I frame my printmaking and writing practice as that of a cultural worker. After starting in 2003 as a lecturer at the University of California, Davis, in 2007 I became an assistant professor in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department, where I assumed leadership of the art curriculum after the retirement of Malaquias Montoya in 2008. Assigned the task of establishing a community-based art center, from 2005 to 2015 I served as founding director of the Taller Arte del Nuevo Amanecer (TANA). In 2009 TANA moved to its current location in Woodland, a largely Chicana/o and Latina/o community ten miles north of UC Davis. I have been deeply committed to teaching and expanding access to the Poster Workshop, a curricular space within the Chicana/o Studies Department that is now held at TANA’s Woodland facility.

Paper is the primary material I utilize in my practice. It is the substrate for poster production and the material that facilitates dialogue within the Poster Workshop. In the workshop, subject formation occurs through a praxis that combines dialogue about critical issues facing the community with strategies to achieve transformation. The Poster Workshop at UC Davis is in its twenty-seventh year, and during its existence several thousand individual poster projects have been produced by students and community members. These posters are now held within the department’s Chicana/o Studies Poster Archive. My review of the archive demonstrates students and community members engaging in a rigorous process of interrogating and creating new identities and subjectivities. In this respect, Chicanx posters demonstrate that Chicanx identity is fluid, in development, and open for creation, a finding that contests the widespread notion that Chicanx identity is a fixed category that is manifested in predictable ways. According
to cultural critic and feminist theorist Rosa Linda Fregoso, “Chicano” is a self-identified category and identity produced through efforts to achieve social justice. She resolves the question of what “Chicano” represents “by de-emphasizing the biological claims to authenticity, yet accentuating its productive quality. In this respect, Chicano refers to a space where subjectivity is produced” (Fregoso 1993, xix). Her analysis is useful in thinking through Chicana/x posters and the Poster Workshop as spaces for subjectivity creation.

I write this essay at a time when postrace and post-Chicano discourse is being adopted and manifested within new scholarship and cultural critique. It is also a time when social media and digital design have become the dominant forms of communication, especially among younger generations of cultural workers. In light of these forces, the Chicana/x poster might seem to be a cultural form that is irrelevant to the contemporary moment. I argue that it is not, and I will share some brief reflections on how the poster (and by extension the Poster Workshop) remains a relevant tool for creating community while facilitating the formation of Chicanx subjectivity. In this context, I honor paper as a meaningful and necessary substrate that facilitates this process.

This essay discusses the methods that I use to teach the Poster Workshop courses at UC Davis and relates those methods to the way Chicana/o art was integrated as a central element of the Chicana/o studies curriculum during formation of the discipline. Utilizing archives at the University of California, Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library, I review the establishment of the Chicano Art Center at UC Berkeley, precursor to the UC Davis community-based arts curriculum, and show how arts curriculum was a core element in the formation of Chicano studies. I ask: if artistic studio/workshop courses had been valued and expanded within Chicana/o studies in its early days, would there be more spaces today for community-based

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and decolonial artistic methodologies within the discipline? Would there be more opportunities for Chicanx artists to serve as faculty within Chicana/o studies, leading the discussion, not as objects of study but as intellectual guides? Lastly, I discuss the development of community-based art curriculum within Chicana/o studies at UC Davis and the methodologies of the Poster Workshop as it is taught today. I argue that the artistic and cultural methods that were effective during the Chicana/o movement remain relevant and should be expanded so that artists are centered within the discipline, not simply as objects of study but as educators and producers of knowledge. Throughout this discussion, I recognize paper as the material that facilitates the historical and contemporary practice of Chicanx poster making, which is one artistic method of many that remain relevant to social justice community-based efforts.

