Chican@ and US Latin@ Art and Muralism: From the Street to the (Staniar) Gallery

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Office Hours: Monday & Tuesday from 12:15-1:15 and by appointment

Course Description: For decades, Mexican American (sometimes self-identified as Chican@) artists were dismissed by mainstream galleries and museums and instead turned to the streets to express their political and artistic messages. Public walls were appropriated by artists to recount the Chican@ story for a larger audience. Themes of discrimination, discontent, and marginalization were featured alongside vibrant scenes of community pride, accomplishment, and aspiration. This class examines the process by which Chican@ artists have garnered public attention and respect and taken their artworks from the peripheries of the art world to more traditional museum and gallery spaces. Along this path, many Chican@ artists have continued to embrace themes of heritage, legacy, and community through the creation of politically and socially conscious artworks.

Using the mural entitled The Great Wall of Los Angeles (The History of California) as a connecting thread, this class considers the broad theme of identity creation and transformation as expressed by Chican@ artists from the 1970s to the present. The Great Wall of Los Angeles is a half-mile-long mural located in the Tujunga flood-control channel in California’s San Fernando Valley. During five summers, between 1976 and 1983, the prominent Chicana artist Judith Baca (b. 1946) and co-founder of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), organized four hundred youth mural makers and dozens of professional artists to paint an alternative history of California. The community mural depicts the story of the state from prehistory until 1960, and the scenes emphasize the role played by Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Jewish Americans in creating California’s culture. The Great Wall imagery highlights themes such as immigration, exploitation of people and land, women’s rights, racism and racial equality, and the struggle for gay rights. The mural provides the public with free access to the histories of traditionally marginalized communities.

During the term, students will have the opportunity to work closely with prominent San Antonio-based artist, Vincent Valdez (b. 1977), whose series The Strangest Fruit will be on view in the Staniar Gallery. Valdez began painting community murals in San Antonio at age 9. His recent paintings and drawings focus on subjects with socio-political themes and frequently question individual and cultural memory. In The Strangest Fruit, Valdez comments upon the contemporary cultural climate using references to the historical mistreatment of Latin@s in the United States. The term research project will result in the creation of an educational gallery guide for Valdez’s exhibition on view in the Staniar Gallery and will give students experience with research, visual and contextual analysis, and conducting artist interviews.

Goals of the Course: Students will become familiar with the leading artists of the Chican@ movement. They will be able to link the works of these artists to larger artistic, religious, political, and cultural themes of both Mexico and the United States. Assignments will give students experience in research and critical reading of primary and secondary texts, museum/gallery production, and exposure to and close study of these artists’ work.

Course Requirements & Grading:  
Participation: 10%  
Blogging (term): 10%  
Valdez event (4/29): 5%  
Ollin event (5/20): 5%

Gallery Guide:  
Artist Interview: 10%  
Thematic essay: 15%  
Peer review of essay: 5%  
Fully formatted Galley Guide: 5%  
Public Gallery Talk: 10%

Great Wall Image Annotation: 15%  
In-class presentation: 10%
Week One (April 27 - April 30)

4/27 Introduction to the Course: Origins of Chicano@ Muralism in the United States

- 4/27-28: Meet with Prof Lepage to pick a Great Wall of Los Angeles panel to annotate

4/28 Introduction to Vincent Valdez’s The Strangest Fruit series on view in the Staniar Gallery

- Familiarize yourself with Vincent Valdez’s recent artwork. Pick one work that interests you the most and blog about it (make sure to post an image). Blog discussion will form the basis of an informal class discussion. (http://vincentvaldezart.com/)

4/29 Workshop with the artist Vincent Valdez

- Before meeting with Valdez in the Staniar Gallery: Watch David S. Rubin’s interview with Vincent Valdez. Artist Conversations between David S. Rubin, The Brown Foundation Curator of Contemporary Art and contemporary artists, parts 1 through 10 (available on the Valdez page), San Antonio Museum of Art, Tuesday, March 24, 2009. Total running time approximately 100 minutes. Come prepared with a list of at least 10 preliminary questions to ask the artist about The Strangest Fruit series and/or his artistic formation.

