Chicano Art and the Mass Media

Mel Casas in 1967

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Mel Casas (1929–2014) is regarded as an important Chicano artist who is best known for a handful of paintings that sarcastically critique the stereotyped representation of Mexican Americans. His style may be described as a variant of Pop art. His iconic work *Humanscape 62* (fig. 1), included in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and popularly known as *Brownies of the Southwest*, explores multiple meanings attributed to the word *brownies*.[1] Dating to 1970, this painting is generally acknowledged as the earliest in which Casas addressed Chicano or Mexican American issues.

Among Casas's lesser-known pre-1970 works are three paintings dating to the last quarter of 1967: *Humanscape 37* (fig. 2), *Humanscape 38* (fig. 3), and *Humanscape 39* (fig. 4). These paintings are the focus of this article. In these works, I observe that Casas painted female figures with different skin tones: in each work, one woman is white while other women are Brown or dark. This leads me to wonder whether, in late 1967, Casas could have been responding to debates that racialized Mexican Americans as Brown. As a context to this observation, my research shows that in the second half of 1967, a series of events accelerated the organization of politicized Chicano groups in San Antonio, Texas, where the artist lived and worked. I argue that these debates and events, as well as printed visual culture from the mass media, generated a response in Casas, and that his response is visible in these three paintings. I propose that Casas's critical consciousness about the social position of Mexican Americans deepened during this period. These three paintings I discuss may be regarded as early Chicano works.

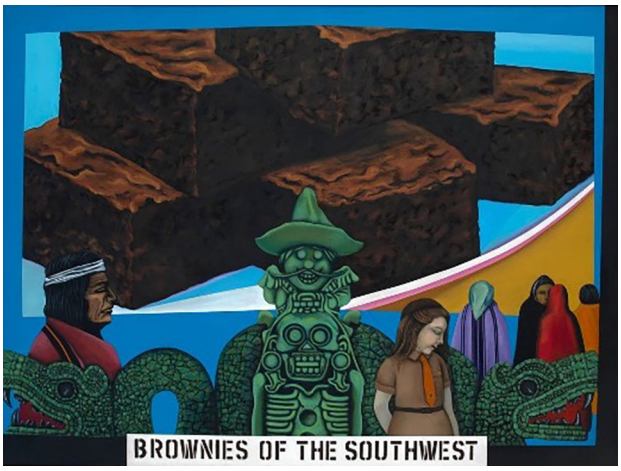

FIGURE 1. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 62*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 73 x 97 in. (185.4 x 246.4 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2012.37 (© 1970, the Casas Family, photograph provided by Bruce Casas)

BRINGING RACE INTO THE PICTURE

In his seminal book *Mexican American Artists*, published in 1973, Jacinto Quirarte discussed how Casas's work up to 1970 focused on three aspects: representations of cinematic experiences, the blonde and blue-eyed female ideal, and two Chicano works, including *Brownies of the Southwest*.[2] As quoted by Quirarte, Casas described this painting as a series of puns where the word *brownie* stands for different things: cookies, a girl scout, a Native American, Mexican Americans, Xolotl, the Frito Bandito, and the "Two-Headed Aztec Serpent: represents the schizothymia and dichotomous nature of the Mexican American in the Southwest."[3] Quirarte also documented two artists who dealt with similar imagery and comparable styles: Emilio Aguirre and Luis Jimenez. These Mexican American artists also critiqued the mainstream American ideal of the blond and blue-eyed beauty. Jimenez stated: "The Mexican American or anyone who is not blond and

1. See Smithsonian Museum of American Art, "Episode 1: Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art," YouTube video, 3:47, September 30, 2013, https://youtu.be/9brKfjJMi2s.

2. Jacinto Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973).

3. Casas, quoted in Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists*, 85.

Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture, Vol. 6, Number 2, pp. 65–89. Electronic ISSN: 2576-0947. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/lavc.2024.6.2.65.

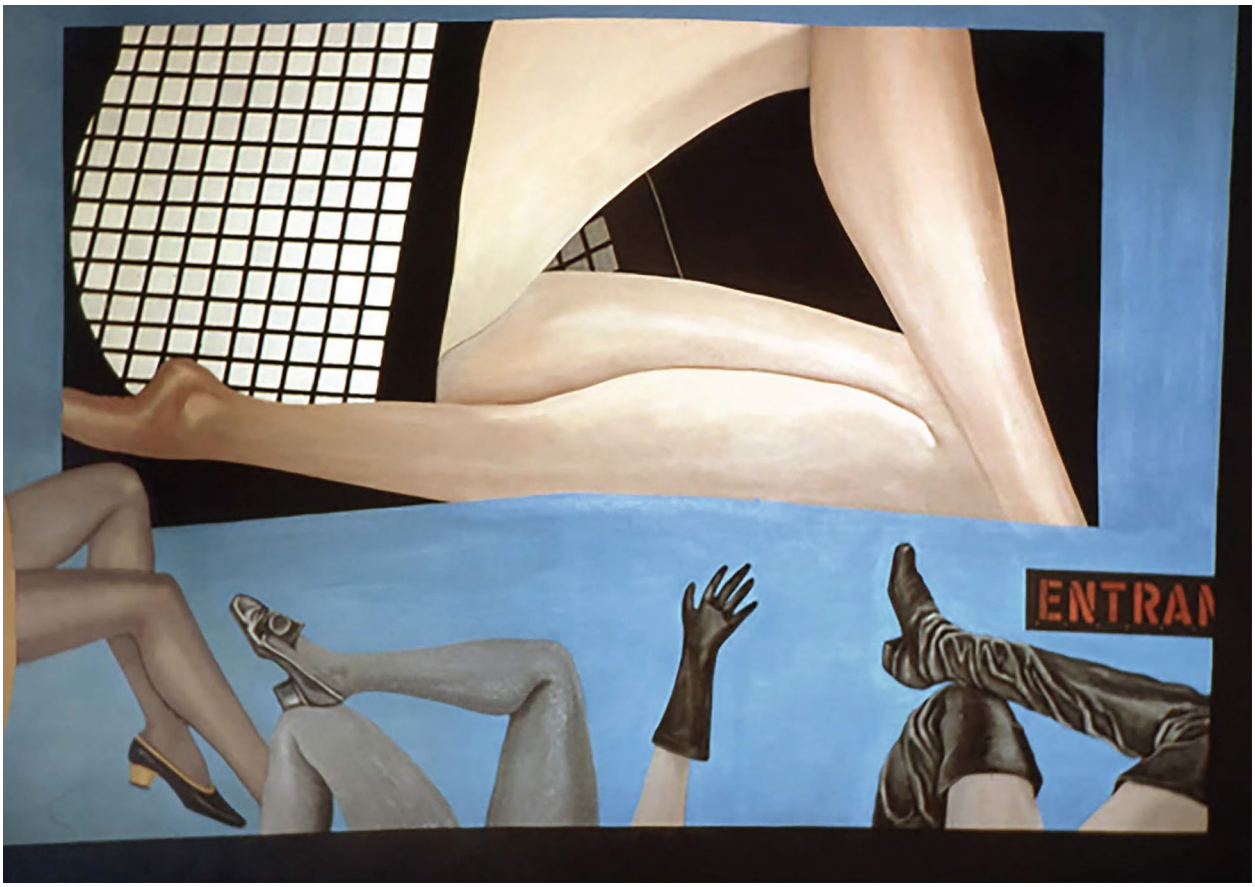

FIGURE 2. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 37*, October 1967, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm). Collection of the artist's family (photograph provided by Bruce Casas)

blue-eyed is super aware of it, because he does not fit this image."[4] Jimenez's *The American Dream* (1967–69) and Aguirre's *Instant Male* (1969), both illustrated in Quirarte's book, exemplify these attitudes. These works are comparable to contemporary works by Casas such as *Humanscape 58* (1969), also known as *American Beauty*.

In 2013, Nancy Kelker published a monograph on Casas that richly analyzed his oeuvre based on interviews with the artist that she and others conducted, as well as a myriad of cultural references.[5] Ruben C. Cordova, who also knew the artist personally, focused on studying his most extensive series, the Humanscapes. This was a total of 153 acrylic paintings, mostly seventy-two by ninety-six inches, with their picture space structured as a movie theater, with a wide-angle screen in the top half and the audience area in the bottom half. Using this split structure, Casas explored multiple subjects for twenty-four years. Upon the artist's death in 2014, Cordova curated the Humanscapes into four chronologically arranged themes and organized four exhibitions in 2015, each with one theme.[6] In 2011, Cordova had also published an important article on the first part of the Humanscape series, in which he first drew upon the stylistic and thematic similarities with British and American Pop artists and then analyzed each Humanscape painted from 1965 to 1967, supported by artist statements and interviews.[7] In 2015, Cordova published a second article where he focused on the Humanscapes from 1968 to 1977, arranging them into "a virtual exhibition," divided into eight

4. Jimenez, quoted in Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists*, 120.

5. Nancy Kelker, *Mel Casas, Artist as Cultural Adjuster* (self-pub., CreateSpace, 2013). See also Nancy Kelker, "Mel Casas: Redefining America," in *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jennifer A. Gonzalez, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon A. Noriega, and Terezita Romo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 183–93.

6. "San Antonio Celebrates Mel Casas with a Series of Citywide Tribute Exhibitions Honoring the Late Artist," artist's website, www.melcasas.com/mel-casas-c1h79.

7. Ruben C. Cordova, "The Cinematic Genesis of the Mel Casas Humanscape, 1965–1970," *Aztlán* 36, no. 2 (2011): 51–87.

FIGURE 3. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 38*, November 1967, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm). Collection of McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Gift of Harriett and Ricardo Romo, 2019.50 (photograph provided by Bruce Casas)

themes, each with three works. This overview discussed Casas's overtly political paintings and their varied themes.[8] Additionally, in 2009, Cordova published a solidly documented book about the Chicano group Con Safo, characterizing Casas as the leading member from 1971 through 1973, the years roughly overlapping the period when Casas painted politicized Chicano themes (1970–75).[9] In 1996 Paul Karlstrom interviewed Casas for the Archives of American Art and Smithsonian Institution.[10] Karlstrom's interviews left a solid record of statements and recollections that reveal Casas's views.

