

Oral History interview with Manuel Cruz

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**Cruz, Manuel, born
Painter
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Part 1 of 2

Sound Cassette Duration – 28 minutes

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MANUEL CRUZ: They put this music because they didn't want to be *seria* (serious about it). These guys were cheaper. That's why that book that you see in there, *hicieron* (they did) a smaller with a hard cover *pero no más* (but in only) two colors; black and red.

DENISE LUGO: You were talking about the film and you said you lend it to who? Montezuma Esparza?

MANUEL CRUZ: No. Look we came to the USC ok? It was 15 Chicanos, right?

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember who they were?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't remember their names. I could only mention a few.

DENISE LUGO: Ok.

MANUEL CRUZ: Ramses Noriega.

DENISE LUGO: Oh really?

MANUEL CRUZ: I remember him because he got involved with Bobby Parramo and myself. *La esposa de* (The wife of) Montezuma Esparza. Montezuma Esparza was a main *vato* (guy) that got the connection. He's the one that- They were going to make a program *que se llamava* (that was called) "*Vida alegré*" (Happy Life) on channel 7, I think it was. So "*Vida alegré*" (Happy Life) got us a grant. They went to the barrios and they chose 15 Chicanos and Chicanas from the barrio.

DENISE LUGO: They didn't go directly to Mechicano? They went all over, right?

MANUEL CRUZ: As far as what?

DENISE LUGO: Picking the artist.

MANUEL CRUZ: No it wasn't. I just happen to be with Mechicano but I mean as far as all the other *vatos* (guys). Bobby Parramo used to go to Mechicano. It was, just like I told you before, these *vatos* (guys) they were amateur filmmakers. They used to have all kinds of people going to Mechicano and Bobby used to be one. I think Ramses used to go in there too. I mean not Ramses Noriega. I made a mistake there. Oh wow! Which one is *el nombre que te dije primero* (the name I told you first)?

DENISE LUGO: You said just Noriega and Bobby Parramo.

MANUEL CRUZ: No, not Ramses Noriega. Sorry it's a mistake.

DENISE LUGO: Not Ramses?

MANUEL CRUZ: No, it wasn't Ramses. Anyhow I forgot his name it was this other dude. So the wife *de* (of) Montezuma Esparza was one of the students *también* (also) before he married her. I don't remember her name. Find that out. Anyway to make the story short they got us and brought us to USC and they took us to cinema department where it used to be. We were under a three-month program for cinema and we weren't even here for 2 weeks when right away they gave us a 8mm and they gave us all a camera. We were supposed to do a film on negative and positive or what you thought was negative and what you thought was positive. So our first film was exactly that; 3 minutes. From there on we kept on learning, you know, the process as far as doing super eights. We kept on doing making little films through the months. [...] Once we had learned the different process of key editing, sound, how to operate the camera, lighting and all that. When we went through all that process and finally they figured that we were ready and then they divided us into three crews. In other words three people for a film. So the theme [...] we chose was the "Balloon Man" the movie called "Balloon Man" and that was made into a film.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah. Who worked with you on that film?

MANUEL CRUZ: Well Bobby Parramo and I forgot his name. I don't know, I forgot his name. Anyhow so there was this other dude that I worked with. So the reason I'm mentioning all this is because the film was called the "Balloon Man" was about a dude that's a *tecato* (drug user), he's a semantic, right? Then there's an artist involved and the story goes about this guy named "Diablo" (Devil) which is a *tecato* (drug user); he's a heroin addict and this other guy that's supposed to be the artist and we still met up in front of Mechicano that why I'm mentioning that. Part of it is filmed in front of Mechicano and part of it was film at my house and then the other part was at *el mercado* (the market), right there on 1st street. So there was an exhibition at Mechicano. And there was some guy from San Diego was having an exhibition there; some *artista* (artist) from over there. We shot all these different paintings of his because he had like devils and dragons and skeletons so it went along with the idea, you know? I already had it in my head what I wanted. So we shot all that. Then we came to the house and then we

shot the scene where the *vatos* (the guys)- Ok see what happen is the guys is walking in front of Mechicano and when he is walking in front of Mechicano, he meets the artist and then he's telling him if he wants to get down and *que este, que otro* (this and that). So then the guys says, "No, no. Why don't you come [and] check out my art show?" He answers them that way. So we did it bilingual; one of them would be talking in English and the other one would be talking in Spanish. What happen was when we were filming the film Leonard happens to make a turn so he's in the film. He wasn't being an actor it just happened that he walked into the scene. If you ever find that film you'll see him there. So then from there the *vato* (guy) gets all pissed off at the artist and says, "You know what? Nothing's happening and nobody has come to see my exhibition." "El Diablo" (The Devil) my buddy here told me if I want to get down to go to his apartment. So he ends up going down there and gets down. Then while he is getting down, you know, *¿cómo se dice?* (how do you say it?); he ODs. The reason I'm mentioning that is because while this is happening I make the song called a "Balloon Man" and I'm playing the electric guitar and then when he's getting down-. All this is in the film; you know what I'm saying? It was done part of it at Mechicano, part of it at the house, and part of it all over.

DENISE LUGO: How many tapes were made of that?

MANUEL CRUZ: There was 3 films, 1 for each; one for Bobby and one for myself.

DENISE LUGO: Does Bobby have his?

MANUEL CRUZ: Ramses no, I keep saying Ramses. Huh? Bobby lost his too. I think the only one that might have it. I already called USC and USC says they don't have it. So the only person that I presume has one would be Montezuma Esparza and if he don't; then the people who did "*Vida alegré*" might have the negatives. It was shown at UCLA. We had what you call it a film festival over there and everybody took their different films so we showed it over there. We showed it. Bobby showed it on channel 7 and I showed it all over the place *también* (also), you know? Wherever I could, you know?