Throughout my time at UC Davis, I have continuously questioned my practice as an educator and administrator for both university and community arts curriculum. I teach a range of courses in my department, but my primary courses are the introductory and advanced Poster Workshops. In interrogating my practice, I question whether the Poster Workshop remains a relevant curricular emphasis within Chicana/o studies. Today, social media is the primary platform and digital media a primary tool used to disseminate content for social justice movements. The majority of students who are currently establishing creative careers, because they were inspired to become social protest image makers, are seeking instruction in the technical aspects of digital graphics programs such as Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop, as well as coding/programming applications. The screen-printed poster is no longer the most effective means for disseminating information and supporting social movements, which were the two primary purposes of poster making when the Chicano studies curriculum was in its most formative stage.

Chicana/o art scholarship has characterized the poster as a relic of the earliest phases of the movement. The seminal exhibition *Just Another Poster*, and its accompanying catalog, framed Chicana/o print production into periods. Terezita Romo outlines three broad phases of Chicana/o poster making: the first is “Seize the Moment: The Chicano Poster, Politics, and Protest, 1965–1972”; next is “Synthesis: The Chicano Poster and Cultural Reclamation, 1972–1982”; and last is “Selling the Vision: The Chicano Poster as Art, 1983–Present.” She further states,

The evolution of the poster began in 1965 with the production of graphic work for the United Farm Workers’ organizing and boycotting efforts, both within and outside the union. During the 1970s, the artistic
Romo thus sees Chicano/o poster making as primarily relevant to the community during the first period, 1965–72. The second period marked a departure from the direct militancy of earlier prints in favor of artistic production that “had as a central goal the formation and affirmation of Chicano cultural identity” (Romo 2001, 100). In an article on the print archive of Self Help Graphics & Art, Colin Gunckel affirms this analysis. Referring to Romo’s second period, he states, “In fact, the first decade of [Self Help’s] existence (1972–82) coincides precisely with Tere Romo’s astute periodization of Chicano silkscreen production and its tendency toward ‘cultural reclamation’” (2011, 159). Within this chronological framework, the third and current phase is that of “fine-art” printmaking, which is aimed at producing a market for Chicana/o art. In this way, the Chicano/o “poster” morphed into the Chicana/o “print.” Whereas the poster engages social movements and community and is not handled as a precious item, the print is fragile/precious, numbered and signed, so that it can be exhibited and sold within artistic environments. Today I continue to teach the Poster Workshop, and I believe its processes and outcomes remain relevant, ultimately challenging this periodization.

While scholars in Chicana/o studies historicize the poster, it is also at the farthest reaches of the periphery within contemporary art discourse. The orientation of mainstream art discourse and practice is to seek validation through the exhibition of artwork in commercial galleries and mainstream art museums. These hegemonic structures frame the poster as didactic propaganda and/or as a product of “design.” I’ve often asked myself, are Chicano posters “art”? Am I teaching “art making”? If hegemonic art structures see the poster as propaganda, and Chicano scholars see the poster as a relic of a movement that currently has no form (in a postmovement era), then what relevance does the poster have to my practice as an artist and faculty member within Chicana/o studies?

The spring 2015 issue of Aztlán produced an important dossier titled “Teaching Chicana/o and Latina/o Art History in the Twenty-First Century.” Alma López’s article, “Artists as Migrant Workers: From Community to University Teaching,” provides a powerful statement about the role of the Chicano artists within both Chicana/o studies departments and art
departments. López states, “We are rarely employed as tenure-track faculty in art departments. In fact, I can’t think of a single tenure-track Chicana artist in a University of California art department.” Furthermore, “It has become commonplace for academic departments, including Chicana/o studies departments, to require those applying for a full-time tenure track position—even if the position is to teach studio art—to have a PhD. In fact, in the last few years all the arts-related teaching jobs in academic departments such as Chicano studies in which I was interested required a PhD” (López 2015, 183). López’s article makes clear that institutional support for established and emerging Chicana artists is in a state of crisis.

