

Drawing Citizenship Through Vincent Valdez's *Stations*

Construction and Representation

by

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ABSTRACT

This project is a critical look at Chicano artist Vincent Valdez's 2002-2004 series *Stations*. The theoretical framework for this work is the concept of cultural citizenship, which refers to a variety of ways in which marginalized groups of people create, fight for, and retain space, identity, and rights within American society through acts of daily life. This research considers how the ten large-scale charcoal drawings that comprise *Stations* contribute to the construction and representation of distinct and unique Latino spaces and identities. Valdez establishes space in the sense of belonging and community engagement that his work allows. Within this context, thoughtful attention is paid to the cultural meaning of the artist's subject choices of boxing and religion. This research considers the significance of these subject choices and how the connections between the two create unique spaces of shared experience and consciousness for a viewer of the work. However, the parallels that Valdez draws between the Christ figure and his boxer also allow for a careful examination of the representations and contradictions of contemporary constructions of masculinity that are present in the series. Within this project, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa is critical in understanding and discussing the fluid nature of Chicano identity. This study also considers how in the tradition of Chicana writers, Valdez expresses and affirms identity through autobiographical methods. Further, the artist's use of charcoal to create these large scale drawings is considered for its narrative qualities. This study concludes that Valdez's series *Stations* is an act of cultural citizenship.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A Tradition of Sports in Art

The use of the sports hero as a subject has existed throughout the history of visual art. Specifically within American art, sporting images grew out of the tradition of genre paintings, including celebrations of the outdoors and sociable exercise.¹ Images of games and sports from the mid-nineteenth century, including those of yachting, cards, and boxing, have been argued as evidence of the young country's optimism and promise.² The subject of boxing was explored by both painters interested in the physical aspects of the activity and illustrators creating political caricatures using boxers as their characters.³ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, artists such as Thomas Eakins, George Bellows, Mahonri Mackintosh Young, and Fletcher Martin explored the subject.

Eakins' trilogy of boxers at the end of the nineteenth century was "devoted to the prowess, exertion, and vitality necessary for the sport," and as an artist he was interested in the boxing arena and all of its participants – boxer, referee, and crowd – as a "place for complex human interactions, as much psychological as physical."⁴ Compositionally, Eakins reached back to classical images of the gladiator, most notably in *Salutat* (oil on canvas, 1898).⁵ Working in nearly the same time period, George Bellows' images of boxers have been argued to "reflect the collective aspirations of his generation."⁶ As a member of the Ashcan School, he investigated the sport as an expression of the "modern landscape" accessed by capturing the city's energy.⁷

For artists at the turn of and during the twentieth century, choosing to illustrate and document a competitive sport reflects an interest in the psychology and confrontation of the activity.⁸ Mahonri Mackintosh Young's sculptures of boxers in action capture "the essence of the sport of boxing," exemplify his "ability to capture the human form in action," and "reveal his empathy for human struggle."⁹ Fletcher Martin's stylized depiction of the boxer and ring in his painting *The Glory* (oil on canvas, 1948) is decidedly not political, but rather focuses on simply the physicality of the sport and its participants.¹⁰

Writings on these past works have focused on the ideals of the United States from a European immigrant perspective of the country's promise and optimism. However limited by their perspective, these artists have contributed to the political and social traditions of sport in art from their individual experiences and are not to be dismissed. For the purposes of this project, they serve to illustrate an established history and explorations of the subject of boxing in American art. Although in some ways continuing in these traditions, the work of Vincent Valdez offers a counter-perspective to previous sports hero images. Moving beyond interests in the physical aspects of the sport by earlier American artists, but continuing in political and social explorations, Valdez's boxers communicate a specific and unique experience, sensibility, and identity. His explorations of the subject provide a deeper context of his identity as presented from a very specific male, Chicano space. Valdez provides a unique, contemporary view of the boxing hero as a representative of his community and its experience. His experience as a young Chicano male is reflected in these works

within which he uses his mostly Mexican American Southside San Antonio neighborhood as inspiration for his subject matter. Valdez offers his boxer to reclaim space and affirm identities to resist invisibility in society.¹¹ Further, Valdez not only intends for his work to speak to those within his community but also to society as a whole. His images of boxers serve as a metaphor for human struggle and survival.

Defining Cultural Citizenship

Cultural citizenship, coined by Renato Rosaldo and later investigated by the Latino Cultural Studies Working Group, refers to a variety of ways in which marginalized groups of people create, fight for, and retain space, identity, and rights within American society through acts of daily life.¹² The theories of Latino Cultural Citizenship developed by Rosaldo, William V. Flores, Rina Benmayor, and Blanca G. Silvestrini, serve as the theoretical framework for this project. Not always or exclusively a political standpoint, acts of cultural citizenship achieve the right to self-define without assimilation, an appreciation of difference, and spaces created for, and by, Latinos. A counter-response to the legal definition of citizenship, these theorists discuss how citizens who do not fit within mainstream society claim membership through daily cultural acts such as creative artistic expression. This contributes to group and individual self-definition as well as Latino identity and space.

It is important to note that other authors and theorists have explored the concept of cultural citizenship in a variety of ways. Christina M. Getrich uses Rosaldo's theory as the framework for her study of second-generation Mexican

youth and their reaction to the political climate in Southern California in 2006.¹³ Aihwa Ong argues, however, that the theory does not fully investigate the role of the state in the development of cultural citizenship.¹⁴ Nick Stevenson researches systems of communication in relationship to globalization and cultural citizenship.¹⁵

For the purposes of this research project, the theories put forward by Rosaldo and the Latino Cultural Studies Working Group are the most applicable to discuss Valdez's work as an act of cultural citizenship. Their focus, being not on legal terms (birth or otherwise), but rather on the actions of communities and individuals, allows for interpretation of multiple forms of creative expression as acts of cultural citizenship. Through their studies of cultural citizenship, Rosaldo, et al. discuss the various ways in which marginalized communities fight for and achieve full rights and citizenship. Focusing on the daily acts of a community's members illustrates how cultural citizenship is established internally. Each community can define citizenship through their own perspectives, values, and experiences. From religious celebrations to worker strikes to negotiating and receiving educational and medical services, these authors provide a range of examples outlining how cultural citizenship is built from within. Valdez's work is significant for the ways in which he creates space and affirms identity through his images of boxers. His use of real people in his life, and the references to religious and sacred practices within his narrative, create an opportunity for shared experiences between the viewer, the artist, and the community.

Throughout this research project, I discuss how Valdez's images of boxers contribute to the construction, representation, and affirmation of a distinct and unique Latino sensibility and identity. As an act of cultural citizenship, his work creates a shared space of belonging for the community while also contributing to definitions of its identity. Valdez's boxer represents respect and affirms difference, inviting the viewer to reflect on the rights of a community. To expound upon the concepts, events, and social actions documented by Rosaldo, et al., I address the creation and development of cultural citizenship through visual art. Through this, I aim to provide a valuable contribution to an underdeveloped area of the theory.