4/29 Workshop with the artist Vincent Valdez

- 4/30 Assignment: Prepare a list of interview questions for the artist. Make sure that your questions are specific and relate directly to your assigned artwork. Note: Interviews with the artist will be recorded so that you can transcribe them for later gallery guide assignment.
- 5/1 Assignment: Blog entry: Response to public lecture, workshop, and interviews with Vincent Valdez. Writing down some of your thoughts about the visit will help you to remember details about the visit later when you begin writing your formal assignments.

Readings: All readings are due on the day that they are listed on the syllabus. You are responsible for all readings unless otherwise notified. Come to class each day prepared with any questions that you have regarding the readings, and be ready to participate in class discussions. Readings are available to you in the textbook or in PDF format on Sakai. If it becomes clear that the majority of the class has not read the readings on a given day, the instructor will administer reading quizzes.
5/4 Overview of the Great Wall of Los Angeles: Minority Representation and Alternative Education

- Read SPARC mural manifesto
- (Recommended) Read the Great Wall of Los Angeles Walking Tour Guide published by SPARC (The Social Public Art Research Center), 1–80.
- **5/4 Assignment:** Artist interviews due via Sakai by 6pm. Each group should submit one interview,

5/5 Indigenous Heritage and Spanish Legacy

- Readings on the canonization of Junipero Serra TBD
- **5/5 Assignment:** Thematic essay topics to be approved in class. Come prepared with an idea to share with the class.

5/6 Exploitation of People and Land, 1848–1910


5/7 World War I & Rights for Women

Week Three (May 11 - May 14)

5/11 The 1930s: Crash and Depression
- Watch [as much as you can of] Ken Burns’s The Dust Bowl (PBS 2012): http://www.pbs.org/ken-burns/dustbowl/
- **5/11 Assignment:** Thematic essays due via Sakai by 6p.m.

5/12 The 1940s

5/13 The 1950s: Racism and Racial Equality
- **5/13 Assignment:** Peer review of thematic essays due in class.

5/14 Plans to Extend the Great Wall: SPARC Mural Preservation and Chicana/o Muralism Today
- SPARC Website / Restoration reports
- In class we will work in groups to come up with a plan for the later sections of the Great Wall (1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s).

Weekend Assignments:

5/15 (Friday) **Assignment:** Final essays (with comments addressed) due via Sakai by 6 p.m.

5/17 **Assignment (Sunday):** Finalize last details of Image Annotation projects. All projects are due by 6 p.m.
Week Four (May 18 - May 22)

5/18 Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art, Pt. 1

5/19 Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art, Pt. 2
- No readings—continue work on gallery talks and catalogue
- 5/19 Assignment: Fully formatted gallery guides (one guide per group) due via Sakai by 6 p.m.

5/20 Workshop with Ollin
- Familiarize yourself with Ollin’s music. Write a blog response to a particular song, issue brought up by a song, or your listening experience in general.

5/21 Gallery talks (open to the public)
- Each group will present on their assigned artwork. Please invite your friends so that you can showcase all that you have learned during the term.

5/22 Spring Term Fair
- Attendance required (please plan to attend the entire spring term fair, or spend at least fifteen minutes standing in front of the class poster to talk about the work that we have completed during the term)

Stanier Gallery and the Mudd Center for Ethics Present
The Strangest Fruit Radio Hour
a multi-media performance by
OLLIN

Wednesday, May 20, 2015 • 6:00PM, Keller Theater
Washington and Lee’s Lenfest Center for the Arts
free and open to the public

This event will be livestreamed at go.wlu.edu/livestream
Course Requirements and Description of Assignments

**Participation (10%)**: Participation is key to a lively class. 10% of the course grade will depend upon your contributions to our class sessions. Class participation provides the opportunity to practice speaking and persuasive skills, as well as the ability to listen. Please avoid comments that are vague, repetitive, unrelated to the current topic, disrespectful of others, or without sufficient foundation. Contributions in class should reflect exceptional preparation. Outstanding contributions are considered those that offer substantive ideas and provide insights as well as direction for the class.