Kelker and Cordova discuss the early Humanscapes in two contexts. One is the sexual revolution; that is, the period during the sixties in which attitudes toward sexual behavior became more tolerant and liberal.[11] The other concerns Casas's ideas about the mesmerizing effects of the cinematic experience, which, according to Casas, turned spectators into automatons.[12] Cordova repeatedly quotes from Marshall McLuhan's *Mechanical Bride*, following a cue in a 2008 conversation with Casas.[13] Kelker cites Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's theories on the culture industry as well as Carl Hovland's theory of the "sleeper effect," arguing that these texts informed Casas's work through his first major in college

8. Ruben C. Cordova, "Getting the Big Picture: Political Themes in the Humanscapes of Mel Casas," in *Born of Resistance: Cara a Cara Encounters with Chicana/o Visual Culture*, ed. Scott L. Baugh and Victor A. Sorell (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 172–89.

9. Ruben C. Cordova, *Con Safo: The Chicano Art Group and the Politics of South Texas* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, 2015).

10. Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Mel Casas, 1996, August 14 and 16," Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

11. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chaps. 2 and 3; Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis." See also David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 10–40; Eric Schaefer, ed., *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

12. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 63; Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 2.

13. Casas's statement is in Ruben C. Cordova, "Conversation with Mel Casas and Ruben Cordova," in Baugh and Sorell, *Born of Resistance*, 162.

FIGURE 4. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 39*, December 1967, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm). Collection of the artist's family (photograph provided by Bruce Casas)

(psychology).[14] Both writers also extensively discuss the blonde and blue-eyed female ideal that Casas attacked.[15]

In 1988, art critic David Hickey attempted a short but overarching commentary on several works by Casas dating from 1967 to the late 1980s.[16] Discussing *Humanscape 35* (1967), Hickey visualized "a cluster of dispossessed, dark-skinned people loitering in the shallow pictorial space before a large symbolic image of the torso of a reclining white woman." Hickey perceived the body of the white woman as a "theatrical 19th century landscape" and the setting of the painting as "Casas's home town, El Paso del Norte, the pass to the north."[17] While Hickey's reading was original, it was underdeveloped and unsupported. In 2011, Cordova dismissed Hickey's argument, stating that it does not incorporate the cinematic critique implied in the split pictorial space of the Humanscape. He added that the foreground characters are blue, not brown, and that they "do not look like immigrants."[18]

Though there is no question that Casas's oeuvre includes remarkable examples that show him to be an insightful cultural critic, his significance as a contemporary American artist and his place in the history of Chicano art remain difficult to determine. His Chicano works are a mere handful, an isolated episode in his vast oeuvre. This, coupled with his uncommitted statements about the Chicano movement ("the Chicano movement, which I tried to help, is just a phase in my life"[19]) put into question the authenticity of his status as a "Chicano artist"—even though he was included in two major exhibitions (*Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* [1990] and *Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* [2002]). Stylistically, his works strongly recall Pop art, but it is unclear whether his Humanscapes were in any way indebted to the New York Pop artists of the sixties.

14. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 2.
15. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 58–60, Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 3.
16. David Hickey, "Mel Casas: Border Lord," *Artspace: Southwestern Contemporary Arts Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1988): 28–31.
17. Hickey, "Mel Casas," 30.
18. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 71.
19. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 41.

Finally, the voyeurism visible in the artist's paintings may be easily interpreted as sexism. This complicates the exploration of his work because it seemingly contradicts his politically progressive attitudes. Especially in his works of the sixties and seventies, Casas frequently integrates voyeuristic and erotic imagery with imagery that critiques the Vietnam War, Nixon-era politics, and the exploitation of minorities.[20]

Scholars have responded to these issues in various ways. Kelker argues that Casas's sexualized women often have agency ("if her nudity renders her available, it is on her own terms").[21] She also contributes information about the artist's support of women art students and colleagues, as well as his involvement with the San Antonio chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the seventies.[22] Cordova's book on Con Safo detailed Casas's seminal role as organizer of exhibitions and writer of foundational texts, cementing the artist's connection with Chicano art in the early seventies.[23] Cordova also sought to establish Casas's position as a Pop artist by creating stylistic and conceptual analogies with each of the New York Pop artists, while Kelker opened her book with a holistic context of Pop art as a zeitgeist for Casas's works.[24] In 2019, the Nasher Museum's exhibition *Pop América: 1965–1975* included *Humanscape 62*. Like two prior international Pop art exhibitions, *Pop América* amplified the movement's geographic and ideological scope, expanding it beyond New York and Great Britain.[25]

My position supports these existing viewpoints, but I seek to reinforce them using different methods. Rather than suggesting Casas's place as a Pop artist by connecting him with New York or with holistic contexts, I explore how he responded to the mass media visual culture that he had access to locally. Disputing the perception that Casas was nothing but sexist, I argue that he represented women as rebellious and reluctant to follow the women of the big screen; thus, he politicized women while he eroticized them. Additionally, I propose that, beyond engaging in an attack on the blond ideal, Casas positioned his painted characters in a white-brown skin dichotomy as early as 1967. This prompts a racialized interpretation, which I contextualize in the late sixties' debates regarding the race of Mexican Americans as Brown. This is a new interpretation. Finally, I further assert Casas's place as a Chicano artist by interpreting three of his 1967 works as responses to the rise of Chicano political organizations in late 1967 in San Antonio, where he lived and worked. I expect that doing this will further our understanding of his Mexican American and Chicano experience and artistic output, while also encouraging additional focused studies of his many remarkable art pieces.

My argument relies heavily on the premise that Casas responded to and interacted with the mass media, defined by John Walker as "photography, the cinema, radio, television, video, advertising, newspapers, magazines, comics, paperbacks and recorded music in the form of disks and tapes."[26] Walker's book *Art in the Age of the Mass Media*, first published in 1983, explores ways in which post-1960 artists responded to and interacted with the mass media, and how the mass media incorporated the fine arts, cross-pollinating "high" and "low" culture. Walker's text has been useful to conceptualize Casas's relationship with the mass media: how, like other artists, he both criticized the mass media and its products—visual culture and consumer culture—while also incorporating them as visual material in his works.

One mass media technology cited by Walker is the newspaper. To create a context that allows for the interpretation of three Humanscape paintings, I rely on articles and advertisements published in local newspapers—that is, sources that were directly available to the artist and recorded events that happened close to him. The newspapers I use are *San Antonio Express*, *San Antonio Light*, and *San Antonio Express and News*. Through a close reading of news articles from these sources, I trace the changing debates about the race and social status of Mexican Americans in San Antonio, as well as the formation of politicized Mexican American groups in San Antonio in 1966 and 1967. I argue that Casas responded to the news and visual culture available in the San Antonio newspapers, and that his response is visible in these paintings.

20. For examples, review the artist's website, www.melcasas.com, under "Collection."

21. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 2.

22. Kelker, chap. 3.

23. Cordova, *Con Safo*, 35–46, 63–71.

24. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 53–56.

25. Esther Gabara, ed., *Pop América: 1965–1975* (Durham, NC: Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2019). The other exhibitions were *The World Goes Pop*, held at the Tate Museum in 2015–16, and *International Pop*, organized by Walker Art Gallery in 2015. Casas was not included in either of those.

26. John A. Walker, *Art in the Age of the Mass Media* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 9.

CASAS AS MEXICAN AMERICAN

Casas was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1929, to Mexican nationals from the state of Chihuahua. His parents had moved to Texas to escape the Mexican Revolution. In El Paso, Casas grew up in an inner-city neighborhood among Syrian, Jewish, Chinese, and Mexican immigrants. As a child, he would frequently cross the border to Ciudad Juárez with his father, where they visited locals who told him stories of the Mexican Revolution.[27] Despite his early knowledge of Mexican culture, history, and Spanish language, upon entering elementary school, Casas realized he needed to learn English and make it his first language.[28] He eventually chose a high school outside of his neighborhood, realizing that this Anglo school offered a better education. Meanwhile, from the age of fourteen he worked part time, on and off, as an iceman for the Pacific Fruit Express company, packing railcars with ice. He also worked at an Italian-owned grocery store and at his father's small business, a Swedish massage parlor. Immediately upon graduating from El Paso High School in 1949, he went to work full time for Pacific Fruit in the same unskilled job he had previously.[29] After eighteen months, he was drafted to serve in the Korean conflict. He suffered shrapnel wounds from an exploding land mine and was honorably discharged for disability with a Purple Heart.[30]

Upon his discharge and now a veteran, Casas took advantage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill of Rights, to pursue studies at Texas Western College in El Paso, entering in 1953 and graduating in 1956. With a year left in the bill's benefits, he decided to pursue an M.F.A. and was admitted to the University of the Americas in Mexico City (formerly called Mexico City College), graduating in 1958. Having obtained an all-level teaching certificate with his bachelor's, he worked for three years at Jefferson High School in El Paso. He was finally hired to teach in the Visual Arts Department at San Antonio College in 1961, where he worked for thirty years, becoming chairperson for the last twelve, including a short stint in 1983 as dean of arts and sciences.[31]

Casas's personal history of social advancement aligns with many other stories of Mexican Americans who became aware at an early age of their social disadvantages and actively fought them by taking available opportunities.[32] Between 1944 and 1949, as battles for school desegregation were being fought in Texas—such as *Delgado vs. Bastrop Independent School District*, which ended legal segregation in schools in 1948—Casas was able to get into a majority Anglo school.[33] His story suggests that attending college would not have been possible had he not been eligible for the GI Bill, which required veterans to have been in active duty for at least ninety days and be honorably discharged.[34]

The artist's adolescent years coincided with the initial period of legal changes that allowed Mexican Americans to improve their status in Texas. However, Mexican Americans carried the baggage of discrimination and prejudices that had been imposed on them since the independence of Texas from Mexico in 1836, and more so, since the annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845. Anthropologist Martha Menchaca discusses how the exclusions and restrictions posed on people of Mexican origin sprang from arguments about race.[35] The Anglo-American inhabitants of Texas deemed Mexicans inferior, which led to attempts to classify them as "free whites," "other race," "colored people," and "Mexican race" at different key moments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[36] Attempts were made to disenfranchise and dispossess Mexican Tejanos residing in Texas at the time of annexation, alleging that they were not Caucasian but mixed race or Indian. ("Indians," including Native Americans, were not granted citizenship even after the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1866). The arguments intended to exclude people of Mexican origin from citizenship rights never prevailed at the federal level. However, at the state and county level, where the federal government had no jurisdiction, they tainted the general perception of them as inferior, legally

27. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 18–21; Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 4.