Stations: An Overview

The drawings I analyze comprise Valdez's 2002-2004 series *Stations*. Valdez first began to explore the image of the boxer in 2001 after learning of a close friend's suicide, and over the next two years the project would evolve into a series. Loosely based on the Catholic Stations of the Cross (the depiction of the final hours of Christ), *Stations* leads us through one night in a young Chicano boxer's life. From weigh-in to knockout, Valdez narrates the challenges the boxer faces during the fight and suggests those he likely faces outside of the ring. Through a series of ten large-scale charcoal drawings, ranging from 42 by 92 inches to 60 by 40 inches, Valdez guides his viewer through the boxer's fight. In the first image, *Weigh In: Coming in at 140 lbs. 8 oz.* (2004), the boxer is weighed by a trainer before his manager and the media. Next, he heads down the aisle toward the ring past a shouting audience in *The Strongest Man in the World is He*

Who Walks Alone (2004). In station three, *Main Event* (2004), just prior to the fight, he stands proud under the glow of the arena lights. The worm's eye view of the piece creates an overwhelming image of the man. The following three images focus less on the actual violence and more on the struggle to survive. In *Keep Your Guard Up Son, Now Get Back Out There and Fight!* (2004), the boxer receives coaching while collapsed on his corner stool. *He Then Fell Once More* (2002) and *They Say Every Man Must Fall* (2002) shows the boxer struggling to rise from punches that have knocked him to the ground. The only work that illustrates actual physical contact between the boxer and his opponent, *Get Outta There! Kill 'im!, No Mercy! Finish Him!* (2004), consists of a sequence of four smaller drawings arranged vertically. Each provides a different perspective as the opponent closes in with a hard right to the boxer's jaw causing him to fall as his trainer throws in the towel. In the penultimate images, *A Fine Performance By Our Winning Fighter Tonight* (2004) and *Laid Out* (2004) the boxer has lost his battle. First bloodied and limp on the floor of the ring and then later lying on his back, perhaps on a stretcher. It is unclear to the viewer if he is simply resting or has died. *Collect 'Em All* (2004), the final image, recalls a trading card showing the young boxer healthy and strong in a classic boxing stance with his fists raised.

Carefully planned, the series would become what Valdez says is his first well thought body of work; "Just every angle, every aspect of it was thought out very carefully on my part."¹⁶ As part of his research, Valdez closely studied photographs, films, and illustrations of boxing, including sketches by seventeenth century British artists and footage from *Tuesday Night Fights*, a television

program on ESPN Classic.¹⁷ Valdez also studied drawing masters of the past including French neoclassical painter, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres.¹⁸

For Valdez, boxing serves as a metaphor for human struggle, and his portrayal of a tragic hero is something that speaks to both his community and society as a whole. On the subject of the sport he says, “It has really nothing to do with the idea of the actual sport of boxing but more this internal, physical, and mental struggle that we all face and encounter throughout our lives.”¹⁹ Valdez is careful to note that his references to Christ were not a focus on religion, but rather to pay homage to the ultimate symbol of a tragic hero who continues to represent the enduring human struggle;

I was more interested in Christ as the universal ideal, concept, and representation of a human being that was fighting for people... The idea that of regardless of time or era, of nationality or race, we are all fighting the same fight. We are all fighting for humanity. We are all fighting for the foundation of oneself or of a population.²⁰

Additionally, Valdez has stated that through the subject of boxing he is raising questions about masculinity, violence, and sport, and how these have together become widely accepted as entertainment. He also looks at issues of the convenience, availability, and validity of heroes in pop culture. Valdez seeks to recreate the hero as a character that survives the pressures of everyday life through a metaphor he hopes is open-ended enough to be relatable to those within and outside of his community.²¹

Before delving into how Valdez's work relates to theories of Latino Cultural Citizenship, it is important to clarify the terms Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American, and Chicano. The term Hispanic was often used by the United States government for census purposes, in an attempt to apply an easy label to a large group of non-Anglo people of Spanish descent. Although still used by many who claim Spanish descent, the word Hispanic has been rejected by those who self-define as Mexican American or Chicano, because of the term's lack of recognition of actual ethnic heritage and diversity.²² Latino is a term often used when referring to people from various Latin American groups, including Central and South America and the Caribbean. Although the term Latino can be considered generic, to many it is less dismissive than Hispanic. Mexican American is a term used by many that is less politicized because it is not associated with the specifics of the Chicano Movement, but still maintains recognition of a heritage with roots in both countries. The latter term is particularly relevant because Valdez self-identifies as a Chicano artist. Once a slur used to negate or insult Mexican Americans, it is now embraced by many in the community as self-identification and form of reclamation. Originally a highly political term, Chicano has been embraced since the 1960s by many. It is a positive self-definition that speaks to the unique experience of those living between two cultures, Mexican and American.

Through the course of this project, I am exploring concepts of space presented by William V. Flores in *Latino Cultural Citizenship*, and how Valdez's work creates and claims space through shared experiences and community

engagement. Further, I analyze Valdez's work as a contribution to past and existing discussions of identity.

Chapter Two discusses the concept of space and how it is created and claimed through Valdez's boxer images. Specifically, Valdez's work establishes space by creating a sense of belonging, expressing a shared consciousness, and serving as an opportunity to engage the community. This chapter considers the significance of Valdez's subject choices of boxing and religion and the ways in which the parallels between the two promote a particular construction of contemporary masculinity.

In his essay "Citizens vs. Citizenry: Undocumented Immigrants and Latino Cultural Citizenship," William V. Flores discusses the claiming of space by Latinos as a direct result of the need for a sense of belonging and a place to call home. Flores does not necessarily refer to a single domestic location; but perhaps an entire neighborhood or public space. Through the construction of these spaces, which Rosaldo and Flores have termed "sacred," Latinos achieve a sense of community and a "distinct Latino quality of life... *un ambiente Latino*."²³ Flores' use of both Spanish and English illustrates one aspect of the unique community in which many Mexican Americans live, one that embraces both languages as part of the distinct experience of living within two cultures.

The experience of being Latino requires movement within and between cultures. Often neither identifying nor relating as solely Mexican or American, Chicanos in the United States find themselves within a liminal space that is of their own unique personal and collective experiences. In this light, Latino spaces

do not only constitute physical structures, neighborhoods, and public spaces, but also shared experiences and culture. The shared experience of being Latino transcends age, location, and gender and contributes to a unique “Latino consciousness” which embraces difference as an essential aspect of being.²⁴

The writings of Flores and Diana Taylor provide two differing Latino/a views while also expressing a shared and unique experience. In his article, “Citizens vs. Citizenry: Undocumented Immigrants and Latino Cultural Citizenship,” Flores discusses the relationship between citizenship and membership in the United States. Regardless of legal status, many Latinos have been continually denied full membership and equal rights within society, often treated as less than first-class citizens.²⁵ Considering this, Flores discusses the struggles of Latino people to create unique and important spaces for themselves. He refers to his own reality as a complex hybridity in which he is not solely Mexican or American but both:

Certainly, as Latinos, we have access to two worlds especially those of us who speak and can read Spanish. We can fully explore and fully appreciate the richness of Latin American culture. But our hybridity is more complex – we are both and we are neither.²⁶