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<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Never or almost never participates in class discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Rarely participates; infrequent reference to class readings; disruptive in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Occasional participation; occasional reference to class readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>Some class participation; rarely starts discussions, but sometimes joins the discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Participates very often; demonstrates good knowledge of readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Extremely active participant; excellent preparation; relevant discussion of reading; frequently starts conversations</td>
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Note: Points will be deducted from your participation grade if you sleep or text in class.

**Blogging (10%)**: This term you’ll blog at least a week, and hopefully more. The point of this blog is to keep you engaged in the material outside of the classroom. These posts will form the basis for in-class discussion each day. Each week, five students will be responsible for leading blog discussions. Blog discussion leaders will post questions and also keep discussions going throughout the week with follow-up questions. The rest of the class will be responsible for posting at least twice a week. There is no length requirement for your posts or responses; I ask only that your writing be thoughtful, respectful, and relevant to the course material in a meaningful way. You are encouraged to participate more frequently than twice a week, and extra participation on the blog can also be counted toward your overall class participation grade. I also encourage you to post relevant comments or news items even if it isn’t your turn to lead the discussion.

Some types of blog posts might include:
- Current news or events that relate to class content
- Questions or musings about the readings
- Questions or comments about a particular artwork discussed in class or readings
- Commentary on relevant current events
- Soliciting help from your peers concerning a research question/topic
- Discussion of class events, lectures, performances

Blog address: http://uslatinoartmuralism.academic.wlu.edu/?cat=1

**Workshops and Out-of-class Events (10% total) (Valdez events, 5%; Ollin events, 5%)**: Attendance is required at two out-of-class events: Vincent Valdez’s artist talk on April 29th at 5:30pm and Ollin’s multi-media performance on May 20th at 6:00pm. In addition, attendance is required at the in-class workshops associated with both events (April 29, April 30, and May 20).

Vincent Valdez Artist Talk, Wednesday, April 29th at 5:30 p.m. in Wilson Hall’s Concert Hall. Reception follows.

Ollin multi-media performance (The Strangest Fruit Radio Hour) on Wednesday, May 20th at 6:00 p.m. in the Keller Theater.
ITS and your peers at W&L have developed an image annotation technology. In this digital age where individuals are bombarded by images and data, new studies must simultaneously make use of technology while educating viewers in the ways of careful and informed looking. This user-driven annotation approach promotes a new critical awareness of any artwork and provides access to scholarly materials to the public.

Image annotations allow viewers to explore original content (visual and contextual analysis) as well as critically curated primary sources (newspaper articles, historical photographs, interviews, video and audio files, and related artworks, etc.) and secondary sources (related bibliography and links for additional reading). This object-based collection of materials provides the viewer with a lens through which to understand the cultural and artistic significance of any artwork. This is a thesis-driven project. Your thesis will determine the type of annotations that you create.

During the first week of class, you will meet with the instructor to choose a segment of the Great Wall of Los Angeles that relates to your own interests in or out of class. Or, you may browse the sections of the Great Wall on the class website and get in touch with the instructor with a list of the panels that interest you.

Throughout the term, you will be responsible for annotating the segment to create an interactive version of the Great Wall. You will produce a minimum of 6 annotations for your assigned panel. Some types of annotations include, but are not limited to the following:

• **Biography**: If you include a biography of the Judy Baca or other artists, include only the facts that are directly relevant to studying your main artwork. Where was the artist when s/he created the work? What major historical events occurred at that time that may have influenced the production of the work?

• **Identification**: Identify various individuals or objects within the panel.

• **Iconographical**: Iconography is study or interpretation of visual images and/or symbols. Identify the important symbols presented in the artwork.

• **Comparative artworks**: Include a comparative artwork that will be viewed beside your main artwork. Conduct a comparative analysis of the two artworks.