28. Kelker.

29. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 15–18.

30. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 5.

31. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 21–23 and 26, and Mel Casas, "Vitae," artist's website, www.melcasas.com/vitae.

32. See, for example, Carlos B. Gil, *We Became Mexican American: How Our Immigrant Family Survived to Pursue the American Dream* (self-pub., XLibris, 2012).

33. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 15.

34. Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The G.I. Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 118.

35. Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican American Experience in Texas: Citizenship, Segregation, and the Struggle for Equality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022).

36. Menchaca, *Mexican American Experience*, 49–52, 125–28.

impacting them in the areas of education, residential zoning, and exclusion from services.[37]

How were Casas and his Mexican immigrant family affected by these legal exclusions? Based on the information provided by Menchaca, by the time Casas was born in El Paso in 1929, residential zoning laws segregating neighborhoods for whites from those for nonwhites (including Mexican and Asian people, African Americans, and Jews) had been in effect for sixteen years. In 1920, Texas expanded education to all nonwhite students, but school boards used residential district plans to assign district boundaries to specific neighboring schools. This typically resulted in a triracial school segregation system—a system dating to 1884—with state funding distributed based on taxes collected, which gave minority students lower quality education. Meanwhile, exclusion laws against Jews, Native Americans, Asians, and Mexican Americans had existed since 1885, based on the principle that private businesses had the right to reject service to anyone without having to give a reason.[38]

Casas grew up in a multiethnic neighborhood in southeast downtown El Paso, interacting primarily with nonwhites. He attended neighboring elementary and middle schools and was taught by dedicated Anglo teachers.[39] However, upon leaving these familiar places to escape a low-quality education at an all-Mexican high school for a better education at El Paso High School in a different neighborhood, the differential treatment and the economic gap became evident.[40] At this point, Casas experienced active social exclusions, which resulted from a long history of racial prejudice, long sanctioned by laws and policies of discrimination. His critique of the blond and blue-eyed ideal sprang from these experiences.

Late 1967 marked a period when Casas deepened his critical consciousness about his condition as a Mexican American. I use the term "critical consciousness" echoing Paulo Freire, who stated that "[f]or someone to achieve critical consciousness of his status as an oppressed man requires recognition of his reality as an oppressive reality."[41] Casas's recognition of the oppressive reality of Mexican Americans is visible in the three paintings I analyze here.

THE HUMANSCAPES OF 1967

The three paintings that are the subject of this study were created between October and December 1967 in San Antonio, Texas, where Casas had lived since 1961. These early Humanscapes explored images projected on film and television screens as well as their audiences' reactions to the projected images. For example, in *Humanscape 16* (1966), a movie screen shows an extreme close-up of an alluring blonde woman wearing dark glasses (fig. 5). Under this projected image, several other women who closely resemble each other and the projection either turn from it or contemplate it. It is unclear whether the women are part of an audience or are also projected on the movie screen—as if the audience has lost its own separate identity from the projection in the process of watching the film.[42]

The early Humanscapes express the artist's criticism of the audience's response to film, especially with regards to sexualization and eroticism. An artist statement published for a one-person exhibition held in San Antonio in April 1968 offers clues regarding Casas's own interpretation of these early works:

> In my paintings which I entitled Humanscape, I use the black of the movie house (anonymity) and the persistence of vision (the projected image) to probe into the most compulsive mysteries of its effects. . . . I so divide the picture plane of my painting formats so as to force the spectator into the role of "voyeur" thus acquiring an identity through participation. . . . Indoctrination through the use of the projected image can be salvation, or catastrophe. It is the trend of our time. . . . The fantasy machine projects a world of external calm and interior crisis. The audience looks at a situation and is simultaneously in it and living it. It makes knowledgeable automatons of its willing audience offering them a kaleidoscope of life in techniques of mass coercion-mass seduction. The

37. Menchaca, 75–149.

38. Menchaca.

39. In Texas in the sixties, *Anglo* was used for persons of European origin who spoke English and were not Mexican or Mexican American. For a discussion of the role of Anglos and Mexicans in Texas history and the broader definition of those terms, see David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

40. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 15–18.

41. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 174n49.

42. Kelker analyzes *Humanscape 16* in similar terms, as does Cordova about *Humanscape 17*, from September 1966. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 3; Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 67.

FIGURE 5. Mel Casas, *Humanscape 16*, 1966, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 in. (152.4 x 152.4 cm). Destroyed by Mel Casas on May 5, 1971 (photograph provided by Bruce Casas)

> result is a willing menticide. The cinematic environment isolates and depersonalizes the audience, reducing them to an anxious pause charged with a visual question.[43]

As this text shows, Casas perceives the movie-viewing experience as one where viewers lose their separate identity from the images they see on the screen. He interprets this experience as a form of seduction and judges it to be a form of "mass coercion." His negative opinion about mass media evidenced in this text offers clues to analyze the Humanscapes.

Like *Humanscape 16*, the three 1967 paintings—*Humanscape 37*, *Humanscape 38*, and *Humanscape 39*—maintain the dualistic connection between the projection and the audience. However, a change is evident from previous Humanscapes. In these three paintings, the skin color of the audience is a shade significantly darker than the skin color of the figures that loom over the audience

43. Mel Casas, "Artist's Statement," in *Mel Casas Paintings* (San Antonio, TX: Mexican Art Gallery, Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexican American Cultural Exchange, Consulado General de Mexico, April 1968), n.p.

on the movie screen. In prior Humanscapes, the skin color of the audience had a blue or gray-blue tint—a feature that has been interpreted as representing the reflected blue color of the screen on the figures' skin.[44] Yet in these canvases there is a far more evident contrast between the light skin of the projected figure and the dark skin of the audience: the skin color of the audience is not blue, but brown.

Starting with this observation, I propose that these three paintings evidence the artist's deepened critical consciousness about the social and political problems affecting Mexican Americans historically, but particularly in the mid-1960s. Questions about the "nationality" and the "race" of Mexican Americans began to be discussed in San Antonio exactly in October 1967, when *Humanscape 37* was painted. The seeds of the notion of *la raza* as a mixed race that unified Mexican Americans and constituted a politicized position consolidated in the months that followed.

THE RACE OF MEXICAN AMERICANS IN 1967

It was during October through December 1967, when Casas created these three Humanscapes, that the question regarding the "race" of Mexican Americans intensified, leading to the changed classification of Mexican Americans from a white group to a minority. Evidence of this may be gathered by reviewing the San Antonio local newspapers that the artist had access to.[45]

Discussions about the racial identification of Mexican Americans started when the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) requested schools to report the "nationality" of all students and staff to the Office of Education. On October 13, *San Antonio Express* reported that the "HEW Nationality Guidelines" were changing:

> The nationality of Mexican American students and teachers in San Antonio schools will be listed this year as "Other" instead of "White" on enrollment records required by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. . . . Forms issued to school systems by HEW have three nationality columns—"White," "Negro" and "Other." But this year the "Other" column heading has an asterisk which explains
>
> "Other"—Should include any racial or national origin group for which separate schools have in the past been maintained or which are recognized as significant "minority groups" in the community such as Indian-American, Oriental, Eskimo, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Latin, Cuban, etc.[46]

The article goes on to explain that the new guidelines have drawn criticism from reputed Mexican Americans, who have complained that the new classification was "'ridiculous' and contrary to all legal definitions that classify Americans of Mexican descent as "White."[47]

An article published in *San Antonio Express and News* discussed how these questions had come about. The now-established minority status of African Americans had brought attention to the suffering of other minorities. Texas Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez, for example, stated: "And if the Negro suffers, I share that suffering, because the same affliction cast on the Negro is cast on me. . . . For all of us are in the same society."[48] Yet the implication that both African Americans and Mexican Americans were to be equally treated as minorities immediately led to complaints that the government was being racist toward Mexican Americans. Albert Peña, for example, complained that "Unfortunately, in this racist-oriented nation, people have to be classified. It would be simpler if we were classified as good Americans."[49] Another agency that rejected the classification was the Federation for the Advancement of the Mexican American (FAMA), which presented a resolution attacking HEW's new classification of Mexican Americans as Other by stating that the classification was "not feasible, prudent . . . nor sensible" and "racist . . . guilty of provoking unrest among the Mexican American citizenry."[50]

The new classification caused such unrest that it had to be suspended. An article in *San Antonio Express and News* dated October 21 announced that Representative Gonzalez had received a telegram from the Office of Education stating that the forms where Mexican Americans were

44. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 71.

45. Regarding the debates during this period about the whiteness of Mexican Americans, see Laura Gómez, *Inventing Latinos: A New Story of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2020), 99–132.

46. "HEW Nationality Guidelines Change," *San Antonio Express*, October 13, 1967. All cited articles from *San Antonio Express*, *San Antonio Express and News*, and *San Antonio Light* can be obtained as digital facsimiles through the online database *Newspaper Archive* (https://newspaperarchive.com).

47. "HEW Nationality Guidelines Change."

48. "Gonzalez Praises Negro Progress," *San Antonio Express and News*, October 7, 1967.

49. "Lunch Program Lack Rapped," *San Antonio Light*, October 14, 1967.

50. "FAMA Raps Race Listing," *San Antonio Light*, October 15, 1967.

being asked to be classified as Other instead of white would be impounded.[51]

Just ten days after the confusing classifications were being officially rescinded by the US government, we find an early (perhaps the first) mention of a group called "La Raza Unida" (The United Race) in *San Antonio Express*, in relation to dissident Mexican American groups that had not been invited to the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs—a government-sanctioned event. These dissident groups had now banded together in a committee of their own and their group would be called La Raza Unida.[52] Thus, the notion of Mexican Americans as a "race" had been planted; when taken from the hands of the government, it acquired a dissident, politicized meaning.