Flores posits this as a liberating space in which self-definition can be achieved.²⁷

The experience of living between two cultures requires Latinos to claim a space which links both, but is entirely unique. In the introduction to *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diane Taylor describes a similar experience of growing up between Canadian and Mexican cultures:

While a citizen of the Américas, I was/am not a happy NAFTA subject, a product of ‘free’ markets and cultural zones. In a world set up in terms of ‘First World’ and ‘Third World,’ ‘white’ and ‘brown,’ ‘us’ and ‘them,’ I wasn’t them but I wasn’t us either.²⁸

Taylor’s reality places her in a space between the two dominant cultures, one of unique characteristics and citizenship. The experiences of these two individuals do not serve to define those of all Latinos, but illustrate the unique experience of being Latino in the Americas and the commonalities despite differences in gender, age, and location. A product of transculturation – the loss of an indigenous culture and subsequent alteration that is the result of foreign cultural influences – Latino culture has been transformed by the forced fusion of native civilization with the foreign, dominant, Anglo society of the United States to result in something entirely unique.²⁹ At once the product of both native and Anglo societies, but at the same time occupying an entirely additional space, Latino culture is lived, experienced, and expressed as a blending of cultures and a unique and shared consciousness. The social relations that are built through shared culture expand beyond geography and do not necessarily correspond to one’s immediate community.³⁰ Common spaces appear within and between marginalized communities as people unite around social and political ideals.

Latinos seek and create inclusive spaces of both a physical and abstract nature in which they feel welcome and at home. Rosaldo and Flores refer to these spaces as “sacred” for their distinct Latino qualities.³¹ From locations of social, political, and religious importance, to more theoretical spaces of creativity,

expression, and opportunity, spaces that invoke a sense of belonging and welcoming are vital aspects of cultural citizenship. Not necessarily a single domestic space, this includes neighborhood and public locations where experiences are shared, appreciated, and celebrated. Although obviously necessary for gathering, the significance of an architectural space is not solely defined by its structural, economic, or aesthetic value, but also the social meaning it represents for the community.³² Locations such as churches, community centers, and parks are important not only for their physicality but also the sense of community they permit and create. Annual events and celebrations in San Antonio, Texas – Valdez’s hometown – are vital aspects of the community-based culture of the city. Valdez tells me that *Fiesta*, an annual celebration of culture and history of the city is the “best way to get to know San Antonio.”³³ What began in 1881 as a commemoration of the Battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto, has become a festival to celebrate the richness and diversity of the city’s cultures. The never-ending community work of 100 local non-profit organizations extends *Fiesta* beyond the official eleven days each April to contribute to and impact the community year-round through scholarships, clubs, boosters, art classes, and church ministries to name a few.³⁴

It is critical not to overlook the fact that even seemingly insignificant places can be a focal point for the community. A local example in South Phoenix, El Rancho Market is significantly different than the typical grocery chain found in mainstream neighborhoods. Catering to its neighborhood highly populated by Mexican Americans, it offers standard groceries as well as culturally specific

Latino goods. Every aspect of the store has been considered in a culturally sensitive way. From the manner in which items are arranged for display to the availability of diverse foods and spices, the resulting atmosphere is one of intermingled influences and cultures. My own visits to El Rancho Market have been unique experiences of a space that is at once subtle in its outward appearance – a grocery store – but wonderfully unexpected in its execution through the very special blend of colors, smells, and sounds. For the Latino community, a welcoming space such as this market is priceless as a physical manifestation of the unique community it represents.

In his discussion of Latino Cultural Citizenship, Flores employs Mark Gottdiener's concept of space, not only as a physical location, but also as "opportunities for creative expression, self-representation, and engagement."³⁵ The space created from these opportunities illustrates the significance of Valdez's subject choices of boxing and religion. For an athlete, boxing represents hope for success, which in turn becomes an opportunity for community pride and engagement. To Catholics, the Stations are a significant aspect of their religious expression. For them, viewing the work creates a shared experience. Within Gottdiener's definition, the space created through a shared consciousness and a sense of belonging expands to include these opportunities.

In the absence of physical spaces from which to act, theoretical, emotional, and artistic expressions become the path for marginalized peoples to create opportunities. Through creativity and expression, opportunities to self-define, self-represent, and engage the community arise. For a Latino community

member, a book, poem, performance, or artwork can become the space within which they feel at home and from which they are able to speak and be heard.

Writers, performers, and artists can channel their energy to create something positive from negative experiences and express important cultural aspects and events. Communicating the experiences of living within a dominated culture, exposing injustice, and arguing for social and political rights through creative expressions are essential to the concept of cultural citizenship. The effects of cultural domination can be healed through aesthetic expressions, creating new ways of thinking and nurturing the soul.³⁶ In her discussion of black artists' subject choice, bell hooks argues that creating from one's own experience leads to a complete awareness of one's artistic identity.³⁷ Referencing the careers of Lois Mailou Jones and Romare Bearden, she asserts that these artists fully realized their artistic identities when they moved beyond the European artistic notion of form and content, and instead focused on expressing the experiences of their own African-American culture and history.³⁸ For the community, viewing and connecting to these expressions creates a space of mutual understanding of shared experiences. As if the artist is speaking directly to them, the community feels a special connection that fosters self-justification and ultimately, empowerment. The availability of these spaces fosters a deep sense of community and gives a voice to those who often feel silenced.

Valdez's paper and canvas is such a site for self-expression and creativity that speaks to the experience of his community. First, his work allows the viewer to witness active community engagement illustrated through the characters on the

canvas. Second, his work recognizes and encourages the very unique interaction that occurs between viewer and canvas. As with any art form, each viewer brings his or her own perspective. The dialogue is always dynamic and so the meaning behind Valdez's boxers shifts accordingly. A young Chicano male from San Antonio will read the image differently than a Chicana from Los Angeles. However, there will always be a certain base level of shared experience between those who are Latino/a or Chicano/a in the United States. This allows for some important mutual understanding of the work.

And so, Valdez's subject choices of boxing and religion are significant for a number of reasons. As stated earlier, the sport provides an opportunity for success. For a young Chicano man, boxing among other sports offers some success in a country where options are often limited for him. Second, it can be an expression of community pride. Accomplishments in the ring are a source of pride for an athlete's community. Last, the use of the Catholic Stations creates a site for shared experience between those who are familiar with the annual observance of the Catholic Stations. The collective experience and engagement within and between communities through the viewing of these works is itself an act of cultural citizenship.

Finally, a critical look at *Stations* also reveals how Valdez's use of the boxer presents the emotional and physical challenges faced by some men. Facing high expectations of success – from himself, his family, and community – a young Chicano man must negotiate these demands by displaying a particular masculinity rooted in physical achievement. *Stations* presents a masculinity

defined by power, domination, and an implied role as community hero. In using both boxing and religion together, Valdez draws parallels between the sacrifice of Christ and that of the boxer. The boxer's sacrifice is revered and worshiped in a similar manner to Christ. The series also raises critical questions about the violence and sacrifice that must occur for men to achieve citizenship among their peers. The challenges illustrated by Valdez present the varied pressures of the structure of contemporary masculinity.

