That’s great.

PV: Yeah.

WH: And I was kind of in a special situation because I have an Irish name—

RT: Right.

WH: I come from East LA. So me and then my brother-in-law—he used to be my best friend, now he’s only my brother-in-law—we went to school. We’re both from Garfield.

RT: Right.

WH: He was the student body president of Garfield. We are engineering majors, and we’re athletes. So he played basketball and played freshman football. He said football was not for me. [laughter] And track, I didn’t feel like track. [pause] We studied—or went to class—with these white people who played ball and lived with the Black people. And [indistinct] brother would come up to me and say, “Hey, Healy, them white guys, they’re no good. White guys, Black guys over there. And, you know, you’re one of us.”

RT: That’s interesting.

WH: “And those are no good.” So, I was a Chicano, so I was pals with the Blacks and I was white. So here’s these two people pointing at each other, and—

RT: And you’re in the middle.

WH: And I’m in the middle. [laughter] But . . .

RT: So you saw these race relations.

WH: Race relations. There really wasn’t race relations. I mean . . . Like in high school, Japanese were Buddha-heads. They called themselves Buddha-heads. You call ’em Buddha-head now, and it’s politically incorrect.

RT: Right, right.

WH: [laughter] So there was certainly an awareness of the variation, but there was really not a white-versus-Black thing in East LA, in my experience.

RT: Experience, right.

WH: So it was quite a trip. The other point I wanted to make—talking about the 3.2 average. Right now, they’re crying about 50 percent dropout in some of the schools. I remember maybe ten years after I graduated getting an alumni magazine from Garfield that bragged about 50 percent not dropping out, 50 percent—

RT: Retention.

WH: Retention, graduating. When I graduated, 87 percent dropped out, 83 percent dropped out.

RT: So you had friends who had probably dropped out. Do you remember, like, the circumstances that led to that?

WH: I had a good buddy in junior high school, and the damn guy could draw better than me and did algebra better than me. And I really admired this kid. And he was this little guy, José [indistinct], and he was from the projects, Maravilla. And we both graduated from Griffith Junior High School, went to Garfield. He lasted about a semester. I never knew what happened to him. For someone to drop out is a tragic thing. My mom was always behind me.

RT: Driving?

- WH: “You’re gonna make it, you’re gonna make it, you’re gonna make something of yourself.” If anybody was going to make something it’d be Joe. And . . . so he didn’t graduate. And I don’t know what ever happened to him. But, I think about that.
- RT: As a comparison.
- WH: Yeah.
- RT: Do you remember his family background? Did he have a family background that was driving his interests?
- WH: He had, like, a single-mom family. And I really didn’t know his folks that much. He never invited me over his place. I invited him over my house. I lived on Arizona Avenue, and he lived in the projects, so maybe he didn’t want to invite me there. Although my great-grandmother lived in Maravilla. *[laughter]* So that was interesting. I wonder sometimes, what ever happened to old Joe, is he still around? *[laughter]*
- RT: So going back to the Mechicano—your first exhibition. Who was there? How was it that you got this exhibition? What were sort of the artist friends that you began to make? When did you begin to realize that this was really now becoming your vocation and your career? Because I’m imagining that probably really, sort of, set the turning—
- WH: That was a definite milestone. And in that milestone, before the show—that was in ’73—I started painting murals in ’72. That was the real kicker. I’m already blown away by Mechicano. I thought it was the only artists in the world. And here’s all these other artists. And they’re, like, doing all Chicano stuff. It’s really cool. I called up one Saturday—or Friday—“Hey Rea, what’s happening tomorrow, about my print,” or something. He said, “Tomorrow, go to the projects, man. We’re gonna paint a mural.” Well, the projects that he’s talking about were Ramona Gardens and . . . a mural. “Wait a minute. You mean, like, on a wall, like outside? Like everybody’s gonna see it?” “Yeah, we’re gonna do a mural.” “That sounds cool.” So, I showed up to Nico’s or Rico’s grocery store on Lancaster, a block from Soto. And it was a grocery store, and we were gonna do the wall. And there was maybe six or eight people there. I hardly knew any of them. This one cat that I met that day—I met several guys that day—was Rich Raya, and he appeared to be the guy in charge. So he had some rudimentary sketch. He had this corn goddess, and she was throwing the corn, and there was cactus over here, and Chevys over here, and a couple of things, so . . . “Who knows how to paint faces?” “Oh, I do!” “Oh, Okay, go paint some there. Who knows how to cactus?” “I do!” “Okay” . . . So he was sort of directing the thing and shit, I was just glad to be there, you know? Painting outside. That’s just so cool.
- RT: Which part did you paint?
- WH: I painted faces, cars. I jumped around.
- RT: You jumped around?
- WH: In two days we did something we called a mural. *[laughter]* But that was it. Man, I was terminally bitten by the mural bug. That was the end of that.
- RT: This is the format.
- WH: This is me.
- RT: Do you remember if that one stayed up for a while?
- WH: It stayed up for a while. I have—
- RT: Some images?
- WH: An image somewhere. It’s been long gone, you know? It’s been painted over several times. But yeah, I have it somewhere.
- RT: So I’m imagining you being part of this evening and being overwhelmed by this. And I’m certain it probably had—in part—to do with it that it was collective, that there were a lot of people involved.
- WH: Yeah, there was a lot of energy.
- RT: A lot of energy. And that it was—I mean, the format, I’m certain, had something to do with it.
- WH: Yeah, oh yeah.
- RT: Large format, that it really—

- WH: Oh yeah. No, I had up, to that point—I don't know what the biggest thing I ever painted, maybe thirty-six inches or something. So anyway, so that was that one. And then there was, there was other group of murals going on. So I painted several with other people in Ramona Gardens. About that time, at Mechicano, I met all the artists that you know today. Carlos Almaraz, Frank Romero, Gronk, Willie Herrón, all these people. And later on, down the line, Carlos. This would be in maybe '74, '75. Carlos was doing the farmworkers' banner, so I helped him work on that. I went up to Keene, [to] the farmworkers' union, with him and checked out the place. So Carlos was kind of, like, a more seasoned artist. So he—we were talking one day—and this street, and that people, and those people. "Where did you grow up?" Turns out I grew up on Arizona, Carlos grew up on McDonnell. Carlos was four years older than me, which is a lot of years when you're—
- RT: At that age.
- WH: When you're young. But we knew the same people, and all that. Lalo Guerrero lived right there on McDonnell Street.
- RT: Then you begin to find this out later, that you grew up in the same—
- WH: With Carlos, yeah. I knew Lalo 'cause my brother is the same age as Mark, and they used to play together. They went to school together and played together. My brother—'cause we had to go by his house to go home. When you go down into the big yard there, with the horses and the cows. Sounds weird now, but—
- RT: That's the way it was.
- WH: That's the way it was in those days. But one day I got my own mural in Ramona Gardens, my own wall. And I made this drawing. A line drawing, no color or anything on it. That may be the greatest piece I ever did, because every year somebody wants it in their book, in their teaching thing, like—
- RT: Is this *Ghosts*?
- WH: This is *Ghosts of the Barrio*. It was completed in '74, and it was restored by the city of LA maybe four or five years ago. They hired these—it was so interesting to see these five white ladies, 'cause Ramona Gardens could be pretty rough from time to time, and they're taking all this graffiti off with Q-tips. And I'm looking at them and I go, "Oh, jeez, that's your job, man, that's not mine." But I was really happy that they restored it, and the sucker looks good today. So '74. It's thirty-three years old. [Wayne Healy, *Ghosts of the Barrio*, 1974, Building 2731-37, Ramona Gardens, Los Angeles.]
- RT: So the conservators, they only had to remove the graffiti?
- WH: They removed the—they did a very—
- RT: 'Cause I've seen a picture when it had the graffiti, which was pretty much on the lower half.
- WH: Right, right. And I was hired as a consultant. And they wanted me, you know, "We can't get this right shade. Could you just paint that color, but nothing else!" But I'm a liar, you know? I'm not Michelangelo, you know?
- RT: The artist is here.
- WH: They're really . . . They want me to fuck with the damn mural.
- PV: Security! Gotta take that tape and destroy it.
- RT: So that was your first solo mural?
- WH: My first solo mural, and probably my last solo mural because, man, that was a lot of work. I'm sure it took over six months because I had a real job. And so I only painted on Saturdays.
- PV: A real job?
- WH: A real job.
- RT: Nine-to-five job.
- WH: Like, like Friday, and you have a check in your hand?
- RT: [laughter]
- WH: When was the last time that's happened around here?
- PV: Well I thought I left a real job for a real job?
- WH: Get out.

