



**HABLAMOS JUNTOS together we speak**

Melanie Cervantes and Jesus Barraza

Title of Piece: La Cultura Cura

Photographer of piece: Jesus Barraza

Medium: Digital Print

Dimensions: 20" x 29"

Description: These posters reproduced in editions of 1000 and wheat pasted through out, Mexico by a national collective of street artists to elevate the idea that to emphasize how culture heals and contributes toward wellness.

Website: [www.DignidadRebelde.com](http://www.DignidadRebelde.com)

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*1. Let's get personal. Tell us about your artwork and the importance of Chicana/o artists as role-models. What education and skills are needed for an art career?*

- Our cultural heritage is rich and varied. Our ancestors come from the Yaqui Peoples of the Sonora Desert, Jalisco and Durango (Jesus) and many generations of women come from the area of Dolores, Guanajuato as well as Michoacan (Melanie)
- I was encouraged by or mentored by my journalism teacher Jan Glenn, my professor Velia Garcia, artists Juan Fuentes, Michael Roman and Calixto Roman, Celia Herrera Rodriguez. (Jesus) I was encouraged by or mentored by my professor and artist Celia Herrera Rodriguez (Melanie).
- My education/training included working as a graphic designer at Mision Grafica at the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco, earning a Bachelors Degree in Raza Studies from San Francisco State and currently working on a Masters in Visual Critical Studies and a Masters of Fine Art in Social Practice from California College of the Arts (Jesus) . My education/training include an Associates Degree in Chicana/o Studies, a Bachelors Degree in Ethnic Studies from UC Berkeley and a community college course in screenprinting.
- What were/are your major influences? Our major influences have been out

artist mentors as well as other visionary graphic artists and print makers including Rupert Garcia, Emory Douglas, Ester Hernandez, Malaquias Montoya, Yreina Cervantez, Barbara Carrasco and Los Brothers Hernandez.

- How old were you when you started your artwork? 19 (Jesus) and 24 (Melanie) I knew I was an artist when I saw my art hanging on the walls of people's homes or community centers (Melanie). I knew I was an artist when I saw the impact of my work in my community (Jesus).
- What was the reason you started creating art? I turned to art when I felt. The dramatic experience that made my art have even more meaning to me was.
- **Dignidad Rebelde** is a graphic arts collaboration between Oakland-based artist-activists Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes. We believe that art can be an empowering reflection of community struggles, dreams and visions. Following principles of Xicanisma and Zapatismo, we create work that translates people's stories into art that can be put back into the hands of the communities who inspire it.

We recognize that the history of the majority of people worldwide is a history of colonialism, genocide, and exploitation. Our art is grounded in Third World and indigenous movements that build people's power to transform the conditions of fragmentation, displacement and loss of culture that result from this history. Representing these movements through visual art means connecting struggles through our work and seeking to inspire solidarity among communities of struggle worldwide.

Dignidad Rebelde's graphic art is of the highest quality and versatility – our art is for museums, collectors' exhibitions, community and cultural centers, individual homes, political rallies and more. We are committed to advancing the acceptance of people's art as quality art, and to nurturing a model of art-making grounded in collaboration with community organizations and other networks of artists.

In this spirit of collaboration among artists, we are also members of the [Taller Tupac Amaru](#), [Justseeds Artists' Cooperative](#), and the [Consejo Gráfico](#).

- I would tell young artists to keep making work and find ways work with your community so that we can keep the tradition of arts alive.

Short – one paragraph bio

Melanie Cervantes (Xicana) has never lived far from the California Coast having been born in Harbor City, California and raised in a small city in the South Bay of Los Angeles. Now making her home in the San Francisco Bay Area she creates visual art that is inspired by the people around her and her communities' desire for radical change and social transformation.

In 2007 she co-founded Dignidad Rebelde, a graphic arts collaboration that produces screen prints, political posters and multimedia projects that are grounded in Third World and indigenous movements that build people's power to transform the conditions of fragmentation, displacement and loss of culture that result from histories of colonial-

ism, genocide, and exploitation. Dignidad Rebelde's purpose is to translate the stories of struggle and resistance into artwork that can be put back into the hands of the communities who inspire it.

Melanie has exhibited at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco); National Museum of Mexican Art (Chicago); Mexic-Arte and Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center (Austin, TX); and Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY). Her art is known worldwide reaching Egypt, Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, Slovenia, Palestine, Venezuela, Switzerland, Colombia, India and Guatemala. Her work is in public collections of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, the Latin American Collection of the Green Library at Stanford, and the Library of Congress and the as well as various private collections throughout the U.S.

Melanie currently works full-time as a Senior Program Officer at the Akonadi Foundation which supports movement building organizations working to finally put an end to the structural racism that lies at the heart of social inequity in the United States. She holds a BA in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

Jesus Barraza is an interdisciplinary artist and is pursuing an MFA in Social Practice and a Masters in Visual Critical Studies. He holds a BA in Raza Studies from San Francisco State University. He is a co-founder of Dignidad Rebelde a graphic arts collaboration that produces screen prints, political posters and multimedia projects and a member of JustSeeds Artists Cooperative a decentralized group of political artists based in Canada, the United States and Mexico. From 2003-2010 he was a partner at Tumis design studio where he worked as web developer, graphic designer and project manager.