Chapter Three explores how identity is expressed and developed through Valdez's boxer images. Considering the fluid nature of Chicano identity is key in understanding the ways in which Valdez illustrates the various roles his boxer must play and how these represent his identity.³⁹ This chapter also considers how Valdez's media choice, as well as his autobiographical and narrative methods contribute to affirming identities of his community, including his own.

Stations provides a view into a male identity specific to the Chicano cultural experience. Blanca Silvestrini's essay "The World We Enter When Claiming Rights': Latinos and Their Quest for Culture" provides an opportunity to look at issues of identity as they relate to, and are developed through, one's culture. Silvestrini illustrates culture as an avenue of "unity" and "connectedness" from which to view individual and collective identity.⁴⁰ Defining Latino culture is not easy. It is multilayered and fluid, varying from individuals to families to communities.⁴¹ Through culture, people find a sense of belonging, a feeling of empowerment and entitlement, and the support to resist struggles faced as minority members of a larger exclusionary society.⁴² Commonalities in language,

arts, religion, history, and the like, form shared culture for Chicano people. It is of each of these and more, and all at once, that forms a loose definition of culture that bonds many Chicanos, uniting communities through shared experience and knowledge.⁴³ Although this definition of Chicano culture is fluid and multidimensional based on the diverse experiences of individuals, she asserts shared culture among Latinos creates a sense of belonging and understanding that is essential to the formation of identity.⁴⁴

The concept of identity has been discussed by many theorists at great length. Through this project I do not intend to redefine identity. Rather, I consider how Valdez's boxer series adds to the ongoing discussion. The notion of fluidity as presented in the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, is critical in consideration of these issues.⁴⁵ Her writings are helpful in understanding the multiple layers that construct both individual and community identity. Anzaldúa considers herself in a "constant state of *nepantilism*," referring to the Aztec word for "torn between."⁴⁶ She sees herself living in multiple cultures at once, divided between them and unable to choose only one because she is truly a little of each. She claims opportunity in this space; opportunity to challenge the structures of each side and to explore multiple avenues of identity by letting go of assumptions holding her to one or the other.⁴⁷ She argues for releasing ties that hold one in a single identity, an act that is dependent on fluidity between cultures. Deeply rooted in multiple cultures, Chicano identity flexes between communities, languages, and histories. Being Chicano requires a straddling of multiple cultures, and, through this, a special identity is formed. For each individual and community, a unique identity

is possible. Flexibility and fluidity allow for growth, not abandoning the old for the new, but the development of a distinct Latino sensibility created out of all.

The powerful need to communicate a separate and distinct identity was a key force behind the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. Also called the Chicano Civil Rights Movement (or *El Movimiento*), the Movement rose out of Mexican Americans' struggle to emancipate themselves from histories of marginalization and imposed cultural domination by Anglo society as well as social and political invisibility. Cornel West discusses invisibility as a condition that results from relative inability to self-represent and self-define one's self.⁴⁸ He argues it results in a response of resistance and urgency for representation.⁴⁹ The Movement encompassed a broad cross-section of issues including the restoration of land grants and farm workers' rights, education reform, political mobilization, and perhaps most importantly, the emerging awareness of collective history and the hurried need for recognition and affirmation.

A symbolically significant piece of the Movement was the budding of Chicano art driven by heightened political activism and a newfound sense of cultural pride. The arts provided an essential element in the expression and development of a distinct Chicano culture and identity for both individuals and communities alike. The Movement, and specifically the arts, fed a "basic hunger for community" that Mexican Americans had felt since the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁰ Creative visual and literary expressions helped achieve the goal of gaining political voices and power and establishing a Chicano community, identity, and unity. The combined role of both visual and written arts in the

Movement allows for the use of literature theories when analyzing Chicano art. A discussion of Chicano/a autobiographical theories illustrates the connection between literature and the ways Valdez narrates a collective identity and experience in his work. The community-oriented methods of Chicana autobiographical writers are particularly significant in the discussion of these parallels. Specifically, like these authors, Valdez uses autobiographical, yet fictional, methods in this work. He inserts himself, his family, and his community into a fictional narrative that connects with his viewers.

Particularly for Chicanos, literature serves as an avenue to express and build connections through shared memory and language.⁵¹ As a “site of contestation” and “rememorating,” literature offers an avenue for recovering lost histories and re-establishing a sense of community.⁵² Authors writing during the Movement argued for a mythical homeland known as Aztlán, directly responding to their peoples’ need for a place of origin that established and documented unity.⁵³ The urgency in their work was a reflection of the immediate emotions and desires of the collective. Tomás Rivera writes, “the writer speaks from the community, by characterizing members of the community, thus extracting wisdom, advice, and counsel from it.”⁵⁴ He defines community as place, personal relationships, shared values and conversation.⁵⁵ The Movement empowered people to participate in creating connections that formed a sense of belonging and developed relationships among people with shared language, values, and culture. Writings serve both to express collective memory and language and establish importance in society. Drawing on these traditions, today’s writers engage in a

production of literature that is concerned with the views and experiences of a people who belong to a “particular imagined community” and express “an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top, which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world.”⁵⁶ As in the visual arts, literature continually serves to communicate and build an identity created out of shared experiences, languages, and histories.

As with literature, the visual and performing arts were an important aspect of the Chicano Movement and to the development of identity. In the case of periodicals published during the student movement of the 1960s, the visual arts were used as one way of expressing a shared consciousness and identity.⁵⁷ Claire Bishop argues socially oriented artwork creates active subjects empowered to self-determine their own social and political status through their physical and/or symbolic participation with a work.⁵⁸ She quotes Benjamin to further her discussion of looking at the social and political position of artists and audiences in understanding the works, arguing that each must be read from this position and how it communicates, inspires, and creates an active participant through shared understanding of situations.⁵⁹ A bond is then created through collective understanding of a work’s meaning.⁶⁰ Through this, creative expressions by Chicano artists and writers can be viewed as open, in which the audience is an active agent who contributes to the meaning through their interpretation.⁶¹ Each individual’s perspective is an essential aspect of the validity and meaning of a work.⁶² For example, drawings are not closed at the artist’s completion but rather

continue to develop through each viewing. The completion of a work is in the reading of it, its “unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”⁶³

Norma Klahn’s exploration of Chicana writers’ autobiographical fictions provides a unique view of the literary genre. She defines these works as “constituting a mixed genre that takes verifiable events and characters for their inspiration but insists on their fictional (imaginative rendering) delivery.”⁶⁴ Chicana authors have adopted fictional autobiography to insert themselves into recognizable and imaginative events that allow them to express histories and narratives from a first-person perspective in ways that successfully engage their audience and speak to the experiences of many.⁶⁵ These works also differ from traditional autobiography in their lack of focus on “the individual will for personal agency.”⁶⁶ Socially oriented in their writings, Chicana authors and critics have an awareness of the connection their work has to the social and political status of their community.⁶⁷ This is not to say Chicano writers are not socially engaged but rather there is a greater collective focus and presence within the written works of Chicanas. Avoiding narrating a single character’s life experiences, Chicana autobiographers tend to tell a communal story, paying careful attention to issues of gender as well as class and race. These women write from a particular space and knowledge, also recognizing the influence of time, place, language, and culture in their position.⁶⁸ Defining her identity as not solely based in her individual experience, the Chicana writer sees and expresses the collective in and through her work.⁶⁹ Through her writing, she purposely includes herself into histories that have previously excluded her and her communities.⁷⁰ Her authority

to narrate these experiences is not self-assigned but rather drawn from her position as an author for her community.⁷¹ She is empowered to write about herself while maintaining a commitment to narrate voices of the collective.⁷² It is precisely her recognition of the importance of community to her identity that provides strength to the Chicana writer's voice and allows her to become the voice for her community.⁷³ She is interconnected to her community in such a way that she cannot communicate her own experience without first recognizing her place within the larger community.