• **Primary sources**: Include discussions of primary sources and explain specifically how these sources help us to understand or provide a better context for your main artwork. Include the full text of your primary source if possible.

• **Secondary sources**: Is there an essay that really helps to inform the study of your artwork? Include a link to the essay and introduce the essay in 1-2 paragraphs to explain the key points that are most relevant to your discussion of the main artwork.

• **Audio and video**: Would the viewer understand the artwork better if s/he could see it in situ? Hear someone talking about the piece?

• **Theoretical**: Is there a particular theoretical approach that helps the viewer to understand the artwork (psychoanalysis, feminism, Marxism, iconography, formalism, etc.). Define and discuss the approach as it applies to your artwork.

• **Conservation**: Would knowing something about the restoration of the piece help the user to understand the panel better?

• **Further Reading**: Create and annotate a list of sources that will be most helpful to your viewer.

• **Modern and Contemporary**: Was the impact of the artwork lasting? Did other artists pay homage to it in some way? Conduct a comparative analysis of the two artworks.

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**In-Class Presentation on the Great Wall of Los Angeles (10%)**: Once during the semester, each student will prepare a short, informal in-class presentation based on the assigned Great Wall panel. Each presentation should be no more than 8-10 minutes long. You will use the Image Map tool to present your work.

Find an aspect of each topic that is interesting to you; it is not necessary to cover the panel exhaustively (and you couldn’t do that in ten minutes anyway!).

One-page handout: Design a one-page handout about your panel (include a title, a couple of representative images, and some relevant information about the topic). You must submit your handout via Sakai no later than 9am on the day that you will present. I will make copies of the handouts for each member of the class.
During the term, each assigned group of 2-3 students will produce a gallery guide for one of Vincent Valdez’s The Strangest Fruit paintings on view in the Staniar Gallery. These guides will be prepared during the term and available in the Staniar Gallery during graduation. Since the guides will be available to the public, they should be polished, professional, and showcase exceptional writing and critical thinking skills. The goal of each guide is to help the Staniar Gallery visitor to understand the varied and textured layers of meaning contained in The Strangest Fruit series.

Each guide will include:

1. A high-quality reproduction of one of The Strangest Fruit paintings accompanied by all identifying information (artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, photo credit and institution);
2. Thematic essays, one written by each member of the group, that discuss the assigned painting in detail and also put it into a larger cultural, artistic, historical, personal (etc.) context;
3. An interview with the artist conducted by the group, condensed, and transcribed.

Part One: Artist Interview
(Interview, selection, and transcription, 10%)

When Vincent Valdez visits campus, you will have the opportunity to interview him. These interviews will be video recorded for archival purposes and so that you may transcribe it later (and don’t have to worry about taking notes during the interview). You will conduct this interview with your group (2-3 people) and your questions should elicit specific information about your assigned artwork from Valdez. As a group, you’ll decide which selections from the interview will appear at the back of the Gallery Guide. This part of the gallery guide assignment is meant to give you skills in research, interviewing, editing, and critical thinking as you construct meaningful interview questions.

Before the interview, each member of the group should craft at least 10 questions for the artist. It is unlikely that you will have the time to ask all of these questions and I encourage you to let the conversation take you in unexpected directions. Listen, watch, or read other interviews with the artist to come up with questions that build upon past interviews.

For tips on interviewing an artist, check out this Indianapolis Museum of Art blog “How to Interview an Artist.” The authors recommend that you:

- First, do your research.
- Know your audience and your interviewee.
- Be respectful, but ask hard questions.
- Make it a conversation.
- Listen!

Part Two: Thematic Essay (15%)

During the term, you will produce a 1500-word thematic based on Vincent Valdez’s The Strangest Fruit series. This assignment is meant to be an exercise in looking closely at the artworks on view in the Staniar Gallery and thinking critically about how those works fit into larger themes presented in class. Your essay can engage all of the artworks in the series, but should pay special attention to your assigned piece(s).