- RT: So about six months it probably took?
- WH: I would say, I would guess that. Some of the early murals—I would say *Chicano Time Trip* and *Moonscapes*—took more than a year. [*Chicano Time Trip*, 1977, 2601 N. Broadway, East Los Angeles; *Moonscapes*, 1979, 11400 West Washington Boulevard, Culver City.] And that’s ‘cause I was working full-time and [with] David, who was a freelancer at the time. But he still had his workload he had to deal with.
- RT: But you knew David for a while. Maybe you can talk about your relationship with David, how that evolved?
- WH: Well, I knew David from kindergarten to fourth grade. [*pause*] What’s that? That’s *Moonscapes*.
- RT: That’s a very good [*indistinct*]. Excellent.
- WH: In Ramona Gardens. Nobody got paid.
- RT: Right.
- WH: We painted for free. We painted just for the—just sort of, *chingón*, let’s paint. And the next one, that’s the first Streetscaper mural.
- RT: Right.
- WH: After David and I got together. So we got this job and there was money involved, because at that time Judy Baca had just started.
- RT: SPARC [Social and Public Art Resource Center].
- WH: Not SPARC.
- RT: Not SPARC?
- WH: Pre-SPARC. This is—she worked for the Department of Parks and Rec. She, I guess, wrote a grant to the federal government or something, a mural thing, and got it. [Baca received the grant from the city of Los Angeles in 1974 —ed.] And so now we hear this lady in city hall has got money for murals, so we applied for that. And I already had this wall. So they—four hundred bucks. Four hundred dollars, wow! We’re doing it on the damn bank, man! The bank should put some bucks in there. So we went in there and talked to that guy. He put in six hundred dollars. So we got one thousand dollars for that mural. And if you measure the mural, that works out to one dollar a square foot. [*laughter*] So we make a little more than that now.
- RT: Do you remember what the community—do you remember your interactions when you were doing the first, the *Ghosts of the Barrio*?
- WH: There was no process, there was no committee review.
- RT: No, but I mean, people may have been passing by. Do you remember the comments, or . . . It must have been unusual for them to be seeing—
- WH: Right, right, yeah. Well, remember, a lot of people wanted me to paint “Hazard” all over the place there. [*laughter*] That’s the name of the barrio, Hazard Grande. And—but no, mostly they were like, you know, that’s *chignón*, eh? Our critical comments. [*laughter*] But you were asking about Botello.
- RT: Yes.
- WH: And then, so, we were crayon buddies from the beginning, in kindergarten. And then he was out of my life, and I don’t know how that happened, or what. And so, later on, the reason came. It was just that the Long Beach Freeway went through his house. Knocked on his door, and said, “Hey, you gotta get out o’ here, the freeway’s coming through.” So that’s where we broke off. He moved far away to El Hoyo Mara, two blocks. [*laughter*] Over on First Street, you know, where they call Obregon Park now, there was El Hoyo Mara. And I did not see him again until ‘75, twenty years later. He was [around thirty]. And he remembers me. Of course he had a beard and all that stuff. I didn’t know who the hell that was. And [*indistinct*], finally it kind of sunk in, and then, “Well, what are you doing these days,” you know? I say, “Well, I’m painting murals.” “I’m painting murals! Where are you painting murals?” “Estrada Courts.” “I’m painting in Ramona Gardens.” “Which one’s yours?” “Which one’s yours?” “Oh shit, really?” “Oh, that’s so cool.” So we said, we should paint one.
- RT: Collaborate.
- WH: Collaborate. So we did that piece on the bank in ‘76 and ‘77. “We’ll paint one. Forget that! This is way more fun than painting alone.” So that’s the first one.

- RT: Now when you collaborated, how would you come up with the images? Did you draw together, or you'd brainstorm?
- WH: This one was a flip of a coin.
- RT: Is that right?
- WH: Yeah. We flipped a coin, and I won, or lost, depending on your point of view. So I had to get the wall, and I had to design the mural. Well, the relationship became apparent pretty quick in that I drew all of that and submitted it. I had also made a cartoon for it. "But where's the color?" "Color? It'll be colorful." I mean . . . "But we want to see it on the cartoon!" "Oh, all right." So I got some red and I painted this red, and I painted green, and all that. And so now they had a color cartoon. So when we started painting it, David's going, "You just have this one red there." I go, "Yeah, well, we could lighten it up." Anyway, this guy is a color genius, and it became apparent that I had a lot to learn on color. I thought that the line was the king, but the line is a skeleton and the color is the meat. So by the time we were done with that, we were talking about doing more stuff.
- RT: Who came up with the title *Chicano Time Trip*?
- WH: I did.
- RT: Did you know that from the beginning? Because it seems suggested by the historical panels that lead to, or proceed from—
- WH: Right. Well, it was designed as a West Coast answer to the mostly East Coast symbols of our bicentennial. You know, bicentennial, 1976, George Washington, Jefferson . . .
- RT: The Liberty Bell.
- WH: The Liberty Bell. All this Revolutionary War stuff. Well that's cool, but in 1776, we were happening out here, too. So that's what that was supposed to get across, that this is our bicentennial. And of course, we go back farther than two hundred years. And so [the panels,] they're called "La Indigena," "La Española," "La Independencia," "La Revolución."
- RT: Contemporary.
- WH: Contemporary. We have a painting here. Tom Bradley, bless his soul, he's wearing a big hat there. He's Mexican, Cinco de Mayo, you know? Cinco de Mayo parade.
- RT: Did the response to this lead to other murals?
- WH: What it led to was, we applied for that and got it. The state of California said they had some projects, and we applied for all of 'em, and we won this one. And that was \$10,000. We thought we had died and gone to heaven. It took about fourteen months to do that.
- RT: Is that right?
- WH: Well, the thing, we embellished it, we went crazy. Because once we won it, we decided it wasn't good enough. We had these long walls, and here was something, there, and something there, something there. Anyway, we went berserk. The thing is, I was working in Culver City at Hughes Aircraft Company.
- RT: Right.
- WH: So that neighborhood was—
- RT: Familiar to you.
- WH: Aerospace people, you know? And so this was our—and this was out of East LA. [pause] And so we, you know, we put other stuff in there. Like, that's a Mexican flag on the astronaut's—
- RT: Suit.
- WH: Suit.
- RT: Yeah.
- WH: And we're cleaning our brushes at the end of the day when the cops come by, "Hey, you guys painting that?" "Yeah." Says, "Hey, I didn't know Mexico had a space program." Ha-ha-ha. I said, "Oh, yeah, wait 'til the oil comes in from Campeche, and you'll see that." And, as it turns out, there was a Mexican astronaut who had a Mexican flag on his back, so we weren't stretching it too far.
- RT: That's great.

- WH: And this, by the way, is Healy's Comet.
- RT: Very good. *[laughter]* That's great.
- WH: So there's a bunch of stuff in it. And this is seventy-eight feet, right here. This thing goes all around the building. It's four hundred feet.
- RT: And again, this was a—at this point now, you'd been working together two years now?
- WH: We started in '75, and finished this in '79. And when we got that job, before these other jobs, we had a little tiny room in my house. That was our studio where we met, and stuff like that. So we decided, "We're gonna get a place to work on that," and we got the little storefront in Glassell Park, and another one. Got bigger, kept moving, got bigger and bigger. One time we were in Self Help Graphics [& Art], where their print shop is—etching and print shop. And so, several places. Cyprus Park, downtown LA.
- RT: Now as you were producing these murals with Botello and meeting other muralists, do you remember what were the conversations and what was the debate at the time around the mural painting movement in Los Angeles?
- WH: I remember one of the comments that we used to crack up at is that Willie Herrón kept saying that muralism was dead. 'Course he kept painting them. *[laughter]* So I began to think, maybe he's insane. He was only there when he didn't have a job, and then when he'd get a job . . .
- RT: Was he serious, or was he just provoking?
- WH: Well, I'm sure he had a little bit of his Asco tendency. *[laughter]* I really—I had met Willie at Mechicano. I didn't really get to know him until we both went to Houston for a gig—some Chicano show at the University of Houston—and he and I were painting our own paintings. Sort of like, look at the live artists, don't feed 'em, whatever you do. So we roomed for a week, anyway. And so we've been good buddies. I mean, he's—he does his thing. *[pause]* As far as murals, I've heard every damn thing about murals. How great they were, what a waste of time they were, how they were gonna solve all the streets' problems, you know? *[laughter]* And I'm thinking, you know, that painting's about that big, I don't know whose problems it's gonna solve. I think it looks *chingón*, and our hope for this was just to put something up and beautify the neighborhood. It was very simple. We weren't trying to start a revolution or anything.
- RT: But did you have a sense that at least Mexican and Chicano themes were being represented and that painters were being represented as well? I mean, even, for example, that very good story of having the Mexican flag on the astronaut must have given a sense of affirmation—of an identity—in places like Culver City, where that was not represented.
- WH: Yeah. That was not represented. Barbara Carrasco, in fact, told me that these guys—'cause she's from Culver City—and she said these guys, "Hey, see that *chingón* mural on the DMV? It's better than they do in East LA!" And she said, "These cats are from East LA." *[laughter]*
- RT: That's great.
- WH: I thought that was pretty funny.
- RT: Now was Judy Baca producing murals at that point?
- WH: At some point there, she was. Her legacy creation, the *Great Wall*. [Judith Baca and collaborators, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, completed 1983, Tujunga Wash, Los Angeles.] And actually, you know, she was in the [storm] channel, and one of Southern California's famous winters came in and took all her—I guess she had chained the scaffolding or something like that. Anyway, Mother Nature came in and sent them out to the Pacific Ocean. We had a scaffold for the bank, [for] *Chicano Time Trip*, and then she needed it, and we're in the middle of this mural. And I say, "Well, I wanna finish the mural," and then—'cause I had to give it back—and so there was a little tiff there. But we kissed and made up *[laughter]* on that. But at one time—I remember that, 'cause, I mean, we didn't leave our scaffold there. Of course not, it was a busy street corner. But I had it at my house.
- RT: So you had to—
- WH: Unload and load.
- RT: Load every time.