In their autobiographical fiction, Chicana authors construct present identities through the use of shared memories and experiences, recognizing the influence history and community have on their individual and collective identities.⁷⁴ The ways their stories are constructed – taking into consideration issues of gender, race, class, sexual preference, and so forth – illustrates a complex, ever-changing community that mirrors fluid, non-essentialist notions of identity.⁷⁵ These narratives provide a framework from which to read *Stations* as an autobiographical work in which Valdez shows an awareness of the shifting and varying identities of his community. The parallels between the methods of these writers and those of Valdez are useful in understanding the autobiographical nature of *Stations*. In the tradition of these women, he chooses to tell a story that represents himself through a portrait of his community. His decision to model his characters after people from his life reflects their importance and the vital role they play in the formation and narration of his identity.

The significance of Valdez's choice of charcoal for his series *Stations* strengthens the discussion of his work as a narrative. Two aspects are important to this analysis. First, as a storytelling medium, the images recall black and white film stills in which the action of the ring is captured within each carefully planned composition. Valdez's mastery of the medium creates an energy that draws the viewer through the sequence. Second, I discuss the idea of charcoal as a secondary medium to painting in the history of art. Charcoal serves as a metaphor for the artist's and his community's social position. Finally, I discuss the boxer's exertion in the ring as a metaphor for the artist's exhausting effort to create large size charcoal drawings.

The final chapter of this project is dedicated to the conclusions of how space and identity are intrinsic to *Stations*. These concepts are fundamentally built in to each image. The space and identity created and expressed contribute to the value of the series to the community and concretely establish his work as an act of cultural citizenship. In these ways, Valdez certainly draws from the artistic traditions of the Chicano Movement which focused on claiming a space and defining an identity for their socially and politically unrecognized community. However, the non-traditional approaches that Valdez chooses also relates to other artists working since the Chicano Movement. Valdez is among this new generation of artists who take into consideration global happenings and seldom-explored subjects, using new media to explore issues like identity and space using new strategies in ambiguous ways.

¹ John Wilmerding, *American Views: Essays on American Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 305.

² Wilmerding, *American Views*, 307.

³ Wilmerding, *American Views*, 307.

⁴ Wilmerding, *American Views*, 314. The series includes three paintings, each oil on canvas; *Salutat* (1898), *Taking the Count* (1898), and *Between Rounds* (1899).

⁵ Jock Reynolds, "Thomas Eakins," in *Sport in Art From American Museums* edited by Reilly Rhodes (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 26.

⁶ Wilmerding, *American Views*, 319. Notable boxing images by Bellows of this nature include *Both Members of This Club* (oil on canvas, 1909) and *Club Night* (oil on canvas, 1907).

⁷ Wilmerding, *American Views*, 319.

⁸ Reilly Rhodes, ed., *Sport in Art from American Museums* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 12.

⁹ Virgie D. Day, "Mahonri Mackintosh Young," in *Sport in Art From American Museums* edited by Reilly Rhodes (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 89-90. Young's bronze boxer sculptures include *On the Button* (1926-27), *Right to the Jaw* (1926-27), and *The Knockdown* (1927).

¹⁰ Martin H. Bush, "Fletcher Martin," in *Sport in Art From American Museums* edited by Reilly Rhodes (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 100.

¹¹ Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MS: MIT Press; New York, NY: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 27. Cornel West discusses invisibility as a condition that results from relative inability to self-represent and self-define one's self. He argues invisibility results in a response of resistance and urgency for representation and recognition.

¹² Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), xi. The term cultural citizenship was coined by Rosaldo in this text.

¹³ Christina M. Getrich, "Negotiating Boundaries of Social Belonging: Second-Generation Mexican Youth and the Immigrants Rights Protests of 2006," *American Behavioral Scientist* 52 (2008): 533-556.

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- ¹⁴ Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 37(1996): 737-762.
- ¹⁵ Nick Stevenson, "Globalization, National Cultures and Cultural Citizenship," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38 (1997): 41-66.
- ¹⁶ Elda Silva, "Technical Knockout," *San Antonio Express-News*, August 12, 2004
- ¹⁷ "Religion and Boxing are Themes of 'Vincent Valdez's 'Stations' Exhibit at DePauw," DePauw University College News, Accessed February 23, 2009, <http://www.collegenews.org/x5245.xml>.
- ¹⁸ "Religion and Boxing are Themes of 'Vincent Valdez's 'Stations' Exhibit at DePauw," DePauw University College News, Accessed February 23, 2009, <http://www.collegenews.org/x5245.xml>.
- ¹⁹ *Vincent Valdez: Art of Boxing*, Mini-DVD, Directed by Ray Santisteban (San Antonio, Texas: Nantes Films, 2008).
- ²⁰ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, Tape recorded telephone interview, Phoenix, AZ, April, 22, 2010.
- ²¹ *Vincent Valdez*, Ray Santisteban.
- ²² There is an important exception to the rejection of the term Hispanic. Many individuals from New Mexico claim Spanish descent and self-identify as Hispanic.
- ²³ William V. Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry: Undocumented Immigrants and Latino Cultural Citizenship," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights* edited by William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 262.
- ²⁴ Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry," 261.
- ²⁵ Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry," 255.
- ²⁶ Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry," 257. – I recognize the term "hybrid" as problematic but have chosen to include it as it is the term Flores used in his writings.
- ²⁷ Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry," 257.

²⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), xv.

²⁹ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 94.

³⁰ Renato Rosaldo and William Flores, "Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latino Communities: Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights* edited by William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 72.

³¹ Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry," 262.

³² Rosaldo and Flores, "Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latino Communities," 76.

³³ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, Gallery conversation in *Stations* exhibition, Mesa Contemporary Arts Center, Mesa, AZ, April, 2, 2010.

³⁴ "History of Fiesta," Fiesta San Antonio, accessed April 25, 2010, <http://www.fiesta-sa.org/about-2/history-of-fiesta>.

³⁵ Flores, "Citizens vs. Citizenry," 263.

³⁶ bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 5.

³⁷ hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 5.

³⁸ hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 5.

