

Oral History interview with Ramon “Ray” Atilano

Atilano, Ray
Painter

Los Angeles, California

Sound Cassette Duration – 52:29

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DENISE LUGO: So you say you started in 1969 in Melrose and Cienega? You lasted approximately six months because you have problems with that.

RAY ATILANO: We had problems. We got to move, there can't be owner. You see, we leased half the building. The other half, the guy was going to sell out. We were threatened.

DENISE LUGO: The first site in East LA, no?

RAY ATILANO: We were at Gage and Whittier.

DENISE LUGO: Yes. Moira Bright—

RAY ATILANO: Moira Bright and Victor Franco. They were the only two. Then it was Leonard Castellanos, then myself; more or less than that in that category.

DENISE LUGO: And so you were in Gage and Whittier?

RAY ATILANO: On Gage and Whittier.

DENISE LUGO: Was it a big place?

RAY ATILANO: Quite big. Large enough. It was a circle gallery. Channel 2 gave us some panels and we took advantage of the panels and we did a circle of the gallery. We had free workshops, silk-screening, free classes at the theater, band—We had everything.

DENISE LUGO: You had a theater?

RAY ATILANO: Oh yeah.

DENISE LUGO: Did “Aurista” come down and ever perform here?

RAY ATILANO: Who?

DENISE LUGO: “Aurista”.

RAY ATILANO: He seems familiar.

DENISE LUGO: "Aurista" was a—

RAY ATILANO: "Aurista", I think that's the one we were talking about. He bought one of my paintings.

DENISE LUGO: I want to talk to him. He's in San Diego.

RAY ATILANO: Oh no, then that's not him. Wait a minute hold up. The one that was here in East Los Angeles. He was a poet teacher. I have it written down on paper.

DENISE LUGO: Anyone has any photos of these locations? Exterior photos, internal photos?

RAY ATILANO: I have everything.

DENISE LUGO: *¿No los tirastes?* (You didn't throw them away?)

RAY ATILANO: When I resigned, I gave everything back. I said, "Here's your money. I resign. I am not taking a penny. I am not taking a paper." My garage was packed with papers, you know, tons of it. I turned it all back. "Here it is, I don't want no part of it," and that was it. I gave everything back. So I do have—

DENISE LUGO: Anything. I'll Xerox it. Maybe I'll make copies of it.

RAY ATILANO: I might have some.

DENISE LUGO: We'll talk about it later on.

RAY ATILANO: I just have to look for them in the garage.

DENISE LUGO: You can lend them to me and I can Xerox them. On Gage and Whittier, that was the first site? How long were you there, do you think?

RAY ATILANO: Around two or three years.

DENISE LUGO: Oh really? And the community was behind you?

RAY ATILANO: No, not really.

DENISE LUGO: Of course.

RAY ATILANO: Because the people and the artists weren't so— That place was given to me. We had a show at UCLA and I invited the public relations officer of the Doctor's Hospital. I invited him. He looked at the show and he was very impressed and he says, "Why are guys moving around or what?" I says, "We don't have a place." He says, "I'll give you a place free."

DENISE LUGO: *¿Quién te lo dio?* (Who gave it to you?)

RAY ATILANO: Public relations of the East Los Angeles Hospital.

DENISE LUGO: Oh, the doctor's hospital?

RAY ATILANO: Yeah. He is the one who gave it to us free and we didn't want it free. We had a contract. We wanted to pay, not free. Free they can take it. We clean it up and everything and they are going to take it away from us.

DENISE LUGO: Did you get a contract?

RAY ATILANO: We had a contract. We were paying direct. It was to free after all. This guy Livett. He gave me a big opportunity. East Los Angeles Doctor's Hospital. He was public relations from the Doctor's Hospital. Not only there, he was from six or seven hospitals, you know—

DENISE LUGO: Who were the artists then that was in that group?

RAY ATILANO: You have Frank Martinez, [Lucila Villaseñor] Grijalva, Castellanos, Armando Cabrera, and Jose [Cervantes] from San Diego. He was good. He was living there. He would make a lot of paintings.

DENISE LUGO: Montoya?

RAY ATILANO: No, [Jose] Cervantes.

DENISE LUGO: Yes. He's a friend of mine.

RAY ATILANO: He lived there. He was our baby there.

DENISE LUGO: I'm going to call him. I'm going to see him this weekend.

RAY ATILANO: Jesse Gutierrez, we had Solano, [Carlos] Almaraz and that [entire] bunch was with us at one time.

DENISE LUGO: Romero?

RAY ATILANO: Frank Romero.