Meanwhile, animated commentators offered a variety of opinions regarding the situation of the race of Mexican Americans, indicating that the topic had become socially controversial. In letters to the editor published in November, a certain Frank J. Gonzalez made an argument about the difference between race and ethnicity, implying that Mexican Americans were an ethnicity and not a race. He questioned whether "the Caucasian should expropriate the term white for himself without regard to the fact that the ethnic group might belong to it also."[53] Along the same lines, a certain Jake Rodriguez rejected the notion of a "Mexican race" and attacked a certain Mr. Guzman for

> laboring under the widespread and so popular misconception that there is a "Mexican race." Either he has forgotten or just never realized that his race is Spanish. . . . Since we haven't realized it yet, it is time we learn that "la raza" does not refer to a Mexican race but applies only to the Spanish-speaking people.[54]

By December, we find yet another letter to the editor where a certain Eduardo de Alva supports a mixed race ideal for Mexican Americans. He says:

> Mexico classifies his nationals as: Race—Mixta (mixed), and in my American citizenship certificate is written, Race: Mexican. . . . There is nothing to be ashamed of being Aztec, Maya, Toltec, or any other Indian Tribe, and it has never been a handicap to me. . . . I am a loyal North American citizen of Indian-Spanish origin. That is: I am Mexican-American by current standards and very much satisfied with that classification.[55]

A sense of pride in the concept of mixed race was emerging. As 1967 ended, La Raza Unida confirmed its presence. On December 6, *San Antonio Light* announced: "There is a lot of talk about that conference of Latin leaders in San Antonio Jan. 6. That is why some of the ramrodders of La Raza Unida have scheduled a confab Dec. 10 at 330 N. Laredo to formulate an agenda."[56] Another article announced that "[t]he restiveness of the chicano leaders is likely to cause a mass descent of political wranglers from the two major parties upon San Antonio when the "Conferencia de la Raza Unida" assembles on Jan. 5–6 at Kennedy High School."[57] It is evident that a consciousness of Mexican Americans taking pride in their nonwhite roots was forming in San Antonio.

HUMANSCAPE 37, OCTOBER 1967

Casas made several meaningful choices in *Humanscape 37* (see fig. 2). On the painting's higher plane, where the movie screen is represented, we see a pair of white female legs displayed in a sexually provocative pose and wearing a miniskirt. On the picture plane closer to the viewer—the area designated for the audience—we see three pairs of legs wearing fashionable boots and shoes, along with one hand wearing a glove. A sign placed at the bottom right reads "entran"—perhaps short for the full word "entrance."

The most intriguing feature of *Humanscape 37* is the skin color assigned to the disembodied extremities. The contrast between the white legs on the screen and the brown and grey legs in the audience was not evident in earlier Humanscapes, but it cannot be missed here. Earlier Humanscapes showed a visual and conceptual framework where the members of the audience blindly

51. "Census Forms Withdrawn: New Papers to Be Used, Gonzalez Says," *San Antonio Express and News*, October 21, 1967.

52. "Grievances Born from Conference," *San Antonio Express*, October 31, 1967.

53. Frank J. Gonzalez, "Racial Identification," *San Antonio Express*, November 16, 1967.

54. Jake Rodriguez, "Lo, the Poor Spaniard," *San Antonio Light*, November 26, 1967.

55. "Race Doesn't Worry Him," *San Antonio Express and News*, December 9, 1967.

56. Frank Trejo, "Federal Lunch Program Discussion Planned," *San Antonio Light,* December 6, 1967.

57. "The Signs Mount," *San Antonio Express and News*, December 17, 1967.

followed the lead of the characters on the screen. In this painting, the brown bodies follow the lead of the white body by wearing similar fashionable items that recall print advertisements from the period.[58]

Print advertisements from this period, especially those featuring women's apparel, often showed disembodied legs and arms drawn in an illustration style, with linear contours and highly contrasting areas of light and shadow. Likewise, the legs and the hand visible in *Humanscape 37* are coarsely modeled, with highly contrasting areas of light and shadow, and the shapes are defined by sharp color contrast. All body parts are disembodied, and the boots, shoes, and glove are diagonally oriented and tapered.

Advertisements of the period were available to the artist through San Antonio local newspapers and would have provided sources for this painting. Tall boots similar to those in *Humanscape 37* are advertised by Katz Shoes in *San Antonio Light* and *San Antonio Express*.[59] Gloves with delicately extended fingers sold by Tuesday's Treasure are advertised in *San Antonio Light*.[60] Low-heel shoes with round and square points resembling those in the painting are repeatedly advertised in both newspapers as sold by various stores and brands: Burts, Joske's of Texas, and Frost Bros.[61] Short skirts and bare legs were also featured in advertisements for Marco's Vogue lingerie, Frost Bros. dresses, Siegel's evening dresses, and Joske's of Texas stockings.[62] In sum, fashion ads were readily available to Casas and may have been sources for this painting.

By reviewing their placement in the cited newspapers, we may infer who the targeted audience was for these advertisements. They appeared in the social pages of the newspapers next to engagement, wedding, and travel announcements. The people listed in the announcements bore both Anglo and Spanish surnames. Upon reviewing the society pages, a pattern emerges where fashionable articles of clothing, shoes, and accessories are advertised on the same pages where Mexican weddings and social events are announced near Anglo social events. The presence of both Spanish and Anglo surnames in the society pages indicates that both groups sought social validation, or social proof, through the same media outlets—a strategy that downplays social differences between them.[63]

Indeed, sociologist and historian David Montejano explains how, beginning in 1950, a successful urban Mexican American middle class rose socially and economically, eventually to gain prominence in social settings like school boards, city councils, and other forms of representation. Their consumer power encouraged Anglo businesses not to tolerate forms of segregation that might disrupt business, and to encourage their integration. Montejano explains:

> In structural terms, the returning veterans, via the GI Bill of Rights and college degrees, formed the base of the expanding middle and skilled working classes among Texas Mexicans. The GI Bill of Rights, the compensation for WWII and Korean service, proved to be a most significant avenue for upward mobility for Mexicans and blacks . . . enrollment in state and private colleges increased substantially. Home ownership by Mexican Americans was facilitated by VA loans in the late forties and early fifties. . . . In San Antonio, the implications of a politically active Mexican American community were recognized by the reform-oriented Anglo businessmen and professionals who formed the Good Government League (GGL). . . . Accordingly, black and Mexican American representatives were regularly recruited to run on GGL-sponsored tickets. It was a means of allowing the minorities to have "visibility and ego input," as one GGLer put it.[64]

A snapshot of this situation becomes evident when reviewing the society pages in the San Antonio newspapers. Next to ads for tall boots from Katz Shoes (fig. 6), for example, we notice an announcement where Miss Dwyer is married to Mr. Bain. Adjacent to that news, we learn that "Miss Guerra Is Honored with Pre-Nuptial Events" and that her marriage to Mr. Alberto

58. In his interpretation of *Humanscape 37*, Cordova notices that disembodied body parts resemble nylon and pantyhose commercials. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 23.

59. Katz Shoes advertisement, *San Antonio Light*, July 16, 1967; Katz Shoes advertisement, *San Antonio Express*, September 5, 1967.

60. Tuesday's Treasure advertisements, *San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1967 and November 13, 1967.

61. Burts Fashion Shoes advertisement, *San Antonio Light*, October 8, 1967; Joske's of Texas advertisement, *San Antonio Express*, January 11, 1967; Frost Bros. advertisement, *San Antonio Light,* October 22, 1967.

62. Marco's Vogue advertisement, *San Antonio Light*, October 22, 1967; Frost Bros. advertisement, *San Antonio Express and News,* July 8, 1967; Siegel's advertisement, *San Antonio Express and News*, August 27, 1967; Joske's of Texas advertisement, *San Antonio Express,* October 30, 1967.

63. This idea is inferred from Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Collins Business, 2007); Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations* 7, no. 2 (May 1954): 117–40.

64. Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 280–81.

FIGURE 6. Full page with Katz Shoes advertisement and society announcements, *San Antonio Express*, September 5, 1967 (© San Antonio Express-News/ZUMA Press)

Perez is approaching. Details of the upcoming wedding provide a long list of Spanish surnames: Garza, Perales, García, Morales, Trevino, Rodriguez, Chavez, and many others. Likewise, near the advertisement for shoes by Frost Bros. (fig. 7), we find a vacation announcement regarding the "Espinozas on Trip to Monterrey." On the same page, Anglo and Spanish surnames accompanied by photographic portraits mingle in wedding announcements for "Miss Janie Acker Bride of Glenn L. Schuh" and "Perez-Suarez Ceremony at Little Flower." The gloves advertisement by Tuesday's Treasure (fig. 8) is juxtaposed to even more Anglo and Mexican nuptial announcements for the "Valdez, Luna Ceremony" and "Miss Agold Bride of D. J. Akers." An advertisement for stockings by Joske's of Texas displaying bare legs appears on the same page as the wedding announcement for Rosalinda Montemayor, the engagement announcement of Miss Tommie Cosme, and many others (fig. 9). The advertisements evidence a target audience who made efforts to symbolically demonstrate social status and mobility.[65]

The representation of disembodied legs and arms in an illustration style akin to the advertisements of the period is very likely to have inspired *Humanscape 37*. However, the harmonious mingling of Anglos and Spanish-surnamed persons that is evident by reviewing the newspapers cannot be found in his painting: it is very clear that the legs visible on the screen belong to a white (and characteristically Anglo) woman, while the legs and arm in the audience area belong to dark-skinned women. By doing this, Casas breaks the illusion of social harmony and points at the subservient imitation of one group to the other group—something he would describe as "mass coercion."[66]

Indeed, reviewing additional news articles that covered the conditions of poor Mexican Americans in relation to Anglos during this period sheds light about the meaning of *Humanscape 37*. A front-page article published in November 1966 in *San Antonio Express* opened with this pessimistic statement:

> A South Texas first grader named Juan has less than half the chance of one named John to earn a high school diploma. . . . The result is a great mass of ill-educated American citizens who speak neither Spanish nor English well and who are practically illiterate in both languages. Their poor education leaves them fit only for the poorest jobs and means that their children will be economically and educationally deprived as they are.[67]

The topic of discriminatory practices against Mexican Americans intensified in the last quarter of 1967. On October 17, *San Antonio Express* recounted statements from a seminar given by US Senator Ralph Yarborough at a local university:

> The senator said that it is a fact that a large percentage of the Mexican-American population lacks an extensive formal education [and] unemployment along the Texas border rates two to three times as high for the state as a whole. . . . "Tuberculosis is twice as common among Mexican-Americans as it is among the Anglos," he said. "The Mexican-American family income is only half that of the average American family." . . . He said because the Mexican-American has been deprived economically, culturally, and socially, the Mexican-American in 1967 still has only half the education of the average Anglo-American.[68]

Poor education and lack of access to adequate resources were to blame for the problems of Mexican Americans. When compared with the articles in the social pages, these news sources add a level of complexity to the issue of their social and economic conditions in San Antonio. While a select group had been able to advance socially and enjoyed better opportunities, most Mexican Americans experienced a pattern of discrimination throughout their lives.