- WH: Right, which is something we don't do anymore. We have a wall.
- RT: That's right.
- WH: But yeah. If we get this scaffold and we gotta stop, I don't know how long it will [*indistinct*] giving this 'til we're done. [*laughter*]
- RT: Are there any other murals that were not yours, that you had—that you felt spoke to you in particular ways, among your peers?
- WH: Well, like, when I first saw *Dreams of Flight*. [David Botello, *Dreams of Flight*, 1973, Estrada Courts, 3241 E. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles.] Oh, man. I'm an aviation freak. I love aviation. And I find out this kid Botello did it, so that one really popped in my mind. I remember Carlos Almaraz painted something on the International Building. God, I think they pulled that building down. But his mural was long gone, 'cause he . . . What did he do? I think he put [on] some sort of graffiti guard, and graffiti guards were in their infancy, and they just pulled the damn mural off the wall. [Carlos Almaraz, *No compre vino gallo*, 1974, Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center (demolished 2006), 2317 Michigan Avenue, Los Angeles.]
- PV: The graffiti guard ate it.
- WH: Yeah.
- RT: Really.
- WH: It pretty much ate the mural.
- RT: Is that right?
- WH: Yeah. And he had—the guy had a pretty good piece there. “No Gallo Grapes.” And he was a big Communist, a lot of Marxist stuff in the early days. Then later on he started selling paintings. But . . . what else? We did one on Brooklyn and Soto that was the third one on that wall. [*El corrido de Boyle Heights*, 1983, 2336 Cesar Chavez Ave., Los Angeles.] Somebody was writing about that, said that we painted over somebody's. We have never, ever painted over anybody else's art. Frank Romero had painted a *corazón*—I don't know how long it lasted. Then John Valadez came in and painted a little bit more—painted over the *corazón*. [John Valadez and collaborators, *Our People*, 1978 (destroyed in the 1980s).] And this building was an unreinforced masonry building, so the city's laws said you either retro-fit it or you knock that sucker down. So next thing you know, they're bashing the walls in and just the steel columns are left there. So now they need another mural, and they called us—[Councilman] Art Snyder's office—and say, “Hey, let's [*indistinct*] like to paint.” And where they bashed around there was still parts of the mural left on the shards. [*indistinct*] “You have to take that off, 'cause I won't even paint over that.” So they had to sandblast all of that off. So we did that evolution. And then recently, maybe two years ago, we restored that. It was getting pretty bad with graffiti. We never put graffiti guard—never had to, you know? And that really—what the hell's that all about, you know? And there's gonna be a conference, or some sort of a thing, on the seventeenth of November, and I'm going to be in it. And there's going to be taggers there, apparently, and all that. So I don't know what'll get decided, or—
- RT: What's the theme of the conference?
- WH: Resistance and respect.
- RT: Is it a dialogue between muralism and taggers?
- WH: That's what it's supposed to be, yeah. I don't know if you know Rubén Guevara.
- RT: Oh yeah, sure.
- PV: It's gonna be a dialogue, if you go [*indistinct*].
- RT: [*laughter*] Exactly. But there was certainly graffiti when you were—
- WH: Well, there's been graffiti since forever. But when I was a kid, it was a—little things on the grocery store. Nobody ever sprayed a truck or a church or somebody's garage. They didn't do that. The most scandalous thing that has ever happened was in junior high—in grammar school, the Humphreys Avenue School. There was some kids that decided they were gonna start a gang called Los Mariachis. I don't know if they actually played or [*indistinct*]. And they painted it on the entrance to the Humphreys Avenue School.

Oh shit, the cops were there, and there was people taking pictures, and oh my God, this is an outrage, you know?

RT: Is this Los Mariachis?

WH: Yeah. And, so that was the most—and like today, you can't even—there's no concept there. I mean, I've seen graffiti art. You know, I thought it was spectacular stuff. They have a different concept. I don't know if our murals are gonna last forever, but we sure give 'em the chance to last as long as they can. Clean that wall. There's probably a lot of color on there. And we've gone back and restored stuff. Graffiti murals—psh, they go out, a few days later there's a different one on top. Just as *chingón*, you know?

RT: Right.

WH: So it's a different thought, and I realize there are different levels of artistic taggers. Some taggers do the scribble and they just go down the block—

PV: Taggers or writers?

WH: Taggers or writers or whoever they are.

PV: I know, I know.

WH: I know.

PV: I'm the father of a tagger. "I'm a writer, Dad. I'm a writer."

WH: My son, the writer.

PV: My son's a writer. "What did you write? Show me?"

WH: My dream come true.

PV: "Oh no. [laughter] You misspelled it." [laughter]

RT: So right around that time, then, you're also beginning to see your career move in two directions. On the one hand, your collaborative work. And you're continuing your own, what you would consider your own personal work, studio work.

WH: Yeah. One thing I noticed right off the bat is I'm having less and less time for my studio work.

RT: At that time?

WH: At that time. Certainly, I got a full-time job, and then when I get off work and go to the studio, I'm working on a public project. And all the time we were at Self Help, I didn't do anything with Self Help other than rent a space, until after that. I moved out of there probably in '83 or '84. I applied to be in the atelier [program], an experimental silkscreen [workshop]. And so I did a print there. This was a serigraph. But hey, I had a stack of serigraphs that day and I thought, "I did that in a week. Hmm, that's pretty *chingón*." So I started to see when could I get a date in there. And then another—some guest artist came in with this new, cool printing way. [Margaret Garcia, who taught monoprinting at Self Help Graphics —ed.] And so, "Hey, you gotta come down and check out this lady, see what she's got." So she did something called [a] mono silkscreen print. And it looked like a serigraph, except in the serigraph, you had to cut stencils, you have to do a photo transfer, you have a screen for each color. Mono silkscreen is, you had an open screen and you put all the colors on there, and the fact that you pull them and transfer it to the paper meant that you just messed up everything you did on the screen. So you got one print, mono silkscreen.

RT: Right.

WH: So I did that a little bit with [printer] Oscar Duardo. And then Self Help got José Alpuche. And with José Alpuche, I pulled—or he's pulled—about five hundred of my images—different images.

RT: In various techniques?

WH: In—

RT: Mostly silk—

WH: Either serigraph or mono silkscreen, and most of them mono silkscreen. I would say I probably did ten serigraphs, meaning ten images, but a stack. That was the other beauty of it, is like, I didn't pay no dough. They got half [of the prints], and I got half.

RT: Right.

WH: And so I could see where printing—printing soon became an escape. From here, and the phone’s ringing and I’ve got to see if this guy’s doing his job. I got, you know. I go over there, and if the phone rings it’s not for me. And I’m just one guy in the corner there doing his thing. “Hey Joe, I’m ready!” [*whistles*] And so that became—I became slightly obsessed with that, I think, in that I couldn’t do a painting. Or, it was hard to do paintings. I would do paintings in spurts, maybe four or five at a time, then I wouldn’t do it for two years, and . . . But the screen printing, I could get out and do that. I also learned some etching, stuff like that. So I could see that as a way to [*indistinct*], ‘cause I didn’t want to lose my studio art. And now I’ve been more active now, in later years. Certainly, being involved with the Cheech Marin show has given me a lot of impetus, has turned me onto gallery—

RT: Patricia Correa.

WH: Patricia Correa, and some of the stuff there. She’s still painting, though, and I would never have been able to sell for those amounts. And this year she took me to Madrid. I mean, I was traveling. I went to Dubai, I went to Qatar, and she got me a gig at this place. I was in an exhibit. [*Painters of Aztlán*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, April 4–June 3, 2007.] But not only that, not only the exhibit, I taught a workshop. Right there, see that picture?

RT: Yeah.

WH: Imagine a Chicano going to Spain to teach the Spanish how to paint murals.

RT: That’s great.

WH: [*laughter*]

RT: What were your students like?

WH: There they are. They were great. They were most enthusiastic. They were all—

RT: College age?

WH: Twenty, twenty-somethings.

PV: They were all South Americans.

RT: Were they?

WH: No, there was, there was—

RT: Some?

WH: They were most—mostly Madrileños. Well, I think they were all Madrileños.

RT: But some of them from [*indistinct*]?

WH: A Mexican, a Palestinian, a Korean. And there was another Argentine lady. Argentine. But they were most enthusiastic. I didn’t know, I was just wondering, “What’s this Mexicano doing?” No, it was wonderful. So we’re painting that thing there.

RT: This was Casa Encendida?

WH: Casa Encendida is the art center, the non-profit art center. And man, they had a really impressive place—four stories. And they had writing and music and painting, and everything was—

[*break in audio*]

WH: In ‘97 or so.

RT: When was the first time you met Cheech?

WH: Ninety-six, ‘97, maybe? Around there. A lady who was working—she’s still around, I hear. What was her name? . . . I can’t think of her name, but she worked for the Robert Berman gallery. Robert Berman used to be on Main Street [in Santa Monica].

RT: Right.

WH: And so, she—I guess he had a Chicano show. He had been showing Chicano artists. So the lady put my painting in the window, a painting called *Una tarde en Meoqui* [1991]. Meoqui is a small town in Chi-huahua. That’s where my wife was from, I’ve been there a few times. So I did, like, a typical backyard family scene. Barbacoa, chicharrones cooking in the pot, tacos and beers everywhere. And so she calls up, she says, “You know who bought your painting?” I say, “No.” She says, “Cheech Marin.” I say, “Really?”

[*indistinct*] She says, “Yeah, I can’t find anybody to take it over to him.” [*pause*] “I’ll take it over to him!” So I got the address and drove out there and delivered. And, yeah, he was just Mr. Cool, a regular guy. And he was very liberal with his compliments. Said it was great. “I love this,” “reminds me of this,” and, “well, what is it?” You know, “Tell me about it.” So I could see this guy was really interested, and I saw other artwork on his wall. And so I don’t know exactly when he got his epiphany, but if it wasn’t by then, it was soon thereafter. And then he bought several other pieces from me.

RT: In the course of the—

WH: In the—as the years have gone by.

RT: And you maintained contact with him?

WH: Yeah, yeah. [*pause*] One thing I did was take my nephews—’cause I was gonna take them to the Dodger game, two nephews of mine,—and I knew he was shooting. They told me he was shooting near Hollywood, near Cahuenga? So I took ’em there to meet Cheech. Even in his dressing room, he had some paintings, and I’m pretty sure he had a Botello by that time. So my nephews, who are all grown up now, got a picture with a big movie star. [*laughter*]

RT: That’s great.