DENISE LUGO: How about Harry Gamboa?

RAY ATILANO: Harry Gamboa wasn't exactly with our group, but he made three or four shows there. We left the gallery open for them. They would do anything they'd please.

DENISE LUGO: He did four shows?

RAY ATILANO: Around three or four shows there. Very impressive. They bring out white gloves there. They got married there. They did, oh!

DENISE LUGO: Who got married there? Oh you mean ASCO?

RAY ATILANO: Oh, that was [Harry] Gamboa and all them.

DENISE LUGO: Gronk [Glugio Nicandro]? Was Gronk part of the whole thing too?

RAY ATILANO: Like I said he was not directly involved.

DENISE LUGO: He was like Harry. How about Salvador Torres?

RAY ATILANO: Don't know him. We had around thirty artists. I probably have a list somewhere. We had one-man shows, three-man shows. We exhibited in every college there is here in town.

DENISE LUGO: How about el manifesto? Was there a manifesto made? Some one told me there was one. There has to be one.

RAY ATILANO: If there's one, I don't—

DENISE LUGO: A manifesto is something that they say. You know what a manifesto is, no? How they feel, what they think art is, what it shouldn't be, and mostly everybody believed in. [Such as] the philosophical viewpoints. I got to have that.

RAY ATILANO: Check into San Fernando. You could find—

DENISE LUGO: You mean at Northridge?

RAY ATILANO: No. In fact [Oscar] Castillo worked for them. It's just a lot of pictures and slides. He would sit with us and talk about what we did and how we felt about the art or what have you. But it was an exciting class. A lot of things happened.

DENISE LUGO: After you were in Gage and Whittier, where else did you guys go?

RAY ATILANO: Then we fell behind on the rent and, not taken out, but we moved out of there. We went to Highland Park.

DENISE LUGO: You are kidding.

RAY ATILANO: We went to 52nd – 53rd and Figueroa.

DENISE LUGO: How long were you guys there?

RAY ATILANO: Over one year, at the most. I had to quit.

DENISE LUGO: When did you quit? In Highland?

RAY ATILANO: I resigned. I think about a month after that and that was it; nobody knew anything else.

DENISE LUGO: That was in 1975?

RAY ATILANO: Around 1974-1975.

DENISE LUGO: And Moira [Bright] was then still?

RAY ATILANO: Moira [Bright] was [...] not that involved anymore, but her name used to always come up and in any great meeting she—

DENISE LUGO: She was a figurehead.

RAY ATILANO: Yes. [...] Very involved.

DENISE LUGO: The art that you guys produced was art for public places, no? *¿Que clase de arte?* (What type of art?)

RAY ATILANO: Well we showed in any gallery. I mean any place. There was nothing stopping us having any shows or anything. When we started the galleries, we had a lot of shows; you know, going to every university. You can name any university around here or hospital or anybody. We showed any place. For the Cinco de Mayo we had around three or four colleges wanted our art. We had enough art for everybody.

DENISE LUGO: You know what I would like to do? Eventually I want to have every single major exhibition that was made there in your buildings, everything you were involved with— it's going to end up in a book I think.

RAY ATILANO: I had the book, but I don't know if—but I did have. I don't know, I can't say yes or no.

DENISE LUGO: I know, but can even Xerox it.

RAY ATILANO: I have all the shows we had, galleries. I have dates.

DENISE LUGO: There was another organization, Self-Help.

RAY ATILANO: I was a gallery director so I had all those. Every art had to go through my hands.

DENISE LUGO: Self-Help, tell me a little about them because I've heard a lot of funny stories.

RAY ATILANO: They started up when we did.

DENISE LUGO: *¿Al mismo tiempo?* (At the same time?) By who?

RAY ATILANO: By Sister Karen. There was no competition, like most people think there was. We never had no competition among us. Even though the Goez came up almost the same time we came. To me, they all been nice. Most people criticize them because they wanted the money and we didn't want the money. We were not looking for money; we were looking for a name. For the name to grow, grow and grow.

DENISE LUGO: How was Self-Help different than yours at the beginning?

RAY ATILANO: They weren't very different. They had silkscreen, they had grants, and people working there.

DENISE LUGO: Where were they located originally?

RAY ATILANO: Brooklyn.

DENISE LUGO: The same place they are at now.

RAY ATILANO: Yeah. You can't say we were very different. I don't think there was much of a difference.

DENISE LUGO: Did you have artists that worked in the same places? Or just no?

RAY ATILANO: [No response from Ray]

DENISE LUGO: Okay, some one told me. I knew that. You'd be surprised at the stories I hear.

