Chapter Title: Mel Casas · 2013: Redefining America
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Book Title: Chicano and Chicana Art
Book Subtitle: A Critical Anthology
Book Editor(s): JENNIFER A. GONZÁLEZ, C. ONDINE CHAVOYA, CHON NORIEGA, TEREZITA ROMO
Published by: Duke University Press. (2019)
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv120qrn6.31

20. Mel Casas · 2013

Redefining America

[. . .]

The Mexican American or "Chicano" rights movement first came to the attention of middle-class America in 1965 with television coverage of César Chávez organizing migrant workers in California. The Chicano movement, or *el movimiento*, predated the farmworkers' strikes by at least two decades; its roots anchored in the racism experienced by Mexican Americans during and after World War II. It can also be argued that the origin of the movement dates back even further to the annexation of vast stretches of Mexican lands after the U.S.-Mexican War. As a result of the territorial concessions granted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexican citizens in the Southwest found themselves suddenly citizens of the United States and the first Mexican Americans. Although legally citizens, the process of acceptance into the cultural mainstream was difficult. The government administrators and white settlers who moved into these new lands saw the Mexican American residents as "outsiders." This nebulous outsider status of Mexican Americans lingered through much of the twentieth century.

[. . .]

Mel Casas's response to the issues raised by the Chicano movement as well as his own experience as a Mexican American can be found in *Humanscape 62: Brownies of the Southwest*. The painting is a powerful statement of what it means to be a Mexican American living in the American Southwest. It speaks to the here and now as well as the longing for a sense of communal past. In this painting, Casas deliberately plays with the shades of meaning, some innocent, some pejorative, of the word "brownie," making it a color-based designation for Mexican Americans, equivalent to the use of "black" for African Americans or "white" for European-descent Americans. On the screen Casas paints a monumental plate of chocolate brownies, rendered as mouth-watering as those pictured on a package of Betty Crocker mix (fig. 20.1). These brownies are more than a popular snack; the key ingredient is chocolate, a food indigenous to Mexico,

FIG. 20.1. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 62: Brownies of the Southwest*, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 73 × 97 in. Image courtesy of Grace Casas.

its name derived from the Nahuatl (Mexica or Aztec) word *chocólatl*. In this way the brownies are part of the Mexican heritage appropriated by Anglos and Anglo corporations.

Chocolate or brown is also the color associated with the types of people (Brownies) who make up the audience in this painting: a Brownie Girl Scout, an American Indian, and four Mexican women. Casas's use of brown is not merely reflective of the natural condition, but purposeful: "Brown as a color is amplified because pigmentation appears to have such vehement social relevance. I use it to give social color to what I consider significant events."[1] In each case, the color brown denotes a second-class status in society. The Brownie is a junior grade (second-class) member of the organization, not a full-fledged, green-uniformed Girl Scout. The American Indian had been a nonperson in American society long before general Philip Sheridan opined in 1869 that the "only good Indian is a dead Indian."[2] In the early years of the Conquest, natives were conveniently believed to be animals, and hunted as such. The affirmation of the humanity of the American Indian did not come until 1537, when Pope Paul III finally issued a papal bull declaring that the Indians had souls, thereby making them targets of conversion by the Mendicant orders—a fate, perhaps, only slightly worse than death. The four Mexican peasant women represent the residual Mexican element, the Mexican heritage of the Mexican American that renders him a second-class American citizen.

In contrast to the "brown" real people, Casas paints mythical and imaginary characters: the god Xolotl, the double-headed serpent, and the Frito

Bandito in green. The use of green for these figures not only marks them as unreal or supernatural but also plays on the pre-Columbian Mexican association of the color green with "preciousness." In the center of the canvas, Casas depicts a skeletal figure that he identifies as Xolotl, the Aztec god of monsters and twins.[3] Xolotl is normally depicted in pre-Hispanic codices with a canine head and wearing the ornaments of Quetzalcoatl, but Casas's version calls to mind José Guadalupe Posada's famous *calaveras* (skeletons), here posing in the role of the ancient god.[4] The grinning Frito Bandito, riding piggyback on the Xolotl, is its monstrous issue, a Brownie monster. The Frito Bandito figure, based on the image of Pancho Villa and other peasant leaders of the 1910 Revolution, reinforces the stereotype of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as thieves and bandits. The Bandito is also a statement of the corporate disenfranchisement of the Mexican American: they are considered to be so powerless that a derogatory caricature of them can be made into an eraser and used to market junk food to both Mexican American and Anglo children alike.