WH: But he invited myself, Gronk, Patti [Valdez]

PV: Valadez.

WH: John Valadez, that’s it, and myself to meet him at a studio. And he says, “I’m gonna shop a show around.” Shop a show around? So apparently, museums are like most any other consumers. They go to a convention and buy the programming. And he said, “There’s gonna be an art show convention, and I want to do this because I’m going to have an exhibit of my work.” And I remember one time, he said, “If you get ten thousand for a painting now, when this is over, you’re gonna get one hundred thousand for a painting.”

RT: [*laughter*]

WH: That got my attention. Of course, I wasn’t getting ten thousand for a painting, but I could do the math—that degree of . . . And so we talked about different things. About building a house, and all that. So I ended up designing this little mini house to look like an East LA house, and he says, “It’s got to stand out across this big convention floor.” And so I say, well, “I designed a cholo satellite—a cylindrical.” I was working at Hughes Aircraft, and they make all the damn communications satellites. So here’s this cylinder, and it has solar panels here, but this—it’s painted like this vato with shades and a bandana and all that. And on top, he’s got a little sombrero, but it’s a sombrero like this, ’cause it looks like a dish. And down there I got a big sombrero. I got these at Olvera Street.

RT: That’s great.

WH: And put it on the house. So here is—suspended from the ceiling is this satellite. And here’s this sombrero. [*laughter*]

RT: That’s great.

WH: So you could see it across it. That was the seed for *Chicano Visions*. [*Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*, opened December 1, 2001, San Antonio Museum of Art.]

RT: Right.

WH: And when that happened, that was big for me, in that I had really been ignoring my personal—

RT: Artwork.

WH: Artwork. Or not ignoring it, but just—

RT: But there was less time for it.

WH: Less time for it. And with that, it—

RT: Re-energized.

WH: Re-energized.

RT: And it must have been—there must have been a struggle at the same time from up to that point, in that there weren’t that many venues for exhibition.

- WH: Well, yeah. I mean, I had no gallery representation. I knew cats that did. Frank had been in several. There was one called Oranges and Apples, or something. [Oranges/Sardines Gallery, Los Angeles.] Carlos always did, and then towards the end of his life—in fact, the very year he died—he had a show in January—this is in '89—at the—I want to say Jan Baum. Jan Turner? Jan somebody gallery. [Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles.] And I went in there. I hadn't been hanging with him for a while—I knew he was sick and all—and when I got in there, this damn gallery was just jam-packed with work. And there's like red dots everywhere. And I'm looking in and they're all saying, '88, '89, '89. What do you mean, '89? This is '89, and it's January. How the hell could he do this? So he went out with a big blaze there. And when I went to see him—"How you doing?"—he was the color of death. This gray—that was his skin, right there. And so I had always admired his painting 'cause, I mean, he was ta-ta-ta-ta-ta, you know, and he's going like a madman. And so I want to be like a madman. That's the only way I'm gonna produce anything. So I started borrowing my mono silk-screen techniques. 'Cause one thing I learned about the [mono] silkscreens, you could draw as you were doing this, and you could draw with a squirt bottle. I started painting with a squirt bottle.
- RT: Was that the moment that you started to incorporate the squirt on the canvases?
- WH: I don't know the exact moment, but . . . Well, like, Cheech has a painting—with no squirt bottle on it—of mine and that's like from '92. And then *Una tarde en Meoqui* is probably like '94 or something like that. So it had to be around that time. That's about the time Joe Alpuche came to Self Help. So I can see how instead of getting paint—'cause I—some of the old paintings, they're just so smooth and pretty—not that.
- RT: So you wanted a little bit more energy?
- WH: Well, I wanted to get—
- RT: And speed.
- WH: I don't want to paint eight months on a painting.
- RT: Right.
- WH: I want to paint a week, or two weeks, you know.
- RT: And that allowed you, and it kind of released this possibility.
- WH: Yeah, right. And so now I'm not worried about, "Gee, do I have the eyelashes right?" It's, choo, choo, choo. So, no mistakes. There's no mistakes. Just tell yourself there's no mistakes. [laughter]
- RT: Do you see a relationship between the mono silkscreen or silkscreen and the kind of quality of the colors that seem to have translated or had an effect on the canvas painting?
- WH: Well, yeah, in a way. And that really has to do with pre-mixing colors, because Self Help has a standard palette. You know, there's red, and there's magenta, and there's this and that. I don't know how many of 'em are pure, out of the color. There's some of 'em are mixed. There's a light this and there's a light that. And you of course can do your own colors, but every time you deviate from the standard palette that they have, you're taking up time.
- RT: Right.
- WH: And I'm trying to crank. Not only do I want to get the most work done in the day, but a mono silkscreen starts drying immediately.
- RT: Right.
- WH: And if you're in August and the humidity's five percent, you're gonna have a miserable time. When it's January and it's—
- RT: Crisp out.
- WH: Raining outside. That's perfect monoprint weather. [laughter]
- RT: Right.
- WH: So that's kind o' how that comes together. I hadn't really thought about that.
- RT: It is interesting, because I think that there is a relationship between the—and there's a kind of transparency in the canvases that I've noticed from, say, around the '90s to the present, that has a kind of veiled quality that seems like it comes from the print process. But it's a version—it's as if it were a version of that.
- WH: There are certain things on a print, there's no way you could, like, try to do it.

RT: Exactly.

WH: And a lot of it is, like, say, the edge of a color dries in the screen, so when you pull the screen nothing goes through, so you end up, you know, [you] have a white . . . But it's not a straight line, it's just real crazy painting. So it's . . . I began to realize—because it took a while for me to catch on to this mono silkscreen stuff—'cause I'm pulling and I'm, "God, this is crap, what is that? What did I do wrong?" And it took me, I don't know, twenty-five, thirty tries before I really started to see, "Whoa." And what it boiled down to—and I've told students, let your medium help you, don't fight your medium. And the mono silkscreen is a great example, because if you're, like, an oil painter and you've never done this before, you're gonna want to do something right here that looks pretty to you. Bland, and all that. And guess what? You have wasted all your time, 'cause that's paint. That's what the paper sees.

RT: Right.

WH: You can blend and do everything you want—

RT: But it's the initial contact.

WH: That first contact goes into the weave. Use that as your pal, don't try to fight that, you know. And so I'm telling people that, I'm telling myself that. So, yeah, it's—I think once you get over your—you know, "I'm an oil painter."

RT: [laughter]

WH: You get a little more—you have an understanding of what's going on.

RT: Right.

RT: And with—I'm also making the link now between the squirt bottle on the canvases—is there something related to when you work on—when you have to fire pigments for tiles?

WH: We almost—well, we always do some tests. And there are certain things that we have pretty down. We've done it so often that we know what's gonna happen. But yeah, we usually do tests, and I do squirt bottle on the thing. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes you do—they call it trailings in ceramics. And so I might have this neat line, and as it dries, it just goes whoop.

RT: It lifts.

WH: And I go, shit. And there's no way to get it down. You wet it, and it goes like that and then it dries. So for each job, we need to do testing. Something you think you know, but it's a different glaze or it's a different this or a different that. You got to check it out.

RT: And linking your prominence in the *Chicano Visions* show with your gallery representation and with Patricia Correa, how would you describe how your work has developed in that time period. In the last seven years, more or less?

WH: Well, I've just—I've had more shows. And so I've been painting more than before that. Like I said, there was—you know, there's a *Chicano Visions* show that's been cruising around. It's supposed to come to LACMA in the summer. [*Los Angelenos/Chicano Painters of L.A.* (selections from *Chicano Visions*), June 15–November 2, 2008, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.]

RT: That's right.

WH: But I was in a show in Madrid while I was teaching that. And I had a print retrospective at the University of Judaism. [*Wayne Healy: 25-Year Print Retrospective*, 2002, Platt Gallery, American Jewish University, Los Angeles.] I had two one-person shows this year, one in Oxnard in February, and one at Vincent Price art gallery in July or June, maybe? [*East L.A.: The Way I Remember It*, Vincent Price Art Museum, May 24–August 2, 2007, East Los Angeles College.] I'm much more aware. And I like to think as I cruise into the cocktail hour of my life—I've been in it actually for quite a while.

RT: [laughter]

WH: But as I get older, I would like to think that I don't have to do all of this stuff. I mean, I love doing it, but building a twenty-foot sculpture is a pain in the ass. I mean, it's a pain. Engineering, call-outs, permits, insurance, and all that. Of course, if I just sat on my butt there and painted something, [and] I said, "Here, look, it says 'Healy' on it." "Oh, I want that one!"

