

Oral History interview with Lucila “Lucille” Villaseñor Grijalva

Grijalva, Lucia

Los Angeles, California

Sound Cassette Duration – 55:11

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DENISE LUGO: Where were you born?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I was born in Los Angeles.

DENISE LUGO: You were born in LA?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Hmm-huh. (Agrees)

DENISE LUGO: Where was your education?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was catholic school education. I went to ___woods(?) grammar school and then from there I went to Sacred Heart High School in Lincoln Heights; Sacred Heart of Jesus.

DENISE LUGO: So basically it was parochial school right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mmm-huh. (Agrees)

DENISE LUGO: Then from there?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: From there I went into an apprenticeship in art with an Italian artist. He was part of the Catholic Church. They call it the propagation of the faith at that time. We did calendars and [...] annals of the holy childhood and some of the “marinal” work. So I did illustrations.

DENISE LUGO: You know who that artist was?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was Fred Giglioli.

DENISE LUGO: He was a priest?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No. He was an artist and I worked with him.

DENISE LUGO: Did he come from Italy?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No. He was from here. A lot of what he taught me was similar to the way the Old Italian schools taught. So like for hours I would stand at an easel drawing nothing but horizontal lines.

DENISE LUGO: When did you know you're going to be an artist?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I was nine years old and in the fourth grade and I remember consciously thinking I want to be an artist.

DENISE LUGO: What did your parents say? Were they supportive of this?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: My parents were non-supportive.

DENISE LUGO: [Was it] because you were a female?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: They didn't not support me, but my mother always believed that she wanted us to have a good firm foundation academically. Her goal was for us to go into the secretarial route because they work in factories and they had a __ store, so to them that was moving up. My mother secretly desired, which I didn't really understand it, was for one of us to be a teacher. It was her dream to be a teacher.

DENISE LUGO: How did your parents consider themselves ethnically?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: They were Mexican. Yeah, they were nationals. They did not become naturalized US citizens just before they were sixty-five.

DENISE LUGO: So they raised you very Mexican?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: They raised me very Mexican, Catholic, but very open. My parents spoke English, they learned English, even though Spanish was our primary language. Even though we were raised the *barrio* [Chicano neighborhood], originally when we were still growing up, [...] it was still a mixed community, but gradually a lot of the Anglos left and the Mexicans remained. From there, for a while we lived in the Maravilla area, so that was definitely very Mexican. But even so, my parents were very accepting. They had a lot of acceptance of other people. [...] My father and mother's way of relating with people was very cosmic.

DENISE LUGO: From your apprenticeship, what happened? How long were you in the apprenticeship?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: In the apprenticeship for a year.

DENISE LUGO: What year was that?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I graduated from high school in 1953, so this was right after and went in, so in 1954. From 1953 to 1954. Then from there, I made a feeble attempt of taking an art class in East LA College, life drawing and I dropped it.

DENISE LUGO: Why?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Because I didn't think that I wanted to do that.

DENISE LUGO: Was it very academic?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No. What it was is that frankly I have fallen in love. (Laughs) I wanted to get married. So that's what I was doing; I was making my decision of which way I wanted to go and I decided marriage. So I have dropped the class and I quit the apprenticeship and I got married.

DENISE LUGO: Explain to me the environment in East LA College. Was it very artistic at the time?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Oh geez! The buildings were "quanzit" huts.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah. You know, it was still struggling. It had started and some parts of the building were permanent.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember your professors then?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No. I did not stay that long.

DENISE LUGO: Then you got married?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: My husband was very motivated to go to school, so he was going to school and I felt like, "So you go to school. I am not that interested." Then before I knew it I started taking classes because I was bored. (Laughs) I started taking like arithmetic for college students and English just because. Then he encouraged me to get serious about it so I did and I knew what would my major would be. So I took all my electives.

DENISE LUGO: When did you go back to school?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It took me seven years to get out of East LA, so it was part time. I worked as a medical assistant and in seven years I got my AA.

DENISE LUGO: So in 1961?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yes. So then I had Mr. Soloman and Rosas Salazar; I loved her.

DENISE LUGO: Did you have Roberto Chavez?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No.