On either side of the Xolotl is a double-headed mosaic serpent perhaps meant to represent the Aztec serpent, Xiuhcoatl, a name in Nahuatl meaning "turquoise snake." The model for this image is the famous turquoise pectoral, of Aztec-Mixtec manufacture, in the British Museum. Double-headed and entwined snakes were potent symbols in ancient Mesoamerica. They could be symbolic of the celestial realm, of renewal through the act of shedding their skin, and of the underworld—the open jaws of the serpent representing the cave entrance to Mictlan ruled over by the fearsome skeletal lord Mictlantecuhtli.

Here, however, according to Casas, the two-headed serpent characterizes the "schizothymia and dichotomous nature of the Mexican American in the Southwest."[5] Thus, the split serpent refers to the split classification of the Mexican American who, in the social caste systems of both Mexico and the United States, is neither Mexican nor American, and who can claim neither heritage without implicitly denying the other. As a result of this identity tug-of-war, the Mexican American exists in a state of cultural limbo where he clings to a fantasy past, which is both his and not his, but offers an alternative to the realities of a present in which he has no place. Even more ominous is the lesson suggested by nature, where two-headed snakes are known to occur, although rarely. When no head is dominant, these animals are doomed. Casas, like Lincoln a century earlier, makes the point that a nation or a people so divided cannot long endure.

In addition to redefining the social and racial status of the Mexican American, the Chicano movement also provided a new definition of what it meant to be a "Chicano artist." As Jacinto Quirarte noted, "The Mexican American artist is not difficult to identify in the twentieth century. His parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents may have originally come from Mexico. He may have been born in Mexico himself but has spent a good part of his life in the United States. He may be a first- or a sixth-generation American. The important thing is that somewhere there is a tie with Mexico."[6]

Furthermore, to be an authentically Chicano art, the artist's tie with Mexico must overwhelm his connection to the culture of the United States, according to Quirarte, if the work is to be truly Mexican American art: "Coming back to the Mexican American situation, we see that there is a desire to move away from the so-called European (*gabacho* or Anglo) approach to the creation of a work of art. Coupled with this search for new approaches is another, which is related to what can only be described as a longing for, a feeling of, nostalgia for the ancient past. A search for original sources. And by this is meant the indigenous, or pre-Columbian, sources."[7]

Circumscribed by the politics of the larger movement, Chicano art became narrowly codified as an art of alienation or outsider art, and as such, it needed to be stylistically distinct from that of Anglo artists to be authentically "Chicano." Exhibitions of work by Mexican American artists, even when produced by minority curators, frequently focused on political and spiritual themes, as if

those were the only terms in which this art could be understood by a larger, non-Hispanic, audience. This emphasis on ethnicity caused problems for the very artists such exhibitions were intended to promote. When the only avenue for exposure is an exhibition predicated on race, then ethnicity rather than aesthetic quality becomes the inviolate prerequisite for inclusion.[8] Through such exhibitions Mexican American artists did gain exposure that many of them would not have received otherwise, but recognition came at a cost, as Holland Cotter explained, "By binding art to racial, ethnic and sexual identity, multiculturalism carved out discrete areas of high visibility but kept those areas self-contained. Minority artists were introduced to the art world power center, only to find themselves, with few exceptions, viewing it from culturally specific ghettos. The deal was, you could get inside the gates, but your movements were restricted."[9]

Although the advent of the Chicano art movement proved particularly beneficial to younger Mexican American artists, being categorized as a "Chicano artist" could also limit a career. For artists such as Casas, who had already broken into the mainstream, such artistic typecasting was a step backward. Although the majority of paintings in Casas's *Humanscapes* series comment on a wide range of social, political, and cultural issues in contemporary American life, only the half dozen or so "Chicano" paintings from the early 1970s are regularly exhibited or published in the art historical literature.