³⁹ The term representation has two meanings. Most obviously, a drawing is a two-dimensional illustration that physically represents an object or person visually. For the purposes of this project, the term has an additional meaning. For the Latino community, an familiar image that evokes emotion can represent the viewer's one self. It can serve to embody the feeling of being Latino within their individual experience.

⁴⁰ Blanca G. Silvestrini, "'The World We Enter When Claiming Rights': Latinos and Their Quest for Culture," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights* edited by William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 43.

⁴¹ Silvestrini, "The World We Enter," 43.

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- ⁴² Silvestrini, "The World We Enter," 43.
- ⁴³ Silvestrini, "The World We Enter," 43.
- ⁴⁴ Silvestrini, "The World We Enter," 47.
- ⁴⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), preface.
- ⁴⁶ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* ,78.
- ⁴⁷ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* ,78-79.
- ⁴⁸ Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MS: MIT Press; New York, NY: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 27.
- ⁴⁹ West, "The New Cultural Politics." 27.
- ⁵⁰ Tomás Rivera, "Mexican American Literature: The Establishment of Community," in *The Texas Literary Tradition: Fiction, Folklore, History*, edited by Don Graham, et al. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), 125.
- ⁵¹ Norma Klahn, "Literary (Re)Mappings: Autobiographical (Dis)Placements by Chicana Writers," in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*, edited by Gabriela F. Arredondo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 115.
- ⁵² Klahn, "Literary (Re)Mappings," 116. Klahn argues writers use memory to re-map social and cultural boundaries based in lost experiences, giving voices and a sense of community and history to disenfranchised peoples. These writings "remember a community" by retrieving missing or erased memories and stories and illuminating histories hidden by colonization. 114-116.
- ⁵³ Rivera, "Mexican American Literature," 125.
- ⁵⁴ Rivera, "Mexican American Literature," 127.
- ⁵⁵ Rivera, "Mexican American Literature," 127.
- ⁵⁶ Klahn, "Literary (Re)Mappings," 116.
- ⁵⁷ Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano

Art,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 136.

⁵⁸ Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers,” in *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Claire Bishop. (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 12.

⁵⁹ Bishop, “Viewers as Producers,” 12.

⁶⁰ Bishop, “Viewers as Producers,” 12.

⁶¹ Umberto Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work,” in *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 22.

⁶² Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work,” 22.

⁶³ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 45.

⁶⁴ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 119.

⁶⁵ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 119.

⁶⁶ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 120.

⁶⁷ Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, “Chicana Literature from a Chicana Feminist Perspective,” in *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature*, edited by María Herrera-Sobek and Helena María Viramontes (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 213.

⁶⁸ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 119.

⁶⁹ Yarbro-Bejarano, “Chicana Literature,” 215.

⁷⁰ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 118.

⁷¹ Yarbro-Bejarano, “Chicana Literature,” 215.

⁷² Yarbro-Bejarano, “Chicana Literature,” 217.

⁷³ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 120.

⁷⁴ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 116.

⁷⁵ Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” 121.

Chapter 2

CONSTRUCTIONS

Defining Space

The introduction discussed the claiming and development of space as being a key aspect in understanding cultural citizenship. For these purposes the definition of space goes beyond recording simple physical dimensions. It is a holistic construct that includes notions of community belonging, shared culture, and collective consciousness. Space represents an opportunity for personal expression and community interaction.

Valdez's series *Stations* is significant to the theory of cultural citizenship for the valuable and unique spaces of belonging he creates through expressions of shared consciousness and connection. By merging two subjects significant to his community, boxing and religion, Valdez very carefully creates intersections of space that allow for wider collective engagement. This process also helps to raise critical inquiries about masculinity and religious imagery in his community. The works provoke questions in regards to the roles of men in society and constructions of masculinity based in domination and violence.

Boxing: Opportunity, Symbol, and Pride

Valdez's choice of subject is significant. To young minority men, the sport of boxing offers potential for success, often unattainable through mainstream options. It represents an avenue for escape and growth. To the communities of marginalized people that support these individuals, the results of a successful boxing career are a unique opportunity for community pride. Perhaps most

importantly boxing, as with many sports, historically represented an opportunity for marginalized people to challenge discrimination in a non-traditional yet highly symbolic way. Thus the outcome of a sporting endeavor can often be charged with deeper meaning. In some instances it provided a rare opportunity to oppose domination by Anglos and the upper class, even if only in the ring or on the field.¹ Through a simple game or match, perceived inequalities in society can be expressed as hugely symbolic battles. Waged through athletic competition, these metaphorical clashes serve as resistance to ever-present modes of social domination. In their competitions, these athletes confronted the unbalanced structures of society and hierarchies of class. Historically, an interesting juxtaposition of oppression and opportunity can present itself. Minority participants may, at once, find themselves in a disadvantaged position but at the same time are delivered the possibility to overcome those that imposed the inequitable conditions to begin with.² For example, in the early nineteenth century in British colonies, public school cricket teams were segregated by race and organized in terms of “loyalty and obedience”.³ Though the young, colonized men were subjugated through separation into teams distinct from the socially dominant Anglo students, they were able to symbolically resist racism and domination simply by excelling on the field.⁴

Traditionally, poor minorities felt encouraged to partake in the violent sport of boxing as an option for upward mobility. In the United States, it is a path few upper class Anglos would consider. It is precisely the relative abundance of minority members in boxing that delineates the unequal structure of this country’s

society.⁵ The prevalence of poverty in marginalized communities, and the gradual appearance of minority boxer role models such as Joe Louis, signaled a shift. In just one study in 1948, the majority of boxers were minorities, almost half of them were black, with Italians and Latinos as the respectively second and third largest racial groups represented.⁶ The physical commitment of boxing, in both training and the toll taken in the ring, sadly forced only the most desperate young men to choose the sport.⁷

In addition to the opportunity to achieve financial success and escape poverty, boxing offered young men the opportunity to exhibit personal and community strength.⁸ For Irish immigrants in the late nineteenth century many sports, including boxing, built self-esteem and encouraged a sense of community.⁹ With few options and little success in society, participating in sport fostered a personal pride and emotional fulfillment often not found in their daily social interactions.

Beyond personal feelings of achievement and fulfillment, the athlete's success also served as an anchor for community engagement and self-respect. Vicariously identifying with the athlete, members of the community felt an increased sense of community, self-worth, and pride.¹⁰ Victories engendered pride in the athlete and symbolically served as rallying calls against Anglo domination.¹¹ Certainly this was true for African-Americans in the early twentieth century, where victorious matches with opponents of a differing race provided emblematic victories for the community as a whole.¹² The minority boxers were seen as community representatives who carried the courage and strength of all

those behind them. These young boxers were able to directly affect the sense of self-worth held by an entire collective of people. Most importantly, a boxer's success in the ring served to directly challenge stereotypical views held about minorities. Latino triumph in sporting endeavors, for example, led to a marked fall in negative opinions about the Spanish speaking community held by dominant society.¹³

Valdez's choice of the boxer as his subject is significant precisely because of how the images can be read by the community. Valdez chose the boxer for the "endless themes and metaphors that come out of the fighter."¹⁴ He states:

I wasn't too interested in the actual technique of the sport or the actual system of boxing but again it was this universal concept of what it meant, what fighting represents. And I think at the end of the day it's still to me a true symbol of the universal and the infinite fight. The world has always been in conflict. I think human beings will always face conflict. From generation to generation, throughout societies, it can be any universal concept of a fight whether male, female, old, young, black, or white. It is this endless theatrical, dramatic, and tragic but glorious event.¹⁵

It is understood that as an active participant in the viewing of a work, a person's own experiences can color their relationship with it. So to a member of the public, Valdez's drawings are a stunning example of artistic skill and mastery of the charcoal medium and provide a unique view of his life and community. For the Chicano community though, they represent something much more complex.