Casas's own life experiences resonated with the social contradictions of Americans of Mexican descent in South Texas. In 1967, the artist was a well-established college educator. He lived in a home located in the predominantly Anglo section of San Antonio, and he was making a name for himself in local art venues.[69] However, he had

65. See also Douglas Monroy, "Our Children Get So Different Here: Film, Fashion, Popular Culture, and the Process of Cultural Syncretization in Mexican Los Angeles, 1900–35," Aztlán 19, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 79–108.

66. Casas, "Artist's Statement," in *Mel Casas Paintings*, n.p.

67. Ernest Morgan, "Teaching the Latin Child," *San Antonio Express*, November 7, 1966.

68. "Senator Praises Seminar," *San Antonio Express*, October 17, 1967.

69. In 1968, his "local residence" is given as: "702 Inspiration Drive, San Antonio, Texas" in the biographic information section published in Casas, "Artist's Statement." This address on Inspiration Drive was in the northwest side of San Antonio, in an area of the city primarily inhabited by Anglos. For a discussion of San Antonio neighborhoods and the ethnic groups that inhabited each in 1966, see David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966–1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 17. In 1967, Casas participated in multiple regional exhibitions every year and had received one award. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 37.

FIGURE 7. Full page with Frost Bros. advertisement and society announcements, *San Antonio Light*, October 22, 1967 (© San Antonio Express-News/ZUMA Press)

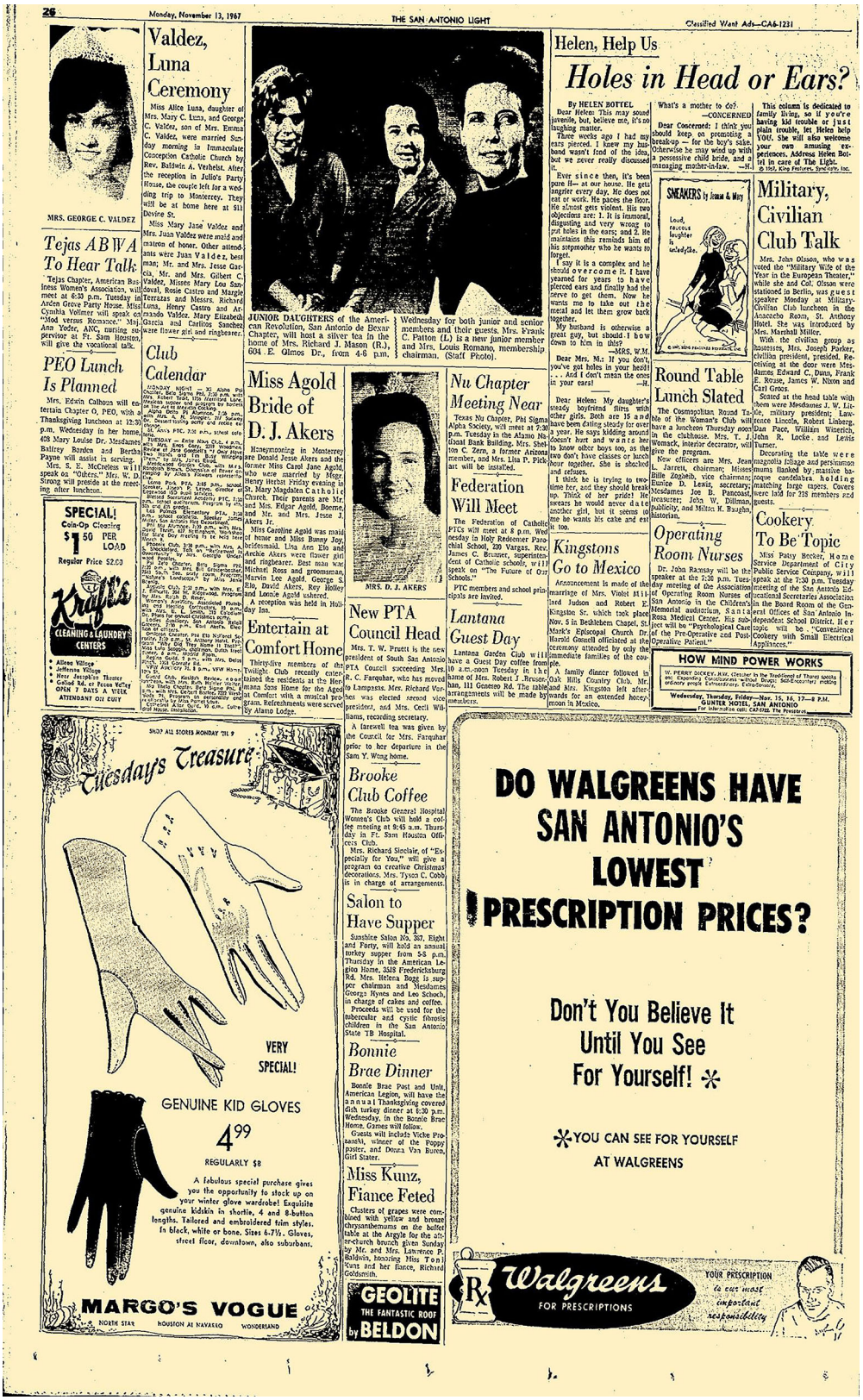

FIGURE 8. Full page with Tuesday's Treasure advertisement and society announcements, *San Antonio Light*, November 13, 1967 (© San Antonio Express-News/ZUMA Press)

FIGURE 9. Full page with Joske's of Texas advertisement and society announcements, *San Antonio Light*, October 30, 1967 (© San Antonio Light/ZUMA Press)

felt his Mexican background to be a burden before. Growing up in El Paso in a proudly Mexican and Spanish-speaking family, he nevertheless chose a predominantly Anglo high school rather than a predominantly Mexican American one to seek better educational opportunities.[70] Yet, according to his own statement, he was made to feel unwelcome at his new school:

> Anyway, when it came time to go to high school, tremendous change happened. I wanted to go to a particular high school at that time, and that was El Paso High School. The reason I wanted to go there, I felt I would get a better education. I wasn't wrong. . . . I didn't even count on one thing—I did manage to go there—was that I was out of pocket. So I was shunned away from. I was a pariah—or something different. And I spoke with a heavy accent, so. . . . And so I really didn't have any friends, because they stuck to themselves. Realizing that, I stayed away from everybody basically, and I just fumbled through high school. And I graduated with gentleman's C's because I didn't drop out. In some ways I did because I could have been a straight-A student. But the environment wasn't there for me. . . . Anyway, that's important because, see, that in a sense affects how you react, and I reacted negatively up to a point. Meaning "No, I will not drop out."[71]

The high school experience left Casas bitterly marked and aware that he was perceived as different and as inferior. He may also have experienced discrimination when applying to graduate school under the GI Bill as a veteran. He applied to several graduate programs in the United States, but none replied, and eventually he moved to Mexico City to attend the University of the Americas.[72] His ambition, dedication, and talent eventually prevailed over the difficulties he experienced, but the memory of his challenges must have revived as the struggles of Mexican Americans started gaining attention in the late sixties.

With all this in mind, let us now return to *Humanscape 37*, where the fashionably attired grey and brown legs follow the lead of the fashionably attired white legs. We know that Casas used the structure of the Humanscapes as a springboard for social criticism where he addressed the mesmerizing psychological effect that film and television elicited in audiences. At this juncture, during open discussions of the social conditions of Mexican Americans and the forging of a new identity based on a shared mixed race, the artist's criticism of the ills of mass media may have shifted toward a more specific criticism of the contradictory experiences of Mexican Americans. In this interpretation, the partial word *entran* ("they enter") may stand for the idea of entering a higher social status by virtue of wearing the same fashionable items: the darker legs seek to enter or access the higher status of the white legs.[73] Whereas some Mexican Americans, including Casas himself, had advanced socially and economically, entering a social milieu comparable to that of Anglos, the vast majority of *la raza* was left behind.

The question may be asked about why Casas chose women, or rather sexualized women's body fragments, to articulate his critique of the social disparities between Mexican Americans and Anglos, or more generally, between dark-skinned people and white people. What if Casas was simply enticed by the scantily clad legs and provocative poses rather than intending a social critique? When asked about voyeurism in his paintings many years later, Casas stated: "[w]hen it comes to sexual intent, sometimes I'm the guilty party."[74] He was not immune to the seduction of the screen, yet his scopophilia did not preclude his critical understanding of how the dominant culture used cinematic pleasure to entice audiences—in his own words, how it induced "a willing menticide."[75] (In this sense, his critique of cinema is very different from that of Laura Mulvey, who equates the male gaze with male power over the gazed-upon woman.[76]) Casas equates the cinema with "mass coercion" articulated through "mass seduction"—a seduction that induces (or coerces) imitative behavior through identification with the image on the screen—in his own words, "indoctrination through the use of the projected image."[77] The woman on the screen imparts consumerist seduction to her imitators in the audience area, but this situation acquires an

70. Karlstrom, 16.

71. Karlstrom, 15–16.

72. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 4.

