

Educator of children. Mariachi was one of the most important aspects of our culture here. Thank God we're preserving it and we're keeping it here in el barrio. And uh Those were just one of the cultural change getting to be self-sufficient, educating ourselves and educating our children and celebrating it. And it's such a beautiful culture. Such , such richness. Magnitude of expression of a people that existed since the independence of Mexico.

Did you feel like you know, growing up, whether yeah here in Arizona and time you've spent in the neighborhood, has that influenced your artistic practice in any way?

I've learned so much. Not only the families but you gotta understand that religion plays a big part, I believe plays a very big part in our culture and the Catholic church, our foundation is the Virgin Mary. It's our foundation to our culture because it symbolizes the family. It symbolizes how to keep the family together. And she appeared to native american to Nahual indian that spoke Aztec and we believe that she's the hope for our culture and um, the mother is the foundation of our culture, Mexican culture and that symbolizes what it means. Our foundation is our mother.

Can you talk a little bit about how you got into arts, to visual arts and how your career started?

Art. by the way I did go... I did go for three months and eight days. This art was part of my early periods of purity (puberty) and I remember my teacher for math and english and other special studies. History. Besides, we couldn't speak spanish in our classrooms. I said look I finished all my academics and she said cause she caught me sketching I was doing like an aminy. At an early age I was drawing a picture of Hercules because I was learning about Greek mythology that I learned from history. Those were my early impressions that something was wrong with me that I had a passion for art that like comes from my uncle because he was also an artist. My uncle Ismael that lived here in barrio anita probably was a better artist than me. It was fascinating, it came in the bloodline. Maybe on both sides of the family.

What kinds of work did he paint?

He painted a lot of, he did a lot of ink ink and pen, he didn't do linear, he did dots. Dots and paint. He's very fascinating so genetically I think it runs in the bloodline. Passed down from one generation to the next.

What kind of subjects are you drawn to in your art?

At this point social and political...

-----audio A2-----

I... I'm just gonna ask you some questions. You, I mean you might not have the answers for them but I'm trying to get a little more personal perspective. I was just wondering if you had any girlfriends from this neighborhood or like any memories as a teen. You know, yeah any relationships you might have had like do you have memories.

Like through my puberty period like I did I have any girlfriends? Not in this particular neighborhood no. I went into my room and did a lot of illustrating while everybody else was playing football. Sometimes I would go out and play football. Football was one of my favorite sports. Football and basketball but I would spend a lot of my time inside the kitchen drawing. Am practicing my art and again I had a love for it. I also love sports. I was really into the development of practicing ...

Why do you think a lot of young folks, brown folks, they draw, they like to draw, a alot but few of them continue on that. Most people they graduate, they get a job, and that ends it.

Back then, we didn't have this. Back then we turned on the radio as humbling as your life was, you know, you came from parents that worked, you weren't wealthy. Times were different. Probably like I'm talking about the 1260's when star trek came out .... Lessons that type of thinking from adults to a child, it expands your imagination back then when it came out it was in black and white. And some in technicolor. I was living in the time when music and film in my opinion was at a science peak. Very high, and I was lucky and today like you say, technology has changed the young minds. Very very true that it's changed the systemic system different.

Yeah definitely but I wonder too

You gottta understand you got the whole world in your hand. You have knowledge you have art you have einformation. You have the whole library in your hand. And what I noticed also, the young generation, tend more to stay gaming and other issues other than history and they have the world in their hands yet they;re not interested in history thats...

And why do you think that?

It's supposed to be social

Right right

-----audio A3-----

And real easy and carefree. My father encouraged me he told me the opposite, he said go forward. You can go a long way, you can contribute. And that's another misconception about the art world. That in reality, the art world, is very important and a lot of people don't see that. For example you have to have some kind of art knowledge to design a car to design engineering an engine. How is the engine going to look? It's not going to just be an empty spot. You gotta design it. So you have to be an artist. You want to be an architect, you gotta be an artist. You gotta learn to do lines or shapes. You wanna design furniture, you gotta bean artist. You want to design tools, you gotta be an artist. You want to operate cause you want to be a doctor, you have to be an artist on how to cut and sew flesh. I wrote a poem here it goes. In life... (are you guys ready) PAUSE. In life... In life... Nature can be violent in the human condition. The

manifestation through man and the imagination of a genius artists.... Mankind cannot live without a genius artist through the creator...

That's nice man

-----audio A4-----

Who were some of your early teachers? What were some of the lessons you learned?

Thanks to a lot fo people who supported me through the years and some of those people were like Alfred Quiroz. Like at 10 years old that encouraged me to paint. He was a great teacher, now at the U of A. My uncle Ismael Castro Mena and my fatehr encouraged me not so much my mother. Now she understands and people like the Aguirrez, Clarine and Raul Aguirre. Mr. Jim Clock at Safford Jr. High. Mr. McCavine at Tucson High. Mr. Herrera at ... High School. Counselors, prinsipal like Mr. Iracuna. Whatever you need Mena, run with it, I'll support you. So with a lot of people it's great when you get that support but then again you have those that support you and the difference between reality. The reality is Alli vamos a lo mismo, so in the real world life can be very cruel, it's not easy, you gotta fight in the real world...

You're working me harsh. We've talked in the past... you did a lot of work to try and make this a better place.

At the time when I was here in the 80's, I moved back into the barrio. In the 80's I settled here,. I bought my home here. I was a bachelor at the time. It was pretty rough. It wasn't stable cause of the teenage. Me and the principal managed to consolidate in fixing the problem. We took action. That was great about ... Gomez he contribute, He knew it was important to work with the people he knew.

Who was Congrado Gomez?

Congrado Gomez was the guy that was here, the principal, when I was here.

And h, li guess you're going to talk about his relationship with the neighborhood?

Early about 8 o'clock and we had coffee out there at the table and we would start talking about how we could fix the problems in the neighborhood and it became a success and we moved on with it. And we accomplished a lot of things with it. We accomplished many issues....

.... Many issues?

Well we're going to have battle between our beloved black neighborhood and our brown people. I put a stop to it and there was peace.

Oh, talk about that. The details about that.

Well, I can't talk too much about it. It was one of the problems

Are you talking about Dunbarr's neighborhood? You know, dumb bars?

Yeha, well there and you know the kids. Too many west side stories. You want to copy movies, and we put a stop to it. No gain out of it. That was one issue. The other issue was sidewalks, life, we were involved in putting the wall to keep the noise down from the freeway. So that was one of the issues and to have the families here remodel their homes. That was another issue. One issue after another and actually I was voted as president of the neighborhood at the time, I was voted in. I didn't vote myself in, I was voted in. So big difference, people voted me into the neighborhood. It was a good 14 years.

So why do you think of some of the talks I've had with you and some of the other residents the time that there was a period of time that you're talking about right now. A lot of things, a lot of organizing

-----audio 5-----