- RT: [laughter]
- WH: Highest bidder. I would like to think that I could do that. Right now, I can't do it on my own artwork. Living on public artwork is an adventure. [laughter]
- RT: And they are different kinds of gratification, I would imagine.
- WH: Yeah.
- RT: Because these have a—maybe you could talk a little bit about your various commissions, and how they've come—some of your—what you consider the key commissions that come about and their—the response afterwards. And perhaps some of—even the ones that have been really crucial for you?
- WH: Okay. Well, the first non-mural job was the Blue Line of the—the Metro Rail Blue Line, on Slauson Station. [South Central Suite, 1995, Metro Blue Line Slauson Station, Los Angeles.] And, you know, when you apply for these jobs, you send your slides and all that, so I sent all the slides. Well, the slides are all murals.
- RT: Murals, right.
- WH: So we did. So we win this job. Yay! And they say, "No painted murals." I say, "No painted murals?" How did they pick us—
- PG: Non-painting?
- RT: Non-painting, yeah—some of the ones that you feel were really fundamental to your—
- WH: Right. Well, the Metro Rail Blue Line was the first one that was a non-painting job. So we didn't—I went to the site, 'cause the site was already built and there was no painting wall. They had a wall down there that was deeply grooved and stuff, so . . . We decided to do tile there. [indistinct] Tile and concrete. And then upstairs we had to do something because the tile and concrete was on street level, and this station was one of the few elevated stations, so if you're sitting in the train and you don't get off there, you won't see—
- RT: Any of the work downstairs.
- WH: Any of the work downstairs. Then we put this—there was a fence surrounding the stairwells. And so I thought it was kind of architectural, it had some crazy angles to it, so we could put some panels there. And I'm trying to remember how I got into porcelain. Anyway, porcelain on steel. And so I got some paint and stuff—porcelain paints. They were awful!
- RT: Right.
- WH: They're beautiful, but they were like mud. Like molasses. Just shit. And I remember having the samples, and I had just come back from Self Help with some mono silkscreens. And then Botello came, and then I'm saying, "God, this is shit paint, man, I just can't—it doesn't work." And he said, "Oh, what's that?" I said, "Oh, I'll show you. These are the monoprints, mono silkscreens." "Well then, why don't you do a mono silkscreen on that?"
- PG: That's what I said.
- WH: That's what he said.
- RT: And had that been done before?
- WH: I don't know.
- PG: Well, not by us.
- WH: Not by us. And so I thought, hmm. So I went back to the guy that was fabricating, and I said, "I want to try something."
- RT: With the tile?
- WH: Bam! So it turned out that was the way to go.
- RT: And that's how you did the Slauson?
- WH: And that's how we did the Slauson.
- RT: That must have been what year—that was—
- WH: Ninety—it was finished in '97. I would say '95 to '97.
- RT: Took two years?
- WH: Somethin' like that.

- PG: We finished it here.
- WH: Well, we came here in '94.
- RT: So that was one of the—
- WH: So '93 to, or—
- PG: That job we won [*indistinct*].
- RT: So you brought that with you?
- PG: That was an \$80,000 letter.
- WH: That's right. And then we did the concrete casting out here.
- PG: Which brought me [*indistinct*] together.
- WH: Right. David had done some concrete casting—very, not too detailed or anything—at his house. And he said, "Well, let's make one here." So we made an image of, like, a family, like of parents and a baby and a heart. We made that in clay, made a mold out of that.
- PG: It's right here.
- WH: [*indistinct*]
- PG: It's right here.
- RT: Oh yeah. Right.
- WH: And then we had never done tile, so we recruited art—yeah, we thought it was a tile expert. The ceramics guy is Duffy, Ricardo Duffy. So he said he could do some handmade tiles. And then we got Raya, the guy I told you was on that mural, and he was a silkscreen expert. I had never silkscreened a tile. I don't know why I thought it was so exotic, a silkscreen's a silkscreen. So I got him to work on those. And then we're screening the steel panels. So that was like, whoa, you know?
- RT: Multi-layered.
- WH: Multi-layered. Different kind of work.
- RT: Right.
- WH: And then we just started applying for more jobs like that. He said—we were in Palmetto when we got LAPD and San Jose. Those are big jobs. [LAPD Memorial Sculpture Court, 1997, Westchester, California; *Monument to the Founding of the Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe*, 1997, Parque de los Pobladores, San Jose, California.]
- RT: Right.
- WH: San Jose. [*cross talk*]
- PG: The Slauson—that's how I started working with you.
- WH: On the Slauson, yeah. You were gonna—we were gonna do that gateway to East LA, and they ended up—we didn't get it.
- PG: There was the gateway to East LA. It wasn't a gateway to East LA, it was the building—
- WH: They called it the gateway.
- PG: And they had three. And it was a million-dollar job. Million dollars' worth of public art. And they separated it in three areas. I didn't know Healy at the time, but Lorenzo Hernández, who was with you [*indistinct*]. He and I, we work in our space in the company [*indistinct*]. He comes up to me, I say, "Hey, you want to do a proposal?" "Well, yeah, sure. What is it?" "It's a [*indistinct*]." "Oh, I'll do it." So he come out and did it. But they had a—the MTA [Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority] wanted three different artists. But we wanted to [bid on] the whole thing. So we went out, we did it, and we lost. And they gave it to . . . I don't remember who they gave it to, but they—
- WH: They gave it to—
- PG: The westside artists.
- WH: No, it was the Echo Park artists. Peter Shire, but also Patsy. [Peter Shire, Elsa Flores, and Robert Gil de Montes, *Paseo César Chávez*, 1995, Union Station, Los Angeles.]
- RT: Oh really?
- WH: Yeah. Apparently, we didn't have a real harmonious association.

RT: Working relationship, yeah.

WH: But anyway, they did something, and it's there.

PG: And so Lorenzo wrote a letter, 'cause they said we didn't win, but they screwed it up, and [*indistinct*] artists. We could expect a commission for eighty thousand dollars. Well, anyways, Lorenzo wrote a letter saying that he was absolutely convinced that there was no racism in the selection.

RT: Process.

PG: That it was all done fair. "I'm sure you guys were all fair." How come he always ends up picking up the same [*indistinct*] in the *Times*? [*indistinct*] Anyways. It was one of those letters, and he got totally bent out of shape. And that's why I always call it the \$80,000 letter. Because they said, "You get nothing." So to me that was the end of that. And there was an article in the *LA Times* saying, you know, this was an international competition. Because it was. At least I didn't know it was, but it was, because the *LA Times* said it. How come the same people always win? So it became like a huge problem. And so they decided the hell with this, we'll just parcel it out to everybody. And you ended up with the *Arroyo—La Sombra del Arroyo*. So we ended up with something. [*La Sombra del Arroyo*, 1995, Bus Plaza, Union Station, Los Angeles.] And that's how I met him. That's the first job.

But then he had that—the MTA, the Slauson Station—and they had this huge problem because they want to take it away from me. "It's takin' too long." It wasn't happening—they had proposed too much for the money. So he and Healy and Botello came to me, we talked, and I said, "All right, we'll figure out how much it should cost to do this job." So I went out and costed it out, and it was more than the budget. And the guy from the cultural affairs department at the time comes to see us at Palmetto, and he says, "How did you come up with that number?" It was, you know, pretty simple. You write out all of your expenses, you write 'em up, and that's how it's going to cost. Riley didn't do that. He thought I was doing—I was being a smart ass. I wasn't. You know, that's what you do. You figure out, you make a list of all your—

RT: Materials.

PG: You make a list of all your tasks, and you divide 'em between labor and materials. And when you add 'em all up, that's what it's gonna cost to do the job. So anyways, that's how I hooked up with them. Many—that was '93. [*pause*] Then by '96 I had a chance to get the hell out of aerospace, and I did.

RT: So Patricio, this is an opportune moment for you to tell us who you are, and now that you've told us, how long you've been working in collaboration with Wayne?

WH: Who is this guy? Speak up. [*laughter*]

RT: Come closer to my microphone.

PV: That's the mic?

RT: Yeah, it will pick up.

PV: [*laughter*] Now I started with you in '93?

WH: Ninety-three? On Palmetto?

PV: Sounds about right. With a gateway building. A big building. It's not called the gateway.

WH: No, no. That little corner was called the gateway to East LA. It's the tower. It's the transit tower—Metro transit tower.

PV: But it has the name of the—I don't know if it was the architect, or . . .

WH: Well, the whole thing—the developer—Patsaouras. Some Greek name. [Patsaouras Transit Plaza (formerly Gateway Transit Plaza) at Union Station.]

PV: So that's how I got started with him.

RT: Your full name, Patricio?

PV: My name is Patricio Alejandro Villagomez. You said full name, right?

WH: [*laughter*]

RT: And your work prior to working in the East Los Streetscapers?

PV: Well, I worked in aerospace. I worked for a company when I started—well, I started in aerospace, working as a vendor in a sweat shop. I worked in sweatshops from 1972 to 1980. In 1980, I got my first in-job,

which was—you know, when—I work as a vendor, so they send you, they farm you out to different companies. And then these companies hired me, so I went direct, what it was called. I stayed with them for sixteen years. In the process of being there, I met Healy, and then—that was the only job I ever had where I worked directly for a company where I was an employee. Before that, I had always been on my own. So I worked for them for sixteen years, and I liked my work, but working there was very, very difficult. There were all kinds of politics. And when I first went to work there, I went for the interview. The guy hired me, and he says to me, “When can you start?” And I says, “Well, I can start right now.” And he says, “Well, right now, we can’t really . . .” But it was a Friday, and he says, “Come in Monday.” I say, “All right, Monday is fine.” And I was getting ready to leave, and he says, “Don’t you have any questions for me?” And I was trying to think of something, and I says, “Well, what kind of people work here?” And he looked at me, and says, “Well, if they don’t belong to the KKK, they ought to.” *[laughter]* And that’s what it was. Yeah, you know? I’d work with people who would come in in the morning, and they would say, “Did you hear the news? Two guys got killed by the train on the railroad tracks? Fortunately, they were Mexicans.” You know, so . . . Whew, you know? For me, life was a little difficult.

RT: Sure.

PV: I knew more than I should have. I always liked to know more than whatever my immediate environment is. So anyways. But—I had a good time, in certain ways. In other ways, it was difficult. You have always been *[indistinct]* but you make allies, you know? You make people who respect you and back you up, and then you make your enemies who never like you. And you get sick and tired of it, and you say, “The hell with this, I’m going with Healy.”

WH: *[laughter]*

RT: From outer space to public space.

PV: Yeah. And the thing was, at the time when I came over, it was a very special time because there was a lot of work. And it seemed like taking off, like we really needed to get into focus and get it going. Because, hell, it was easier than hell. You had LAPD, you had San Jose . . .

WH: Big jobs.