73. Cordova proposes another reading of the word *entran*. He states that this is a partial word for "entrance," signifying "an opening that one can enter or something that captivates and puts into a trance." Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 72. He suggests that this word leads viewers to contemplate the disembodied limbs as an invitation to sexual acts, while also alluding to the mesmerizing power of sexualized images in cinema.

74. Cordova, "Conversation," 163.

75. Casas, "Artist's Statement."

76. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

77. The quotes in this paragraph come from Casas, "Artist's Statement."

added meaning because the woman on the screen is white, whereas the women in the audience are Brown or dark. "Mass seduction" becomes racialized. The brown legs wear fashionable items to fit in, to enter the idealized realm of the white legs and of the products advertised. Casas is making a sardonic commentary about those who fell for the trap of "mass seduction" to behave like Anglos.

HUMANSCAPE 38, NOVEMBER 1967

Humanscape 38 shows the usual dichotomy of the screen above and the audience area below (see fig. 3). On the screen, we see an extreme close-up shot of a white and blonde, blue-eyed woman. In the audience area, several women with dark hair and skin face toward the viewer and away from the screen. Their hair appears to be blowing in the wind, in disarray. We look at them from a low angle, making their stance appear heroic and even defiant. A sign on the lower left reads "emerg"—an almost complete fragment of the word *emerge*. The facial expressions and liberated hair of the females in the audience recalls excitement, sensuality, and elation.

The reference to the blonde and blue-eyed close-up of the figure on the screen is likely to be Barbie, the doll. From interviews, we know that Casas held a grudge against this popular toy and all its social connotations. In the 1996 interview with Karlstrom, Casas referred to an event where he undressed and criticized a Barbie doll. Casas reported: "So I gave a talk about the Barbie-doll culture, and I undressed a little doll for them, too. . . . Barbie dolls are basically sex machines and baby machines . . . if you were lucky and you were blond and blue-eyed, you were even more in, so you were guaranteed for life."[78] This event apparently took place in December 1967—the month following the completion of *Humanscape 38*.[79] Casas must have been brooding over his disapproval of the blonde and blue-eyed doll as he completed the painting.[80]

Yet what is the reference for the energized and defiant women in the audience? Whose emboldened spirit do they represent? I would like to propose that they represent an idealized version of the young social and political rebels of 1967. The year was full of social rebellions and political mobilizations where a youthful counterculture fully revealed itself. These events brought audacious youngsters and adults to the fore, promoting social and political changes as well as sexual liberation. In San Francisco, thousands of hippies congregated in the name of peace and love in the summer of 1967, taking to the streets with music and sit-ins, and these events were often discussed and addressed in the local newspapers.[81] The youth also joined forces in antiwar mobilizations against the Vietnam War. In April 1967, massive demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands took place in New York and in San Francisco. On October 16, a day of widespread protests took place in thirty cities across the nation. This was followed on October 21–23 by the March on the Pentagon. One hundred thousand protesters congregated at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, and thirty-five thousand went on to the Pentagon to engage in acts of civil disobedience.[82] These political demonstrations and many more were prominently featured and illustrated with photographs in the San Antonio newspapers.[83]

While not epicenters of protest, San Antonio and Austin nevertheless did have their share of youth counterculture and antiwar political protest. We learn that on October 17, "Two S.A. [San Antonio] Protestors Face Army or Jail" and that "S.A. Students Join in Protest."[84] These protests, like many others in the country, consisted of burning draft cards, sending them back to military offices, or giving them to priests. Both *San Antonio Light*

78. Karlstrom, "Oral History," 37. Casas spoke when he was selected as Artist of the Year by the San Antonio Arts League but was stripped of his award a few days later because of the content of the acceptance speech.

79. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 58.

80. Contemporary sources evidence the ascendancy of Barbie in the sixties. A Barbie advertisement showing the Twist 'n Turn doll with light hair and long legs was published in *San Antonio Light*, November 5, 1967.

81. Claude Burgett, "Hippies Prepare Summer of Love," *San Antonio Express and News*, April 30, 1967; Samuel Davenport, "Make Love Not War," *San Antonio Light*, May 6, 1967; Mavis Bryant, "Hard Rock," *San Antonio Express and News*, August 5, 1967; Bill Slocum, "People in Cages No Tourist Attraction," *San Antonio Light*, August 6, 1967; "Hippies Hold Three Day Wake for Movement," *San Antonio Express and News*, October 7, 1967; Patricia Chapman, "Hippie Talk from Acid to Zap," *San Antonio Light*, November 5, 1967.

82. For a detailed analysis of the antiwar protests, see Klaus Fischer, *America in White, Black, and Gray: The Stormy 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 170–211.

83. See "Tentative Pact for Protest Made," *San Antonio Express and News,* October 15, 1967; "Thousands Protest the Viet War," *San Antonio Express*, October 17, 1967; "Draft Protest Mob Routed by Police," *San Antonio Light*, October 17, 1967; "Mob Protests Draft" and "Baez in the West," *San Antonio Light*, October 17, 1967; "America's Gratitude . . . and a Hostile World" *San Antonio Light*, October 22, 1967; "Thousands Protest around the World," *San Antonio Express*, October 22, 1967.

84. "Two S.A. Protestors Face Army or Jail," *San Antonio Light*, October 17, 1967; "S.A. Students Join in Protest," *San Antonio Light*, October 17, 1967.

and *San Antonio Express* described antiwar rallies in Austin.[85] In the capital rally article, the accompanying photograph shows hundreds of young people sitting down on the grounds of the state capitol, listening to a speech by Prof. Charles E. Caims protesting the Vietnam War. The article cites a Dr. Larry Caroline who spoke to the press demanding "a revolution" that should follow the example of "the black people."[86] These sources evidence the local climate of protest. Regarding hippie culture, we learn that on October 22, a "love-in" was held at Brackenridge Park in San Antonio and that it was a great tourist attraction. The article describes how "beautiful people . . . spread blankets on the grass, munched cucumbers and spoke of 'The War,' religion, and what and who 'beautiful people' really are."[87] The accompanying photo shows a long-haired female surrounded by other youths sitting in small groups, celebrating love.

In *Humanscape 38*, the young women facing away from the screen have their hair in disarray. The question of the long hair of the counterculture youth often caught the attention of the press in the conservative San Antonio newspapers. Though hippie hair usually received mocking commentary, the fact that long hair in disarray was perceived as a visual mark of liberated and rebellious youth culture is significant. For example, on the same day that the local love-in took place, a humorous full-page *San Antonio Light* article titled "A Hippie Haircut Is a Rare Happening" described hippie girls as "those girls with the long, stringy hair."[88] A fully illustrated article published in *Time* magazine in July 1967 included photographs of females with long flowing hair in an ecstatic attitude, not unlike the women in *Humanscape 38*.[89] In this context, the flowing hair of the women in the audience of *Humanscape 38*, their elated expressions and sustained gaze, as well as the almost complete word "emerge" may all be interpreted as signifiers of youthful social rebellion, sexual liberation, and political radicalism that have a grounding in the events of the period.

Another significant feature of *Humanscape 38* is the skin and hair color of the audience figures. Both are a uniform brown. With this observation, I believe that the women in the audience may constitute a triple-layered signifier: the social and sexual rebellion of the hippies, the political rebellion of the anti–Vietnam War protesters, and the increased consciousness of the new possibilities for social change that Mexican American organizations were demanding in late 1967. Casas explained that Humanscapes are "visual conundrums"; that is, complex images with multiple meanings.[90] It is thus not surprising that the women in the audience may communicate a collapsed and complex signifier of heroic and liberated rebellion—yet one that can be interpreted in a plurality of contexts.

Several important events affecting Mexican Americans took place in late October 1967, the month prior to the completion of this painting, and Casas must certainly have been aware through local news. The most salient event was the conference and cabinet-level meeting in El Paso, where one thousand representatives from various agencies were invited to communicate the need for social change regarding the situation of Mexican Americans. On October 6, *San Antonio Express* announced that "arrangements are moving ahead for a meeting of 1,000 officials, civic professionals, and business leaders in El Paso Oct. 26, 27, and 28, to work out plans for greater opportunities for this country's Mexican-Americans. . . . Such topics as employment, poverty, housing, migration, and school facilities are among those to be discussed at the conference."[91] This conference was particularly important because it was attended by then-president Lyndon B. Johnson, vice-president Hubert Humphrey, and four cabinet members.[92] The Mexican American conference created increased expectations that the claims of Mexican

85. "Revolution Asked at Austin March," *San Antonio Express and News*, October 22, 1967; "Capital Rally: Austin Sees 800 March," *San Antonio Light*, October 22, 1967.

86. "Capital Rally."

87. Barry Browne, "S.A. 'Love-In' Big Tourist Attraction." *San Antonio Light*, October 22, 1967.

88. Herbert Kupferberg, "A Hippie Haircut Is a Rare Happening," *San Antonio Light*, October 22, 1967.

89. "The Hippies: Philosophy of a Subculture," *Time* 90, no. 1 (July 7, 1967): 18–22.

90. Cordova is quoting Mel Casas, "Human Scapes," *Mel Casas Humanscapes*, exh. cat. (Houston: Contemporary Art Museum, 1976), 1. Cordova, "Conversation," 173.

91. "Mexican American Conference Slated," *San Antonio Express*, October 6, 1967. See also "Texans to Testify at Ethnic Hearings," *San Antonio Express*, October 19, 1967.

92. Johnson and Humphrey attended as part of a visit to Texas that they made on the ceremony of the repatriation of the Rio Grande territory known as "El Chamizal" to Mexico. Gladys Gregory and Sheldon B. Liss, "Chamizal Dispute," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State History Association, 1976, updated September 5, 2022, by Alana de Hinojosa, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/chamizal-dispute.