DENISE LUGO: Roberto is still a student, probably.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think so; my sister had him.

DENISE LUGO: After you get out, what did you do then in 1961?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Right from there I went to Otis Art Institute.

DENISE LUGO: What year?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I guess it was right after that. Miller Sheets was the dean at the time.

DENISE LUGO: How did you like it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I loved it. It was quite an experience for the first two years. See I went three years; the first year was no credit, the second year was credit, the third year I had a rough time. It wasn't that rough, I had a rough time in design and sculpture.

DENISE LUGO: Who were the influential figures artistically in [Otis] at the time for you?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mr. Mugniani and Marknick(?).

DENISE LUGO: Oh, Professor Marknick(?), he's a sculpture. I had him.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: He was beautiful. He was my drawing teacher and Marknick(?) sculpture.

DENISE LUGO: Was there a lot of Chicanos at the time at Otis?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: There was myself, Victor Garza, Maria Teresa Diaz,

DENISE LUGO: I've seen their names before so they come up later on, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think she disappeared and Victor kept on. You know who else? Carlos Almaraz.

DENISE LUGO: You were there with Carlos [Almaraz]?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: He was in his third or fourth year when I was first or second year student. I had a rough time in sculpture I think. Mainly it was sculpture.

DENISE LUGO: Carlos was there. How about Frank Romero?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't remember if he was there.

DENISE LUGO: But you remember Carlos?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yes, I remember Carlos.

DENISE LUGO: Did you relate to him at the time in the institution?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No, we never related.

DENISE LUGO: That's interesting.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: He was upper classmen and I was lower classmen; everybody talks to [each other]. So it was like, Maria Teresa and I clumped together. Victor really reached out; I mean he was friendly.

DENISE LUGO: So from there, it was a few years between Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: From Otis, I transferred to Cal State Fullerton. My poor sculpture skills I transferred them into a class that made up for the sculpture class in third dimensional

industrial design and I did my project and I got an “A”. I had a wonderful teacher. What’s his name? (Laughs) I found very sensitive teachers at Fullerton.

DENISE LUGO: Did you like Fullerton?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was a very good experience. Very sensitive. Even the teachers there that taught the art— there was allowed to be art teachers, I forget the name of the class, everybody was afraid of him. I got an “A”.

DENISE LUGO: That’s fantastic.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: So I had a really good experience.

DENISE LUGO: How many years were you there?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I established residency, so I think it was one semester and then the third one—I don’t remember if it was one year or two years. So I came out with a BA from there.

DENISE LUGO: You got your BA, okay. So then after that?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Then—

DENISE LUGO: You were married all this whole time?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah and two children. By that time my husband was teaching. I tried teaching at Saint Mary’s, here on Whittier. I wanted to try teaching art and it didn’t work because I had to teach everything else. “Let me out of here.” Then I ending up working as a medical case worker at the East Los Angeles Child and Youth Clinic and that’s where it all began.

DENISE LUGO: Okay. What happened?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Then from there—

DENISE LUGO: What year was that? 1968?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was in July, um, what year was it? Geez, I remember that there was an earthquake. (Laughs)

DENISE LUGO: July of 1968. Okay and?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I worked there till 1970.

DENISE LUGO: Okay, and?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: During that time it’s when I got involved with Mechicano.

DENISE LUGO: So between 1968 and 1970?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think until 1971 or 1972.

DENISE LUGO: Mechicano started in the later part of 1969. When you started Mechicano, what area was it? Here in East LA already?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was in East LA, before they moved to Highland Park.

DENISE LUGO: So that was on?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Gage and Whittier Boulevard.

DENISE LUGO: Next to the Doctor's Hospital, right? So that's where you started?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mmm-huh.

DENISE LUGO: How did you end up going down there?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I got involved with the community. I was doing a lot of art and I was doing it on my own. I was doing a study on graffiti on my own. I started going to the schools, just checking and this was like on my own time, like my lunch hour or whatever, and as I started doing that I started noticing Mechicano. Or somebody told me that there was an art gallery there or something and so I went in and I was interested. I met Ray [Atilano, Ramon] and then I really thought, "Gee, maybe if I got involved..."