The canvases that have come to define Casas as a Chicano artist were, with one or two exceptions, painted between 1970 and 1973. These years also mark Casas's active involvement with a group of young artists organized as Con Safo. Casas's involvement with the group began in late 1970 when he was approached by several young painters who had splintered from the Pintores de Aztlán.[10] The leader of this disaffected group, Felipe Reyes, had been a student of Casas's at San Antonio College and so he turned to his teacher for help in organizing a new Chicano artists group; their frustration with Pintores de Aztlán revolved around leadership problems such as *caciquismo*,[11] or lack of dedication to the Chicano movimiento, and no clear definition of purpose for the organization.[12] When first approached, Casas, in a personally difficult period, was reluctant to take on this responsibility. He told Reyes, "Let me think about it a little bit and I'll get back with you." Casas recalls, "I thought about it a couple of days. Maybe my life would change. I was divorced. My timeframe was different, and I was teaching night and day courses to keep my household going. But I decided I would take a crack at art. So once I started, I met with the young men, and I listened to them and I began to realize they really needed to organize."[13] They wanted an organization that could not only define a Chicano aesthetic but also break down the barriers erected by the local museums to exclude them from exhibitions:

> I got that group [Con Safo] going because I got told that they were being slighted in San Antonio. They were never allowed to show. Only certain people showed. I took a look at it. Some of the people in the group were very good, some, uh, um . . . It brought up a question in my mind. I could speak for their being denied their right to show. Are they being denied because of their racial reality; their subject matter in relation to their conscious? I found nothing to ignore. If these people had painted pretty English landscapes—no problem. So that was the problem then. Culturally these people were seeing differently. Second, they put emphasis on other things the establishment did not consider that important. So the question [was]: do you challenge those values?[14]

Casas organized the group of younger artists into an organization he named Con Safo. Casas explained, "That's the old term in Spanish; you excuse yourself with *con safo*. It means I'm not responsible for this. I don't care what you think about it. But it's also an act of defiance that refuses to accept responsibility for the action. . . . The act itself is its own reality whether you like it or not. But you find that *con safo* is usually debasement of someone else's property. So it's a social statement. I started working with that and carried it to extreme levels. I like to do that."[15] The result was

an exploration of the term in all its nuances that reads as free verse.

In December 1971, Casas published a manifesto for Con Safo, titled the "Brown Paper Report." In this two-page document with five pages of appendices, Casas laid out the political foundation, aesthetic concept, and action goals of the group. Casas began with a redefinition of the Mexican American or Chicano role in an American society that had largely ignored them:[16]

> **Brown Vision:** If Americana was "sensed" through blue eyes, now brown vision is demanding equal views—polychroma instead of monochrome. Brown eyes have visions too. It's George Washington and Che Guevara homogenized into one. It's Tejerina reclaiming the southwest and it's César Chávez synthesizing farm workers into the mania that is middle class Americana. It's a promise to be—as middle class Americana is a product of a promise to pay. Utopian facet??? Brown Dream.
>
> **Con Safo:** Act of defiance
> Is a state of mind
> Alienation verbalized
> Clandestine Act
> Profanity that craves sacredness
> Sgraffiti with a purpose
> Cry of anguish
> Cry for help
> State of Anxiety
> Social rejection
> A demand for identity
> Language of the ghetto
> Language of the gutter
> Language of futility
> A demand for acknowledgement
> A divorcement from responsibility
> A seeking of responsibility of anticipation
> I don't believe I have been recognized?
> If you think evil of me—likewise!
> We have been here before
> Critical Point
> Not Pax Americana but the social consciousness of Americana

In 1973 Casas followed up the "Brown Paper Report" with "Chicano Art: A Saccadic Scanning." In this publication he presented a set of eight diagrams. Each further analyzed and elaborated upon the cultural and aesthetic questions faced by Chicano artists that negatively impacted the acceptance of their art by mainstream institutions. These were problems that Casas saw as readymade by society and not those set by artists for themselves: "When you are born into a culture you are born into readymade solutions. As a result we never self-actualize ourselves, we are content to play the game by the established rules. If, however, you question the values of the system, you become marginal, you are cast outside the system."[17]