RAY ATILANO: We did have some from Mechicano and Goetz; very few. Some wanted the money and to further put on pressure and say, "You have to sell."

DENISE LUGO: I understand; they are just trying to hang in there.

RAY ATILANO: Some of them jumped to the Goetz.

DENISE LUGO: How about the Plaza? What happened to Plaza de la Raza?

RAY ATILANO: Well nothing really happened to it, it's just that the people involved—

DENISE LUGO: No, I am talking about way back then.

RAY ATILANO: Oh back then! They didn't have anybody, they had Mechicano.

DENISE LUGO: So they drew from you guys?

RAY ATILANO: Yeah. We had a show at Broadway, downtown Broadway and it was two like it was Plaza de la Raza doing the show, but it wasn't Plaza de la Raza—

DENISE LUGO: It was you guys. If you have to say, who was the historian of the whole group? I am talking about the guy who always likes to curate. I knew of the people that came in to work, but other than that. Give me a little reference on the personalities. Who is the one that liked to curate the show and was the scholar? I was told you were the historian. That's what people tell me.

RAY ATILANO: Well they picked me because I was in charge of it. Nothing would have come out except through my hands.

DENISE LUGO: That's what I was told.

RAY ATILANO: Nothing, but get out of there if I wasn't there or approve. No gallery, no show would be affected. I had to schedule for so-and-so coming in. I had to schedule who's coming in after him, who's next, who's next, who's next? The gallery never got boring.

DENISE LUGO: You did everything?

RAY ATILANO: Yes, I started everything.

DENISE LUGO: How about the other guys?

RAY ATILANO: Castellanos?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

RAY ATILANO: Oh he was the director.

DENISE LUGO: Brothers.

RAY ATILANO: Brothers?

DENISE LUGO: From Mexico are the Castellanos. Okay.

RAY ATILANO: No, no. Castellanos is Leonard Castellanos, he was the director there. He was very good. He was very respected everywhere he went. He was very heavy on his own philosophy and arts.

DENISE LUGO: Is he alive?

RAY ATILANO: Yes. Very heavy. I mean you couldn't touch his arm. He was, "That's the way it goes and that's the way it has to go."

DENISE LUGO: I'd like to see him.

RAY ATILANO: He fought against us. He'd go to all the meeting; Fresno, San Diego, every where. He's always up and down in the meetings.

DENISE LUGO: How about *Queso* [Salvador Roberto Torres]? In San Diego he's considered with a lot of respect. They don't necessarily go with him. You know how respectful they are to him? Him and [José] Cervantes, I spoke to. I know *Queso* [Salvador Roberto Torres] was here for a while.

RAY ATILANO: [José] Cervantes, I don't know lately though.

DENISE LUGO: No, no, I am not talking about them.

RAY ATILANO: Who you are talking about now; I don't know about now.

DENISE LUGO: What I am saying, [José] Cervantes' stuff is rather interesting. He showed me some of his stuff he did with Mechicano. He had some slides.

RAY ATILANO: Very hard edge.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

RAY ATILANO: Very, very hard edge drawings.

DENISE LUGO: When did Gronk [Glugio Nicandro] come into the picture? Do you remember?

RAY ATILANO: Oh Gronk [Glugio Nicandro]. He went into the gallery before exhibit. He and two or three others. We gave it to him.

DENISE LUGO: About 1971?

RAY ATILANO: Yeah you're right.

DENISE LUGO: That's what I figured, 1971.

RAY ATILANO: They came around 1971. His name came up and I says, "Okay, you are entitled to a show. You could have a show." So he kept the place open twenty-four hours. Whatever they wanted to do. They did everything that they wanted to do to the gallery. So that was their show. We gave them to freedom to do anything they wanted to show.

DENISE LUGO: What you are telling me now is for my bones to start going—No one will every know what you have told me in any time ever even decide to publish even the pieces your gold work. Okay? I just want you to be aware of it. What I am doing right now is I go see some one, I don't want to mention someone else's name that will make them mad because I did that in San Diego and I have to be real careful.

RAY ATILANO: I have a lot of respect for everybody and everybody respect themselves. I mean they got their own drug problems, they have their own this, they got their own that; but that's beside the point for me.

DENISE LUGO: So you said [Carlos] Almaraz came in about 1970?

RAY ATILANO: At the beginning.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, he's in the beginning.

RAY ATILANO: He came in around right after the 1970's; him and Frank Romero. Which now he paints exactly like [Carlos] Almaraz.

DENISE LUGO: You know who else too? Limon. You know what I call it? I call it the East LA Chicano—

RAY ATILANO: Limon was very different though at one time.