DENISE LUGO: What did they tell you?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I can't remember, except that at first I didn't say that I was an artist or what. Then eventually I think I did tell them and brought them some of my work. Then he invited me to a meeting that they were having; I don't remember if it was that night or when I went.

DENISE LUGO: You met Moira Bright and Leonard Castellanos, and who other?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Frank Martinez, Armando [Cabrera], and ... I can't remember! Geez!

DENISE LUGO: Come on! (Chuckles)

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: (Sobs/Cries) I didn't think I was going to get emotional.

DENISE LUGO: It's okay. Do you want me to stop? I'll wait. It's okay.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Victor Franco, of course and Ray [Atilano]. Julie Mascoro(?), I remember her.

DENISE LUGO: She was a secretary.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: She was a red-head. That's right. Then Carlos Almaraz and William DeGerano. They were there once at four regularly. They were coming from another direction than from I was coming from, but they were respected. Let's see Armando [Cabrera], Edward Carbajal... Henry de Vega, I am not sure if I remember him.

DENISE LUGO: You remember that there was changes all the time?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah!

DENISE LUGO: So this is fine.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Jesse Gutierrez. Of course some were closer than others. I am trying to remember Jesse Gutierrez; I think I did [meet him]. Santos Lira, Frank Martinez; he taught me so much. Frank was one of the most sensitive people that I ever met and it's not from these long personal discussions because I had [them] more with Ray, I guess, but there was something so special about Frank. I'll tell you a story [that] has nothing to do with art, but it has to do with people: We were at a meeting and in Mechicano it was freezing cold because it was such a cold building. We were just there at the meeting and whatever was going on we were just sitting there on the benches and a *borrachito* (drunkard) walked-in with his *botellita* (beer bottle) and he sat next to Frank. I was sitting next to Frank and the *borrachito* (drunkard) was sitting next to Frank. Anyway the meeting was going on, so we are paying attention, right? But the *borrachito* (drunkard) starts talking to Frank and he was crying for his lost fingers and he showed Frank his lost fingers, apparently he had them amputated.

DENISE LUGO: All of them?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't remember. Then he had his *botellita* (beer bottle) too. Frank [Romero] held his hand and then showed him his fingers and Frank had some fingers missing and I don't remember which ones. He shared that with him. Then the *borrachito* (drunkard) offered him a drink. No, first the the *borrachito* (drunkard) took a drink and then offered him the bottle and then Frank took it and drank. He didn't clean it, he just drank. I am surprised I am not crying right now, but I remember sharing that with my supervisor at the clinic; I was so moved. I remember when I shared that with her, I just burst into tears. His dealing with the *borrachito* (drunkard) with such compassion, dignity and respect of human to human. It's a perfect example of amends.

DENISE LUGO: How did you feel? You didn't feel any prejudice towards being a woman or anything?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I felt very accepted. I just felt totally accepted.

DENISE LUGO: They respected your perspective and viewpoint?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yes. I remember all of the artists, I never felt and so I feel that it was never felt toward me. Never any animosity and just always like a very mutual respect for one another. Like all of these artists that I could say would just respected each other. Just total respect.

DENISE LUGO: And of course everybody's work was different?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Everybody's was different and like everybody was equal; nobody was better.

DENISE LUGO: I have a question because this is from my research. In the early 1970's and late 1960's there was a tendency, well not necessarily a tendency, but because of a lot of the civil liberties and things. You know like, César Chavez and of course of what happened in East Los Angeles; people, basically Chicanos were starting to be very proud of the duality, the pluralism; their culture. And at the time there was, especially during the late 1960's and early 1970's, there was a fraction Chicanos dealing with the identity situation. Many wanted to be considered Mexican-American. I was told by some people in Mechicano that, Leonard Castellanos was a spokesman for Mechicano, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Uh-huh. (Agreeing)

DENISE LUGO: And he said that they call it Mechicano and they were opened to everything. What I mean to everything, in other words they were open to all aspects of art. In other words, stylistically all the artists could explore what they wanted. They didn't have to feel as though they were totally Chicano or totally Mexican, as long as they worked in collaboration for many of the projects and strive to bring a positive identity in Mechicano, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yes.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember other groups coming in from different areas of California? Or different Chicanos coming in and saying anything in regards of Mechicano? When you were there was it positive?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: When I was there I think I was lucky because it was a very good time, I feel, for Mechicano.