DENISE LUGO: Somebody's got to have a video on it somewhere.

MANUEL CRUZ: Oh well I don't know. I hope so.

DENISE LUGO: So who did "*Vida alegré*" (Happy Life)? Who did that? Channel 7?

MANUEL CRUZ: No it wasn't channel 7. It was this program from ah-. This people came from San Francisco somewhere. I don't know. I don't know who they- I don't know, I don't know the people. All I know is the best connection is to get a hold of channel 7. Luis, you know that dude right there on that *también* (also), he knows the ones in the news people about *cinco vidas* (five lives). If you could get a hold of him- In fact it says on the news paper some of the some of the programs he did on channel, I don't know what, it says you got in the newspaper there so you could get a hold of him too; somehow, somewhat. Another way you could find Montezuma Esparza screenwriters' guild has information on films. They have his phone number and address

of Montezuma Esparza, screenwriters' guild. I think there on Sunset. I don't know where there at. Anyhow so I saw the book and his name was in there. I think Luis's name is in there too and some other filmmakers are in there; minorities and other Chicanos.

DENISE LUGO: Mm huh.

MANUEL CRUZ: So you might find it in there.

DENISE LUGO: Ok. Who else would you know that would have some more information on this? You told me you had friends that borrowed stuff.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well.

DENISE LUGO: This is just for my tapes.

MANUEL CRUZ: What are you saying like on what?

DENISE LUGO: Like you said some people barrowed stuff.

MANUEL CRUZ: [...] Ok years went by and these *chavalos* (young guys) were like 15 and 16 when I filmed them, right? Let's say like 8 years went by and one day when I met the *chavelo* (young guy), one of the guys that came out playing a part of the artist. So I loaned them the film so he took it to the library up there in East Los Angeles you know *allí endonde esta* (there where) the projects are at. Well that that library down there. So I gave them he film and they never brought it back. So he kept it, you know? So the only way you are going to get a hold of that film is if someone made a video at UCLA. They might have one there because of that festival that we had over there of *puras películas* (just films), you know. I have a poster of that time and place of where that happened; somewhere if I could find it. UCLA's got to have information of that of what happened maybe if you go to Chicano studies.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, over there. Ok and who else? You said someone else you let barrow you lend them some stuff and they never returned it. I think it was Limon?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah, but those are pictures.

DENISE LUGO: No doesn't matter, whatever, any information.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well those are just a snap shots, you know? I went down there to do exactly what were doing today. I was making Xeroxs *y me llevé un sobre lleno de retratos* (and I took with me a folder full of photographs) To me they are priceless because those pictures of what I took personally back in the 1950s and like that you know? *Tenía muchos retratos de muchas cosas* (I had a lot of photographs of a lot of things), you know; Zoot Suits and so on. In fact I had the pictures of the Pomona freeway when they first made it when I used to go to central. In fact, I remember, the reason I brought the camera *andaba* Burt Lancaster (was around). We were making a film on him *y lleve la cámara* (and I took my camera). Then I could take a picture of this

vato (guy), you know. We were making a film right there and the name of the movie was called “Crisscross” you know? “Sale” (out comes) Burt Lancaster *y este* (then) like to take the camera thinking that I would take a picture of him and he didn’t show up so I took pictures of freeway you know the Pomona freeway when they first were making it.

DENISE LUGO: I used to live there.

MANUEL CRUZ: That’s central high now. It’s a now its a hall of records for all the high schools. In other words if you want to find who went to school where so that’s where its at. So, *¿qué más?* (what else?)

DENISE LUGO: I just asking for more people I could go see to get some stuff.

MANUEL CRUZ: Ok let’s see Bobby Parramo worked for channel 13 in Fresno.

DENISE LUGO: Where was it in Fresno?

MANUEL CRUZ: In Fresno. Yeah, he worked in Fresno for channel 13. He was making films over there and he made a film that has to do with the prison. Has to do with ...

DENISE LUGO: Pinto life?

MANUEL CRUZ: No. Pinto *chavalos* (young men), you know? What they call juveniles. I forgot the name of the movie. So there was a news castor on channel Chicano in Fresno and so he might have information on that for all I know you know. I don’t know if you’ll find out who-. I don’t know where Bobby is at, you know? All I know is that last time—

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember any of the people at all that were in this program?

MANUEL CRUZ: Like what?

DENISE LUGO: Any of the other Chicanos that came here.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well there was there was Magu *también* (also).

DENISE LUGO: Ah huh. Yeah, Magu.

MANUEL CRUZ: Magu you know, he was another one. In fact he ended up being a teacher at some special school a Chicano school up here in Fresno.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, I just talked to him; and who else?

MANUEL CRUZ: Well “Queso” Nacho (nickname of somebody meaning cheese) used to actually come down.

DENISE LUGO: I want to ask you, did “Queso” do a thing on you on you in the early 1970s on Chicano artists? He did his master’s degree and he went out and talked to a bunch of people and he recorded them. Did he do you?

MANUEL CRUZ: When I was working at the all nations where I use to have my studio; they used to call it the “dungeon”. He came down and took pictures that how I remember him coming down. Whether he recorded me or not; I don’t remember.

DENISE LUGO: Okay.