DENISE LUGO: No, no, Limon is identical. You know who too? And Magu.

RAY ATILANO: Limon went to Spain. Magu, well...

DENISE LUGO: No, they are all the same, everything! I like Carlos [Almaraz].

RAY ATILANO: You're kidding! I've seen that mural that they painted out there on the wall and I thought that was [Carlos] Almaraz and I looked at it and I says, "That's Almaraz!" They hired him. They said, "Hey your friend is Romero!" and I said, "Oh, sheez!"

DENISE LUGO: I am just telling you, all these guys are the same. Magu [Gilbert Sánchez Luján], the same thing; they all paint the same way.

RAY ATILANO: Ha! What are you going to say about my painting? You are going to find out I have nothing to do with those.

DENISE LUGO: So in other words he was then very instrumental and influencing a lot of these artists.

RAY ATILANO: Yes, he had a lot of input there. They respected him because he was always a very easy and outgoing person. Even that he wanted his way, you know he is the boss, everybody told him and says, "Hey, these guys are going to copy you." "Ah, they can't copy me! Because I am too good for them." I says, "Wait and see; you're living with them, dreaming with them—they are going to copy you." Then we seen a few sketches, and even in those days, "Hey is this [Carlos] Almaraz?" "Hey, what are you talking about!? That's mine!" I can't believe it.

DENISE LUGO: Los Four. Give me the scoop because I want to meet with the big hot shots in LACMA; they called me. I got to talk to them. It was Frank...

RAY ATILANO: Frank Romero.

DENISE LUGO: Carlos.

RAY ATILANO: Carlos Almaraz.

DENISE LUGO: Beto, Rocha?

RAY ATILANO: De la Rocha. He came a little after. *El otro* (The other one) was Casares.

DENISE LUGO: No! There was a woman! *¿No te acuerdas?* (You don't remember?) She's not here or something. Did you hear about Beto what he did?

RAY ATILANO: What Beto?

DENISE LUGO: Beto de la Rocha.

RAY ATILANO: No.

DENISE LUGO: He has done all these paintings and he burned them when he became a born-again Christian. Every one of his paintings he burnt. This is recent, in the last four years.

RAY ATILANO: He wasn't really an artist. We had another guy who was always drunk out there. He came in with his bible after me. He was trying to push out of the way with the bible. I said, "No, we don't have bibles." "Okay, this girl, this girl. I know her!" She's this heavysset girl.

DENISE LUGO: You know what [Carlos] Almaraz said? That originally it was more than four; it was a whole gang. Was that true?

RAY ATILANO: No, it wasn't that many. It was very selective. It was a little group living together, and then they bought a home.

DENISE LUGO: Okay. You are kidding!

RAY ATILANO: Oh yeah! I went to see it one day. They bought a home and they were doing their own gardening, their own food. We were going to be the so-called communists. They were one hundred percent communist because they had the flag. You went to the living room and they had a big, you know...

DENISE LUGO: You're kidding!

RAY ATILANO: Casares was living there. I went out there and I said, "How can you survive doing this?" Oh yeah, every body has a chore. Today he puts water on the plants [and] tomorrow he does another thing. They were working out like they were going to be a big—everybody was going to pay the house; it was a big house.

DENISE LUGO: It was communal living?

RAY ATILANO: Oh yeah! And that's when we started finding out that [Frank] Romero and [Carlos] Almaraz were not working together to do that after that.

DENISE LUGO: Uh-huh, that's what I heard, but we know that Frank [Romero] had problems. Carlos [Almaraz] moved in with him and helped him.

RAY ATILANO: Well he had problems with his marriage. Well, I don't know.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, I know. I spend a lot of time with Frank [Romero], before I started doing this.

RAY ATILANO: Then we had so many girls. So many women that have been involved throughout the center. I can't think of none of them. I've been out of there since 1970 some or more than ten, twelve years.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, I know, it's hard to think about it. So how long did this thing go on with Los Four?

RAY ATILANO: How long did they stay together?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, for a couple years?

RAY ATILANO: No, I think for more than a couple. When I went to see them, I was still in Mechicano and they had just bought a home and I was invited to their house to see some slides. I went. I was never scared to go anywhere. "Oh don't go there."

DENISE LUGO: Where did they live?

RAY ATILANO: Out there on Highland and Echo Park.

DENISE LUGO: Oh, Echo Park, he likes it! So there was a woman.

RAY ATILANO: What's her name?

DENISE LUGO: That's okay. How did they get that show in LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]? I've heard all these rumors. Jay Livingston did the show, no? And that they had problems with the museum?

