



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Rudy Cuellar Lowrider Posters

NMAH.AC.1514

Clare McElhaney

2022

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Rudy Cuellar Lowrider Posters
Date:	1975-2016
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1514
Creator:	Cuellar, Rudy (Donor) Royal Chicano Air Force
Extent:	0.25 Cubic feet (4 map folders)
Language:	English , Spanish; Castilian .
Summary:	Collection consists of posters featuring lowrider imagery.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Fifteen posters were purchased from Rudy Cuellar in 2021.

Related Materials

Materials at the Smithsonian Institution

Archives of American Art

Roberto Sifuentes papers, circa 1988-2006, bulk 1993-2000. The papers document Chicano performance artist and educator Roberto Sifuentes.

Philip Brookman Papers, 1977-1993. The collection documents Brookman's exhibition, writing, and filmmaking projects in the form of artist files, exhibition files, professional files, and subject and research files. Much of the material concerns the production and distribution of Brookman's 1988 video documentary about Chicano art in California, *Mi Otro Yo (My Other Self)*, that grew out of the exhibition and conference "Califas: An Exhibition of Chicano Art and Culture in California," held at University of California, Santa Cruz in 1981 and 1982.

National Museum of American History

Tomas Ybarra-Frausto Calendar Collection, NMAH.AC.0660

Lowrider "Dave's Dream," 1982. See accession: 1990.0567.

Smithsonian Institution Archives

Exhibition Records, circa 1983-1994 and undated. Accession 00-002. Includes records for the exhibition *American Encounters*

Exhibition Records, 1970-1995. Accession 01-097. Includes documentation for *American Encounters Lowriders*, 1992.

Productions, 1991-1994, 1997-1998. Accession 02-123. Includes Smithsonian Productions video program entitled, "Spreading Beauty Wherever I Go," on the lowrider cars of New Mexico, 1992.

Productions, 1987, 1989, 1991-1993, 1997. Accession 02-202. Includes video footage for "Spreading Beauty Wherever I Go," on the "lowrider" cars of New Mexico.

Productions, 1991-2000. Accession 05-231. Includes video footage from the exhibit American Encounters Lowrider show, 1978 from the Museum of Fine Arts.

Materials at Other Organizations

Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library

Lowrider collection, 1977-1982. Collection Number: 8098

University of San Diego, San Diego Lowriders Archival Project

The San Diego Lowrider Archival Project documents the history of lowriding in San Diego and the surrounding borderlands, from the 1950s through today. The project includes photographs, car club documents and memorabilia, official records, meeting minutes, dance posters and lowrider art.

University of Southern California, Boeckmann Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies

Lowrider magazine collection 0589

A collection of 56 issues of *Lowrider magazine*, along with three issues of Q-VO: A National Lowrider's Magazine -- all spanning from 1977 to 2003

UC Santa Barbara, Special Research Collections

Royal Chicano Air Force Archives, CEMA 8

Extensive collection of slides and silkscreen prints, along with administrative records, news clippings, correspondence, exhibition descriptions and flyers, photographs, creative writings, and miscellaneous publications of the Sacramento-based artists collective. Founding members of the RCAF include José Montoya, Esteban Villa, Juanishi V. Orosco, Ricardo Favela, and Rudy Cuellar.

UCLA Chicano Research Center

Alturas Films Records, CSRC.2018.009

Alturas Films is a film production company based in Emeryville, California. Founded by Rick Tejada-Flores, it specializes in documentaries that focus on overlooked topics in Latino and Latin American culture, many of which were broadcast on public television. Among its films are *Low 'n Slow*, *Rivera in America*, and *Elvia*.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Clare McElhaney, intern; supervised by Alison Oswald, archivist, 2022.

Preferred Citation

Rudy Cuellar Lowrider Posters, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Accruals

Four posters were donated by Rudy Cuellar in 2021.

Biographical

Rudolfo "Rudy" Ojeda Cuellar was born and raised in Roseville, California. Rudy graduated from Roseville High School where he learned about screen printing, linoleum block printing and a deeper understanding of what being an artist was about. He enrolled at Sierra College, three miles from his hometown, where he was exposed to ceramics and cultural sculptural images. A friend helped him transfer to Sacramento State University where he met professors Jose Montoya and Esteban Villa and many other members of the Royal Chicano Artist group. At Sacramento State, he learned mask making, mold making, and silversmithing. From 1971 to 1979 he worked for Centro de Artistas Chicanos teaching at risk kids from the local school district screen printing skills, art and design and how to get along with one another. While working at the Centro de Artistas he taught and helped the other Royal Chicano Art Front members with the silk-screening process, and creating prints, signs and posters for other community events.