MANUEL CRUZ: But he did come down. He has a lot of slides, he has a lot of pictures *también* (also). What he has I don’t know. Whether he did or didn’t; I don’t know. The only thing I do know is Ramses came down when I was having a this art-mart at all nations He bought or I gave him one of one of my sculpture; one of each he’s might have a whole set of he’s got a whole set of them. If he hasn’t thrown them away, you know? So he took them and I think he exhibited them at some college in San Diego. Ramses got that information on that.

DENISE LUGO: Who else besides Magu, “Queso”; who else?

MANUEL CRUZ: Ramses.

DENISE LUGO: Did he go to that thing?

MANUEL CRUZ: To what?

DENISE LUGO: I’m talking about who made the films.

MANUEL CRUZ: Nah, he didn’t go to the films. Bobby did though. Bobby, “El Monte”- Montezuma Esparza and Luis, that *vato* (guy) was there.

DENISE LUGO: Luis what?

MANUEL CRUZ: Well the one that’s on that-

DENISE LUGO: Yeah okay. I know which one, okay.

MANUEL CRUZ: Him you know. So as far as filmmakers that I remember; I don’t remember some of the other people that went down there.

DENISE LUGO: *Ándale pues* (Alright then) because I was just thinking-

MANUEL CRUZ: What is it your trying to get names? More names?

DENISE LUGO: Sí (Yes).

MANUEL CRUZ: Well Ismael [...] he’s just a sculpture. He does mostly wood sculpture.

DENISE LUGO: Smiley?

MANUEL CRUZ: Smiley.

DENISE LUGO: What was his last name?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't remember. I just know him as Smiley. I just know him as nickname. Sometimes you meet a *vato* (guy) and all you call him is one name.

DENISE LUGO: When's the last time you saw Leonard?

MANUEL CRUZ: Its going be about 7 years or more.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

MANUEL CRUZ: At least.

DENISE LUGO: Why did it break up anyway?

MANUEL CRUZ: Well there's another person named Armando Cabrera. You should put in there too.

DENISE LUGO: Armando?

MANUEL CRUZ: Armando Cabrera; he went to the film trip.

DENISE LUGO: Why did it break up? Do you know why Mechicano broke up? Do you remember or have any idea?

MANUEL CRUZ: Oh well, I think it was financially part of it. It was in other words it was *feria* (money). They used to try and raise funds and sometimes it would work and sometimes it didn't work. I don't think they were getting that many grants as far as to kept the project going.

DENISE LUGO: Oh by the way were you involved in the bench contest?

MANUEL CRUZ: Uh, they asked me but I didn't get involved. I didn't want to do it; [...] to me it was kind of stupid. I said I'm not going to, I don't know. I didn't feel like painting a bench that's all. So I didn't get into it that's all. I should have maybe but I didn't. They asked me; I didn't do it.

DENISE LUGO: How about Self-Help? Do you remember Self-Help back then?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: How was the scene?

MANUEL CRUZ: It was all right, you know, to me it was all right. It was a different trip though.

DENISE LUGO: Ok, let's talk about Self-Help. Tell me why was it different?

MANUEL CRUZ: [...] Different in the way they would run it.

DENISE LUGO: Philosophical differences, right?

MANUEL CRUZ: There was psychological or philosophical whatever you want to call it. [...] In the first place Sister Karen, she's exactly that, a Sister, but she's into this religious trip, right? One, and then the other thing there was more then more then one Sister involved in it and then like they were more into posters and doing like tie dye type stuff you know.

DENISE LUGO: Ok uh-huh.

MANUEL CRUZ: And they were into photography and like Lopez they used to call him, and this *vato* (guy) named Lupe they were like into the Photography.

DENISE LUGO: Lopez and Lupe?

MANUEL CRUZ: Lupe, yeah.

DENISE LUGO: Lopez Lupe? They're two people?

MANUEL CRUZ: No Lopez was one *vato* (guy).

DENISE LUGO: Okay and?

MANUEL CRUZ: And then there was *éste* (like) uh, *¿cómo se llama?* (what's-his-name?), Carlos Bueno.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: From Sinaloa.

DENISE LUGO: Mexico.

MANUEL CRUZ: Mexico and *éste* (like) he was a muralist there. He was doing mostly ink on paper or cardboard whatever. And so he was mostly doing that and then there was a *chavalo* (young man) that was doing he was doing sculptures that were made out of dough. You know what I mean by dough, right?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah. Did they have a lot of people?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah there was always a lot of people. The main event there, as far as the main thing that was happening there, most of the time was when she started her thing as far as *el día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead). She started the *día de los muertos* there. That was the main thing.

DENISE LUGO: Did Mechicano and Self-Help ever do anything together?

MANUEL CRUZ: Mechicano and who?

DENISE LUGO: And Self-Help.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah, well you see there came a time where, not only Mechicano, but Self-Help and Goez gallery and all the other different art centers. We started having meetings at Self-Help graphics. A lot of people would come down 40, 50, more sometimes would come down and we would have a big circle of people trying to unite all the *artistas* (artists) under one flag if you want to put it that way or umbrella.

DENISE LUGO: Was that before 1975 or after 1975?

MANUEL CRUZ: I guess it was after. This is when they were at Brooklyn ok? That's when they were on Brooklyn.

DENISE LUGO: Mechicano was in Brooklyn?

MANUEL CRUZ: No. Self-Help was right there next to St. Louis and Brooklyn. So, that, you could ask Sister Karen.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah I know that but I wanted to have a few things before I leave here. Okay and right there when you, still did work, unification.