DENISE LUGO: What year?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think it must have been in 1969. I think I just started. Victor was still there.

DENISE LUGO: I'll figure it out. Later on we'll go over on this date. So everything was really positive at that time, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: At that time, yes.

DENISE LUGO: How about Self Help?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was not there yet.

DENISE LUGO: Okay, how about *Con Safos*?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: *Con Safos* I think started coming in later.

DENISE LUGO: 1968 to 1969?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't know. Wasn't *Con Safos* part of—?

DENISE LUGO: *Con Safos* was a magazine, remember?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Oh yeah! That's right, okay.

DENISE LUGO: Then there was *Generación* that came afterwards. Then Harry Gamboa took that over, I think in the mid 1970's. So that was a very interesting time. Tell me, many people took away the graffiti aspects, the *placas*, and incorporated that "negativeness" into positive art. Tell me a little bit about that.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Well I can only say what I did with it.

DENISE LUGO: Okay, tell me what you did.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mine was put down in art form, but very minimally. What I did a sketch, I wanted a mural, so I thought of the mural for the wall of Mechicano. Outside we were decorating the walls and it wasn't a great mural, but I see it as a very humble one and that's when I was doing my research for graffiti, before I thought of the mural. It kind of fell into place.

DENISE LUGO: What was your philosophy at the time about *placas*?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I thought it was awful at first. I grew up around that and I thought it was terrible; it's very destructive. As I started doing the research I got to meet with people who were doing that.

DENISE LUGO: Okay why did they do it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: They did it for many reasons, but primarily it was a means of being immortalized in their own right and a lot of it was because they were poor and they were depressed. You know, it was their way of saying "Here I am"; asking for help.

DENISE LUGO: Most of those people were little *cholitos* (Chicano gangsters)? They were doing this?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: (Agrees)

DENISE LUGO: From my perspective and my feeling anyway, it was not always *cholitos*; it was just sometimes kids. They just wanted, like you said, wanted to be immortalized.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Well if you go back into Roman times—

DENISE LUGO: Of course everyone, but I was talking about this particular sense.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah, because children will do it too. They would write on the walls to be immortalized. I experienced that when I painted on the wall. (Laughs) It was a very good feeling of being immortalized. So anyway I did this mural showing the graffiti and that's when another aspect started forming because in order to do that I had to meet the gangs that were involved in that area. Because I realized that I was going to do this and put down their writing that have been copied from the walls.

DENISE LUGO: What do you mean by "gangs"?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: The gangs in the area. For instance, Mechicano was situated in Barrio Nuevo near Little Valley.

DENISE LUGO: What are gangs?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Gangs are groups of, we're talking about here, youth. That move together and for whatever they want to do and whatever goals they set and they move on them; whether negative or positive. I am talking about negative activities. So I realized that I couldn't just put this up, let's say Little Valley in Barrio Nuevo, without talking to people that were involved. So went in and looked up the gang members *son de allí* (they're from there). It was like knocking on their door. "Are you a gang member?" (Laughs) So anyway that's how I found them. From there, I was invited to their meetings and got to know them.

DENISE LUGO: You went to their meetings?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: They asked me to come to a meeting and I went to their meeting and it was very interesting and I fell in love. So then I put that mural up, on the wall of Mechicano, and then they asked me to do a mural for them. This was before murals. (Laughs) Before the neighborhood knows.

DENISE LUGO: Before the popularization of it later on. The murals that you did, did you incorporate these different gangs or just one in particular?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: My experience was the first one at Mechicano that I said was a very humble one. You know, I just wanted to do it and I didn't care. It's just what came from my heart, my gut. The second one—

DENISE LUGO: Wait a second. How did Mechicano feel? What was the people's response to it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: As far as I know it was okay. No problem as far as I knew.