RAY ATILANO: Problems with the museum? Yeah, I didn't have much to do with that show.

DENISE LUGO: Did you go see it?

RAY ATILANO: No. I did not see it because I was not officially invited to it. For reasons, I don't know. I became a police officer at the center. Everybody would walk out of the center and you see smoke coming out of the room. As soon as I walk in—

DENISE LUGO: Put everything else back.

RAY ATILANO: Nobody broke a glass. You could have killed yourself. There were kids in there. I didn't like it.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, I see your point.

RAY ATILANO: As far as the shows we had there, we had fabulous shows. We had gangs from all over Los Angeles at the meeting there. We had inmates from jail go in there and have shows at the Mechicano. We actually had prisoners to have exhibits at the center.

DENISE LUGO: How were you able to make it go?

RAY ATILANO: Well, we had the connections and—

DENISE LUGO: Government.

RAY ATILANO: And government would say, "Okay, we are going to let these people have their own show." But there's going to be one guard. So we'll take "boos" and everything. These guys out there were, "They'll never let us come out again." We had some beautiful time there. That's some thing that could go on and on.

DENISE LUGO: You know what I have problems with is with the very first one; is with Sister Karen. I have problems with her. It's very hard to get on her good side and I've been doing that for a long time.

RAY ATILANO: She had something else, but then again she was very much involved with the [David Alfaro] Siqueiros. We went to go see the Siqueiros murals and we were all involved in it and then suddenly nothing happened with it. The government didn't want it.

DENISE LUGO: Once you left, that was the end of Mechicano?

RAY ATILANO: When I left that was the end of Mechicano.

DENISE LUGO: Where do you think you're going now? Was it Leonard—

RAY ATILANO: Leonard Castellanos. I got no word.

DENISE LUGO: *¿No sabes?* (You don't know?)

RAY ATILANO: I don't have the slightest idea. The funny thing, after I resigned, nobody has gone to my house; after so many years that I gave, three. In fact, my house is where we had the meetings. When I took off to vacation to Mexico, I left the house open for them and soon I quit. That's how hard it was. He's a very talented guy. If it's one of the artists that's been hurt, it's been Leonard.

DENISE LUGO: He's been hurt?

RAY ATILANO: Oh, yeah. All the murals that he did are white washed. He's one of the artists that really got hurt.

DENISE LUGO: Can we talk about the philosophy of the Chicano art at the time? I know what it is; I just want to hear it from you. I am part of the *barrio* [Chicano neighborhood] and it takes a lot for me to put it in words, but I know what I want to say. I want to hear it from someone of what it was then, not now.

RAY ATILANO: What was it then?

DENISE LUGO: Yes. What did you guys consider art? What was it for? The function? The painting?

RAY ATILANO: No it wasn't the painting. Our function was to have the best of the crop. The best there was. There was no second best for us. So there was many artists, who wanted to participate with us and we would check out their paintings and if they were very good quality, they would be exhibited or otherwise they would not be exhibited, they would be turned back to the artist. We had the best of the best. I don't think there is anybody who could say the opposite. Those were the best and we were not involved in making money; all we wanted was to show the best.

DENISE LUGO: The work; what was the distinction between homeboy stuff, *placas* (graffiti), and Chicano art?

RAY ATILANO: The artists that we had graduated from Chouinard (Art Institute), who graduated from Mexico, myself—

DENISE LUGO: So they were formally educated?

RAY ATILANO: They were not straight artists. What we call the homeboy artists, none of them were homeboy artists. The artists we had, all of them were out of Chouinard. So they were fine art, the best there was. We had to really go down and find out what their piece of art was. We looked at it judge it. "That's good. No good."

DENISE LUGO: The work was very "didactic", wasn't it? It was educational? To show philosophy? Much of the work was for all those reasons?

RAY ATILANO: No, not really. At those times when you talk to Mechicano and we had a lot of fights with a lot of people because they wanted us to paint flowers, paint Indians, paint

everything the way they did it in Mexico; I refused that. We fought against that. We wanted to be of fine arts. That was not our goal. We wanted fine art. Fine art that can be represented anywhere in the world without being labeled with a Mexican flavor in it. No, we didn't care for Mexican flavor, we just paint for ourselves.

DENISE LUGO: Very good! You're kidding, that's great!

RAY ATILANO: And now we have a lot of fights with San Diego and all of the rest of the group. They wanted to do the Azteca—

[Audio cuts off]

DENISE LUGO: ...Mexican intellect when you came; no wonder! Oh my God! No wonder!