MANUEL CRUZ: No. There [were] too many people- you would get two or three groups or three organizations of artists or whatever you know? Okay, you had photographers *también* (also) that started coming in this besides the artist and the photographers wanted to do their thing and the artist wanted to do theirs. You started you started to get little groups. Some would say well you would get lets say four or five that would say we'll get together and then after that you would get three or four or five that would say "no" and it was like a tug of war.

DENISE LUGO: There was a lot of animosity towards each other, right?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah. Sort of like that.

DENISE LUGO: And the ones that united the most got more grants right?

MANUEL CRUZ: Nah, it wasn't that way. Ok all I know is that Sister Karen for instance when she was doing her thing she used to have this organization, a catholic organization, so all she had to do was if she found herself in a real tight spot she would go to the

Franciscan Fathers, *de sabe de que fregados* (from who knows where), and they would help her out *con feria* (with money), or she would get it from other organizations. Once she found herself in a real tight spot, the church in some form or another would help her out. Mechicano was just trying to get it from here and there and I don't know. I really didn't get involved in that.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, I know.

MANUEL CRUZ: And then as far as the Goez's they were more into the commercial making *feria* (money), you know? They didn't worry too much. I mean they got grants *también me entiendes. Pero son más ladrónes que la chingada* (also, you follow? But they are nothing but thieves).

DENISE LUGO: *Ladrónes* (thieves), eh?

MANUEL CRUZ: To me. When I made those 15 cards, those Chicanos Christmas cards, they were going to give me a grant, a \$5,000 grant to continue. I had already done it one year. I was going on my second year and *se juntaron los de Goez* (people from Goez art gallery got together). Ok what happened was *se me quebró un carro* (my car broke down). I stopped over at this to make a phone call, they saw my Christmas card at some spinning shop and when I was talking on the phone the *vatos* (guys) from the printer we started talking and *le agarre confianza* (I began to trust them) and I told them about the grant and I was asking them, "Hey how much would you charge me to make these *tarjetas* (cards)?" I wanted them in color and all that. So they got together with the Goez's instead of coming back to me, they got with Goez and then *they* went in and made the "*Sabor Latino*" Christmas cards. That's when they came out, you know? They got a \$10,000 grant and then there used to be a *centro* (downtown) up there on I forgot the name of the "*centro*" (downtown) where there used to get *se llamaba* (it was called) Model Cities or some shit like that I think it was. They got the *feria* (money) from them. I was going get it from them *también* (also), you know? So anyways the Goez would always do little *trinquetes* (swindles) like that. We were in *pleito*. I was in "*pleito*" (at war with them/argument). In fact I didn't like them from the beginning and when they did that to me I really didn't like them then, you know? So they used to do a lot of *trinquetes* (swindle). In fact another words when they were selecting the cards that they were going to do, what they did they invited all these different artists to come and show their paintings and then there was on the winery up there on San Fernando Road.

DENISE LUGO: Oh San Antonio Winery or whatever.

MANUEL CRUZ: So everybody was walking around with there little cocktail glasses *y la fregada* (and shit). And I remember going with Jose Fasanchez from *centro* Murieta and I walked in, I go in my pick up and then *mire todas las pinturas y toda la gente acá* (I looked at all the paintings and all the people here). High society so called more or less, you know? *Con corbatitas y la fregada*, (With little ties and shit) *Y le dice* (And I told him), "Look at these people now what they are doing." You know what they were doing? They were selecting from the paintings- They were selecting, *¿cómo se dice?* (how would you say it?)

DENISE LUGO: Models, ideas?

MANUEL CRUZ: No. They were going to select those paintings and convert them into actual cards. Eventually they did they accomplished it, you know? They promised the *vatos* (guys) that they were going to give them *feria* (money) and this and that. A lot of *vatos* (guys) were later on the artist a lot of them were complaining that they never got [any money]. Some of them got a little bit some of them got nothing, you know? [...] I think the first year they aced me out *en otra palabras, me fregue yo* (in other words, I screwed myself) because theirs were in color the only difference is that mine had poems inside. Little *poesía* (poems).

DENIESE LUGO: What year was that? Oh I'll look and find out. [...] How did Murieta function?

MANUEL CRUZ: Murieta was a center to help [...] students that wanted to get a grant to go to college. Then they used to help them to fill out the forms and so on and so on.

DENIESE LUGO: Yeah, the college forms yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: That was not the only thing. They were involved in a lot of outside besides that they were helping the community in all different forms, you know?

DENIESE LUGO: But the main art centers were just Self-Help, Mechicano and Goez, *¿verdad?* (right?)

MANUEL CRUZ: As far as I remember. No there was "Flor y Canto". That was Carlos, uh what's his name?

DENIESE LUGO: Carlos Valvadez, Velazquez?

MANUEL CRUZ: No, no *este* (it's).

DENIESE LUGO: "Flor y canto" came in later. It didn't come in the early 1970s.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well they came in- I don't know, see that's what I'm saying.

DENIESE LUGO: Yeah but what was "Flor y Canto". *¿Te acuerdas?* (Do you remember)? What street was it?

MANUEL CRUZ: When we moved into to the avenues, like avenue 44 Mechicano, when Jose took over there, after Leonard left and all that, and Mando Cabrera and myself and [...] Ray [Ramon] Atilano. So "Flor y Canto", so-called, ended up about three blocks from where we were at on the same street. Before that I don't know where they were at. I remember going down there to their place one time only, you know? I don't know where they were at before.

DENIESE LUGO: And what was their function?

MANUEL CRUZ: Well they were into art *también* (also), you know? They were into *pintura* (paintings).

DENIESE LUGO: How did they differ between you guys or Self-Help? Their philosophy.