DENISE LUGO: What did the artists think about this? Was it something new?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't remember. I in a way I wondered what Ray thought. I was concerned about Ray because Ray to me was so beautiful. To me he was the epitome of a conservative artist. You know, very respected, respectable, two feet on the ground, knowing his direction and doing it. Just really put together. I felt, father of his family, husband, to his wife. This kind of person is very respected so it mattered to me. I don't think Ray realized that I cared. (Laughs) But it did matter to me how he would react and his reaction was positive. It's like I felt total acceptance.

[Audio cuts off]

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I remember feeling as I was doing these murals. I said, "Wow!", now I know how kids feel when they write on walls.

DENISE LUGO: Really?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mmm-huh. (Agreeing)

DENISE LUGO: Did you prepare the wall before you did it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I must have put an undercoating ; latex, I don't know.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember exactly where it is at? Which wall, the right of the left one? Or where was it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I have pictures of it.

DENISE LUGO: Oh, fantastic!

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I mean snapshots of something. It was as you went into the door, it was the first wall on this side. I chose that wall. (Laughs) I was afraid that they're going to bomb Mechicano! I was afraid of the gangs! Barrio Nuevo and Little Valley are going to get into it.

DENISE LUGO: How did they feel about Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: They loved it! They loved it! In fact I was at Mechicano at a meeting when they came for me. Some of the girls from Little Valley came in and said that Little Valley wanted me. And I remember that they wanted me to go down there because they wanted to talk to me. And I said, "Oh of course!" This was at night and Ray said, "No don't go!" (Laughs) I said, "Oh I got to go." He says, "What does your husband think of this?" I said, "It's alright Ray." So I felt, I had to leave. (Laughs) So they liked Mechicano. I don't think that they were involved, like "Let's go to Mechicano and let's learn how to draw." You had to go to them and teach them. But they were very accepting, knowing that I belonged to Mechicano. I hid the fact that I was a social worker, from them for a long time.

DENISE LUGO: You were just an artist?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Because I felt they could accept me as an artist. I wasn't sure how they could accept me as a social worker. (Laughs)

DENISE LUGO: I could understand.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I had the hang-ups, you know?

DENISE LUGO: So tell me, you worked there all this time. What did you exhibit? Tell of the shows you remember and who?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Okay my first show was a retrospective show and I don't remember when that was.

DENISE LUGO: Were you excited?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah!

DENISE LUGO: First retrospective. How long were you there before you had it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't remember.

DENISE LUGO: A lot of group shows, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah. Whatever group show Mechicano was involved in my work was there. There was one at ____, there were traveling shows; Arizona, whatever state colleges they went to.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember any particular exhibitions that stick to your mind?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: That Mechicano had as a group?

DENISE LUGO: That were exhibited in Mechicano. Do you remember the early exhibitions of ASCO?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Of who?

DENISE LUGO: ASCO. Harry Gamboa. What shows do you remember? Do you remember any works that stick to you mind? Or anything regarding that? Early shows?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I remember a group show at the old Mechicano.

DENISE LUGO: What was it called?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't know.

DENISE LUGO: Who's work was it?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think I was a group of artists. We had a group show. I think that Frank Martinez and Lui Quijada and I guess Cervantes and Armando and all of them participated. Yeah because I remember Armando was spraying a table. So I remember there was a group show, but that's all. Oh and we had a bench contest for the Doctor's Hospital; I remember that. It was fun because it was a lot of education at the community with that.

DENISE LUGO: Excuse me?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I remember that there was a lot of education of the community with that. For me anyway, because we were doing that we were supposed to do in the street and I remember people stopping and being turned off with the name Mechicano; you know the older Mexicans.

DENISE LUGO: Why?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Because it rang a bell that "Chicano" was a bad word.

DENISE LUGO: Why is "Chicano" a bad word?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Because to the older Mexicans that was—My parents were very up set with that because that was a very degrading term because at one point in history, I believe, "Chicano" was not a good word. So my parents really felt that was degrading. So the way

that I tried to change the perspective is that there was Mechicano, it has to do with the Indian whatever. So then they could accepted us better. Then they saw that.

DENISE LUGO: Okay mainstream galleries. There were mainstream galleries in La Cienega and stuff. Was there any communication between Mechicano and mainstream galleries?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't know.

DENISE LUGO: Carlos Almaraz showed you.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Okay, but see I would have no idea about that because that happened later.

DENISE LUGO: No earlier.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Earlier?

