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**FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE**

**Obituary– Forrest Antonio Bernal Hopping (1937-2023)**

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Internationalist Mexican-American Artist and Activist with Central Valley and  
L.A. Roots Dies at Age 86

Bernal's 1968 mural in Del Rey, California, has been cited as the first  
Chicano mural

*Antonio Bernal, 1961. Courtesy of the artist's family.*

**Forrest Antonio Bernal Hopping  
(Antonio Bernal)  
April 8, 1937 - September 1, 2023**

LOS ANGELES, CA (October 5, 2023) – Forrest Antonio Bernal Hopping, artist, activist, writer, and educator, passed away on September 1, 2023, at Huntington Hospital in Pasadena, California. He was deeply connected to the cultural, protest, and creative fabric of California, sometimes at its center, and often at its margins. His murals and paintings have been progressively researched and discussed by visual art historians, political scientists, and Chicano Studies scholars.

Antonio Bernal grew up in Mexico during the late 30s and early 40s, while his father designed interiors for notable figures in Mexico City. He often assisted his father in the



decorating of Spanish colonial furniture. His ability to paint and draw emerged clearly during this period. In his late teens, he participated in local theatre productions in Visalia and Fresno. He later studied dance at the San Francisco Ballet in 1959, where he befriended the flamenco dancer Carmen Amaya (1913-63) and by 1960 enrolled at the Escuela Nacional de Arte Teatral of the National Institute of Fine Arts in Mexico City. Bernal became friends with many emerging film and TV stars from Mexico, such as Enrique Aguilar, Héctor Bonilla, Rita Macedo, and Socorro Avelar (1925-2003), who was a dear and life-long friend. He eventually became disillusioned with acting, and by 1962, at his sister's request, the US librarian and diplomat, Ann Hopping (1932-2023), he returned to California and later enrolled at The Art Center School, located at the time in Hancock Park (today called ArtCenter College of Design and located in Pasadena).

By 1963, he became involved in the Congress of Racial Equality and lived on Western Avenue with a Black family near the Watts District of L.A. During this formative period, he experienced the treatment of L.A.'s Black community by national and local government institutions and police, reaching a burning point in the subsequent riots of 1965, which Bernal saw firsthand. He witnessed these hardships and saw parallels to the Chicano experience that made it back into his artwork. These years marked a progressive move to the left for the emerging artist, who in his own words, said he became "radicalized" and took part in countercultural and protest groups, such as the Brown Berets. He was a friend and ally of Black Panther members and an active participant in El Movimiento Chicano, which he documented in photographs and drawings. He eventually graduated with honors from the Advertising Design program at Art Center College of Design in 1966.

In 1968, after a long period of unemployment, he returned to the Central Valley and joined El Teatro Campesino as a member and an activist for the United Farm Workers. During this period, he is credited by art historians Shifra M. Goldman, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, and other researchers as "the first Chicano muralist," especially in having produced a clear political artwork that gathered the intellectual and spiritual bases of the emergent Chicano movement. It was a designation that he resisted as he paved the way for other artists to be recognized. The mural now known as the "Del Rey mural," was created in 1968 and painted on the facade of the United Farm Workers headquarters, aka "El Centro" in Del Rey, California.

The artwork represents in several panels a processional visualization and history of resistance and contestation by historical figures from Mexican-American and Black communities. One side of the building has a selection of the walking Bonampak figures of the Late Classic Maya period. On the other side, seven male figures facing "El Centro" are led by a *Soldadera* holding a saber. This revolutionary woman soldier is known in Mexican pop culture as *La Adelita*. The figures follow her in this order (left to right): Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, Joaquín Murrieta, César E. Chávez, Reies López Tijerina (holding the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo), Malcolm X (wearing a Black Panther's t-shirt) rests his right hand on Tijerina's left shoulder in support, and finally, Martin Luther King Jr. who stands behind Mr X in resolve.

The panels, according to the artist, were backdrops to the pop-up theatre performances staged by El Teatro Campesino in the front of the building. They were conceived as ephemera and produced with inexpensive materials. Due to the effort of activists Vicki Treviño Filgas and artist/curator Carissa Garcia from Fresno County, the murals were found, and this led to a campaign in collaboration with L.A. art collector Armando Durón and AltaMed Art Collection to acquire them into the AltaMed Art Collection. The mural will be available to the public as the AltaMed Art Collection gets consolidated into a museum in Downtown L.A. slated to break ground in 2028.

Antonio Bernal was born into a family of Mexican and Anglo descent with deep ties to California and the Hollywood/Mexican film industries. His parents were Maria Louisa Bernal (1900-1995) and Forrest Hopping Sr. (1894-1967). Maria Louisa, originally from Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, was born into a middle-class family who migrated to the United States in 1910, fleeing the early stages of the Mexican Revolution. Her family settled in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, where she became involved in silent movies, working as a background actor, singer, and dresser. She also shared her operatic talents with local audiences at venues like the Bullock's building on Wilshire Blvd. It was during this period that Maria Louisa met Forrest Hopping Sr., born in Kaweah, California. Forrest Sr. was known as a versatile artist. His skills as an interior decorator, and his contributions as a set, furniture, and prop-maker, were in high demand in Hollywood and Mexico City. He decorated the homes of movie stars such as Dolores Del Rio, Jeannette McDonald, Ruth Chatterton, Ralph Forbes, Ramon Navarro, and others. His legacy extended to his role as the Art Director for the Los Angeles State Historical Monument of El Pueblo de Los Angeles in 1962, collaborating closely with Christina Sterling and subsequently offering a significant contribution to the city's historical preservation of its Native/Mexican/Spanish heritage.