PV: Big jobs—

RT: Very big jobs.

PV: Remember, we had—

WH: We had over half a million dollars of work.

RT: And in what time frame did those projects have to be developed?

PV: Within a year.

WH: Well, that was when they wanted them, but we didn’t do ’em within a year. It took a while. But in that while, we learned [that] public art outside of mural painting was quite a bit bigger of an enterprise. I was gonna point out, in ’91 I quit my job. I went home one day and told Mrs. Healy—bless her heart—“You know what? I think I’m gonna quit.”

PV: *[laughter]*

RT: How long had you been working? And this was the . . .

WH: At Hughes. I was there fifteen, sixteen years. I had been an aerospace engineer for twenty-three years. I worked at some other company. And the thing is, in 1991, my baby—baby girl—was nineteen. And Mrs. Healy—bless her heart—she said, “You earned it. Go for it.” I can imagine a lot of wives would say, “What? You’re what?!?”

RT: Right.

WH: So that’s exactly what I told Patricio when he says, “I think I’m gonna quit my job.” I say, “Are you crazy?” Well, you did.

PV: The thing was, when I quit that job—and I really want to be very general about it because I don’t really—

WH: You have to speak up.

- PV: The thing was that had I stayed in my job, last year I would have had eighty points, which in aerospace means you are fully funded for retirement. And my salary probably would have been, by last year, a little over a hundred thou—a hundred K. And I don't think I'll ever see that kind of money again. *[laughter]*
- RT: However—
- WH: Oh, how ye of little faith!
- RT: *[laughter]*
- PV: But the thing is, you know, at some point—it took me a long time. I always had a conflict between working—dedicating my life to making money, or dedicating my life to doing something that was not necessarily money, but was something I wanted to do. And the thing with aerospace was that the people you work with—you saw them as they got farther and farther ahead into what's called the corporate ladder, they became bigger and bigger assholes.
- RT: Sure.
- PV: And so you knew that if you wanted to get ahead, you would have to become one of them. So it was very clear to you what kind of person you would have to become. And so you always had to choose between making lots of money and becoming one of them or not making lots of money. But on the other hand, you always had, to me, was like, if I'm gonna be here eight hours a day, five days a week, and I have to put up with all this trash, I'm gonna make as much money as I can.
- RT: Right.
- PV: Because there was no other reason to be there. So you were always in that contradiction. That you wanted to make as much money as you could, but at the same time you had to become somebody you didn't want to be.
- RT: Did you feel that there were other employees in the aerospace industry that were going through the same kind of conflict, or that most people who worked were already on track—on that track?
- PV: Well, the ones who saw the conflict were my allies. The ones who didn't were the enemy. *[laughter]* So it was. Everybody knew it, and everybody made a decision.
- RT: Sure. And I'm certain the stakes were very high, because the aerospace industry was one of—is the big industry in Southern California, and has been for so long.
- WH: When I quit, I was making around \$60,000 a year. And I've never seen that again. *[laughter]*
- PV: *[laughter]*
- WH: Or my wife. *[laughter]*
- PV: And when we see it again, it'll mean nothing. *[laughter]*
- RT: Did your coworkers know that you were an artist?
- WH: Oh yeah. You know what, I have no complaints about Hughes Aircraft and any of the companies I worked for 'cause they really allowed me to do that. I got a—what did I—oh, we won a mural job in Bellingham, Washington, in 1990, and I could see—I estimated, and it took six weeks to do. *[Centennial Mural, 1990, Salmon Art Trail, Bellingham.]* So I went in to see my boss, and I said, "I need to take some time off." And he says, "Well how much time?" I said, "Six weeks." Six weeks. Well there was people there, they worked and they worked, they never took their vacation. They had six months—
- RT: Accumulated.
- WH: Accumulated, you know? "Do you have six weeks?" I said, "Well, I have two." *[pause]* "Well, you know, we can't pay you for those four weeks." I said, "I'm not asking to be paid what I'm not supposed to be paid for." And they let me take six weeks off. I go up to Washington, I stayed in Washington—Bellingham, Washington—for six weeks. Another story—that one pops out in mind, but . . . As I was—there was like a clearance of workers because Hughes—Howard Hughes—had Hughes Aircraft locked up with Howard Hughes Medical Center. And it took the government ten years after he died to untangle his legal web and say, you're a medical association, you cannot own the biggest electronic company in the world. And so you have to sell that. So they sold it to GM. When they sold it to GM, a lot of changes happened. Now it was publicly owned. Before, it was a private corporation. So a lot of the bigwigs—as I like to call them—were

retiring, and they need cards—like these big silly cards with a caricature, and then five hundred people could sign the card. So I did a few of those.

PV: [laughter]

WH: And I got paid, which—wait a minute.

PV: Engineering wages.

WH: No! Well, I got paid artist wages. I billed them, and they had—at one time, they were going, “Wait a minute, we can’t do this, we can’t pay a vendor’s price to a guy that works for us direct,” you know?

RT: Right.

WH: But they did.

RT: That’s fascinating.

WH: So I have good memories of my—

RT: Experiences.

WH: Aerospace, yeah. And I worked at some *chingón* projects. I mean science fiction projects, you know. And so that was a part of my life. And I’m going Thursday to a Hughes old-timers reunion. And I just went fishing with a bunch of cats that I went to Hughes with. They’re all retired in Cabo, in San José del Cabo.

RT: Oh, is that right?

WH: Yeah.

RT: And where was the Hughes?

WH: The one I worked at was in Culver City. They had a ten-thousand-foot runway that Steven Spielberg and his buddies tore up to build Playa Vista. [laughter]

RT: Right.

WH: But the flying boat [the Spruce Goose] was built there. There were huge hangars there. They’re still there. It’s at the foot of a cliff. On top of the cliff is Loyola Marymount.

RT: Oh right, sure.

WH: So I started there. And then I moved to El Segundo. I worked also in Manhattan Beach. All that, it used to be Hughes. Now you go down Sepulveda, you don’t see a fuckin’ Hughes sign anywhere.

PV: Except for Peter Shire, who has one of the hangars.

WH: That’s what I heard. Peter Shire, [indistinct].

PV: I don’t know. [Kent] Twitchell?

WH: One of them, yeah.

PV: You should have had one of them.

WH: You would think so, but no.

RT: [laughter] That would have been a good studio space.

PV: Oh, man, are you kidding?

RT: How about that?

WH: Those are large buildings. They’re huge, they’re cavernous. When I was—

PV: I think clouds form in there. [laughter]

WH: When I was there I saw some high-performance aircraft land and take off. I worked in Santa Barbara a few times at the Santa Barbara Research Center, which was Hughes, and they used to fly in a commander from Culver City to Santa Barbara and back. I remember one time, they said, “Hey, an F4’s gonna come in.” So I went out to the parking lot. Here’s a screaming F4, and here’s this Hughes Way—the drive in to the parking lot—and this guy—you could hear the screaming engine, and he’s got his flaps down, and he passes that, and then you can hear him throttle back, and go boom! [laughter]

RT: Incredible.

WH: I mean, he just dropped out of the sky. Wow. Saw a C-90 Globemaster there. That was a great job. All my jobs were fun jobs. But it came time to go.

RT: Yeah.

PV: Is there any time in your life where you haven’t had a good time?

- WH: *[laughter]* Yeah, when you do your budget and there's not enough money for me.
- RT: *[laughter]*
- PV: After all I've done, I'm the bearer of bad news.
- WH: *[laughter]*
- RT: Well, I think we've covered quite a bit. Is there anything we didn't cover that you wanted to talk about? I think you've given a really good sense of what it was like.
- WH: Yeah. *[pause]* No, the saga continues.
- RT: Sure. Maybe you want to talk about just some of the projects you're working on now as a way to, sort of—
- WH: Oh, sure. Currently, well, let's see, what's on the board? It was on the board. This was on the board. This is a mural for El Sereno's brand new Barrio Action Youth and Family.
- RT: Oh right, you began by mentioning that.
- WH: Family Center. I have the color cartoon out there.
- RT: How big will this measure?
- WH: This—are actual feet, so . . .
- RT: Twenty-seven by—
- WH: Almost twenty-seven by almost thirteen feet. And we had to go through several community meetings, which is fine, because—the thing, you know, you learn soon, is that public art is not yours. That's not your mural. It belongs to the people. And so we go down there, and this is our impression. And they go—like the first meeting—there was three community meetings where they got to throw darts at the design. First one is the kids, you know, from Wilson High School. Well that's really pretty, but—I forget their words—“We don't live in Fantasyland” or something. “Fantasyland,” I think, was one of their words.
- RT: Is that right?
- WH: And I said, “Well, what's wrong there?” “Well there's violence in this neighborhood, and there's this and that.” And I said, “¿Qué?” I mean, that's something that we might have put earlier, but going through all these years, and knowing—like the mural in Santa Monica. We had people pushing the shopping carts and stuff like that. There's no people like that in Santa Monica.
- PV: That's not the image we want to—
- RT: To represent, right. Sure.
- WH: That's not our—
- [break in audio]*
- WH: Already had these two characters. This is kind of like a kid in school, maybe getting in trouble, and a counselor. So here, now, we have domestic violence, or somebody trying to stop domestic violence. And here we have some cat doing time. Here we've got a little girl, but she's got a—
- RT: A “No to the guns” T-shirt?
- WH: Yeah, there's too many guns in this neighborhood.
- RT: Stay in school, do your best.
- WH: Right, right, right. And so that image is pretty close to what we started with, but it was edited by the community within which it's gonna reside. Which to me is totally part of the program. Public art, not mine.
- RT: Right, right.
- WH: They gotta live with it.
- PV: You can't have an ego when you do public art. You rely on your ability to draw and to paint and to make sure it happens within the budget. And it's really their images, their mural.
- RT: Well it seems to be a conversation, right, between the artist and the community, and then—
- WH: Sometimes more and sometimes less. *[laughter]*
- PV: Sometimes you get to a place where you—you know, you go there, and you show 'em, and you talk to them. And they look at you, and [they] go, “We don't want to hear that, you're the artist, just do whatever you want to do.”