In 1980 Cuellar started Centro Screen Print & Associates with Louie "the Foot" Gonzalez (another founding member of RCAF). Rudy taught silk screening at Folsom State Prison and Louie became a rural mail carrier. His work as printer and as artist has been in numerous exhibits and publications such as Triumph of our Communities, Posada's Mexico 1979, CARA Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985 Wight Art Gallery – University of California, Los Angeles. Design in California and Mexico 1915 – 1985 and Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now. Cuellar was deeply influenced by his trips to Mexico and especially art teachers, counselors, and friends such as George Lem and Mr. Otis, John Adams, Juan Cervantes, and Stephan Kaltenbach that each taught him to never put boundaries on his quest to create Mexican and pre-Colombian images.

Historical

The Rebel Chicano Art Front was created in 1969 by art professors José Montoya and Esteban Villa along with many other artists, activists, community organizers, poets, and teachers while at California State University, Sacramento. As artists and art students, they often loosely worked to support community events with creative endeavors. The group eventually came together under Joe Serna and was managed by Ricardo Favela in 1972 to form the Centro de Artistas Chicanos, an organization that provided much needed community space and support for after school arts programs, a library and bookstore, training programs, family and child programs such as Día de Los Muertos festivals, acting classes, and even an auto body repair training program. As part of the after-school arts program (and print shop), RCAF artists came together to teach community children about history and culture through art.

To supplement the meager city and private funds for the Centro, the artists organized art and gallery shows, art auctions, and sale of prints in the bookstore. As this collective of artists started having art shows, they would shorten their name to the "RCAF," often being confused with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Being a creative bunch, they changed their name from the Rebel Chicano Art Front to the Royal Chicano Air Force. They embraced this new identity/confusion, getting Army surplus clothing, and creating "ranks" of general or "creative mechanicos comsimcos" [cosmic mechanics] for everyone. They created a mythical origin story that states that they flew here from the mythical homeland of Aztlán in adobe airplanes. This playfulness broke down many social barriers in the barrio as well as within the larger Sacramento community and helped them tackle serious subjects through their programs and art.

The 1960's and 70's ushered in a wave of political and social awareness for communities of color. Community organizations around the country began advocating and organizing for more political and social empowerment as a counter to the discrimination, oppression, and neglect that many Chicanos (and other Latino communities) encountered. The GI Bill sent many Chicanos to college, opening young Chicano eyes to new ways to fight injustice. Many young social reformers started to take advantage of funds from the War on Poverty programs to establish community service organizations. Chicano and Latino artists were very aware of neglect and lack of representation in mainstream galleries and art institutions and started to rethink and reinvent cultural spaces. The RCAF was formed as a way to creatively instill pride, dignity, and

respect for the Chicano community of Sacramento (Los Angeles Times, July 22, 1979 "Chicano Air Force Flies High").

In addition to the RCAF, other Latino groups and organizations formed during the late 1960's and 1970's in the Bay area such as the Mexican American Liberation Art Front, La Raza Graphics Center, and Artist Sies that cultivated artist collectives and artist support networks. Galleria de La Raza, the first Mexican American "museum" in the Bay area opened to encourage Chicano and Latino art within their own community. Throughout the country, Latinx artists and activists formed organizations and galleries such as Self-Help Graphics in Los Angeles. The East coast also saw their share of organizations develop such the Taller Puertorriqueño in Philadelphia in 1972. In New York, the Taller Boriqua and El Museo de Barrio saw the Puerto Rican activist community grow and build their own galleries, arts spaces, and educational spaces to reach Latino communities in ways that traditional art and cultural centers did not.