Antonio Bernal's father was a son of the socialist-utopian commune, called the Kaweah Colony that was established at Atwell Mill in what is today Sequoia National Forest in 1886. The colony was modeled on the socialist ideas of Laurence Gronlund and to some extent by the utopian ideas of Edward Bellamy. The legacy of his grandfather, George W. Hopping (1845-1925) a member and early supporter of the colony, was foundational to Bernal's socialist and anarchists political formation as an adult. Bernal, himself, tirelessly advocated for antiwar positions and protested every American war or proxy war from Korea to Ukraine.

Bernal embraced but never politicized being Chicano. He considered himself an internationalist Mexican-American and would resist any form of nationalization of identity. But would not turn or look away from being framed as a Chicano artist. He saw identity as necessary but not the main driver of history and he sought more scientific channels by which to understand, define, and emancipate humanities from repressive systems and empires. For this reason, he always protested and fought injustice, oppression, and fascism.

On August 29, 1970, he took part in the National Chicano Moratorium, an antiwar rally protesting the Vietnam War and the draft of Chicano and Black youth into this bellic enterprise. The protest notoriously ended with the killing of L.A. Times journalist, Ruben Salazar. In

witnessing the participation of Chicano youth moratoriums, coming from all parts of California, consolidated his resolve to become an educator and as such, he gave a significant part of his life to teaching. In 1973 he was a lecturer in Chicana/o Studies at Cal State University, Los Angeles. This year proved pivotal for him and chose once again to leave and relocate to Mexico City after meeting the activist, labor union leader, and later anthropologist, Belén Miranda. They married in 1974. He spent ten years in Mexico raising a family, painting, and teaching at various venues and organizations. His status as an American citizen, coupled with his activism, made it increasingly difficult to teach and in 1984 he relocated back to L.A. again, where he took up a position as a Spanish teacher at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles.

His two sons and stepdaughter followed with his wife in early 1985, where soon after the marriage ended in divorce. He continued to paint during these periods. The artworks were often given as gifts to protestors, friends, or anyone that asked and he never sought a market. Sometimes he would attend protests and have someone carry his paintings on wooden picket sticks. Some paintings were never returned by galleries or failing museum efforts, like the Latino Museum that was launched in the mid-1990s on Main Street in Downtown, L.A. or simply lost to time. There are some works in private collections and consistent with his politics, regarding where other works are, he would say, "The people have them."

At Garfield High School he painted a mural between 1985 and 1990. He was forever at odds with the administration of this East Los Angeles public school. He sought several times the position to become an art teacher at Garfield but was never given the post. In his Spanish classes, he gave everything he had to his students, many became his friends after they graduated and some continued careers researching topics he introduced to them in high school. He was a pioneer of action research and video learning, where he had students rewrite plays based on Spanish language classics and act them out on video productions. Using essentially the same methods that were put into practice in El Teatro Campesino. Students read and drafted scripts from authors like Lope de Vega, Elena Poniatowska, Gabriel García Márquez, and others. Before retiring from the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2005, Antonio Bernal used his vacations to travel to Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, and other places that his research took him. As an avid reader, he amassed a large library of books, which he gave away to a second-hand bookstore in the blink of an eye. He was an active advocate for people without shelter and donated money and supplies to many in need. His home and automobiles were always offered as a last-minute shelter for many individuals over the years. He attributed this to his deep secular love for Christian ethics and approaches to eliminating poverty through love and radical charity.

Some of his archive images are in the collection of the Los Angeles Public Library, UC Santa Barbara, and the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA. The latter published a selection of his papers in a book edited by Charlene Villaseñor Black, titled *The Artist as Eyewitness: Antonio Bernal Papers, 1884-2019* (<https://uwapress.uw.edu/book/9780895511744/the-artist-as-eyewitness/>). The book provides a selection of papers written by the artist and reproduces a selection of Bernal's paintings. The book is complemented by essays by Gabriela Rodríguez-Gómez and Miguel Samano, and an

overview of his life is written by Black. The book was awarded several honors including the Gold Medal for Best Biography (English) at the 2022 International Latino Book Awards as well as Honorable Mention for Best Arts Book and Best Nonfiction (Multi-Author).

Forrest Antonio Bernal Hopping is survived by his sons Alex Hopping and Hugo Hopping, his daughter Gabriela Miranda, and his grandchildren, Malcolm Recinos, Amara Hopping, Violeta Hopping, and Costa Guldager Hopping.

A public celebration of **Vida and Comunidad** will be held on **Sunday, October 22, 2023, from 2-4 p.m.** in **Del Rey, California**. This celebration will take place at the new plaza, where a [recreation](#) of the Del Rey Mural was painted by artist [Mauro Carrera](#) in 2021. His ashes will be scattered in a private ceremony.

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