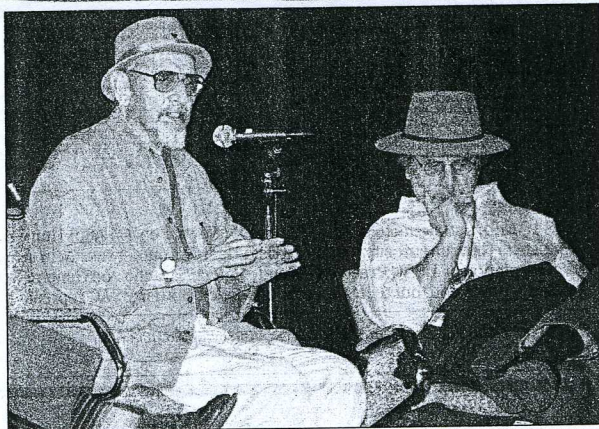


# DAILY BRUIN

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José Montoya, left, and his brother Malaquías Montoya, speak at LACMA about the impact of war and prejudice on their art as Latino artists.

## Latino artists speak on war

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When José Montoya was told by a judge that he had to enlist in the Marines, he went.

When Montoya was told by the Marines that he couldn't join because he had a cross tattooed on his hand, he changed the cross to an anchor and joined the Navy.

When he was told by his superiors that his stay in Korea was over, he enrolled at UC Berkeley and became an artist.

For Montoya, the situations of prejudice, hate, violence and patriotism he faced during the Korean War profoundly affected him and subsequently impacted his artwork, as he told an audience Friday in a dimly lit theater at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

At a panel titled, "From Ike to Iraq: Conversations with Latino

Artists on Six Decades of Art and Politics," Montoya was one of nine artists who related his experiences of war and injustice while simultaneously discussing art's role in society and politics.

Many of the artists in attendance talked about the impact violence had on their way of thinking and added that for them and their communities, war was the norm and a given.

"I remember the Eisenhower times. The happy times. The 'Chevy' times. Yet there was always an incredible fear of having to dig a hole when the bomb came," Montoya said.

The constant waging of war – including the psychological wars of racism and prejudice – evoked fear, hatred and confusion, and these emotions all poured into the

## LACMA | Art turned into political movement

from page 1

artists' work, they said.

"I thought if you really wanted to destroy something, why do it to someone else's stuff? Why not do it to your own stuff?" said Raphael Montañez Ortiz, a performance artist who also enlisted in the Korean War.

Ortiz told the audience of about 100 people of how he began his career collecting furniture and publicly burning it because for him, "art is therapy and we're all reconciling something."

Ortiz went on to say that soon after, he began attending anti-war rallies and proceeded to showcase his art within that arena.

At one point in New York, Ortiz and others gagged and tied a colleague to one of the horse and buggies commonly found in Central Park, drove into Rockefeller Center at lunch time, and had the colleague murmur over a speakerphone. The point was to reveal the way they felt their First Amendment right to free speech was being stifled.

"We felt, as artists, that to be responsible politically, we needed to be in the public sphere," Ortiz said.

Such forms of art shaped the Chicano art movement, which many of the artists described as a poignant political movement extending beyond murals painted on the sides of buildings.

At the dawn of the Chicano art movement, many artists dreamed of getting their work into the galleries in New York and Paris.

But then, the political and social climate of the mid-1960s created a mandate for the artists to utilize their talents to politicize their communities instead.

Some of the first works created sprung up in the farm-worker communities of central California. The art was meant to support the United Farm Workers' labor struggles of César Chávez.

"I hated murals, but we had to tell people in our *barrios* (neighborhoods) our true history! The beginning of Chicano art was political in that sense. ... We weren't thinking about New York or Paris anymore," Ortiz said.

One of the main questions that arose from Friday's panel was whether that sense of enthusiasm was still alive today.

"Are we still committed to our community? Is that our role anymore?" Ortiz asked.

No clear-cut answer was given, but the artists agreed one important role of art was to instigate and motivate.

Chon Noriega, director of the UCLA Chicano Research Studies Center and moderator at the event, also spoke of art as a form of communication, referring to a series of posters about capital punishment.

"Art is a form of communication that puts you on an ethical relationship with people," Noriega said about Malaquías Montoya's poster depicting the head of a man being electrocuted.

For Noriega, the image was both painful and beautiful. In addition to emotions elicited by war and political events, the artists also spoke of the cultural disconnect they experienced when their Latino heritage merged with American culture.

"When I was taught my forefathers came to Plymouth Rock on the Mayflower, I believed it. ... I still believe it, because when you believe it, you own it and when you own it, you can change it," said Yolanda López, an artist who now lives in San Francisco.

Whether it be the outcomes of cultures integrating or the experiences of anti-war rallies, the panel agreed that much of politically motivated art makes a demand of the viewer.

"It demands you take it seriously. You try to see the work on its own terms and the political and cultural backdrop of the work. ... It is visceral, something that's grabbing you," Noriega said.