MANUEL CRUZ: They were just like two guys I think involved in the whole *mitote* (messy trouble). Two or three guys, I don't know. I mean we didn't see eye-to-eye, you know? Same thing *otra vez* (all over again). [...] They had a difference in *filosofía* (philosophy). In fact Jose and—

[End of Interview]

Part 2 of 2

Sound Cassette Duration – 28 minutes

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MANUEL CRUZ: ... he had the Goez gallery on 1st Street.

DENISE LUGO: The commercial?

MANUEL CRUZ: They were totally commercial. They used to say themselves that they were businessmen. They were not artists though. I mean the director were businessmen. They used to admit it themselves. So we didn't get along with them because we didn't see the *centro* (same ideals). I mean Leonard, none of us for that. Like you said we were trying to do our own thing. We were interested in the money but more interested in what we were going to produce or make, create. We had a lot of *plietos con ellos* (conflicts with them), as far as that goes.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: How was your art? How did it differ from you guys? I know what it looks like.

MANUEL CRUZ: It was more commercial. I cannot explain it. To me, it was more on the commercial side, you know? They were not interested in seeing things on what's happening.

DENISE LUGO: They dealt with the *menzaje* (message) with looking back on Pre-Colombian things.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: And did not really try to show, this is what I been told by people, did not try to better further their better understanding of Chicanos—

MANUEL CRUZ: No.

DENISE LUGO: --And for a positive nature. But some people would go for Mechicano and work there for a few months and then come back to make some money to keep going.

MANUEL CRUZ: Right, right.

DENISE LUGO: It was understandable.

MANUEL CRUZ: When I was there I wasn't getting wages.

DENISE LUGO: Okay, *¿qué pasó?* (what happened)? Now, let's talk about Self-Help. When Self-Help came, there was also a little friction between Self-Help and Mechicano, why? If you remember.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah I know, we had meetings and all that. [...] Self-Help was more into photography, [...] silk screening, but they were doing totally different. I cannot explain it. [...] Sister Karen was the main director there. You can't compare them even now.

DENISE LUGO: ... the quality of work.

MANUEL CRUZ: No the style of the things they were doing. I cannot explain it. You would have to see what they were doing then and compare.

DENISE LUGO: I know that. I've seen the stuff.

MANUEL CRUZ: Even now they're still in their- soft of- They wanted a totally different- I cannot explain it. It was a lot of meanings. [...] We were trying to form an organization where there's going to be the Goez's and the Mechicano and Self-Help graphics and some *vatos* (guys) from Flor y Canto and I forgot which other organizations, the Chicano Rural Air Force, *de sabe que fregados de donde eran* (from I don't know where the hell they were from) and some people from San Diego. We had a big circle of people and everybody was getting into anything. It looked like it was really going to get organized and when thing really looked good, things would fall apart.

DENISE LUGO: *¿Por qué?* (Why?)

MANUEL CRUZ: Difference of philosophy, concepts and so on. Everybody was pulling this way or pulling that way.

DENISE LUGO: But I heard in Mechicano there was a very kind of cool environment. You could go and come as you go. Work as you wanted and people got along very well.

MANUEL CRUZ: [...] Let me tell you, in Mechicano [they] had an upstairs, to give you an example, and there was rooms up there and the bottom of that was the gallery. [...] It wasn't just painting, you know, its music too. So I remember, whatever we used to do when we used to meet there, maybe 10 or 15 *vatos* (guys) from different places would meet there as artists and then there was musicians and sometime we would more than once we end up upstairs and play music. I'd be playing my guitar and another *vato* (guy) would be playing the saxophone and the other one—

DENISE LUGO: There's a professor from UCLA that would do the poetry Na-Nava-Navita. I can't remember his name.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah. Well that's what I mean *había eso* (there was that) that we had we had guys that would go in there and sing their *poesía*, their poetry, you know. Then you would have two or three musicians, not myself, some other people and they would go and play their music and we would have it wasn't just *puro hale, hale* (work, work).

DENISE LUGO: *¿Te recuerdas?* Or do you remember was there a manifesto ever made? I can't find it if there was a manifesto.

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't know.

DENISE LUGO: Chicanos philosophy.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well if anybody would have it. If not, Leonard, then Ray. I think he is the one you have to get it from because he's got it.

DENISE LUGO: Also another thing there's artist now Carlos Almaraz, Frank Romero, Lujan, Beto de la Rocha. These were the Los Four and they started in Mechicano also and do you remember anything about them?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: They were the younger generation, second generation that came in. Explain to me. How were they nurtured in this sense? They are very good artist now and everybody is well recognizing them.

MANUEL CRUZ: How were they like how? What are you saying?

DENISE LUGO: Their beginning of them when you use to see them. They came in and they were all educated.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah right-right. Jose was one of them.

DENISE LUGO: Jose *qué* (who)?

MANUEL CRUZ: I think Rodriguez. I forgot, the one that took over afterwards. Okay things started changing. I myself I going to say, I know *también este* (also) Mando. It was like as far as Jose and like ok "do it." Let's say you're going to make a poster, right? Now they wanted a not paint, Jose would say, "Well you need a borderline and it's got to have 2 inches all the way around and you got to have ridges to mark and this and this and that," and I would say, "What's this shit man?," you know, I said, "You want to see what we want to see we [don't have] time for this register mark and boarder line." (chuckles) We were earthy you know and once they started coming out with all this bullshit so we couldn't get along with them.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember the performance pieces? The early performance pieces by Asco, Harry Gamboa?