- RT: Right.
- WH: That has happened, that really has.
- PV: And you go, wow. And then you go wild, you know, and then they're very happy with what you do.
- RT: Other times?
- PV: Other times it's—they're very into it, and they don't like this, they don't like that, we want this, we want this other, change that, do this. And they send you photographs, and you do [it]. And it's really the way it has to be.
- RT: Who represents the community in these conversations at the Barrio Action—
- WH: The Barrio Action Youth Committee—Youth and Family Center Committee. And they're from young folks to older folks.
- RT: To parents.
- WH: Parents, yeah.
- RT: The organizers at the—
- WH: Well, certainly the administrators love the thing, but these are the people of which this thing serves. And I'm sure they have a lot of—a bunch of stuff. And it's a pretty humble place. And now they're getting this fabulous—well, certainly fabulous compared to the humble surroundings. I mean this place is two floors. It's got a whole basketball gym. This is going to fit in the gym upstairs.
- RT: Oh, this is the scale?
- WH: And this is the gym. This is the basketball court right here. Basket here, basket there.
- RT: Are the walls to the right glass?
- WH: Glass? No, no.
- RT: So the view is only from this side, from the inside?
- WH: Right, right. And these are bleachers, by the way.
- RT: Oh, I see.
- WH: Accordion bleachers will come out here, and people will be able to sit and watch the game. And this'll be their backdrop. [pause] That's—that one. And that's on the wall. And then we have a tile mural we're working on for [Lennox] Park. [*Fun at the Lennox Plunge*, 2008, Lennox Park Pool House, Lennox, California.]
- PV: There you go. That'll be nice.
- WH: It's a county project.
- PV: They have the maquette.
- WH: They have the maquette, but we should have some cartoons here somewhere. [pause] Well, it's like a plunge, you know. Kids go to the plunge and swim. So it's a swimming pool in a park. [Lennox] Park was like South Central for a lot of years. Was 98 percent Black. Well, and this is all—
- RT: Latino.
- WH: All Latino. So Latinos have taken over South Central, and this park—I had images of all the activities in the park, and then the county supervisors decided, "No, this is a swimming pool. You're gonna make swimmers."
- RT: [laughter]
- WH: "We'll do the swimmers, you're the boss." That'll be seventeen feet tall, and it's gonna be two sides of a wall at the end. So the wall's about eight feet—
- RT: Apart.
- WH: Well, eight feet wide, seventeen feet tall. So we'll do that side, the end, and then that side. And then—oh, Burbank is a multimedia project. See this figure here, hanging? Like an engineer and a slide rule. And there's another here. A pipe fitter, something like that. We're gonna make fifteen of these out of maybe two-inch gator board, six feet by three feet, like sides. They'll be hanging in the atrium of this community services building. As you walk in on the front entrance or the back entrance, there's skylights, and those will have images in there, so you look up, and the sun is there, you can see big photos of old Burbank.

There are two murals that are thirty feet tall by ten feet wide on each side of the atrium. [*Working People and Building Trades People*, 2008, Burbank Community Services Building, Burbank.] And then there's a twenty-foot sculpture made out of steel, and that's that baby. And that'll be on the outside. [*Burbank Family Tiara*, 2008, Burbank Community Services Building, Burbank] So that's—

RT: And this is projected for 2000—

WH: Next year.

RT: Eight.

WH: Yeah. So we have the engineering drawings. I've just sent those to a draftsman to put 'em in CAD. Not the foundation and the sculpture itself. But I've already—here's the atrium, actually. So the [*indistinct*] is going to be suspended from these beams, and I've already—I put the mounts, so there's gonna be [*indistinct*] once they put the drywall around these beams. Then there's just be nothing but these [*indistinct*]. But those [*indistinct*] are holding a load welded into the main beams, and the pieces they're holding are not that heavy. They're light. But for some reason this engineer decided we needed a half-inch thread. Okay. ¿Qué más?

PV: Well, that's a big project.

WH: Yes, fifty-eight. We just finished that one. That orange? That one there. We just finished that a couple weeks ago.

RT: That is—where is that?

WH: That's in Burbank also.

PV: That's in Burbank, too. Our favorite city.

WH: Yeah, that's our third?

RT: Is that right?

WH: And we're doing our fourth.

RT: This looks like papel picado.

WH: Yeah, it's a little papel picado, and yes, a half-inch steel. [*SongBirds*, 2009.]

RT: Is that right?

WH: [*laughter*] And—

PV: It's a very pretty piece. That—the color isn't the right color there. It's very pretty.

RT: Very bright.

PV: Very bright. Bam! It just comes out of you, you know? And it's a very small shopping mall. So that's an identifying piece, you know? You go there and—it's the thing that you go, what, what's this thing doing here?

WH: I want to see it. I got to shoot it when they put some [*indistinct*] there.

RT: Oh, that's great.

WH: At night, see what that looks like. [*pause*] We allegedly have this job with Bravo Medical Magnet High School, which would be our second mural there. I gave you the line drawing.

PV: Yeah, I have it. Jobs move at different rates.

RT: Sure.

PV: You get—like with this job, they say, “Hey, you know, you need a vendor number.” “All right, I'll go get a vendor number.” So I start looking for a vendor number, you know. No vendor number. I get on the web, where's the vendor number, you know? And there's some obscure links and there's an obscure paragraph, you know, with a few sentences that lets me know that I cannot get a vendor number. Only people who are in the school district can get a vendor number. I spent, like, hours.

RT: Sure.

PV: Call 'em back, and I say, “Hey, hi, thank you very much for sending me on a wild hunt here, but only you can get a vendor number.” So, you know, then, I guess they went to get a vendor number, and then . . . you know. But people have different perceptions of how things should work.

RT: Right.

- PV: You know. And we have a rule. No contract, no work. Because you can burn people, you know. And you end up—and then you didn't have a contract, and you just wasted your time.
- RT: Sure.
- PV: You didn't get paid for work you did.
- WH: And I fear that's what Bravo may be about.
- PV: Well, they seem to—but anyway. And they're trying to tell me what I have to do, and I'm trying to tell them what I have—how I work, you know. So we're talking, and they say, "This is what I want to happen." And I'm going, "You can want whatever you want, but if I don't have a contract, it's not gonna happen." So I'm trying to—in a very polite and dignified manner, you know, this is somebody who's commissioning work for you. But you want to get through that. If you do not sign a contract, there is nothing more to talk about. You cannot be asking me, give me this, give me that, make me one of these, make me one of those, when I don't have a contract. You cannot ask me to work for free.
- RT: Sure.
- PV: And so we went through—but apparently, they've gotten a vendor number. Of course, we haven't seen it yet. But it's gonna be—I think it's a longer job because you guys did a mural there before, before I came in. It's a beauty, and it's well-kept. [*Stairway to Global Health*, 1991.] It's never been tagged. Nobody put tagging or graffiti. And it has been tagged, and, bam! It's gone.
- RT: Is that right?
- WH: So they protected it with something.
- PV: And it's something that I've always—for years, I've been saying that if you want to protect public art, you should have—adopt public art program in every school, you know. I do the public art, I turn to the school—the history and everything—so that the students can take ownership. But most of the murals we do, most of the work we do, is history related. It relates to the site, it relates to the people who live there, it relates to the local heroes. So it's really a history—it's a history aid, plus being art. So if you get the students involved, and the kids know who the taggers are—
- RT: Right.
- PV: So if it's—
- RT: Prevention.
- PV: If somebody goes in and tags, they know who did it, and they go after him. You don't need to send the police, you don't need to make it a crime, you know. But the more people you include in the process, the easier the process becomes. Because the more you marginalize people, you put 'em outside, and then it becomes a problem. Nobody wants to be an outsider. Everybody wants to be in. So . . .
- WH: We have a job on the shelf—we have many jobs go on the shelf, meaning, "Stop, the money isn't there right now," and they've gone away. Just trying to cross our fingers that this one, which we've been—we won [it] in—maybe two years ago now. And it's in Memphis, Tennessee.
- RT: Is that right?
- WH: And it's on Beale Street. If you know the blues, you know Beale Street. This has nothing to do with the blues. Beale Street blues section is about four blocks there. Been over there twice now. Then there's this park, it's called Robert Church Park. Robert Church was this amazing cat. Born a slave, first millionaire—Black man millionaire—in the nineteenth century. [*laughter*]
- PV: When a million meant something.
- WH: Yeah. And so we got the job. That's when Mrs. Healy said, "Damn, you crossed over."
- RT: [*laughter*] That's great.
- WH: You know? It's like, this would be a Black artist's dream job, and they picked us.
- PV: Well, they thought Healy was a—
- WH: They thought Healy was a Black man. [*laughter*]
- RT: And the—you know, the South is now becoming the fastest growing—the demographics are changing in terms of Latinos working in the South.