The art establishment, which had dismissed Chicano art as merely folk art, was a microcosm of the larger Anglo society that, traditionally, had rejected the Mexican American, among others of color, as inferior. The challenge for American society, as a whole, and the art world, in particular, was to break with the dominant Eurocentric paradigms that remained as an English colonial legacy. Although the United States had achieved its national independence early in its history, European standards continued to influence the societal and artistic discourse. The mainstream artistic colloquy remained one exclusively "of the West about the West." Casas saw in Con Safo the means to subvert this monolithic, monoethnic dialogue and convert it into an open forum:

> The essence of Chicano art has emerged from the realities of Chicano life. The result is a coherent Chicano visual dialogue. A definition of Chicano art by its very nature has to be comprehensive, for it overlaps into religion, economics, psychology, sociology, politics and aesthetics. It also bridges time—past, present, future—and compresses space into family, country, continent and world. The Chicano artist is prepared to and is actualizing group identity by means of his visual language. A language that is governed by his own awareness and specific events. The outcome is intellectual emancipation and emergence of a Chicano reality through art. Chicano art is not one of conformity, but rather, one of diversity of concepts and perceptions. Chicano art grew out of the barrios in the Southwest and poured into the consciousness of the rest of Americana. It removed itself from the regional phenomenon and challenged the legacy of

one type of American art by creating its own sense of history and independent cultural validity.[18]

While Con Safo was successful in pushing open museum and gallery doors in San Antonio and gaining well-deserved recognition for Chicano artists, Casas knew that there was more to changing the national ethos than hanging a few exhibitions of Chicano art. He had given the organization the goal/slogan: "Chicano Art is not Art for Art's Sake but Art for Human Sake."[19] This was a tall order. In essence, what Casas was proposing was nothing short of a full-scale cultural revolution predicated on new ideas, new aesthetics, and new imagery: "We are iconoclasts, not by choice, but by circumstances out to destroy stereotypes and demolish visual clichés. We hope, in the process, to encounter new pure forms that will act as catalysts for a visual nascence and awaken the dormant Chicano potential."[20]

Casas's paintings of the early seventies reflect his increasing political radicalization through his involvement with Con Safo. As the main theorist for the organization, he had written all of the group's concept papers, adopting a graphic format that bulleted the main talking points. Casas now applied that working formula to his *Humanscapes*, creating flow charts to explain the complex social statements presented in his paintings. Casas believed that the content of paintings should be more than just compositional or visual effects; they should make clear and powerful statements that could be immediately understood by the painting's audience.

Such unambiguous artistic statements are even more important when the audience and artist do not share a common language or culture. In this situation, communication becomes more basic—the drawn image or even sign language. In *Humanscape 63: Show of Hands* (1970) (fig. 20.2), Casas focuses in on the symbolic language of hand gestures. Depicted in extreme close-up on the theater screen are two marmoreal hands that pantomime the spark-of-life gesture in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The cast shadow of a third hand, with a single finger raised in an obscene salute, rises in the center of the screen to almost touch the hand of Adam. Considered in light of Casas's contemporaneous organization of Con Safo, the reference takes on an antiestablishment context. While issues of race were not an insignificant factor in the exclusion of Con Safo artists from museums and galleries, Casas avoids a frontal assault on solely ethnic grounds and instead attacks what is for Casas the core issue: institutional justification of denial of exhibition access on aesthetic grounds. In the Western tradition, Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* panel from the Sistine Chapel is one of those rare apogeal works that has come to define, in the common understanding, true art. The powerful focal point of the *Creation* panel is the space between the two reaching hands, through which God sparks life and humanity in the mud-formed Adam. In choosing this particular work as a basis for his statement, Casas not only addresses antiquated aesthetic criteria but also the ethnocentric yardstick by which humanity has traditionally been measured.