DENISE LUGO: Yes, 1971.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Okay.

DENISE LUGO: You don't remember that. Do you remember anything in particular anything that had to do with Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think we had a party there once. It must have been one of the shows, you know like the group shows we had, we had a party there.

DENISE LUGO: What year did you leave Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Well when I school social work, oh no! Oh my God it was after I came out of social work school because I went to Orange County. When I was in Orange County, I still belonged to Mechicano. So I got out in 1974 from school and I went to Orange County. No wait a minute. When did I graduate? In 1972? Yeah. Okay so in about 1973, or so, I could double-check that later. Yeah about 1973 or 1974 I was in Orange County and I have a show and I had a one-woman show in Mechicano when it was in Highland Park. It was October when I did that.

DENISE LUGO: Do you remember why they move from Whittier and Gage to Highland Park?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Probably because the building was dilapidated and falling apart.
(Laughs)

DENISE LUGO: According to Ray, he says that the situation—He's pretty good.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah, he would be organized. (Laughs)

DENISE LUGO: He told me—It started in the fall of 1969 on Melrose and Cienega and lasted six months. Then they went to Gage and Whittier. He says it was a circle gallery because Channel 2 gave you all those things, you know, to hang the work around. He talk about the

East LA Doctor's Hospital and how they helped. He says that at one time he had approximately thirty artists, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Uh-huh. (Agreeing)

DENISE LUGO: Then in 1975, they moved to Highland Park. So you were there longer.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think was there in the beginning when it first opened.

DENISE LUGO: So then the first show must have been in 1975 with you. Do you happen to have an invitation or anything?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I might. I could look for stuff.

DENISE LUGO: So that's pretty good. When you were there, how was the silkscreen? Did you do any silkscreens?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yes I did because for that show I did some posters for the show. How could I forget. (Laughs) I was up all night!

DENISE LUGO: I want you to tell me because I know all this. I mean I know a lot but I've been reading and doing research. What exactly was the function of Mechicano in the *barrio* as far as you can remember?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think the primary function was to educate the barrio. I think it was to really to bring art to the community.

DENISE LUGO: On a public sense, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mm-huh. (Agreeing) Like, to offer workshops and for the artist to be there to contribute and model for the younger kids. And to enhance the artist, I guess.

DENISE LUGO: What kind of work was done there?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: The silkscreen primarily and some artists would go and paint.

DENISE LUGO: They had studios there?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No, you just took over a little space.

DENISE LUGO: Who was in charge of silkscreen?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think everybody used to take turns. I guess Leonard [Castellanos] did a lot of it.

DENISE LUGO: What were the posters made for originally? How did they function?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I think they were supposed to be like—

DENISE LUGO: First of all, I know they were obviously to advertise the exhibition and they were also done for a set of purposes.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah, I guess so. (Laughs) Right! Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: Later on many of the people from other groups came in and would make a payment for the ink or whatever they would be able to use and supplies. It was interesting. So you felt good then, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah.

DENISE LUGO: Now looking back retrospective, what do you think were the high points in Mechicano? Because everyone that I talked to, it was very special to them. What was Mechicano to you?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It was family. My people.

DENISE LUGO: You guys were working all the time even weekends, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mm-huh. (Agreeing)

DENISE LUGO: The money situation, was that tough then?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: You mean for Mechicano?

DENISE LUGO: Yeah.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah. They had a grant but—I don't know how tough it was except that Leonard was always working at getting money and Victor.

DENISE LUGO: How is he? How did he deal with everyone? I've heard all these conflicting perspectives stories on him.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Leonard [Castellanos] was a strong person. I remember that I confronted him at one of the first two meetings, I can't remember which one—I tend to be a controlling person and Leonard was in control (Laughs) and I didn't know. We kind of locked horns.

DENISE LUGO: Why? Do you remember?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't even remember why, but I have a feeling it was probably because I was in a way taking over or trying to take over the meeting. I can't even remember anymore. I think what it was, I can look at it now in other ways that I went too dynamic. I was a little too dynamic for whatever it was that we were talking about and he—

DENISE LUGO: He said, "This is it."

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah, he stopped me. So we kind of locked horns, but it was interesting. And I love Leonard.