Americans might be heard at the national level and that solutions might be set in motion.[93]

However, more combative personalities and groups responded to the upcoming conference with vigorous demands. The extremely outspoken Bexar County Commissioner Albert Peña attended the conference armed with a list of eight resolutions, among which two were most striking:

> That steps be taken to abolish alleged discriminatory practices in hiring and promotions in federal installations by investing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of powers such as the issuance of orders to cease and desist. . . . That a "Marshall Plan" be instituted to rescue 100,000 Mexican-Americans in San Antonio from poverty, substandard slums and unemployment through massive on the job training and financial assistance to undertake higher education in the case of low-income families.[94]

The most radical group to attend the conference did so without being invited. According to an article in *San Antonio Express*, the newly formed Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) intended to picket the cabinet meeting.[95] The article also noted that MAYO had begun "a national communications network among the Spanish-speaking with an information center in Los Angeles, Calif. . . . [that] attracted some 1000 members representing seven states and among the purposes behind this new group were to expand the concept of 'la raza' (the race) in relations to other groups."[96] Additionally, two identical photos published in two San Antonio newspapers on October 28 reveal the combative attitude shown by other groups at the conference. The photos show a protest by "A group of Mexican-Americans who identified themselves only as 'some poor people from Laredo.'" The photographs show protesters carrying handwritten signs with the following messages: "Conferencia de Títeres! [Conference of Puppets!]: Laredo Wants Justice," "Demonstrate Laredo We Revolt," "Laredo Poorest City in the Nation," "No queremos títeres para [we do not want puppets for]," and other words that are unfortunately illegible.[97] The militant and insubordinate tone of these Laredo protesters and of MAYO's and Peña's statements was unprecedented, and it imbued a new combative approach to the fights of Mexican Americans—one which led to the rise of the Chicano movement in Texas the following year.

Returning to *Humanscape 38*, we see now that the rebellious gazes and liberated, free-flowing hair of the women in the audience is structured as a form of rejection against the blonde and blue-eyed woman on the screen. This is because she embodies the dominant standard of beauty, which was perpetuated by the Barbie doll and by the Hollywood divas of the period.[98] Meanwhile, the Brown women in the audience "emerge," like the most radical Mexican American youth groups.[99] The Brown women turn their backs on the white, blonde beauty, proclaiming their independence from her. By late October, the concept of *la raza* was becoming increasingly prominent and positive for Mexican Americans. In this context, this painting acquires a political meaning: one in which youth and race become a plural signifier of heroic Brown defiance against white oppression.

HUMANSCAPE 39, DECEMBER 1967

Humanscape 39 shows a fair-skinned woman resting against a leopard skin background (see fig. 4). On her back, near her shoulder, we see a "USDA Choice" shield. In the audience are several women with brown hair and barely

93. President Johnson's presence at the conference was of utmost importance as it represented his acknowledgement of Mexican Americans' claims, following Texas Governor John Connally's public refusal to listen to the marching Rio Grande farmworkers in 1966. Julie Leininger Pycior, "From Hope to Frustration: Mexican Americans and Lyndon Johnson in 1967," *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993): 469–94.

94. "Pena Group Set to Offer Eight Resolutions," *San Antonio Express*, October 27, 1967.

95. "MAYO to Picket Cabinet Meeting," *San Antonio Express*, October 26, 1967. For the history of MAYO, see Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers*; Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995). See also James B. Barrera, "The 1968 Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout: Chicano Student Activism in a South Texas Community," Aztlán 29, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 93–123.

96. "MAYO to Picket."

97. "A Group of Mexican-Americans," *San Antonio Light*, October 28, 1967; "Protest," *San Antonio Express and News*, October 28, 1967.

98. Kelker discusses how the "blonde goddess" ideal was deeply rooted in the fashionable Hollywood actresses of the sixties and before. See Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 3. See also Jessica Hope Jordan, *The Sex Goddess in American Film: Jean Harlow, Mae West, Lana Turner, and Jane Mansfield* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2000).

99. Cordova proposes that "emerge" could instead be a partial word for "emergency exit," in reference to the ubiquitous exit signs in public venues. He then analyzes the word "emerge" as "an emblem of social rebellion and sexual liberation. The long, flowing hair—in conjunction with 'emerge'—serves to signal 'a coming out.'" To support his argument, he cites Casas's words and concludes that "in this painting, their long, billowing heads of hair serve as banners of defiance and independence." Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 67, 74.

visible skin—when visible, it is grayish brown. The three women in the middle look toward the screen. The women to the left look away from the screen and toward the viewer. A third woman motions toward the right of the painting. She wears a red coat with a raised collar and her entire face is covered by hair. She follows the direction of an arrow sign that reads the half word "ladie" with a half letter *s*.

The mood of the painting is grim. The sensual white woman on the screen appears completely self-absorbed and indifferent to her surroundings. The three central women in the audience seem mesmerized by the woman on the screen. The two women on the left have half of their faces and one eye covered by hair, perhaps imitating the woman on the screen, whose face and eye are also partially hidden. The woman on the right appears resentful or upset. While her shoulders are humped and her head is slightly bent down, giving the impression of bitter resignation, her red coat makes her stand out and she faces forward, as if following the arrow sign.

This painting by Casas has been variously interpreted to be about women's desire for their own sexual liberation, about the representation of women in the media as sexually desirable, and about the psychological contradictions suffered by women who become dependent on the beauty ideals promoted by the media. Cordova suggests that Casas saw women as burdened by the mass media ideals of beauty and sexual liberation that they could not achieve.[100] Kelker brings attention to the various reactions of the women in the audience toward the sultry woman on the screen, suggesting that Casas imbues some of these women with agency.[101] Still, there is no doubt that the painting offers a plurality of possible interpretations since the imagery is enigmatic and ambiguous. As a conundrum, the painting is in fact contrived to elicit a plurality of interpretations—a double or triple entendre.

In view of this, I would like to propose an additional interpretative layer for *Humanscape 39*, based on the observation that Casas characterizes the women with two skin colors. Because racial identification was increasingly a signifier of social and political position in Texas in late 1967, the painting also acquires a politicized meaning. As I see it, this painting is not only about women and sexuality: it is also about race and politics—specifically, about the struggles of Mexican Americans, who increasingly designated themselves as *la raza*. *Humanscape 39* may be regarded as the artist's response to the politicized tensions that fermented in San Antonio in November and December 1967—tensions that crystalized between the officers who spoke for the federal government and the militant groups that confronted them, both Mexican American. Casas would have become aware of these tensions from the local news.

The conference and cabinet-level meeting attended by then-president Johnson and held in El Paso in late October created great expectations among Mexican American activists and representatives. One month after the conference ended, new officers of Mexican descent were named in key positions to speak on behalf of Mexican Americans before government agencies. *San Antonio Express* reported that a Mexican American had been newly appointed as Director of the Equal Opportunity Project of the Civil Service Committee to represent Mexican Americans' demands regarding job discrimination.[102] Vicente Ximenes, organizer of the October conference, stated that "the speed with which the commission has moved to ensure equal opportunity for Spanish-surnamed Americans in federal employment is indicative of their true commitment and sincerity and deserves commendation."[103] According to another article, Ximenes again stated that "recruitment programs for Mexican-Americans have begun in Agriculture, Health Education and Welfare, and Post Office Departments."[104] Ximenes was also quoted stating that Mexican Americans were "on the move."[105]

Youthful Mexican American militant groups, however, did not so readily accept that the opportunities for minorities were improving. Members of the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations (PASO) and MAYO made vivid accusations of discrimination and disenfranchisement at the local and state levels. Charges of discrimination in the City Public Service Board in San Antonio were rampant. Data requested by the Community Relations Commission showed that out of the 220 Mexican Americans recently hired, 195 hires were for the lowest classification: the position of laborer.[106] In view of

100. Cordova, 74–76.

101. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 3.

102. "New Romero Post Pleases Ximenes," *San Antonio Express*, December 7, 1967.

103. "New Romero Post."

104. "Mexican-American Report Nearly Ready for LBJ," *San Antonio Express*, December 15, 1967.

105. Jim Moss, "Mexican-Americans 'On the Move,' U.S. Aide Says," *San Antonio Express and News*, December 16, 1967.

106. "CPSB 'Bias' Charge under Probe," *San Antonio Express*, December 15, 1967.

this, Mexican American militant groups made aggressive accusations of employment discrimination. In December, Mario Campean of MAYO stated: "We will tolerate this discrimination no longer. We want better homes, better cars and homes on the north side. The gringos want to keep the salaries for themselves but we are here to see that changes will be made."[107]

The greatest challenge for Mexican Americans was their lack of representation in the state government, and the culprit was the voting registration law. The *San Antonio Express* in December reported that citizens who wished to register to vote experienced many hindrances, of which the most detrimental was the requirement to register every single year. PASO "estimate[d] that 600,000 Mexican-Americans of voter age [were] not registered in Texas."[108]

Mexican American militant groups such as PASO and MAYO were outspoken. They showed that federal government officers like Ximenes were at best exaggerating the presumed advancements of Mexican Americans under the Johnson administration, and at worst being gullible. Richard Jasso, a grass-roots activist working with MAYO, published the following accusation ("Gringo Rule") in the *San Antonio Light*:

> It's the Gringo's establishment—it controls all activity in our schools, our jobs, politics, at the local, county, and state levels.
>
> We are forced into unnatural situations in that we live lives which are imposed on us—and which are not of our choosing.
>
> It syphons off our leaders by getting them to compromise the interests of the Mexican-American. The Establishment is overwhelming in its drive to impose its values on the Mexican-American. It represents moneyed interests—neglects the Mexican-American. It exploits the Mexican-American. The Establishment uses law enforcement agencies as instruments to intimidate the Mexican-American. The Mexican-American was not consulted in the imposition of the laws, i.e., the anti-riot law, the draft law.[109]

Soon after the publication of this statement, MAYO declared that they would join other groups at the upcoming conference called "La Raza Unida," to be celebrated on January 6, 1968, at John Kennedy High School in San Antonio.[110]

With this context in mind, and the understanding that Casas cannot have been aloof because he himself was a Mexican American who had experienced discrimination and diminished opportunities, let us now return to *Humanscape 39*. Besides the skin color of the women, three additional signifiers must be examined: the USDA shield, the arrow bearing the half word "Ladie," and the woman with humped shoulders wearing a red coat.