MANUEL CRUZ: It was Gamboa and Willy Jeron. To give you an example, one day *estos vatos* (these guys) they brought a movie, *para mí se parecieron jotos los cabrónes* (these bastards were guy). (Chuckles) So anyhow what happen was, I didn't know them that well right, *pero yo los miraba muy vacilones* (but I noticed that they just wanted to mess around.) [...] So what happened *es este* (was that) one day they invited us to Goez (art gallery) they invited they invited Mando, Leonard, myself, Willy and Gronk and I forgot the other Gamboa I think. They were sitting in the front and they were showing a slide show or a movie. I think it was a movie. Then there was all the guys from Goez (art gallery) and then I know they didn't like us, we didn't like them either. So things started happening right there at the Goez gallery. And while they were showing the movie, Mando's *ruca* (girlfriend) was out there and some *vato* (guy) from Goez started making *tiempo con la con ella-* (conversation/flirting with her)

DENISE LUGO: He started flirting with his wife?

MANUEL CRUZ: No, his girl. So things started getting hot there and not *no más por eso* (just because of that) because in the first we were having our *problemas* (problems) me and Mando with this *vatos* (guys).

DENISE LUGO: *¿Qué vatos?* (What guys?)

MANUEL CRUZ: Well, the guys from Goez (art gallery). So Gamboa and them they were showing their movie and the *vatos* (guys) were saying *que eran jotos* (that they were gay), you know. So by the time the whole *mitote* (uproar) was over everybody was having a big *averiguata* (fight/argument). They were having their problems and we were having our problems and it almost turned out to be a big a physical thing. I didn't give a shit *pero* (but) that's the way it went. So we couldn't get along with the Goezes and they couldn't get along because they were making fun of their work that they were doing. The only thing I could see, as far as I am concern, in fact I use to have sort of respect for them and I still do because they were free. They were not playing no part as far as Gamboa and them. When they use to do their thing they use to do it, and you know *no les importaba* (they didn't care).

DENISE LUGO: They were artists.

MANUEL CRUZ: They were artist and they were free.

DENISE LUGO: Did you see any portable murals in 1972? Do you remember some of those of the early work that ASCO did?

MANUEL CRUZ: Are you talking about the Gamboa and them? There's one. Have you ever seen the movie called "Homeboy"?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well did you ever see the mural that is on the freeway that he puts it on the freeway? Well one of these days you could rent that movie. What happened is that I was over here in City Terrace and Judy Vaca sent me these people because they needed someone to give advice on gangs. So they came from Venice, I forgot the name of them, anyways it was this movie called "Homeboy". So what happen was I talked to these *gabachos* (White male Americans) and we had set it up. I was going to help them on the movie. They shot a flick of me on the murals that we did for Mechicano. We all did several more then several quite a few murals over at the Ramona Gardens. Everyone would make murals down there. So they were going to shoot the mural that I did.

DENISE LUGO: What was Ramona Gardens? Excuse me.

MANUEL CRUZ: Ramona, the projects, you know?

DENISE LUGO: Housing projects?

MANUEL CRUZ: Housing projects. So what happen is they were going to shoot that mural of mine and then at that time I told them, "How come you don't take some shots of...", *también ese, ¿cómo se llama?* (also, what's his name?), not Gamboa.

DENISE LUGO: Jeron?

MANUEL CRUZ: Willy Jeron. Jeron used to pass by City Terrace and it just happened that I was sitting with the next to the hot dog stand eating a burrito and drinking coffee. He passed by in his little truck and he was going by. So then I was (makes a whistling noise) and he stops. So he started, "Hey *cálmate* (calm down)," and he stops. When he stopped, I told him, "You want to be in a flick, man? There making a movie on murals, you know?" *Y luego el vato me dice* (then he said), "Yeah, yeah, why not?" So finally I introduced him to them. So he came back and time went by and anyways he started making the movie first I went to go see three hours of *cochinada* (useless junk) as far as the movie "Homeboy". I told him take that off and put this on and that's when I took him to Whittier Blvd and they did the boulevard scene. So anyhow we went through this whole thing to finally to make a decision. I told Gamboa you know he had this portable mural, that's what I was trying to get to. He had this portable mural and I told him, "I know a really good spot where your mural would look *de aquella* (like those)." He said,

“Where?” I said, “*Haya en la* (over there on) Ford, Ford Mara over there where all the freeways are. You could hang them on the *cercos* (wall/fence) there.” We did. We went and hung them on the *cercos* (wall/fence).

DENISE LUGO: What year was that? Do you remember?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't remember. About 9 years or so, many things have happened I don't keep track of all that shit. Anyhow so like it's in the movie, rent the movie one of these days.

DENISE LUGO: What did you say was the name of the movie?

MANUEL CRUZ: “Homeboy”.

DENISE LUGO: By who?

MANUEL CRUZ: Huh? By I don't know who. I'll tell you who could give you that information.

DENISE LUGO: So you're working right now in El Centro del Pueblo.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: Go ahead and explain. They went and they rented the movie without you knowing?

MANUEL CRUZ: No, it's not that. Carlos Callejo went to Nicaragua to make a mural and he told me, "I'm going to Nicaragua and when I come back we'll get down and finish this mural." He split and then after that I got the *chavalos* (young boys) to make a small mural, a panel mural 8x8. While that was happening Robert went and borrowed this movie. When he brought it, it turned out to be this movie called “Homeboy”. I'm in that flick and Willy Jeron is in that one too. Which is the one I'm telling you right now. So you could borrow it but I'll tell you what the only thing you won't be able to see are the credits at the beginning because *estaba toda rompida*, it's all torn. You got to go beyond the credits and then you start seeing the flick but you could get it I guess from the can, right?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: You know another one? You that are interested in this, you should look for the one called “Mural, Mural” Ever heard of that one?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: Ok get that one too. That's another good movie to get. It's got all the different *muralistas* (muralists) in there, you know?