1 First, in collaboration with your group, come up with a theme for your essay. The theme should relate to the works on display in the Staniar Gallery and the larger class themes. All students will cover different topics, so make sure to have your topic approved by the instructor. You will work on the same artwork with one or two other students. You should discuss themes together so that your essays complement one another and do not overlap too much.

You are encouraged to come up with topics that relate your own interests to the works in the exhibition. Some possible themes include:

- Texas state high school curriculum
- Cultural/historical amnesia
- Book censorship in Arizona
- Lynching of Latinos, c. 1848-1928
- Lynching of African Americans
- Historical lynching photographs
- The American-Mexican border
- Border art
- Ken Gonzales-Day’s Erased Lynching series
- Racial profiling and
- Memory and memorial
- Mass incarceration
- Gerhard Richter, blur
- Popular culture
- Figural painting today
- Identity, performing self
- Early artistic formation
- Chavez Ravine, collaboration with Ry Cooder
- Musical references
- Alex Rubio and Vincent Valdez
- Early mural production
- Lynching and the Great Wall of Los Angeles
- Community engagement and art
- Art and social activism
- Minority representation & mainstream art world
- Masculinity
- Texan art outside Texas
- Blaxican
- Archive of memory
- Collaboration (Menjivar and Valdez)
- Abel Meeropol’s Strange Fruit
- Billie Holiday’s Strange Fruit
Second, construct a clear thesis statement before you begin writing. Place your thesis statement at the bottom of the first paragraph of the essay. In constructing your thesis, make sure that you ask the following questions (from *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* by Sylvan Barnet):

- Does the thesis statement make a claim rather than merely offer a description?
- Is the claim arguable rather than self-evident or universally accepted?
- Can evidence be adduced to support the claim?
- Is the claim narrow enough to be convincingly supported in a paper written within the allotted time and of the assigned length?

Third, use the body of your essay to develop this hypothesis. As you write, consider the following questions (do not answer all of these questions, choose only one or two that apply!):

- Does this artwork relate to other artworks, murals, or artistic traditions discussed in class (themes, aesthetics, function, physical creation, etc.)?
- Is this work political? Personal? Both? What opinion does the artist express about current leaders, laws, government, or personal and community identity?
- Is this work influenced by contact with other artworks, politics, artists, etc.?
- Does this work relate to race, gender, and/or identity in some ways?

Fourth, include a strong conclusion.

Fifth, include relevant illustrations.

Sixth, make sure that your references are formatted properly. Use a minimum of five sources to complete this assignment, and format them according to the Chicago Manual of Style.

**Part Three: Peer Review of the Essay (5%)**

You will submit your paper to the other members of the group for peer editing. The paper that you read should be complete, though it might not be 100% perfect—it’s your job to help to make sure that it is perfect before going on view in the gallery. You should provide as much commentary as possible to help the author improve this paper for its final submission. First, read though the paper draft and provide marginal comments. Identify errors in syntax, grammar, and spelling. Identify passages that are particularly strong, or particularly weak. Answer a set of questions provided on the handout distributed in class. These forms will be returned to the instructor and then handed back to the author of the paper.

**Appropriate sources:** You can find books in the Leyburn library or by using the library’s interlibrary loan service (ILL). You can find articles in hard copies of journals stored in the library or by searching databases such as JSTOR, Art Full Text Database, Project Muse Database, etc. You can also search through specific electronic journals, hundreds of which are available via the library website. Many major museum websites now contain solid and well-substantiated information about artworks housed in their collections—you may consult and reference museum websites in your paper. Most Internet sources (wikipedia, online encyclopedias, most sources that you can Google, for example) will not be accepted. Please consult the instructor if you have a question about a specific source.

**Part Three: Formatted Galley Guide (5%)**

Working with your group, you will create a fully illustrated gallery guide for your assigned artwork (InDesign templates will be available after we come up with an idea for a design as a group). These gallery guides will be available in time for graduation and available to the public. Therefore, the writing, design, and presentation should be polished and professional. Please meet with the instructor if you need help formatting your gallery guide. This part of the assignment will help you to learn practical design and layout skills.