When viewing a work of art that speaks to your own experience and that of your community, you feel validated and perhaps even empowered. Put simply, *living* the experience that Valdez has frozen in time through his drawings, and just *viewing* it, represent two very different encounters. Valdez's work resonates with his community because of shared experience and culture. This more intimate connection with his work reveals the series as a site for creative expression, a space for the community, and an act of cultural citizenship.

Constructions of Masculinity

Stations also offers the viewer an opportunity to ask critical questions about the construction of masculinity as embodied by the boxer. The visual narrative of the fight allows Valdez to illustrate a particular construction of masculinity defined by the physical strength of the boxer, his domination in the ring, and the implied role of a community hero. In discussing the development of his subject, Valdez expressed his interest in the relationship of masculinity, competition, and sport. He sought to "recreate the hero" as a symbol of human survival focusing on "the everyday pressures and a sense of being overwhelmed emotionally, physically, and mentally."¹⁶ For Valdez, his boxer's resolve in the face of challenge and fearless embrace of defeat are attributes of "a true warrior."¹⁷

The subject of boxing, as presented by Valdez, raises important questions about masculinity and more specifically male citizenship. Valdez's presentation of the boxer as a hero emphasizes sacrifice and violence as defining measures of masculinity. Often for a young man to be seen as a member among his male

peers, he must present himself as a warrior willing to challenge himself to a breaking point. This notion of ritual, of a rite of passage, is true of many societies around the world, although the actual expression of this idea differs drastically from place to place. Here, the ring represents these challenges for the young boxer – and his opponent. The way young men the world over achieve wider peer acceptance speaks volumes about the society in which they live. While sporting traditions offer the opportunity to symbolically overcome one kind of domination, that of race, they, by their nature, require domination of another kind – physical strength. Sport can often leave us with only a limited physical definition of masculinity. It can also simply replace one type of domination with another, perpetuating existing structures, and even creating discrimination, albeit of a different kind.

In the first image of the series, *Weigh In: Coming in at 140lbs. 8 oz.* (2004, 60 x 40 inches), Valdez uses a particularly male setting – the locker room in which the boxer is weighed – to affirm his masculinity through physical build and strength. The young man stands on a tall scale, his large, muscular body takes up a majority of the right side of the composition. A trainer, dressed casually in a white button-up shirt and brimmed hat, stands directly in front of him. The trainer's expression and body language are serious as he listens closely to the athlete's heartbeat with a stethoscope held in his right hand. The boxer is wearing only his trunks and wraps on his wrists and hands; the light shines off his body emphasizing his toned physique. The tight visual space is further compressed by the depiction of a close wall in the background. Peeling paint and posters reading

“...of the world,” “Fight Night,” and “King of the Ring” lend to a rough and tough feeling of, and in, the room. The signs suggest a victory for the boxer will confirm his role as the hero of his community and emphasize his position as “king.” The act of weighing-in serves as a celebration of his training and evidence of his readiness to face his opponent. The artist makes nothing else known about the young man, stressing only his physical characteristics. His weight and the anticipated results of his training are the only concern. An arrow pointing to the left and the words “strongest man in the world is he who walks alone” stenciled in upper case letters on the wall direct us to the series’ next drawing of the same title. Three men in suits, likely the boxer’s sponsors, are squeezed into the space between the boxer and the wall. A partial profile of the man on the left is shown, his image blocked by the trainer in front of him. The other two men’s faces are clearly shown, the middle in profile and the other facing directly forward as they observe the weigh-in ceremony closely. The man in the middle wears a pin-stripe suit and takes a slow drag on the cigar in his left hand. A large boom microphone juts into the space from the left, suggesting the presence of the media just outside of the picture plane. Even the location of the proceedings, the locker room, carries significance. Its place in sports culture is a very male space in which athletes learn and promote behaviors typical to hegemonic masculinity. Although these particular practices are not shown in this work, traditionally within the locker room men participate in verbal sparring and peer pressure – often bragging about athletic accomplishments and sexual exploits – to establish dominance among themselves and over women in a manner to project a particular type of masculine

identity.¹⁸ In this image, the pressure of the locker room banter is replaced by the presence of the boxer's trainers and sponsors all watching and waiting closely for the results of their investment. Their close attention to the weigh-in ceremony confirms the expectations of the boxer's masculinity as defined by his physical power. This collective understanding and appreciation of this form of male power serves as a shared space and with it, an important step in the expression of cultural citizenship.

Main Event (2004, 92 x 42 inches), the third drawing in the series, is a larger than life portrait of the boxer in the ring prior to the fight. The significance of his physical strength is illustrated through the display of his body and the title of the work. With dual meaning, the title of the work references not only the boxing match but also identifies the boxer himself as the "main event." The robe he wore in the previous drawing has been removed to reveal his body. He now wears only his shoes, gloves, and trunks. The bright lights of the arena just above his head reflect against his body accentuating his physique, and cast a large, dark shadow on the floor of the ring. The low elevation perspective emphasizes the boxer's size, particularly in comparison to the people in the background. The all-male front row of the crowd peer just over the edge of the ring from directly behind the boxer. A photographer is crouched down on the far left side of the ring, one eye focused through the viewfinder with a finger on the shutter poised to capture the action. The focus of the drawing is again the dominating strength and courage of the boxer. All eyes rest upon him, as he stands confident and defiant facing his opponent. The crowd's unwavering attention and the boxer's proud

stance reiterate the young man's masculinity as defined by his physicality. Valdez's depiction of the boxer in this stance not only affirms the hero's physique but also establishes his dominance of the actual ring. His body language communicates his intent to control. He stands ready to fight and confirm the space as his own.

Main Event also provides us an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the size of Valdez's works. Within the drawings, size and scale actively contribute to the sense of the boxer's domination of the crowd, his opponent and the arena. Externally, the sheer size and scale of the actual pieces work together to create and claim a physical space within which the viewer stands. Robert Morris's discussion of how a sculpture's size affects the viewing of a work is helpful in understanding the impact of Valdez's drawings. He argues the larger an object is, the more space outside of itself it encompasses. It requires participation of the viewer to read the work – i.e. requiring the viewer to step back in order to fully see and comprehend the entirety of the object.¹⁹ By making these works so monumental in size, Valdez has both metaphorically and literally asked us to assess the notion of space and its control. It has already been noted that the size and perspective of the boxer claims the space of the boxing ring within the composition of *Main Event*. However the vertical orientation and considerable size of the drawing extend this control beyond the work's frame. The viewer is forced to step back and look up at the athlete to take in the drawing in its entirety. Valdez claims and controls the space of the gallery by creating large-scale works

that command not only the viewer's attention but also the space within which they stand.