In my view, this lack of institutional support is not due to any lack of quality or quantity with respect to artists; rather, the main issue is how artistic methodologies from the Chicanx community have been supported and taught inside the academy. López highlights an important question: how has Chicana/o studies taken ownership of the cultural/artistic methods that emerged out of the movement? How have those practices become part of the curriculum and scholarship that advances the creation of culture? Chicana/o studies departments that teach Chicana/o art, not simply as an object of study but as a method of creation, are extremely rare. I ask: how do we work within neoliberal institutions to effect a shift so that artists can have a place within the discipline, in the classroom/workshop, leading and participating in the dialogue?

The introduction of an art curriculum into the Chicano Studies Program at UC Berkeley is an important example that is also foundational to the history of the Poster Workshop. The Chicano Studies Program (as it was then called) came into being as a result of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strike at Berkeley in 1969. TWLF was a coalition of students seeking to decolonize the university. Toward this end, they sought to establish a set of academic programs and departments to facilitate the broader self-determination efforts that were at the heart of the civil rights struggles of historically marginalized communities in the United States. The TWLF strike began in January 1969 and concluded with a negotiated settlement in April. By the fall of that year the Chicano Studies Program was created and began offering courses within the Department of Ethnic Studies, established under the agreement in response to the TWLF demand for a Third World College.¹

As stated in an early working paper titled “The Conception of a Third World College,” the “goal of the Third World College will be to provide an education of the highest quality while allowing students to
retain their cultural identity, thus enabling them to return to their communities to live and to create an atmosphere conducive to political, social, and economic changes” (TWLF 1969). This ideology underpinned the formation of a Chicano studies that was, in the words of Chela Sandoval, “outlaw studies.” Sandoval states that “Chicano studies can be conceived as outlaw studies. It defies disciplinary categorization. Its aim is to advance the knowledge required to comprehend colonizer and colonized psyches, bodies, and cultures throughout the Americas” (Davalos et al. 2002, 149). Chicano studies was “outlaw” because it created methodologies that produced decolonial and oppositional forms of knowledge, beginning the process of undisciplining the academy to support Chicana/o community self-determination.

By the 1970–71 academic year, Chicano studies at UC Berkeley was offering the courses Chicano Art History (118) and Art Workshop (119). In 1972, Advanced Art Workshop (140) was added, along with courses in creative writing and contemporary Chicano theater. As stated in a 1972 letter, “In the area of Art, Chicano Studies has developed the Chicano [Art] Center, under the direction of Malaquias Montoya. Students learn skills in poster making and mural painting, skills which they in turn make available to the community. Hundreds of posters have been produced which are veritable history of La Causa. Our library is in the process of collecting these. In addition, we have over 1,000 color transparencies of important Chicano Art Work.” The Chicano Art Center was an off-campus insurgent art center located at a site that had previously been the Anna Head School for Girls, at 2538 Channing Way in Berkeley. It was here that Montoya and his students had made posters for the TWLF strike through an occupation of the space in 1969. In 1970 Montoya worked to establish the space as an off-campus studio to facilitate the development of an art curriculum for the Chicano Studies Program. Both Montoya and Luis Valdez taught courses during the 1970–71 academic year at this location, with Valdez leading the Chicano Theater Workshop course. Montoya taught the Art Workshop curriculum until 1974 (Chabran and Montoya 1974).

The formation of the Chicano Studies Program at UC Berkeley was marked by a deep commitment to valuing art practice as an activity central to the discipline. Chicano art practice was a curricular and intellectual engagement aligned with the critique, analysis, and investigation of culture, history, and society. The Art Workshop, as stated in the 1972 syllabus, was “mainly designed to give Chicano students an awareness of art as a medium of culture and of communication.” The Advanced Art Workshop
syllabus from the same year was “designed for advanced students interested in developing their art as a means of social and political communication.” The course offered “mural painting and advanced poster art” as the two media that students would use to engage the community through the development of new “cultural symbols and forms.” From the very formation of art practice within Chicano studies in 1969, professors named the curriculum a “workshop,” not a “studio.” The term “workshop” signaled a praxis based on community engagement and dialogue that were not valued within traditional studio art courses.