RAY ATILANO: I just came from Mexico, making a fortune out there and then coming over here working with immunity. Of course I couldn't see—

DENISE LUGO: You were born here, weren't you?

RAY ATILANO: Oh yeah.

DENISE LUGO: But you were educated over there? Oh my God! You are much like I am.

RAY ATILANO: Yeah, I was sixteen years in Mexico. I've done five years of art and two years of theater; you know everything out there.

DENISE LUGO: Do you go often? I love to go to Mexico. I was living there when the quakes happened.

RAY ATILANO: I was there in 1968-1967.

DENISE LUGO: Oh that was nothing; those were babies. I was there for the two big ones.

RAY ATILANO: Oh I don't know. This one, when I was there, I was working at the university. I worked for the university of Mexico City.

DENISE LUGO: UNAM?

RAY ATILANO: Yes, I worked through there. All the big people right now Carlos Montezuma, all those, I worked for those. The guy that over here doing the magazine; he's a cartoonist.

DENISE LUGO: I know. He called me.

RAY ATILANO: I got one his books. We started theater in the same spot, when we were just beginning. I don't really like to talk about it because it's like, "Hey you're bragging."

DENISE LUGO: No, that's good. [That's] your background.

RAY ATILANO: I've been very lucky. Very, very lucky because I lived with my teachers and got good experience through them. So I knew [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, I knew Diego

[Rivera], I was there with Frida Kahlo; all them big artists. So I communicated with them, worked with them and I competed with them. I was in the gallery *Los Valores*. I participated in all them galleries. So there was nothing to do with me when I come here and have a show. We had a show at the Ankrum Gallery and all that. "It's a big deal." I said, "What's so big about it?" You know.

DENISE LUGO: *¿Cuándo era?* (When was it?) Do you remember a date?

RAY ATILANO: On the Ankrum?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

RAY ATILANO: I think it was in the 1970's.

DENISE LUGO: 1972?

RAY ATILANO: 1970.

DENISE LUGO: I'm going to look it up.

RAY ATILANO: 1970 in the Ankrum Gallery and then we had the Skinny Art Gallery.

DENISE LUGO: Skinny?

RAY ATILANO: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: Where is that?

RAY ATILANO: It's right next to the car pit, there's a gallery there.

DENISE LUGO: Okay I'm going to look it up.

RAY ATILANO: We had a couple of shows there.

DENISE LUGO: I want to ask you a question: The Farris Gallery, did you guys ever relate— No that was too late for the Farris. C]?

RAY ATILANO: No.

DENISE LUGO: None of those other mainstream galleries ever bother with you guys? Interexchange exhibitions? [Edward] Kienholz never came down? Billy Al Bengston? Remember those mainstream American [artists]? *¿Nada? ¿Nunca?* (Nothing? Not ever?)

RAY ATILANO: No. Not that I remember. Well not at least when I was there.

DENISE LUGO: Well, you were there all the time.

RAY ATILANO: (Laughs) Well, people were trying to do things around me, but I was always sketchy. Oh yeah, people trying to do a lot of things behind me. Like always, trying to get little points here and there and as soon as I find out, I says, "That show is not going out, period!"

DENISE LUGO: Who were the biggest supporters that you guys had outside? I am talking about as mainstream as possible.

RAY ATILANO: We had a group called the Jewish Community.

DENISE LUGO: I heard about that.

RAY ATILANO: We had that group. How much help we had? I don't know. We always knew they were behind us. With honestly I don't know how much help we had. In other words, I don't know. It was just a name behind us.

DENISE LUGO: I am talking about writing, like big art magazines: *Art in America*, *Art Form*.

RAY ATLEANO: We had Wilson from *LA Times* wrote a few articles on us.

DENISE LUGO: I am going to look it up.

RAY ATILANO: He wrote a couple of articles. In fact we had a show and he mentioned something about me being a Diego Rivera or a copy of Diego Rivera or something of that effect. He was the one who spoke with us.

DENISE LUGO: How did you guys deal with the Montoya brothers in Sacramento?

RAY ATILANO: Not personally, I didn't have [anything] to do with that. That was Leonard Castellanos' job. See, we all had a commitment and a job to do. In order for our center to survive, Leonard Castellanos was the man who would go out to all the meetings. Out of town, Leonard Castellanos.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, and tell them your point of view.

RAY ATILANO: Then he would come back and tell them [that here's] another meeting. We would get together, that's all. "Anything accomplished?" "No, not really."

DENISE LUGO: How about Califas?