Barraza has worked closely with numerous community organizations to create prints that visualize struggles for immigration rights, housing, education, and international solidarity. Printmaking has allowed Barraza to produce relevant images that can be put back into the hands of his community and spread throughout the world. He believes that through this work and the work of Dignidad Rebelde, he is playing a role in keeping the history of graphic art activism alive. He proudly continues the tradition of graphic art in the spirit of Jose Gaudalupe Posada, OSPAAAL and Juan R. Fuentes, whose artwork has been part a pivotal part of social movements. Barraza prides himself on his continued connection to his community and his availability as an activist artist who can be relied on for help.

In September of 2014 Barraza led Dignidad Rebelde's mural for the 5x5 Project, Washington DC's largest temporary public art initiative as part of Stephanie Sherman's Near Futures project. In June of 2014 Barraza participated in the exhibit *Chicano Dreams* at the Musée d'Aquitaine in Bordeaux, France. In November 2013 Dignidad Rebelde presented their exhibition *Future Ancestors* at SoleSpace in Oakland and in September 2013 Barraza was invited to participate in the *Embedded in Community: What Is Social Practice?* panel at Leeway Foundation's REVOLVE: An Art for Social Change Symposium.

Barraza has exhibited at Galeria de la Raza (San Francisco); Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (Santa Fe); El Paso Museum of Art (El Paso); de Young Museum (San Francisco); Mexican Fine Arts Center (Chicago); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco); and internationally at the House of Love & Dissent (Rome), Parco Museum (Tokyo), Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juarez (Mexico) and El Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (Bolivia). He was a 2005 artist-in-residence with Juan R. Fuentes at San Francisco's prestigious de Young Museum, and is a recipient of the "Art is a Hammer"

award in 2005 from the Center for the Study of Political Graphics and the “Exemplary Leadership Award” from the SFSU College of Ethnic Studies College in 2010.

2. *Looking at the broader picture, can you help students develop visual literacy of artworks presented, develop their critical thinking, and creativity?*

- Describe your art medium? I use this medium because ....

We made this piece by (process) by integrating photos we shot during our visits to cultural spaces in Ecatepec, Mexico into a collage. The collage was made using digital illustrations created from the photos. During our visit to Ecatepec we learned that each zone of this rather large municipality had adopted a space for collective cultural expression. From basket weaving to murals. While visiting and working in Ecatepec in October of 2008 the three collectives participating in this exchange were given the opportunity to participate in an amazing campaign. The three collectives include the [Taller Tupac Amaru](#) (Jesus and I as well [Favianna](#)), [Yo What Happened to Peace](#) and [Just Seeds Collective](#). There has been an effort to openly declare art and culture as human rights in Ecatepec.

We decided to include photos of the people we met in Ecatepec in the poster in order to give people in Ecatepec a mirror to see themselves. We also used the slogan 'la cultura cura' that is widely popular in the Xicanx community to emphasize how culture heals and contributes toward wellness. The posters will be reproduced in editions of 1000 and will be wheat pasted through out Ecatepec by the Komal Collective (great new allies) a national collective of street artists who engage in political art interventions regularly.

- What is the intent of the work? How is your art a way to tell your story?

We believe that art can be an empowering reflection of community struggles, dreams and visions. Following principles of Xicanisma and Zapatismo, we create work that translates people's stories into art that can be put back into the hands of the communities who inspire it.

- Your artwork creates a dialogue with the student as they relate to and interact with your work. How could a viewer look more closely at the details of your work? How could he/she be more intimately involved with your artwork?

Much of our work deals with contemporary issues that students can explore once they leave the gallery, in this poster they could look up information about Ecatepec and their role in Mexico and migration patterns that pass through their communities. At the same time our work references Chicana/o and learn more about the social issues our work deals with.

- What would you like them to experience and notice? (You might consider hidden clues, seeing something unexpected, connections between facts and feelings, art and life, or how they might be inspired to create their own stories and artworks.)

I would like them to notice people and places, the poster offers a story about the role culture plays in people lives and the purpose this gives them. Culture is then connected to the places people have for this activity, these become important places for communities to create and share what they have made.

- What (unique) skills have your developed as an artist?

We have developed a way of working and collaborating with community groups and organizations to help them include cultural strategies in their work.

- How do you think art impacts our culture?

We recognize that the history of the majority of people worldwide is a history of colonialism, genocide, and exploitation. Our art is grounded in Third World and indigenous movements that build people's power to transform the conditions of fragmentation, displacement and loss of culture that result from this history. Representing these movements through visual art means connecting struggles through our work and seeking to inspire solidarity among communities of struggle worldwide.

Thank you for contributing to this exciting and important journey with us.