The program identified the mural and poster as unique visual forms ideally situated to work toward three goals: to develop new symbols/signs to represent the new ideology and identity of the movement, to communicate those signs/symbols to a broader Chicano/Latino community, and to develop the visual arts as a tangible tool to support social movements. As stated explicitly in its syllabus, the Art Workshop was “designed to show the relationship between artistic creation and community action, as both an educational tool and as a catalyst for social change.” As the mural and poster were accessible visual forms utilized during the emergence of the student movement and labor movement across the United States, these methods became central visual tools to encourage transformation backed by rigorous community engagement and research.

The Chicano Art Center was both a community resource and a classroom for UC Berkeley students. Terezita Romo states that while “the class [Art Workshop] was listed as meeting for three hours twice a week, Montoya conducted it as an open studio from eight in the morning until six in the evening, Monday through Thursday” (2011, 34). At the beginning of the quarter, the Art Workshop and Advanced Art Workshop were structured around demonstrations and instruction, and then “for the rest of the semester the class became a ‘continuous, ongoing print shop’” (55). The insurgent nature of the Chicano Art Center and its community-based oppositional praxis is clearly evident in archival materials that document the space, which I located in an unorganized storage cabinet at the UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library. These materials include slides showing the Chicano Art Center’s environment and some of the posters produced during the early phase of the Art Workshop (figs. 1, 2). The center, as represented in these slides, is a space where a collective of students, or perhaps community members, are actively working on developing screen-print posters. The walls are covered with political graffiti and posters from floor to ceiling, giving a sense of the intensity of the work under way. These
Figure 1. Chicano Art Center, 1969. Image courtesy of Chicano Collection, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Figure 2. Chicano Art Center, 1969. Image courtesy of Chicano Collection, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.
archival materials demonstrate what must have been a powerful dialogue facilitated through the activity of poster making. I imagine discussion, debate, problem solving, and celebration occurring within this space, all facilitated through the collective making of prints.

In 1989, fifteen years after resigning from UC Berkeley, Montoya accepted a teaching position in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at UC Davis. Tasked with leading the community-based art curriculum, Montoya taught courses called Mural Workshop (CHI 171), Poster Workshop (CHI 172), Survey of Chicana/o Art (CHI 70), and Cultural Expression through Silkscreen (CHI 73). In its structure, the curriculum resembled the one instituted in the early days of Chicano studies at UC Berkeley. Montoya’s hiring demonstrated the Davis faculty’s commitment to and valuing of studio/community-based art creation as a key component of the interdisciplinary Chicana/o Studies Department. This complemented the art focus of the Native American Studies Department, where faculty member George Longfish was already teaching art courses while also directing the department’s Gorman Museum.

Since 2003 I have taught the Poster Workshop (CHI 172) twenty-one times. I teach the workshop with limited material requirements, so that students who are on financial aid or come from low-income backgrounds can afford to take a studio course. Students typically create three poster projects in editions of twenty to twenty-five, although the edition size can be significantly larger if there is a need to support a large community campaign. Within the upper-division Poster Workshop, dissemination of the posters to local community organizations or for community events is required. The Poster Workshop is divided into two parts: the first three weeks are dedicated to instruction, and the following seven weeks consist of poster/print production. Before production begins, workshop participants are expected to develop a poster topic that is relevant to the community and to their lives.

Throughout the period that I have directed the Poster Workshop at UC Davis, I have changed the course structure minimally, although I have significantly revised how assignments are framed within the syllabus. Malaquias Montoya’s 1999 Poster Workshop syllabus calls on students to “be responsible for selecting a particular theme, researching it and making an informal presentation to the class before beginning their prints.” This direction is followed by a series of possible themes, including “Middle East, Health Rights, Drugs, Unemployment (workers), Capitalism, Racism, Imperialism, Central American, Props. 187, 209, 227, Women’s Issues,
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I was an enrolled student in this 1999 workshop and recall how important the syllabus and its direction were to my understanding of what I should do in the course. As the faculty member now responsible for leading the Poster Workshop, I outline the process for developing poster topics in the following manner:

The issues addressed in the posters created by workshop participants should engage this idea: that there is a role for all types of work in the collective effort to create self-determination for a community that has been historically denied the structural and individual resources to achieve it. Visual artists, designers, and cultural workers of all types can and should contribute to visualizing the imaginary that is a new, better, and more equitable future. Equity and representation should be at the center of the themes and images put forward by workshop participants. Posters can be broadly defined but also should have a tangible application within community.