- WH: Oh, yeah. They're everywhere. *[laughter]* I've been to several cities with this show, *Chicano Visions*. It's—
- RT: Sure.
- WH: Minneapolis, going down the street, man—
- RT: Midwest, yeah.
- WH: It's like fuckin' Brooklyn Avenue. I'm like, what the hell is going on here. *[laughter]*
- PV: Cheap labor rules.
- WH: Yeah. So. *[pause]* You know, I'm still—I'm not in the best of health, but I'm still—I can shoot a hoop, and I can hike a trail, and I can have a few beers and a few laughs, so . . . I don't know how long we're gonna do this, but we have several jobs now, and we're chasing more. How many submittals do you put out a month, a year?
- PV: Let's see. We probably do between 100 and 120.
- RT: Submittals. Per year.
- PV: Per year.
- WH: These are answers to calls to artists.
- RT: Right.
- PV: And the worst year we ever had, we were finalists for ten, and we won one.
- RT: That was the worst year. And the best year?
- PV: We were finalists for two, and we won two. *[laughter]*
- RT: Two out of two.
- PV: It's just that it's very hard to be a finalist, because, you know, it's—you get a response, and they say, 120 artists responded to this call, and the calls required twenty slides. So twenty-four hundred slides were viewed by whoever is. How does anybody remember anything?
- RT: Right.
- WH: That's why I serve on panels. I think every artist needs to do that. Any public artist who's gonna chase these jobs needs to get up there and listen to the cat that's talking to you.
- RT: From experience.
- WH: Imagine you're up there—
- RT: That's right.
- WH: And it's like, "God, this guy sucks." Or, "God, that's interesting, he should bring this up." I mean, it's an incredible educating procedure. So I serve on panels from time. Not all the time.
- RT: But you've been asked to be on panels?
- WH: I'm asked a lot, yeah.
- PV: And I always—when I get a—not always, but I keep a—I get a job where we lost, or weren't picked, and I send an email. Why weren't we picked? What was it? Was it that the written material was no good? Was the—what was it?
- WH: Almost all of them respond with—
- RT: With some remarks.
- WH: Very constructive.
- PV: So I do that because we've been through this, you know, when you go through a long time when—like right now, we're busy not because of the jobs that we've won through our submittals, but because people come and give us jobs. Literally. You know, they say, "I have a job for you, and you didn't submit for anything, but we want you to do this for us."
- RT: Right.
- PV: And so whenever you go through this period where you submit, and you submit, and you submit, and you're not a finalist, you begin to wonder, "What am I doing wrong?" So I immediately begin asking questions. And many times they would send [to] you and say, "This is how many points you get, this is your evaluation with your points." So I would ask, "I want you to send me how I was evaluated." And I never—we've never gotten a response that said, "Your art was terrible, you were . . ." No, they always say,

“You were right there. You were to the very end, but they picked somebody else.” So, you know, I guess that’s, like—

[*break in audio*]

PV: In Florida, who can print on anything, on any medium, with any medium. And so we prepared a fiberglass mesh the way he wanted it, and we shipped it to him. And we sent them a Photoshopped file, and he scaled it, and he printed it with acrylic paint. So when it came back to us, we didn’t have to do what we were doing right now, which is wrapping the whole thing. And then we have to put the lines, and then we have to draw the whole thing by hand, and it becomes—boom. And the primary colors, the basic colors you’re gonna use are already there.

RT: What was the name of this mural?

PV: This is a—it’s called *Our Pico Neighborhood*, and it’s for the Virginia Avenue Park in Santa Monica. [*Our Pico Neighborhood*, 2005, 2200 Virginia Ave., Santa Monica.] And it’s about ninety feet long, eighty-seven-something, and—the name just got away from me, the number got away from me. So we send that to him, and he printed it, sent it back to us. So we had this mural. And we go, “Hey, Joe!” And we got this job last year, in December of last year. And I said, “We got to have it, we got to have it, we got to have it right away.” So, “Hey, Joe, we got to have it right away.” “Yeah, yeah, we’ll have it right away.” And then it begins to—oh, first the contract. We don’t have the contract. [*indistinct*] Oh, we don’t have this yet.

RT: Is that right?

PV: Oh, we need another meeting. Oh, and we need this and we need that. And pretty soon it starts taking forever. And Joe—every month, way from Florida—sends me an email, “How is the job? How is the job? How is the job?” So we finally get the work, I send the job to Joe, I never heard from him again. “Hey, Joe, what happened?” So Joe apparently had intestinal surgery. That’s a very complicated kind of surgery. But by that time, we have already paid him for the whole job. We never got our print-out back, like we did of that one. And we’re way behind, because doing that saves a lot of time.

RT: Sure.

PV: And now we have to start from scratch. And we’ve already paid for something we didn’t get. So we’re trying to cut shop, and the due date is next month. So, you know, it’s the way public art works.

RT: Sure. When they’re collaborative, and you depend on other sources.

PV: You always do. You always do, you know.

RT: It’s always gonna transform the schedule.

PV: You always do. And you find these people, and you go with it. And you think everything is going to go fine. And most of the time, it [does,] because everybody’s in the business, you know. We’ve never had anybody who deliberately wanted to cheat us.

WH: If they did, it wasn’t a lot of money. Nothing I can remember that would [*strangling noise*]. But imagine public art, or I just go back there and make a little painting.

RT: Right.

WH: Hey, you want it? Fine. You don’t want it? Don’t buy it.

RT: Now do you have a commitment with Patricia [*indistinct*] for an exhibition coming up?

WH: I do not have a commitment, and I really have no written—

RT: No formal relationship?

WH: Yeah. She has sold the most amount of money as far as paintings than anybody ever has, and so. . . . And I’ve had fun. She’s a neat lady. And then, to Spain. Same old lady, kicking ass, you know, it’s been. . . . And the trouble with other artists. I have a friend, this is Rafa Díaz. He’s Cuban born, raised in New York City, lives in Providence, Rhode Island. He’s the most amazing cat. He has friends around the world, and shows—international shows. I’ve been to Chile, to France, to Barcelona, to Las Canarias, to the Dominican Republic.

PV: Peru.

- WH: Peru, to Lima. Two years ago there was a show in Lima. [*Sol y Mar*, 2010, Galería de Arte Ryoichi Jinnai, Centro Cultural Peruano Japonés, Lima, Peru.] I'm the Chicano. He's Cubano. It's kind of boiled down after all these years to four of us. We just call ourselves Los Cuatro Puntos. I'm not sure why, but . . . Rafa Díaz, Cubano. Healy, Chicano. Daniel Manta, Peruano. And José Sejo is Dominicano. That has been a really enlightening relationship for me, because, you know, hey, I grow up Chicano. I'm Latino, but I didn't know no Dominicans. I didn't know no Peruanos. Didn't know Ecuadorians.
- PV: If you know an Ecuadorian, an Ecuadorian is gonna tell you to stay away from a Peruano.
- WH: [*laughter*] Never mind all my cousins. My cousins are different.
- RT: Right.
- WH: A different scene, man. And it's like—
- RT: But you connect in terms of your various work?
- WH: I met him because a lady—born in Chihuahua, raised in the US—she had gone to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] and then she wanted to paint a mural. And she got a mural gig over there. She knew the mayor. The mayor is currently residing in a federal institution right now, but they were a number at the time. So I got to meet Mayor [Buddy] Cianci in Providence. Because she says, "I got a mural job. I don't know how to do a mural. You know how to do a mural. You want to come?" I said, "Well, it'll cost you this." She says, "Yeah, okay." "Fuck," I said, "I'm going to Rhode Island." So I did that, and we cruised around, and I gave workshops and stuff. Rafa showed up and says, "Oh man, I got to go to New York right now, but I'm maybe gonna show this later this year. I want you to come." "Okay, okay." So I went, and that's where I met Dominicans, Colombians, and all these people there. And it was a "Feria de libros y pintura," or something like that. And it was a—it had a just tangent root for me, you know? And . . . But it gave me a real good, a new perspective on stuff.
- PV: Not only that, but you'll never be able to get rid of him.
- WH: And I can't get rid of him. And he wants me to go to the Canarias. [The exhibition was *Cuatro Puntos Cardinales*, 2008, Galería Luroa, Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain —ed.]
- PV: Canarias.
- WH: Canarias. In February.
- PV: Canarias, another show.
- WH: [*whispering*] God damn.
- PV: And he always called, "Hey! There's a party going down. How you doing?"
- WH: I hate it when he calls because when he says, "Hey, guess who this is?" And he's, you know, "Give me the fuckin phone book." [*laughter*] "Oh yeah, I remember you. Fred? Oh, Florencia? Oh, okay." [*laughter*]
- RT: What's up?
- PV: We're going to go down to get some munchies real quick.

[*end of audio*]



INTERVIEW WITH WAYNE ALANIZ HEALY AND PATRICIO VILLAGOMEZ

RELATED RESOURCES

Publications from the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press

BOOKS

L.A. Xicano. Exhibition catalog. Edited by Chon A. Noriega, Terezita Romo, and Pilar Tompkins Rivas, 2011.
Self Help Graphics & Art: Art in the Heart of East Los Angeles. 2nd ed. The Chicano Archives, vol. 1. Edited by Colin Gunckel, 2014.

ORAL HISTORIES

David Botello. Interview with Karen Davalos, May 21, 2009. CSRC Oral Histories Series no. 12, 2013
Johnny Gonzalez, with Irma Núñez. Interview with Karen Mary Davalos, October 28, November 4, 11, and 18, and December 17 and 20, 2007. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 7, 2013.
John Valadez. Interview with Karen Mary Davalos, November 19 and 21, and December 3, 7, and 12, 2007. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 10, 2013.
Margaret Garcia. Interview with Karen Davalos, August 27 and September 10, 12, 19, and 24, 2008. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 11, 2013.
Roberto "Tito" Delgado. Interview with Karen Mary Davalos, November 5, 7, 9, and 16, 2007. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 8, 2013.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AT THE UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER

CARA (Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation) Records, Part 1, 1965–1995, collection 10.
Patricia Correia Gallery Collection, 1991–2008, collection 130.
Self Help Graphics and Art Research Collection, 1973–2007, collection CSRC.0002.

WWW.CHICANO.UCLA.EDU