DENISE LUGO: How about Moira Bright?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't remember much of that interaction. I don't know. I didn't see Moira that much. Like we went to the Walls of Fire thing and then the reception after and then I think once or twice at Mechicano. I remember like she had some other projects and my sister was involved with her. My sister modeled for her. She needed a model for some pictures or something. Mura is my sister.

DENISE LUGO: I want to speak to your sister.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: But I don't even know if it was that much. It was for some commercial or something.

DENISE LUGO: So Moira had other things? She was doing Mechicano in the beginning?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I don't remember if it was for other things or if it was part of Mechicano or what. I think it was for her son who worked in the film industry or commercial—I don't know. All I know that there was some money in it, so my sister said, "Fine, I'll do it." (Laughs) And she did it because she was looking for somebody that was Latina. She wanted a motherly, a young mother kind of person and my sister was it.

DENISE LUGO: So it was really dynamic. ...(?) Identify a little of the work for me, if you remember.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Their work you mean?

DENISE LUGO: Yes.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Leonard [Castellanos], for what I remember, of his work was hard edge.

DENISE LUGO: So his paintings were hard?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Hard edge. Yeah, the paintings that I remember.

DENISE LUGO: He did that mural on the outside, didn't he?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I can't remember; if he did it by himself or in a group. Antonio Esparza...

DENISE LUGO: Some people came in according to Ray [Atilano] and they were from Mexico. They were there for a year or two and then they went back.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah Antonio, was one of them.

DENISE LUGO: Antonio Esparza?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Mm-huh (Agrees).

DENISE LUGO: I'm going to go see him in Mexico.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: That's great. How can I describe his work? It was representational.

DENISE LUGO: How much percent of your work was figurative or representational?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Most of it. Just about all of it.

DENISE LUGO: Did you see other Chicano exhibitions, other than Mechicano at the time? Like of what was going on in other parts of the state of California? Or just Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I was very single focused. If anything it was the ones on 1st and Gage; what was the name? I can't remember.

DENISE LUGO: Self Help?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No. It was another one. They had the gallery on Olivera Street and on Goodridge.

DENISE LUGO: TELACU?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No, but they are by TELACU though. What are they? Who are they?

DENISE LUGO: The Goetz!

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah! The Goetz Art Gallery.

DENISE LUGO: Goetz was real interesting. I want you to explain this to me. I was told there were philosophical differences with Self Help, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Well see, I was not in Self Help.

DENISE LUGO: Well, I am just saying. But if you wanted to go work for Goetz, there's no problem because you went in and made money and you work and you could still be part of Mechicano. That is what I was told. The philosophical differences between Self Help and Mechicano—this whole organization was all different.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Between Self Help and Mechicano? Okay I don't know because I don't know Self Help. See, I think Self Help came in after I left—

DENISE LUGO: No.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Or by the time I was leaving. I was not that involved anymore. It's because I went to school for social work so I couldn't get involved anymore. My involvement with Mechicano dwindled and all I did was show. You know, like I had one other show. Then it was like I wasn't involved like in the beginning. Victor Franco, I don't know what kind of work that he did.

DENISE LUGO: Well anyone.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Well Ray Atilano—you've seen Ray's work. When I was involved in setting up the office at *El Arca* in Boil Heights, I was involved with decorating it. We had money so I chose one of Ray's works. I said, "I gotta get Ray in." I chose two of his works to

put them in the office and I thought that they were so appropriate. Julie was an artist or sculpture.

DENISE LUGO: No, she was the secretary.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I thought she did some art. And Carlos Almaraz, you know his work.

DENISE LUGO: And then Frank Romero.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: William DeGerano, I can't remember his work. I think they were similar. They kind of had the same message. Armando Cabrera, he did sculpture? I can't remember anymore. Edward Carvajal (Laughs); he did some controversial work.

DENISE LUGO: And what's that?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I guess you would call it erotic art. Jesse Gutierrez, I can't remember Jesse Gutierrez. Maybe his work was kind of modernistic—I can't remember; I am lying. Frank Martinez, I loved his work.

DENISE LUGO: Why?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Because it had a lot of movement and the movement of his colors and his shapes...