In the audience space across the bottom of the canvas, Casas presents a primer of additional signs that suggest additional meanings. He begins at the lower left with the brown hand of an Indian shaking a rattle in protest at the clenched fist of a white supremacist; behind them is the anarchist's black flag. In the center, four hands—black, yellow, brown, and white—spell the word "love" in American Sign Language. The brown hand raises two fingers to depict not only the letter "v" in "love" but also the V-gesture peace sign of the hippie generation. Building on the cultural associations of the peace symbol, Casas places two hands—one male, the other female—at the far right. Each holds an item significant to the "Make Love Not War" movement, specifically, a marijuana joint and a contraceptive pill. A second reference here is to the Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War, which had culminated with a march in Los Angeles in August of that year. The Brown Berets organized the moratorium to protest the high casualty rate of Chicano soldiers in Vietnam and a military draft that seemed to draw more heavily from the Mexican American than

FIG. 20.2. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 63: Show of Hands*, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 96 in. Image courtesy of Grace Casas.

from the Anglo community. Casas, a wounded veteran of Korea, and against war on principle, expressed his solidarity with the antiwar movement in this painting. In the background waves the Chicano Farm Workers Union flag as an emblem of the larger social movement of which the Brown Berets were an important part. Casas adds a pop culture subtext to the painting by allowing the third hand, rising from the audience, to cast a pall over the hands signing out "love."[21] This "bird" finger gesture, like George Carlin's contemporaneous monologue on the expletive "F—— You," is emblematic of the political and sexual turmoil that plagued the "Free Love Generation."

The summer of 1970 was an active one for César Chávez and the United Farm Workers. Almost as soon as the Delano grape strike ended, ten thousand lettuce workers went on strike in what the news media called "the largest farm labor strike in U.S. history."[22] Like everyone else, Casas saw the worker's strike and the retaliatory actions of the growers played out on the nightly network news. *Humanscape 65: New Horizons* was inspired by the Salinas strike. In this painting the VistaVision screen displays the Chicano Farm Workers Union flag: a black *huelga* eagle silhouetted against the sun on a red ground. The flag serves to visually identify the theme of the painting by establishing a horizon line and it also, as Casas explained, "becomes a sunrise or a sunset depending on whether one is optimistic or pessimistic." Beneath the screen the blue border is transformed into the sea with crashing waves. The sea not only serves as a traditional icon of fertility and fecundity but also geographically locates the vast fields of lettuce that extend from the observer's vantage point to the briny edge of

the Pacific. The figures of farmworkers stooping over the rows are based on a photograph of lettuce workers taken by Joe McClelland in 1943. In this painting Casas transforms the bent-over workers into the modern equivalents of Millet's anonymous peasants in *The Gleaners*, to drive home the point that the hard life of the farmworker has changed negligibly in more than a century. In *New Horizons*, we see identically clothed labors engaged in the back-breaking work of thinning the lettuce, their faces turned earthward or obscured by hats. Like Millet, Casas does not individualize the workers, and in not doing so makes a statement about the nature of the work they perform and its dehumanizing effect on them—in the fields they become robot-like. Here, too, the lettuce is more than produce or a reference to the Salinas boycott. Both the English "lettuce" and the Spanish "lechuga" are slang terms for "money," in this case "crops" going into only the grower's pocket.

While the lettuce workers' strike might have been the focus of nightly television news programs, many mainstream Americans had little empathy for the concerns of the Filipino (in the case of the lettuce strike) or Mexican American (the Delano grape strike) farm laborers. Such people were seen only in terms of their jobs: farm laborers, gardeners, and maids. Their only social identity was that of servants in white households. Otherwise they went about their daily tasks largely unnoticed by their middle- and upper-class employers. The invisibility of the Mexican Americans in Anglo society is the topic of *Humanscape 68: Kitchen Spanish*. In this painting Casas particularizes the domestic worker's struggle. The tag line "Kitchen Spanish" pertains both to the ethnicity of domestic servants in Texas and to the "Spanglish" typically spoken by upper-class Anglos to their Mexican servants—just enough to tell them what to do but not enough to converse. A domestic locale is suggested by the projected image of a gleaming, stainless steel kitchen sink with running faucet in the background behind a curtain—suggesting the usually unseen domestic areas of the house. Facing the spectator in the "theater space" are the realistic figures of two Alamo Heights (an exclusive community within greater San Antonio) society ladies who epitomize the Anglo as exploiter, a young Anglo girl and boy who are victims in that they are being trained to follow in the footsteps of their elders, a Siamese cat strategically placed in relation to the maid's anatomy to read as "pussy" twice, and a white bulldog held on a leash by the younger Anglo woman to symbolize her status as well as her control of money and power.[23]