RAY ATILANO: Oh Califas! We had an argument one time with those people because we were trying to get all groups together and we had a meeting. We got out of there kind of disgusted. Most of us got frustrated. We didn't want to paint like they think. We says, "No. If I have to paint like you paint, I'll quit. Period."

DENISE LUGO: To follow their code?

RAY ATILANO: I will not follow your code. If you want me to paint flowers just the way you want to paint them, I am not going for that. I paint the way I paint, you guys accept me. "No! You guys have to paint this way or you are not with us." "We are not with you. Period." But that's way it's different. See, they go into a lot of or be too much of the Aztec painting and all this and that. You don't have to do that in other to be a Chicano or anything. You don't have to prove it; all you have to do is prove you are an artist.

DENISE LUGO: You have raised so much excitement in me because you're saying this because everything I've seen and everybody that I've talked have always told me you have to be following that kind of form.

RAY ATILANO: That's wrong.

DENISE LUGO: Like the Goez.

RAY ATILANO: You went to that school.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

RAY ATILANO: And how many people have done it? None, so that's more credit to you. What are they going to do? "Hey you are going into gringo, you're going into that." Why do they bring that up?

DENISE LUGO: How about that show in Barnso(?)? Did you show in that?

RAY ATILANO: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: You did?

RAY ATILANO: Oh yeah! In fact, I was an instructor there. We did a show at—Saint—I would set up every year from them. One of the biggest shows we had was Saint—way out there in Valencia—Vallerno. It was one of the tourist one done out there for the fundraiser, we took all the paintings in the paper and we hung up a show out there. We sold all the paintings and they do it every year just for church. It's like a missionary offer. They have it every year. One of the first ones we had out there. And now every year they have it and they invite us over. We have a lot of contacts.

DENISE LUGO: So San Francisco Galería de la Raza; were all the same, right?

RAY ATILANO: They could communicate better than we could. If you known Leonard, Leonard was a more like an Anglo artist.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, mainstream.

RAY ATILANO: The Anglo type. All our artists; [Armando] Cabrera had the abstract, fine art, very fine art. Jose Cervantes was a very hard edge, but had nothing to do with the Chicano or the Azteca or anything, and we had all these big artists that were just fine art. Frank Martinez went into what they call the Azteca, but he was involved with us. He had to go with the Goez because that's where he can sell his stuff. Frank Martinez says, "I'm going to copy your art technique," he's been always threatened me and he did. I am very proud of him because he did a lot of murals and that could take nearly ...(?) I mean Barraza is TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union].

DENISE LUGO: What?

RAY ATILANO: TELACU, right here on Olympic. There's a big mural and he designed it.

DENISE LUGO: But what I am saying; this is perfect. I knew it, way back in my bones ...(?)

RAY ATILANO: That's what we had to survive with.

DENISE LUGO: How come the damn big major museums and universities did not pay attention to you? It's mainstream bullshit.

RAY ATILANO: Because, like I have said before we didn't want to twist, not me, Leonard Castellanos very hard. He didn't have it his way and never nobody else. And when the big shows came up, Moira Bright kind of get together and says, "Eh, let's do it! Come on! This is the opening for us." "No!" They don't want to use Chicano art there. They want to use whatever other title and we lost everything, just because of a title. Anyway, that hurt us because we should have been way up there long time ago because we had the best of the best.

[AUDIO CUTS OFF]

DENISE LUGO: His name is Carrillo. Oh, this is José Cervantes!

RAY ATILANO: He's still out there work. I got his phone number too.

DENISE LUGO: Yeah, Ed Carrillo UC Santa Cruz. *¿No lo conoces?* (You know him?)

RAY ATILANO: No.

DENISE LUGO: He did Califas. Oh I have another question to ask you guys: When was the rioting in East LA? Remember that? It was—

RAY ATILANO: 1968.

DENISE LUGO: 1968 was the riot, right? Did you guys do anything?

RAY ATILANO: Oh yeah! We had an art exhibit of the photos.

DENISE LUGO: Who did the photos? *¿No te acuerdas?* (You don't remember?)

RAY ATILANO: The photos were from—we had a couple a guys doing it, but it was very beautiful photos; very strong photography. It was a photography show. In fact the police would cruise by every time it was on. We have done a show.

DENISE LUGO: Let me look at your paintings. You have them with you?

RAY ATILANO: Yes.

[AUDIO CUTS OFF]

DENISE LUGO: ... talk about the bench project in 1971.

RAY ATILANO: We did a hospital ... and they wanted a project. In a way they wanted publicity, possibly. So it had their logo on one side and they painted on the other side. The

funny thing that has happened was that some of the paintings were just off a bench ... second day, it was just a formula. They like it so much they ...