DENISE LUGO: Representational?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Representational, but yet decorative; a combination. He sounds like Goetz. Well you've seen his work at Doctor's Hospital. Haven't you?

DENISE LUGO: Mm-huh. (Agrees)

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Lui(?) Quijada, he did a lot of graphics. He lives in Whittier. There's two Frank Martinez's?

DENISE LUGO: No.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: There's another one. This is the Frank Martinez we must be talking about. Okay. See, I am not sure which one. Anyway, the Frank Martinez I'm talking about is the one that did the Doctor's Hospital. Joe Cervantes, you know Joe. I don't know what he is doing now, but he's done everything. I think about roses with Jose. I don't know if he still does that. I don't know Johnny Alvarez. Manuel Cruz, I remember his movie; the black and white movie he did.

DENISE LUGO: Movie?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It wasn't a movie, it was a picture. He did a picture; a black and white documentary about the balloon. Did you see that? About drugs?

DENISE LUGO: He was not part of Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Well, he was there.

DENISE LUGO: He'd come and go. That's what I was told.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I remember seeing it. I remember it was powerful, but I can't remember the details. Guillermo Martinez, I don't know. Roberto de la Rocha, I remember his name and I think I remember seeing him—

DENISE LUGO: Los Four.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Is that what it was? Okay. I knew him from East LA, but I was working and I didn't have time to pal around with anybody. (Laughs)

DENISE LUGO: So you were the only woman?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: There was another woman, but she didn't come back. And Ray would remember he name—Julie? I can't remember her name. There was another woman. She never came but her work was there.

[Audio cuts off]

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: ... paper, it was huge, I had it in Mechicano. Anyway it sold. I was really pleased because it was sold to the first Mrs. Jona S(?).

DENISE LUGO: Oh really? This is in the Jona's album?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It's in her collection, but I can't remember her name. Some where I hope I have the name.

DENISE LUGO: So you sold it. That was right after Mechicano?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: M-huh. (Agrees)

DENISE LUGO: Okay great and it was October 21st, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: I have the date somewhere. I remember that exhibit. I can't remember the name.

[Audio cuts off]

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: When they asked me to do the mural and I got involved in doing the mural but before doing the mural it took a lot more of working with them and understanding their needs, what it was they wanted on the wall, and how I could depict them best. That process became of not only of an artist and working with the community to put things on the wall, but became one of councilor and helping the kids with their own depression and their feelings. I did a lot of war prevention actually. While we were working on the mural, they'd be talking about going to take care of other neighborhoods and stuff. While we were working, before I knew it, it changed the direction. So that they didn't go out and shoot up another gang, instead they chose to finish what we were doing. Then there

was a lot of suicide prevention too because there was some kids that were feeling really down and that became their vehicle.

DENISE LUGO: But during that time, didn't a lot had to do with identity crisis? Were kids just lost their identity? A lot of it was, especially in the sixties and late seventies.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: It's still going on.

DENISE LUGO: That's unfortunate.

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: So part of it is true; they don't know who they are. Deep down they don't have foothold on themselves as individuals. But that's something that comes from within. It's amazing were you have eight-nine kids and maybe seven of them go off, and three of them survive very well.

DENISE LUGO: Let me see that. [Sounds of picking up a piece of paper] That's the one you did?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Oh yeah. Which way is right of left; you could tell by—that was a Mechicano one. That's the one I call my humble mural.

DENISE LUGO: That was the first one, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Yeah. It was just simply the—

DENISE LUGO: That's the one you did on your own, right?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: M-huh (Agrees).

DENISE LUGO: Do have the one of the second?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: Not here.

DENISE LUGO: This is not what they had at the police station?

LUCILLE GRIJALVA: No. And that was not the mural itself. That was a sketch. That's the one I showed the gang. I took that in my van and I went through the streets of East LA looking for genuine gang members. (Laughs) And when I found one, I said "Oh, this is what I am doing." (Laughs) So they were very impressed and that's when they invited me to their meeting. They just wanted somebody that was genuine. And at that time I was with _____. (Laughs) So then we fell in love; it's beautiful. I wouldn't trade that for the world. It's part of my life.

[End of Interview]