Also included in the scene is the requisite (for upper-class San Antonio families) Mexican maid, who stands just under the running water as a symbol of the "wetback." Casas depicts the maid as a cartoon character, a sort of brown-skinned "Little Orphan Annie," which is just as her Anglo employers see her. As a servant, her personhood is negated in the eyes of her employers: she works for them and she has dark skin, therefore, she is inferior to them. As Constance Cortez suggests, "Because Casas draws on flat comic-book characters in his representation of the maid, she becomes less real than those who employ her or even their pets. She has been repackaged in non-threatening Pop Art format—the speech-balloon provides us with her automaton responses and underlines her transformation into a mechanized stereotype. She has become one of many other mechanical conveniences in this house. The curtain, which has been drawn back, suggests domesticity, but it also symbolizes the theatrical nature of this human drama."[24]

While the Mexican maid is rendered as a two-dimensional stereotype in contrast to the modeled, three-dimensional Anglo figures and their status-denoting pedigreed pets, it is interesting that only she is given a voice. The fact that she speaks suggests a humanity denied the dumb (in both senses of the word) Anglo figures around her. In her speech balloon are seemingly rote responses to the demands of her employers and presumably their pets: "Si, Niño. . . . Si, Niña. . . . Si, Senoras. . . . Si, Gato. . . . Si, Perra . . ." But there is more to this maid's litany than meets the eye. Casas is a man who loves languages and who

FIG. 20.3. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 70: Comic Whitewash*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 97 in. Image courtesy of Grace Casas.

is cognizant of not only the power of words but also their subtle shades of meaning. The maid's replies to the children and women are in character with her status as a domestic, but consider the responses to the implied demands of the animals. Is it just that her status, in the eyes of her Anglo employers, is lower than that of the household pets? What orders could a dog and cat give? Furthermore, why does Casas specifically sex the animals as the opposite of the standardized nonspecific species gender designations of cats as "she" or "female" and dogs as "he" or "male"—especially after making an overt sexual point in his placement of the cat against the body of the maid? Possibly, it is because the two animals are intended to be visual red herrings. In colloquial Spanish, the masculine *gato* is not just a male cat but also a slang term for a "moneybag," a "rich and miserly person," or, as in English, a "fat cat," while the feminine *perra* is a "bitch" in both senses of that word. The maid is not simply answering the demands of the animals, but her responses to them express her hostility toward her exploitative employers and their dehumanizing treatment of her.

As a keen observer of social intercourse in American life, Casas realized that the processes of human degradation, detailed in *Humanscapes 65* and *68*, cannot be accomplished overnight; suppression of ambition and negation of self-worth require time and consistency. Dehumanization must begin at an insidiously early age to succeed. In *Humanscape 70: Comic Whitewash* (fig. 20.3), Casas explores "the message of the medium," to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan. Much of the social theory of that era revolved around the ways in which children learned aggressive behavior. The psychologist Albert Bandura proposed that

children acquired behaviors of all kinds through observational learning and social modeling. Thus, they mimic the behaviors of older adolescents and adults they encounter in actuality or in the virtual reality of television and media, such as comic books, specifically aimed at them. In this painting we are presented with popular comic heroes who carry the coded ethnic messages used to indoctrinate the young, both minority and mainstream. An all-white sextet of comic heroes—Batman, Superman, Thor, Captain America, Spiderman, and Hawkman—emerge from the edges of a dark, star-strewn VistaVision screen. The center of the screen has been canceled by a fresh smear of dripping whitewash. The audience for this comic book show is a single young boy, possibly Hispanic, who, enthralled by the powers of the superheroes, thinks, "wow." But as Casas reveals in the chart he devised for this painting, there is nothing funny about these comic characters or the messages they communicate to a young minority audience. From these cartoon exemplars, the boy learns that virtue, power, and society's approbation belong to those who look like the heroes, who have "Band-Aid colored flesh" as the heroes do. He learns that if he is like them, he is superior to those who are different from him and the heroes. If he is different, the subconscious message is that he is unwanted, that he has no power, or that he is believed to be part of a criminal population in league against the heroic forces of "good." Subtly, he is debased and demoralized by these images; his spirit is killed by them. Indeed, there is nothing at all humorous about these comic superheroes.