I encourage students to engage the broader community through their poster making, but also to see themselves as creating community within the workshop. The community I ask students to create is one where there is no center or periphery; rather, it is a community that is infinitely generous in its boundaries. In this way students are urged to create the workshop as a world where many worlds are possible. I recognize that this is an aspiration and that it requires constant interrogation of privilege. What students share in the workshop is a common commitment to engage in social justice efforts through their contributions to community. The workshop could very easily be taught in a hierarchical manner, with the artists acting as the voice for the community and expecting special privilege in their process of creation. Having experienced spaces that are directed in this manner, I actively work to facilitate a different form of engagement.

Critics often frame Chicana/o poster making as an essentialist practice that manifests predictably around stereotypical representations of identity. A critical article written by Josh Kun (2005) in the Los Angeles Times Magazine, profiling an emerging generation of Mexican American and Latina/o artists, reinforced the notion that posters are relics of the movement and stereotypical forms of Chicano art. Kun quotes Los Angeles artist Camille Rose Garcia: “The Chicano tradition of activism and social commentary is so important to me . . . but if your work is only about identity, a lot of people can’t relate to it.” For some time now I have been confused by suggestions that Chicana/o art is “only about identity.” I would argue instead that Chicanx art is an expansive method that seeks to manifest social
justice. That said, I understand the perspective of critics who believe that art practice centered on identity reinforces hierarchies through forms of art-ethnography and ultimately creates exclusive boundaries around the possibilities of subject formation. Derek Conrad Murray follows that line of inquiry when he states, “The artist-ethnographers are said to achieve their success at the expense of the communities that they represent, and in the process reinscribe the hierarchical abjector-abjected relationship between mainstream and subaltern” (Murray and Murray 2006, 34). In this case, Murray discusses visual art that engages identity as a “voice for the voiceless,” whereby the artist represents the voice of the community and reinforces its position of authority over expression, language, and representation.

I have tried to keep this critique in mind when leading the Poster Workshop. I have organized the workshop around the expectation that students will speak from their individual subjectivity, requiring a rigorous process of dialogue within the workshop and among organizations within the community. Both the individual experience and the broader community dialogue creates powerful engagement, which ultimately results in praxis. In its current manifestation, the workshop demands that students speak not “for” the community but rather “from” their experiences “within” the community. According to Fregoso, there is a form of “paternalism in claiming to speak for the community as though its members cannot speak on their own behalf. This is why the video artist Frances Salomé España insists . . . that she speaks not for the Chicano community, but from the specificity of her experience as a Chicana in L.A.” (Fregoso 1993, xix, italics in original). At its best, the workshop is a cacophony of voices as students work together to relate their experiences, education, and passions to the lived realities of their real and imagined communities.

The workshop becomes a powerful educational space, at times a potentially liberatory space, as the course progresses. During the first three weeks I am at the center of the course, outlining the structure for engagement within the workshop and providing technical instruction on screen printing, but during the remaining seven weeks my role recedes. Students are expected to engage with rigor and focused presence while operating within the space. A principle of the workshop, which is constantly reinforced, is that if a student is not working on his or her own printmaking while in the studio, but has some free time, that student should make every effort to assist another student with the printmaking process. Peer assistance can involve racking prints, helping to clean someone’s screen,
coating screens, or engaging in dialogue around the technical questions of developing the imagery. In my experience, the work that students do to support each other’s poster production is a key way to manifest praxis. While the instructor ensures that the foundational approach of the workshop is maintained and that students have the technical instruction necessary for successful screen printing, it is through student-to-student engagement that transformation occurs.

