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by [Adolfo Guzman-Lopez \(http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/aqlopez\)](http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/aqlopez)

on July 27, 2011 11:10 AM



A very simple question seemed to follow me like a rain cloud last Friday. Are Chicanos outsiders anymore? At a wine and cheese press event organized by the Getty in Griffith Park the answer seemed clear. Members of the East L.A. conceptual art group ASCO, who'd tagged the outside of LACMA in 1972 to challenge the absence of Chicano artists inside, celebrated with everyone else that of the 70-something exhibits from October to April eight will focus on Chicano or Latino artists.

Just a few miles away, in a wood-paneled conference room at the offices of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, a 14 year-old Mexican American girl told me about her love of soccer, rooting for the U.S. team in the women's World Cup and how last year her teacher in Big Bear went on an anti-immigrant tirade against her when she showed up in class wearing a soccer jersey for the Mexican national team.

Let's start with the art.

Followers of Chicano art thought the Phantom Sightings exhibit at LACMA a few years ago was big. Well, the behemoth Pacific Standard Time series of 70 exhibitions includes exhibitions by the recently deceased Gilbert Lujan, conceptual history re-thinker Sandra de la Loza, the team of Ruben Ortiz-Torres and Jesse Lerner delving into Mexican modernism in L.A., a deep retrospective of the group ASCO, and several other shows.

The Getty Trust's deep pockets are financing the exhibits at dozens of museums and galleries. Getty CEO Deborah Marrow told all from the podium at the Autry Museum that the Pacific Standard Time shows seek to preserve and tell the huge story of Southern California art after World War Two, including that of modernist, pop, feminist artists and others. "The contributions of our region's Mexican American and Chicano artists in this time period are extraordinary," she said.

Many Chicano artists over 50 years old stopped waiting for the arts institutions to open up and created their own spaces. So was Marrow making amends for art institutions' neglect, benign or otherwise, of L.A. Chicano artists'

contributions?

Not specifically. "I've heard it about women's contributions, African Americans' contributions. And I think that it's a really good moment now in L.A. for museums and for a leadership that really cares about the region as a whole and is really trying to tell a much more complex story about our own history," Marrow said.

I pulled ASCO founding member Harry Gamboa Jr. aside, and he told me I'd turn blue asking museum officials for apologies.

"It's not a matter of being forgiven. I think people coming to some level of awareness and consciousness that to ignore is kind of, sort of an interesting act of delusion, where one can't simply ignore the vast population of Chicanos that have contributed to California, the arts, just overall the development of society as a whole," Gamboa said.

Institutions don't act like people but they're run by people. Less tapado/closed minded people now, maybe. And more Latino curators who tap into wide scholarship on Chicano and Latino art to push for exhibits.

Gamboa's working with LACMA on the very big ASCO retrospective opening at the museum September 4th. All along I'd thought ASCO's Duchampian tagging of LACMA was an effort to open the drawbridge. That's too simplistic, he told me, forget about the outsider/insider dichotomy. "Sometimes when you're throwing rocks and scratching it's really for people to open the door and not so much that you could go in but that maybe they should step outside."



At the MALDEF building on Spring Street in downtown L.A., 14 year-old Coral Aviles stepped in front of a half moon of TV cameras and reporters alongside her mother and one of the group's top lawyers. It took a lot for her to tell how her teacher made sure Coral knew her place as an outsider. About a year ago Coral walked into her 8th grade performing arts class all proud of the Mexico national team, holding hope that in this World Cup they'd make it to the finals. The Mexico jersey on Coral's back was a red cape in the bullring.

As Coral's mother, Diana Aviles, tells the story the female teacher was waiting to explode about illegal immigration. "First asked her a question if she was Mexican and Coral responded, 'Yes.' Even though my daughter is an American citizen but proud, I've always raised all my children to be proud of their culture."

In front of the class the teacher spewed forth the boilerplate rhetoric of taxes going to aid illegal immigrants, and questioned Coral's presence in this country. A teacher, to a 14 year old. It's Big Bear, people tell me. People who don't like Mexicans move there to be away from them, except they use words like "riff raff."

"It's a small community, to be racist like that it really shocked me, for being a teacher," Diana told me. She said an apology from the teacher was insincere. With MALDEF's help the Aviles family now filed a federal civil rights lawsuit. "Because I don't want no other child to suffer. It hurt me, this is my little girl. Anyone hurts my little girl it's my obligation to stand up for her," Diana Aviles said. The lawsuit seeks monetary damages for grief and reforms at the school district to prevent discrimination.

After I finished talking to the Aviles family they got in their car, left Los Angeles, drove two hours to Bear Bear to a community they love but in which they are very much outsiders.

Poet and Journalist Adolfo Guzman-Lopez writes his column Movie Miento every week on KCET's SoCal Focus blog. It is a poetic exploration of Los Angeles history, Latino culture and the overall sense of place, darting across LA's physical and psychic borders.

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