Casas's period of Chicano art activism ended for all intents and purposes in November 1973 when he resigned as president of Con Safo over a dispute with the membership about their participation in the preparation of a national grant proposal.[25] During the Reagan years, when the West and cowboys were back in vogue, Casas painted several works that reference Mexican culture. However, these later paintings lack the cutting-edge social commentary of Casas's "Chicano" period; instead they present a tourism bureau folkloric construction of Tex-Mex salsa culture, and this is, of course, the visual conundrum intended to make the viewer reexamine his cultural vision and concepts. In every decade Casas's paintings reflect the myriad concerns of the time; to brand him and his art based on only one concern is to miss the point of his work entirely. As Casas has said, "The Chicano movement, which I tried to help, is just a phase of my life. You know, that same way that I was very anti-Nixon, very anti-Vietnam. That's another phase of my life."[26]

Notes

This chapter was originally published as Nancy Kelker, "Redefining America: The Civil Rights Movements," in *Mel Casas: Artist as Cultural Adjuster* (Lascassas, TN: Highship Press, 2014), 42–65.

1. Mel Casas, working chart for *Humanscape 62*, "Brownies of the Southwest," sent as part of a personal communication, August 20, 2003. *Humanscape 62* © Mel Casas.

2. Philip Henry Sheridan, statement attributed to him at Fort Cobb in January 1869.

3. Casas, personal communication.

4. José Guadalupe Posada was a nineteenth-century Mexican printmaker who created satirical images of skeletons performing everyday activities for the popular broadsides.

5. Casas, personal communication.

6. Jacinto Quirarte, "Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano Art: Two Views," in *Mexican American Artists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 41.

7. Quirarte, "Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano Art," xx.

8. Holland Cotter, "Beyond Multiculturalism, Freedom?," *New York Times*, July 29, 2001, 1 and 28.

9. Cotter, "Beyond Multiculturalism," 1.

10. Pintores de Aztlán was an early Chicano artists group in San Antonio.

11. *Cacique* is the Spanish term for a native chief, thus *caciquismo* would translate as leadership of an imperious nature.

12. "La Movida Con Safo," *C/S: Con Safos Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1968).

13. Paul Karlstrom, *Oral History Interview with Mel Casas, August 14 and 16, 1996*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., liv.

14. Nancy L. Kelker, unpublished interview with Mel Casas, May 15–19, 2000, San Antonio, TX, 15.

15. Kelker interview with Casas, 15.

16. Mel Casas, "Chicano Art: Stepping into the Future," *Brown Paper Report*, December 19, 1971, 1.

17. Ruben R. Peña, "Mel Casas," *Business and the Arts* (September/October 1979): 15.

18. Casas, "Chicano Art," 1.

19. Mel Casas, "Chicano Artists: Contingency Factors," *Chicano Art: A Saccadic Scanning* (1973): 4, http://latinoartcommunity.org/community/ChicArt/ArtistDir/MelCas.html.

20. Casas, "Chicano Artists," 4.

21. Casas, personal communication.

22. Wayne "Chris" Hartmire, "The Lettuce Strike and Boycott: Farmworkers' Continuing Struggle for Self-Determination," February 1973, Farmworker Documentation Project, UC San Diego Library, https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/essays/essays/MillerArchive/.

23. Casas, personal communication.

24. Cheech Marin, *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* (New York: Bullfinch, 2002), 37.

25. Ruben C. Cordova, "Con Safo: San Antonio's Chicano Artist Group and Its Legacy," *ArtLies*, no. 25 (winter 1999–2000): 18–21, 24.

26. Karlstrom, *Oral History Interview*, ii.