The posters they produce are one outcome that can be used to assess student performance within the traditional grading model of the university. Yet the engagement within the workshop is the more significant result of the course and ultimately provides the tool that can be replicated in other spaces. This engagement is an “outlaw” method that emerged out of the movement and established itself during Chicano studies’ formative stage, yet remains relevant and contemporary.

Two posters in the UC Davis Chicana/o Studies Poster Archive, created during the 2015–16 academic year, illustrate the dialogic process of the workshop. One was made by a student who is a straight cisgender male and identifies as Mexican/Chicano. The other is by a student who identifies as a queer, nonbinary Chicanx/Mexicanx. The two students worked independently but eventually developed projects that were heavily informed by one another. Both posters used eyeglasses to metaphorically represent the perspective or lens through which to view the world. The first poster narrates the story of a woman who is wrongfully convicted for the murder of her abusive partner. Inside the lens the student wrote “white patriarchy” and “Justice’ system” to signal how victims of injustice are framed by colonial logic (fig. 3). On the other hand, the lenses in the second poster represent how oppositional forms of knowledge inform current social justice movements. This poster shows a pair of eyeglasses viewing the US flag; one lens contains the famous Daily News cover that addressed the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin (fig. 4). Looking through the lenses in this poster represents the consciousness developed through education, what Anzaldúa called “taking inventory” and “winnowing out the lies” (1987, 82). Neither of these posters would have been possible without a dialogic process among the students and a foundational expectation that they would address issues that are pressing within their community context. I was deeply inspired by the dialogue and engagement these two students developed during their time in the Poster Workshop, and I know this to be one of many similar engagements that have produced powerful outcomes.

Figure 4. Student artist, American Dream/American Nightmare, 2015. Screen print, 18 x 24 inches. Created at the Chicana/o Studies Poster Workshop. Image courtesy of the UC Davis Chicana/o Studies Poster Archive.
In my experience, the poster workshop remains a relevant method. I recognize and appreciate the scholarly efforts that have proposed periodization of the Chicana/o poster, rendering it an artifact of the movement. Yet I have witnessed countless students address contemporary issues that are quite literally matters of life and death. I recognize that this is in some ways a subjective judgment, yet I believe my engagement and the poster archives provide evidence to support it. I also recognize that digital media are the most effective tools we have today to disseminate information. Community organizations doing social justice work often need designers who can manipulate and generate imagery and content via digital media and platforms, perhaps more than they need a screen-printed poster. Despite this, there continues to be a high demand from community organizations and campaigns for handmade screen prints that engage and support their efforts. The material of the workshop—paper—and the process of poster making facilitate a dialogue that is highly speculative and at the same time relevant to contemporary issues. It is speculative in that the process and the imagery produced allow for the creation of community and for representation of a world in which social justice is possible. Quite simply, what feels endlessly relevant to me is the space that is created through the facilitated process of collectively creating posters. The space encourages dialogue and engagement that results in praxis and, ultimately, transformation.

Notes

1. The Chicano Studies Program was one of four programs established as part of the new Department of Ethnic Studies. Documented in the Third World Liberation Front strike newspaper, 1969, carton 120, Comparative Ethnic Studies Collection, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter Comparative Ethnic Studies Collection).


3. “Response to Ad Hoc Committee to Review Ethnic Studies Questionnaire,” 1972, University of California, Berkeley, carton 2:1, Comparative Ethnic Studies Collection. The center is misnamed in the letter as the Chicano Center; its actual name was the Chicano Art Center.
4. In 1974 Montoya and Myrtha Chabran resigned in protest against what they perceived as the bureaucratization of the program and erosion of its initial oppositional, community-oriented stance.


10. I interviewed the two students (whose names are withheld for privacy) in the Chicana/o Studies 172 Poster Workshop, June 1, 2016.

Works Cited