DENISE LUGO: So tell me how did Mechicano programs for “muralism” work?

MANUEL CRUZ: It's how? It's how? What do you mean? Work like how? What are you saying?

DENISE LUGO: No, no, no. How did they decide who took what mural or who did what mural?

MANUEL CRUZ: Look I'll tell you one thing. All I remember is that Mando and Leonard went and did a mural up there on some theater on Broadway.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah I remember that, and Ray [Ramon] Atilano did that too.

MANUEL CRUZ: Right okay. That's what I'm saying. So then I remember Mando made some murals in Maravilla somewhere. I have that calling book that I have right there somewhere and as you see in the cover the one of the *indios* (natives) that's I have in there they painted that mural in the school where Ray was working at. That's what I'm trying to tell you. The other mural is a picture that I showed you right now where Mando is involved that was at Lincoln High School. I wasn't painting the kids were painting. Mando was in charge of that. The only reason I'm there is because they were going to use the poem that I made called “Barrio Blues” which went on the wall at Lincoln High which is a mural that I have over here at Stevenson's. I mean as far as who was happening and who was doing, I don't remember that many murals going up at that time. The only thing I do remember was when they finally got the *contracto* (contract) with Ramona Gardens. That's when everybody got involved, on the ones in Ramona Gardens.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember the women? Was there any new women involved at that time in Mechicano or any artist that come to mind besides Lucia Grudalva?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't remember too many, not really. *Había muchas viejas* (there were a lot of women) but they weren't muralist. (laughs)

DENISE LUGO: Ok. (laughs)

MANUEL CRUZ: *Tu quieres que te diga la verda* (You want me to tell you the truth). (chuckles). Think about it how many murals did you know right now? *Apenas* (Barely) you start seeing something else. Here is the one I was telling you look.

DENISE LUGO: Oh yes, I remember this one! Where was this one?

MANUEL CRUZ: It's in front of Stevenson's.

DENISE LUGO: Is it still there?

MANUEL CRUZ: It's still there.

DENISE LUGO: You painted them out?

MANUEL CRUZ: I was working for that *centro* (center). I was working for Plaza Community Center. I painted that because some gang tried beating up some little homies. This right here is a poem of a song called “Barrio Blues” which I did. So I painted that mural for them. He’s another *centro* (center) nobody thinks about. Not even a *centro* (center). Guess where this *centro* (center) is at?

DENISE LUGO: Ruben Salazar. Yeah I remember this.

MANUEL CRUZ: We all know. Right here what does it say?

DENISE LUGO: Private point institute of men.

MANUEL CRUZ: Chino Prison. (Chuckles)

DENISE LUGO: Yeah that’s where they told me I should go.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah, Copa.

DENISE LUGO: You know, Franco is there I think. I’m telling you.

MANUEL CRUZ: I don’t know who’s there. I went there to *cantárles* (sing to them) “El Peso de Plata”. Look at the year. I was invited to go sing out there. I’ll have to show you just in case you’ve never seen this before. Look.

DENISE LUGO: Oh, that’s a beautiful one! Yeah, I remember that. Way back.

MANUEL CRUZ: Ok so since we’re sitting here next to which is Motts Street this is where they came out the Mott street murals *aquí* (right here). You’re going to see Judith Baca right here.

DENISE LUGO: That’s the L.A.— What was it?

MANUEL CRUZ: I think it’s the Times, *¿qué no?* (don’t you think)?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah the Times. It’s an old Times description of murals.

MANUEL CRUZ: If I could find it. (Flips through newspaper)

DENISE LUGO: There in there. They’re in the very front.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yes, right here. All I was going to say I was going back to Mechicano that I remember the main project as far as mass mural painting was Ramona.

DENISE LUGO: What year was it, you remember?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't know. *No te digo que no tengo mi* (Didn't I tell you that I don't have my) résumé?

DENISE LUGO: Especially he is referring to is Los Angeles Times April 11th 1976 and it's a home section, Sunday's paper and it's called "The Astonishing Murals of East L.A." Now if there was something that you would like people to remember you as an artist what would it be?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't know. What do you mean?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, I mean for the future.

MANUEL CRUZ: Well I don't think I could answer that. Unless I drop dead now then I would have to think about it.

DENISE LUGO: Uh huh.

MANUEL CRUZ: I'm going on a presumption since I haven't died I don't feel I've done my best. In other words I would like to do something with all of them, which I have done so far. I want to get into monuments, sculptures, that's what I want to get into. As far as the past, who knows. Likes there's murals right now that we been doing most artists have done recently are not like frescos they don't last. The one on Saint Louis they barely erased it they not even three months ago the one I did over there. They might be murals and all that but *no tienen* (they don't have) quality. Right now I can't answer that. ... So then what happen is that he made a catalog. He selected out of 80 something like 45 sculptures he put on the catalog and he numbered them. Naturally I would name all the sculptures. *Me decía- "¿Como se llamaba este?"* (He would ask me- "What's his name?") and I would say, "Well this is the graves and this is a man in the box this is a whatever you know." I use to get all different names and *que esto que otro* (this and that).

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: And then he numbered them. Whatever I called them he called them. He wrote it down and he came out with a nice looking catalog.

DENISE LUGO: You never got a copy of that catalog?