The USDA Choice was a well-known symbol in 1967, publicized in advertisements like one appearing on November 27 for the supermarket Piggly Wiggly, which informed consumers about the quality of the American meat they purchased (fig. 10). In 1941, the US Department of Agriculture had established the mandatory grading of beef according to seven standards: prime, choice, good, commercial, utility, cutter, and canner. In 1965, the standards were revised to determine three grades for ribbed cuts (prime, choice, and standard), leaving all other lesser categories as "commercial."[111] Bearing this in mind, the shield stamped on the woman's body shows that she is of a high grade or category. It places her grade ("Choice") relative to the quality of other unnamed grades—most of which are inferior. More importantly, I would argue that the use of the word "choice" is a play on words—a conundrum—suggesting that this woman is the choice of the United States, since the USDA is a federal government agency.[112]

The second signifier is the arrow sign pointing toward the right. This sign bears a strong resemblance to the One Way traffic sign. It seems like an amalgamation of the two

107. Sam Kindrick, "CPSB Again Accused of Bias by Speakers at CRC Meeting," *San Antonio Express*, December 29, 1967.

108. Nicholas Chriss, "Texas Liberals Hit Registration Law," *San Antonio Express*, December 25, 1967.

109. Richard Jasso, "Gringo Rule," *San Antonio Light*, December 3, 1967. Richard Jasso's role in MAYO is discussed in Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers*, 60.

110. Frank Trejo, "MAYO Plans to Help Group," *San Antonio Light*, December 27, 1967.

111. J. J. Harris, H. R. Cross, and J. W. Savell, "History of Meat Grading in the United States," *Meat Science*, Texas A&M University, 1996, https://meat.tamu.edu/meat-grading-history/.

112. Kelker explains how the USDA shield placed on the white woman's body in this painting has been perceived to signify that the woman is "marked as a cut of meat," and how this reading has led to perceiving Casas as a misogynist who painted objectified women—an interpretation she does not share. Kelker, *Mel Casas*, chap. 3. Cordova suggests that the USDA shield indicates the artist's attack on the blond ideal standard of beauty. He provides further context by connecting it with a 1968 feminist demonstration against Miss America in Atlantic City, where a protester rented a sheep, crowned it "Miss America," and paraded it down the Atlantic City boardwalk. Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 74–75.

FIGURE 10. Advertisement for Piggly Wiggly supermarket, *San Antonio Light*, November 27, 1967 (© San Antonio Light/ZUMA Press)

One Way sign designs that were in use in the sixties (fig. 11).[113] In the painting, the sign reads "ladie" as if it were pointing at the ladies' restroom in a movie theater.[114] Yet I would argue that the resemblance of the sign in the painting to the traffic sign is meaningful because it implies that going in this direction—away from the screen—is the only way to go and that one cannot turn back.

The woman aiming in the direction of the sign bears an enigmatic demeanor. She has dark, long hair in

113. "One-Way Signs: An American History," *Road Traffic Signs*, www.roadtrafficsigns.com/one-way-signs-an-american-history; "One-Way Evolution. One Way Sign over the Years," *Forgotten New York*, September 27, 1999, https://forgotten-ny.com/1999/09/one-way-evolution-one-way-signs-through-the-years/.

114. Regarding the partial word "ladie" in *Humanscape 39*, Cordova states that "it presumably stands for the restroom within the cinema in the painting, it is also meant to address the women who are situated in the foreground of this painting, as well as the women who view the painting." Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 76. He supports his argument by citing Casas's 2008 interviews with him, where the artist stated that "the ladies sign puts pressure on the spectator," alluding to the "state of flux" in the expected behavior of a lady during this period. Casas, "2008. Interviews by author, by telephone and in San Antonio," cited in Cordova, "Cinematic Genesis," 76.

FIGURE 11. One Way signs of the 1960s, "One Way Signs: An American History" (reproduced with permission from RoadTrafficSigns.com)

disarray, which appears flat and lifeless. Her head is lowered, as if she were looking to the floor, and her shoulders are humped. The raised collar of her coat further suggests that she is ashamed or rejecting the situation that she is leaving from. Her demeanor is one of bitter resignation. And yet, the color of her coat is bright red, contrasting with all other colors in the painting and creating a dissonance with the sensuality of the alluring woman on the screen.

Casas must have chosen the color red with a meaningful intent. Red is the color of most revolutionary flags, and especially of the flag of the United Farm Workers Union (fig. 12)—a flag closely associated with the plight of Mexican Americans that the artist would have seen just the year prior, during the Minimum Wage March of 1966.[115] The Minimum Wage March started as a strike, commonly known as "*la causa*," which took place on June 1, 1966, when melon field workers led by California labor organizer Eugene Nelson demanded the rise of the minimum wage to $1.25 an hour and recognition of the union as a bargaining force. The strike led to multiple arrests of Mexican American farmworkers, so eventually the organizers decided to take their case to the state capital. The Minimum Wage March set off on foot for Austin on July Fourth, and press coverage increased as the marchers passed through several Texas cities, eventually arriving on Labor Day.[116]

115. Chad Creech, "Color Meanings in Flags," www.allstarflags.com/facts/color-meanings-in-flags/; P. J. Heather, "Colour Symbolism: Part I," *Folklore* 59, no. 4 (1948): 165–83.

116. Richard Bailey, "Starr County Strike," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State History Association, June 1, 1995, updated June 24, 2015, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/starr-county-strike.

FIGURE 12. United Farm Workers Flag (image in the public domain; photograph obtained from Wikipedia)

Upon passing through San Antonio on August 26 and 27, the march received significant coverage in local newspapers, with photos of marchers being drenched by rain, accompanied by nuns, received by Bexar County politicians, and attending mass at the cathedral.[117] A photo from August 24 shows marchers walking by US Highway 181 carrying two flags, those of the United States and the United Farm Workers, suggesting that the latter flag was closely associated with *la causa*.[118] Casas would have been aware of this most significant symbol—the red flag with a simplified black eagle in the center—which in this context was closely associated with protest. The eagle's wings feature a zigzag pattern, not unlike the hair ends of the woman wearing the red coat in *Humanscape 39*. These added nuances further point at a politicized interpretation influenced by the late 1967 events described above.

In *Humanscape 39*, Casas may be referring to the conflicting reactions of Mexican Americans to the lure of "gringos." In late 1967, while some Mexican American leaders accepted the federal government promises, these fell short when it came to combating discrimination and disfranchisement. The militant Mexican American groups regarded the government's promises with disbelief and resentment, and they put pressure to unite into

117. "March Gains Rain, Support," "Marchers in S.A.," "March Leaders Berate Booing," "Bexar Politicians Greet Valley March Participants," and "Marchers at Cathedral," all published in *San Antonio Express and News*, August 28, 1966.

118. Tom Shelton, "Rio Grande Valley Farm Workers March in 1966: Images from the San Antonio Express and News Collection," *The Top Shelf: A Blog about Special Collections at the UTSA Libraries*, UTSA Libraries Special Collections, September 16, 2013, https://utsalibrariestopshelf.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/rio-grande-valley-farm-workers-march-in-1966-images-from-the-san-antonio-express-news-collection/.

a confederation in the name of *la raza*. In this painting, the sensual white woman on the screen—the "choice" of the United States—lures the dull Brown women in the audience with her promises of beauty and exciting sexuality. Casas shows that some of the Brown women in the audience fall for her allure, fully or partially—not unlike some Mexican Americans who chose to believe and defend the presumed efforts of the federal government to improve the conditions of Mexican Americans. Only the woman to the right, wearing red—the color of revolutionary flags—and bearing a bitter stance, walks away from the seduction and follows the "one way."

CONCLUSION

Painted at the precise moment of the formation of the Chicano movement in San Antonio, the three works that I have analyzed convey Casas's deepening critical consciousness as a Brown, nonwhite Mexican American. This critical consciousness would later find its full articulation in his allusions to "brown vision" in the Brown Paper report of December 1971 and in the painting *Brownies of the Southwest*.[119]

In *Brownies of the Southwest* (*Humanscape 62*), the Humanscape dichotomy of the screen/audience continues, as does the dichotomy of white and brown. Even if called "brownies," the pastries on the big screen represent white culture. (Brownies were being marketed as a sweet snack for wholesome white children as early as 1969, as demonstrated by the original packaging of Little Debbie Fudge Brownies, which featured a blonde and blue-eyed girl with rosy cheeks.)[120] Meanwhile, all the figures in the foreground represent marginalized figures that are Brown: the Native American (a nonperson in American history), a Brownie girl scout (a girl scout of the lowest rank), figures wearing serapes (Mexicans portrayed as stereotyped Indians), the double-headed serpent breastplate (the schizotypal Mexican American), the god Xolotl (an Aztec god associated with many negative traits), and the Frito Bandito (a stereotyped violent Mexican from Frito-Lay advertisements). All these figures are the audience subordinated to the seductively advertised brownies on the screen.[121]

Like *Brownies of the Southwest*, *Humanscape 37*, *Humanscape 38*, and *Humanscape 39* divide the picture plane separating the seductive, white, blonde woman (representative of white culture and dominant mass media) and the Brown, dark women, who react to the white woman with varying attitudes (engagement, elation, bitter rejection) in response to the events that transpired in 1967. As such, the three 1967 paintings are clearly politicized antecedents to the artist's Chicano paintings of the 1970s and constitute early examples of Chicano art.

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119. See Mel Casas and Con Safo, "Brown Paper Report," in Baugh and Sorell, *Born of Resistance*, 168–69.

120. "Little Debbie: The History of America's Sweetheart," LittleDebbie.com, n.d., https://littledebbie.com/291.798/little-debbie-history. See also Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

121. Most interpretations and commentaries on *Brownies of the Southwest* resonate with my reading. However, Cordova describes the painting as an enumeration of stereotypes associated with the word *brownie*. Cordova, "Getting the Big Picture," 178.