

ELAC, UCLA bring Chicano filmmaker to VPAM

JESUS FIGUEROA
Staff Writer

The Vincent Price Art Museum collaborated with East Los Angeles College and the University of California Los Angeles to bring Chicano experimental filmmaker Willie Varela to the S2 lecture hall last Saturday.

UCLA professor of film, television, and digital media Chon Noriega, has been friends with Varela for more than 24 years.

During the time Noriega was looking for filmmakers, Chicano experimental films were rare to find, but he found Varela to be different.

"In the case of Willie, what he did was just completely expand on the number of films. There are well over 100 Super 8 films," Noriega said.

Studying Chicano filmmakers, Willie stood out to Noriega because he was among the first and only Chicanos experimenting with film.

Varela showcased several short films he made over the years on a Super 8 home movie camera.

Varela said that between the years 1971 to 1991, he made somewhere between 80 to 100 Super 8 films.

He went back and forth between silent films and sound films.

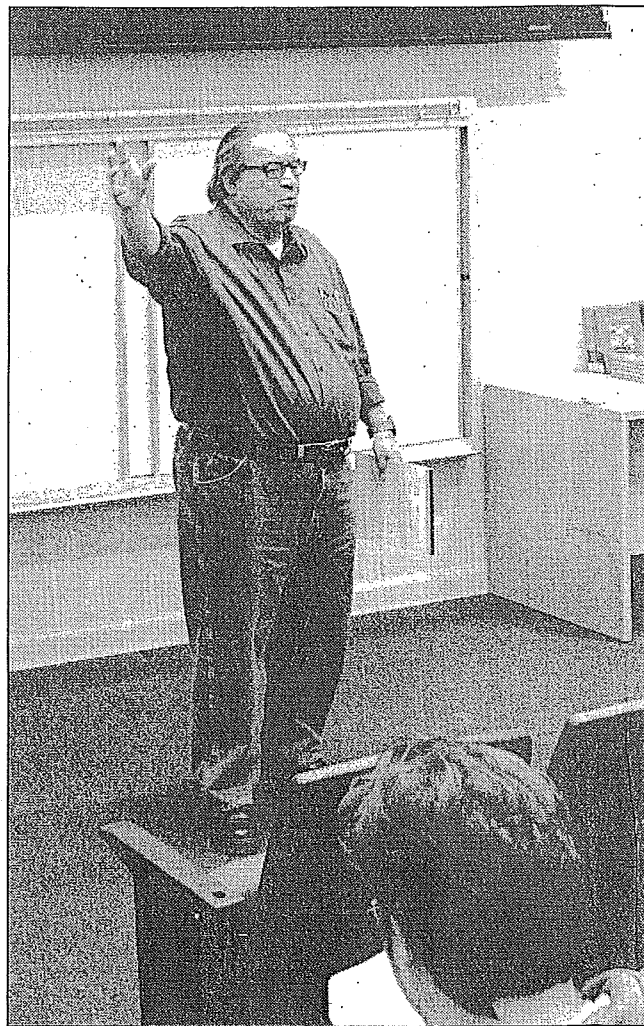
"I started making films in 1971 in El Paso, Texas. I was making Super 8 films in a city where there was no film culture at all," Varela said.

Varela said he was inspired to start shooting and producing film in part by John Lennon.

Lennon shot films on his home movie camera, after leaving The Beatles.

Those films by Lennon were shot in his basement apartment and when Varela saw them, they brought the idea that he could make films too.

The other inspiration was



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STAND UP—Chicano experimental filmmaker Willie Varela presents several short films from his early career to a small crowd at the lecture hall of the Vincent Price Art Museum, Saturday evening.

Stan Brakhage.

At the time, Varela said that Brakhage was making a series of films called "Songs" on 8mm film.

"I thought these guys were making film. These guys can do it,

I can do it," Varela said, "I was no pop star, I was no up-and-coming art star. I had nothing and nothing to do in El Paso."

The films were diverse and unique dealing with various topics.

The videos not only conveyed an artistic vision, but managed to touch the audience and inspire conversations with Varela as he commented on each short film after viewing it and before introduced the next.

From artistic expression based on experimental techniques to politically driven short film, Varela was able to express himself time and time again.

The politics of some of his films showed his frustration with Ronald Reagan,

The short film used Reagan clips combined with chimpanzee sounds to try and convey the message of how Varela felt that Reagan was a puppet.

Varela said that his first conscious film was made on a very low budget.

"It was made with a roll of film, a 3-1/2 minute roll of outdated K-Mart stock, that I bought for 50 cents. You want to talk about no budget? You don't get more low budget than that," said Varela.

Varela said Brakhage saw his first film and said it was not bad. He continued to shoot with confidence.

From that point on, although having a full-time job as a teacher, teaching English and sometimes film, he would take any opportunity he could to go out and shoot film.

"In 2006, I stopped and I haven't made anything since," Varela said, "and for that I apologize because I know all of you are waiting for the next release."

UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center's Communication and Events manager Rebecca Epstein, Ph. D., said that she hopes this will be the first of many collaborations between the VPAM and UCLA.

She hopes to bring more prominent figures to the East Los Angeles community that have expressed interest in the artist that UCLA has showcased.