MANUEL CRUZ: I had them. Ah, that's years ago; I lost my catalog. *Traigo todavía chanza que te traje esto para que lo mires.* (It was lucky that I brought this one so you could take a look at it).

DENISE LUGO: Okay.

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't have a catalog I only have one or two little pieces left there. So that's how I got it. So anyways what happened is, I'm trying to tell you this as fast as I

can, So *lo que paso este* (what happen was), came the day that they were having a gift show at the Ambassador Hotel.

DENISE LUGO: What year?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't even remember that was about that was around 1950, 195-.

DENISE LUGO: I had to ask this question.

MANUEL CRUZ: 1953 or 1954 somewhere in there. I don't know; somewhere in there. It had to be around there already because I think I already had one of my kids, the first one. Anyhow so like what happen was that I went to the hotel and I helped them set up and put all the stuff together and he got some professional salesmen and some *chavala* (young girl) and he had a nice display on the whole *mitote* (event).

DENISE LUGO: So you said he got a salesman.

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah so then after a while the show started and so on and there was a lot of floors en *donde tenían divisiones* (where they had) of all sorts of stuff. This was supposed to be like something new at that time. To make a story short, people started asking how come I didn't sign my work. He won't let me. I started getting wise by that time I started getting smart. People started telling he should let you, *decía la gente* (people would say). He should let you sign the stuff. The show was a success and after a while I started getting all kinds of orders as far as sculptures.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah really.

DENISE LUGO: How much did you sell the things for?

MANUEL CRUZ: I don't know. Anywhere from \$50 to \$100, \$150, \$200, whatever it was.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

MANUEL CRUZ: He was selling them for a lot of bucks and I was still only getting only \$1.50. So we started getting the orders and he started telling me, "You know what put the pieces that you're doing and put them in boxes and number them like a model." He wanted me to do it. *Ese vato trucha* (This guy is cleaver). I know what he is trying to do. *Me quiere chingar* (He wants to screw me over). So I wasn't numbering everything you know. Came my day I told him, "Look man, I want you to let me sign the sculptures," because I use to do the wood bases and they were all different *también* (also). Real fine wood bases, the best wood.

DENISE LUGO: Wood bases?

MANUEL CRUZ: The sculptures were in wood bases. We use to go to this place where they use to sell rare wood like mahogany, walnut, and manzanita. Good wood you know good stuff. *Compraban los cachos* (They would buy the wood) and I use to make the design and then saw them. So when we showed then in a show they already had wood bases. So what happened after a while *el vato le dije que me diera más feria y hay un peso dos, tres pesos era mucho* (I told the guy to give me more money and one or two dollars was a lot). Give me at least two more dollars I would tell him and he didn't want to. I told him, "You know what? If you're not going to pay me I'm going to split." He said, "You can't do that!" I told him, "The hell I can if you're not going to give me no more money and you don't want to let me sign." He started to let me sign but he didn't want to give me no more money. So I walked out and he thought he was smart. I already had 5 assistants by that time. I already had *chavalos* (young men) helping me.

DENISE LUGO: Oh really?

MANUEL CRUZ: Yeah, they were helping me. By that time I was doing art weald and I used to lift that brass and bronze rule that kind of sculpture. So he figured I just get the assistants and let them do the sculpture with the number trick but it didn't work because I told you I didn't do the numbers. So *al rato las veo* (later he saw them). He wasn't making it and eventually he was making chairs when I got there. He was making what they call princess chairs, that was his main line but when I got in there he changed from that he was doing the chairs. When he was doing the sculptures, the sculptures were selling more than the chairs. I ended up getting in with Mendel. Then came a salesman to my house and tells me, "You know what? This guy named Walter Flusher wants to buy Mendel's business because Mendel is not making it anymore. So I went to go meet this so called Walter Flusher, he was a German, and he used to sell coo-coo clocks and all kinds of this foreign goods. He had a show room here on Hill Street somewhere, on 6th and Hill. *Me llevaron a mi y a mi ruca a comer y nos mariamos.* (They took me and my girlfriend out to eat and they gave us a headache.) To make a long story short after so many discussions I finally ended up signing a five-year contract.

DENISE LUGO: Oh, really?

MANUEL CRUZ: But he said, "I'll sign with you." He told Mendel, "I'll buy your line of sculptures if Manuel comes with the *cosa* (whole thing)." So I told him, "Look, if I am going with you, I want my own studio, my own shop." *Ya para ese tiempo me estaba poniendome trucha* (By then I was being cleaver about it) (Laughs) So I ended up getting a studio on Eastern Aveune and we bought all the machinery. When Mendel went down, they auction all this stuff. Walter bought everything, I mean as many machines as he could buy and he bought all the sculptures. Some of them were half finished and some of them were 3/4. We ended up on over here on Eastern Aveune and opened up shop there and I was living [...] from a block from there. I was supposed to only make 15 sculptures *por semana* (a week).

DENISE LUGO: 15 by week. Yeah.

MANUEL CRUZ: But then he started raising it to 20, *y luego* (and then) to 25. Plus he wanted some originals, you know? I remember when I saw him I told him, “Look the day you don’t pay me, because I have a family, *quebramos contrato, allí muere, ya estuvo* (the contract is over, it ends there, I had enough). So he used to travel all over the place and sure enough as months went by I was already pumping out more than the 15. I don’t know how many I was pulling out. I was hard for me. My ruca (girlfriend) was helping me. Not to make the sculptures but to pack them and all that stuff; *pintar* (Paint) the bases.

DENISE LUGO: You paint them too?

MANUEL CRUZ: The bases. The sculptures were not painted. There were just lacquer.

[END OF INTERVIEW]