**Public Gallery Talk (10%)**

On Thursday, May 22, students will deliver public gallery talks in the Staniar Gallery. These 8-10 minute group presentations will be open to the public and focused on your assigned artwork on display in the Staniar Gallery.

For your gallery talk, your group (2-3 people) will present concise versions of your thematic essays. Since these talks will be open to the public, do not assume that the audience knows anything about the context of the works. In your presentation, be sure to include enough background information for the audience to follow along, but also information specific to your work. Be sure to present on the aspects of the work that most excited you during the term.

Each member of the group will be responsible for delivering some part of the gallery talk. 90% of the presentation grade will be based on individual performance, and 10% of the grade will be based on the overall coherence, flow, professionalism, and quality of the group presentation.
Class Policies

Accommodations: Washington and Lee University makes reasonable academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. All undergraduate accommodations must be approved through the Office of the Dean of the College. Students requesting accommodations for this course should present an official accommodation letter within the first two weeks of the term and schedule a meeting outside of class time to discuss accommodations. It is the student’s responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and to follow up about accommodation arrangements. Accommodations for test-taking should be arranged with the professor at least a week before the test or exam.

Attendance: Attend all classes punctually; if you miss attendance at the beginning of class, you will be counted as absent. You are responsible for all material covered in class unless otherwise noted. One third of a letter grade will be deducted from the final class grade per class missed after one unexcused absences. In certain cases, you will be granted excused absences. It is your responsibility to make arrangements with me in advance if you will miss class or an activity due to an excused absence.

Classroom Etiquette:

1. Ringing and vibrating cell phones are disruptive for both speakers and listeners, phones are to be turned off and texting is not allowed. If I see you texting or the like, I will deduct your participation grade.

2. To reduce the temptation of surfing/emailing (and other activities that will distract you and your fellow classmates), computers are not to be used in the classroom without instructor consent (you will need to pledge a statement indicating that the like, I will count you as absent for the day.

3. Do not get up during class and leave the classroom. Please take care of all of your needs before class.

4. Please note that Washington and Lee University has a strict policy against students freely recording classes. The policy reads: “W&L prohibits the recording of classes without the advance written permission of the instructor, except in cases where W&L is required by law to provide for recording of a class as a reasonable accommodation for a qualified student with a disability.”

Extensions and Late Assignments/Papers: Extensions and/or make-ups are not given unless arrangements are made long in advance (and the night before the paper or exam is due does not count as advance notice). An unexcused absence on the day of an exam will result in a zero grade for the exam. Late papers are penalized one full letter grade per day late.

Honor System: As members of the W&L community, you are all familiar with the honor system and understand that all work submitted must be your own. You must pledge each assignment, quiz, or exam that you submit for this class. By taking this class, you agree that you will not consult cold tests or make copies (in any form) or distribute quizzes or exams taken in this class. When writing your assignments, please be very careful to cite all of your sources properly. A paper that does not give proper credit the ideas of other authors may have the appearance of an act of plagiarism, and thus a breach of the Honor System. If you have any questions concerning proper citation formats, please get in touch with me or the staff at the Writing Center. I encourage you to have your papers edited at the Writing Center; if you choose to take advantage of that resource, you should acknowledge the assistance in your pledge. You are also encouraged to have your papers edited by a peer (a peer = another student currently enrolled in the class); you should indicate that your paper was peer-edited in your pledge. You are prohibited from consulting professional editors (paid or unpaid) for any assignment in this class.

Course Grading Guide:

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<tr>
<td>A+</td>
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A = Exceptional work: far exceeding the requirements of the assignment
A = Above average/Good: successfully fulfilling the requirements of the assignment
A = Average/Mediocre: fulfilling the minimum requirements of the assignment
D = Unsatisfactory: Not satisfying the minimum requirements of the assignment
F = Failing