DENISE LUGO: How were the paintings put on there?

RAY ATILANO: They company put them on, you know, bench companies. They were the ones in charge of putting on the show. ... was messing up. We silkscreened the logo on and the other side was the artistry hand. The artists though it was pretty good. If they like it so much keep it. So they really didn't get hurt because you get money out of it because it was a contest.

DENISE LUGO: What was the contest? Do you remember?

RAY ATILANO: I think it was a \$150 first prize, \$100 second prize and \$50 for the third prize. They were trying to do it again after a couple of months. It was in *Sunset* magazine and it was on Channel 7 ... (?) We painted the big mural in East Los Angeles Doctor's Hospital. That was a big mural done by [William] DeGerano. It was a lot of publicity.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember other project that you were involved with?

RAY ATILANO: Well we had a project at the Broadway Gallery, downtown. That was to help and make money for Plaza de Raza.

DENISE LUGO: What was your affiliation with Plaza de la Raza? Let's talk about Plaza.

RAY ATILANO: Well Plaza didn't have no artist to start with. They had Frank Lopez was more or less the ...(?) at that time and he promoted the whole thing.

DENISE LUGO: Early 1970's?

RAY ATILANO: Early 1970's. We had a show and it was a beautiful show. There was a lot of people that participated and we sold a couple of times. That was the beginning of the big shows through the outside world; Los Angeles and all that kind of things. We had another show at the Skinny Art Gallery, a couple of them.

DENISE LUGO: Talk about the Skinny Art Gallery.

RAY ATILANO: The Skinny Art Gallery was, like the name says, a very thin one and right next door to the carpet and the gallery right there. We had free shows.

DENISE LUGO: Was it mainstream?

RAY ATILANO: Yes, it was completely different because they want it something else. They didn't want the so-called—

DENISE LUGO: It was more liberal?

RAY ATILANO: More liberal. We had other shows at the museum.

DENISE LUGO: What museum?

RAY ATILANO: L.A. County Museum.

DENISE LUGO: They did a conjunction with Vincent Price [Art] Gallery East Los Angeles.

RAY ATILANO: No, that's another one that we had. Actually we had two or three right there in Vincent Price. Plus, every college on the Cinco de Mayo or any big deal day, they'd come to our center and they would get paint for all the shows they had.

DENISE LUGO: How were the artists able to make money? How were they able to survive?

RAY ATILANO: They had to work because they couldn't make it on the paintings because very few sold their art. They didn't want to paint to make money. We wanted to paint for ourselves and if it was approved by the public, beautiful so it was so, but it was not intended to be paintings that say, "Hey, I am going to do this one so it can be sold."

DENISE LUGO: How did the children deal? Did you have classes for children?

RAY ATILANO: Oh we had big classes. I had classes at the center.

DENISE LUGO: On weekends and evenings?

RAY ATILANO: Everyday.

DENISE LUGO: So the children were part of this?

RAY ATILANO: That would be the community were involved in it and the kids were there. In fact let's go back, Cazares was one of the kids that went in there and took art.

DENISE LUGO: Victor Cazares?

RAY ATILANO: Yeah. He was learning. DeGerano would give a class and we would all teach these kids what was the arts and they would look at [Armando] Cabrera. DeGerano was a student there and he was learning how to paint there and then he wanted to paint for himself.

DENISE LUGO: So Mechicano basically kept painting?

RAY ATILANO: Silkscreen, painting and we had classes of music. We had a theater group.

DENISE LUGO: Who was the head of the theater group?

RAY ATILANO: He's right now working with Sesame Street.

DENISE LUGO: What was his name?

RAY ATILANO: I don't remember right now. But he had the theater group here. [...] We had a musician group here and [it] was a very good one. When we had shows, they would participate, they were contracted to—

[AUDIO CUTS OFF]

DENISE LUGO: Let's talk about that.

RAY ATILANO: One hundred dollars or one hundred and fifty to attend college.

DENISE LUGO: You mean the shows you used to curate?

RAY ATILANO: Yes. [...] that was part of our survival. To pay for transportation and pay for the costs in the gallery. We did have to pay for everything. It was a beautiful experience.

DENISE LUGO: How long did the theater work? Was that always continual?

RAY ATILANO: They would get together, I think, twice a week.

DENISE LUGO: Did that run through the whole history of Mechicano or the beginning?

RAY ATILANO: No. For beginning, then when Mechicano was contracted to go to New York and that was—

DENISE LUGO: Who's the fellow?

RAY ATILANO: I can't think of his name right now.

[END OF INTERVIEW]