Art, and the inexpensive silk screen process, became one of the fronts in the fight for community self-empowerment and advocacy. The traditions of mural and poster art in California were already very strong by the time RCAF was formed. In the 1930's, 40's, and 50's, African American and labor organizations had formed art workshops developing poster woodcut technique both as an art form and a way to advance political awareness. Art schools and colleges in California (and New York) organized artistic workshops to help combine art with social movements. The RCAF members also drew artistic and activist inspiration from a long tradition of printmaking in Mexico such as political and cultural artist José Posada in the 1890's and the Taller Grafica Popular in the 1930's. The reliance on silk screen poster art created a whole new movement and vocabulary of artistic forms, colors, and representations that drew from Mexican heritage but was also quick and easy to replicate. Artists like Montoya and Favela used these posters as their canvas to create a body of work that was bought and sold like other traditional art pieces, but was inexpensive to create and could relate and engage with the community not accustomed to gallery shows.

The silk screen process was eventually replaced by the screen print process, a technologic change that cut reliance on harmful chemicals, but still retained the "look and feel" of a DIY silk screen. However, what was crucial among RCAF were all the commissioned pieces, like these lowrider posters, that showcased how the artistic forms melded with community activism and documentation. While some of the artworks were bought and sold and made for art spaces, most art was primarily displayed in storefronts, restaurants, and community centers. The community and street space became the gallery that advertised United Farm Worker events, social justice gatherings, health initiatives, etc. The Chicano Civil rights movement succeeded and was sustained in part, by posters like these. The poster "transcended" the advertisement of events into a production of art. More importantly, these posters help document the Chicano movement, bridging community activism, art, advertisement, and social formation.

Source

Historical content note courtesy, Steve Velasquez, Curator, Division of Cultural and Community Life, National Museum of American History, August 13, 2020.

Content Description

Posters for fundraisers, social actions, and community events for the Latino community of Northern California; all prominently feature lowrider imagery.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into one series.

Series 1: Posters, 1975-2016

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Automobiles -- Social aspects -- United States
- Hispanic American artists
- Latinos -- California
- Lowriders
- Popular culture
- Posters

Cultures:

- Latinos -- California

Types of Materials:

- Screen prints

Occupations:

- Graphic artists -- California

Container Listing

Map-folder 1	3rd Annual Day at the Park, 1981-07 1 Poster (17.5" x 23") Notes: Version in purple ink.
Map-folder 2	3rd Annual Day at the Park, 1981-08-15 1 Poster (17.5" x 23") Notes: Version in red ink.
Map-folder 1	Aztlán, undated 1 Poster (17.5" x 22.5")
Map-folder 1	La Bamba, Gran Campanero, undated 1 Poster (23" x 35")
Map-folder 1	The Corn Spirit Going to the Corn Festival , undated 1 Drawing (18" x 23 1/4")
Map-folder 2	Mercado de la Flores Lowrider Show [Announcement Poster; Screen Print], 1975 1 Poster (17" x 23")
Map-folder 2	Jumping Contest [Announcement Poster; Screen Print], 1975? 1 Poster (17" x 23")
Map-folder 2	Lowrider Carrucha Show [Announcement Poster; Screen Print], 1979 1 Poster (23" x 29")
Map-folder 2	Silk Screen Print for Imperial Silence: Una Opera Muerte, 2016 1 Poster (17" x 23")
Map-folder 2	Sacramento's 2nd Annual Lowrider Show [Screen Print], 1982 1 Poster (20" x 28")
Map-folder 2	3rd Annual Day at the Park San Diego Chicano Park, 1981-08-15
Map-folder 2	Calavera Cold Shots and Sick Boys Reunion [Screen Print], 2003 1 Poster (12 1/2" x 19")
Map-folder 2	Cruiser Nite [Pencil Drawing], 1993 1 Drawing (20" x 28")
Map-folder 3	Lowrider Show [Announcement Poster; Screen Print], 1981-11 1 Poster (17" x 22")
Map-folder 3	U.C. Raza Day '79 , 1979 1 Poster (25" x 18")

	Notes: An effort to demystify higher education - conceptualized, organized, & realized by Raza [Printed Poster]
Map-folder 3	Concilio de Arte Popular [Screen Print] , undated 1 Poster (17" x 22")
Map-folder 3	Chicano Art Santa Ana College [Print] , circa 1985 1 Prints (visual works) (16" x 20")
Map-folder 3	1st Prize '65 Chevy [Announcement Poster; Screen Print] , 1982 1 Poster (20" x 28")
Map-folder 3	Bailen con Los Elegantes y Midnight Players [Announcement Poster; Screen Print] , 1975 1 Poster (17" x 23")
Map-folder 4	1951 Chevy Fastback [Screen Print] , 1982 1 Poster (25" x 30")