Get Outta There!, Kill 'Im!, No Mercy! Finish Him!, (2004, 42 x 36 inches) is the only image of the series that depicts actual violence. Broken into four smaller sections, the drawings are arranged vertically providing various perspectives of the fight and its participants. In the first and second images the vantage point is from inside the ring, first behind the boxer as his opponent comes in for a hit and next the viewer sees that punch from the side. The viewer's perspective is close enough to witness the impact crush against the main character's chin, jarring his neck backward as blood and sweat fly off his head. A view from just outside the ropes in the third section shows the boxer falling as his opponent's arm rounds out across his body. The injured boxer's knees are buckling, his eyes closed as fluids are splattered and his mouthpiece is forced free of him. The final image is drawn from deep within the audience and illustrates the final moment. The boxer's weak legs give out from under him as he falls to the floor of the ring in defeat. A towel thrown from his corner signals submission, and hangs mid air. The referee calls the fight. Both title and drawings work toward reaffirming boxing as promotion of violence and defeat over the opponent. There is little regard for safety from either the athlete's or the audience's perspective. With no apparent concern for the physical or emotional well-being of either boxer, the interest in domination is evident. As discussed in the previous review of boxing history, such displays of control in the ring do not differ from the persistent structure of class and race oppression in society. The promotion of male

power, attained through the subordination of another person reflects upon constructions of masculinity that encourage domination and violence. The act of fighting by the boxers is an attempt to claim the space of the ring. It is through domination of, and violence toward, each other that they confirm their masculinity and perceived rightful place in the sport. Through this expression of their masculinity and the subsequent claiming of space the boxers stake their claim toward cultural citizenship.

The eighth image in the series, *A Fine Performance By Our Winning Fighter Tonight* (2004, 42 x 72 inches), continues this thematic commentary. Composed horizontally, the drawing illustrates the scene in which the boxer has been knocked down for the final time. He lies on the floor in defeat after the referee has finished his count. The ring is a frenzy of energy as trainers and families representing both men rush in. In the far left-hand corner, a bikini-clad woman holds up a sign reading “KO,” declaring the knockout of the losing boxer. In the distant background the opponent celebrates, hands held high in victory. As the conquered athlete lies broken and battered on the ring floor, the triumphant boxer’s proud display illustrates the strange dichotomy of masculinity in boxing. To prove one’s worth, a boxer must control and oppress his opponent by defeating him physically. If, as displayed within the series, a man’s masculinity is measured by his physical prowess, to overcome one’s opponent is to reduce his value as a man. *Fine Performance* provides a diametrically opposed view of the boxer’s virility and strength seen in earlier drawings.

A final and clear image of the boxer's total defeat is shown in the ninth image, *Laid Out* (2004, 42 x 92 inches), in which the boxer lies on a table or slab alone with his eyes closed. He has returned to the locker room away from the action and commotion. Lacking the bravado of the first image in which he is being weighed, we see an alternate view beyond the public scene of a boxing match. It is unclear if the boxer is alive or dead, but regardless of the match's outcome this drawing raises questions about the lengths young men will go to achieve their particular notion of masculinity. While boxing certainly offers opportunities for considerable success and perhaps acceptance among other males, those opportunities can come at a high cost.

Laid Out is contrasted with the final image *Collect 'Em All* (2004, 42 x 72 inches), a trading card-like portrait of the young, healthy boxer. Although no violence is illustrated in this drawing, the promotion of masculinity through physical display continues to be communicated. Set against a plain background, the athlete again appears strong and powerful as he poses with his fists raised in a classic stance. He is once more the image of the youthful hero and an ideal embodiment of masculinity. With no particular reference to time or place, Valdez depicts his boxer as the strong community hero or warrior who will live on forever through this image.

Acts of everyday life affirm cultural citizenship for the whole community. Similarly the specific behavior of a male defines masculinity within, and male citizenship to, that community. Their membership in society is expressed through a particular type of participation. In this case, *Stations* narrates a collective

understanding of a construction of masculinity based in physicality. It is understood that through the fight, the boxer affirms his place among his male peers as well as the greater community.

Christ Parallels: Stations to *Stations*

There is a second thematic thread present in Valdez's work, that of religion. *Stations* represents a complex weave of community, sport, and religion in its execution. By merging boxing and Catholicism, Valdez critically presents two very different interpretations of a male's pressure to succeed, both concerned with the challenges he must and is willing to face, to be considered worthy.

Stations serves as a site for shared experience most obviously in its allusion to the Catholic Stations of the Cross. Sacred for its depiction of the final hours of Christ's life and the ritual of devotion – consisting of the act of praying before each station, most often observed during Lent – the Stations of the Cross are deeply embedded in Catholic culture and a familiar rite that those who understand the religion can identify with.

Traditionally there are fourteen Catholic Stations of the Cross, also referred to as the Passion of Christ, *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross), or *Via Dolorosa* (Way of Grief), that lead observers through Christ's final walk – from the moment when Christ is condemned to when he is laid in his tomb.²⁰ The media that depicts the series can vary from sculptures or carvings (wood, stone, metal, etc.) to paintings or etchings and can appear along the inside walls of a church or outside in a courtyard or cloister. However, the scenes are consistent, save the occasional presence of a fifteenth station to represent Christ's

resurrection. The prayers that coincide with each image reflect on Christ's suffering and sacrifice of giving his own life to save humanity. It is strongly believed that by giving his life, Christ allowed the forgiving of sin and entry into heaven for the faithful. In the first and second stations, observers reflect on an image of Christ's judgment by Pilate, and the moment when he first takes up the cross and carries it to Calvary, the site where he was crucified. Christ falls for the first time in the third station, and in the next sees his mother, Mary, who provides him compassion and love from within a hostile crowd. The fifth station marks when the guards become impatient with Christ's slow pace and pull a man, Simon of Cyrene, from the crowd to help him carry his cross. A pious woman named Veronica appears in the next station. She comes out of the crowd to offer what help she can by wiping blood and sweat from Christ's face. It is then that the image of his face appears on her cloth. In the seventh station, Christ falls for the second time. The next station illustrates Christ comforting a group of women from Jerusalem. Christ falls for the third time in the ninth station. The tenth station shows Christ has arrived at the site of his crucifixion. Seizing an opportunity for additional torture, the guards force Christ to remove his clothing, and throw dice to gamble for the garments. With the crowd cheering them on, they proceed to stab at and reopen his wounds, while challenging him to prove he is the Son of God by performing a miracle. The next two stations illustrate the guards nailing Christ to the cross and his subsequent death. His body is removed from the cross, and given to his mother, and he is laid to rest in his tomb in the thirteenth and fourteenth stations.

As a common ritual for Catholics, the parallels between the religious stations and Valdez's *Stations* are likely obvious to particular viewers who are familiar with the observance of the Passion of Christ. Valdez has purposefully chosen a familiar ritual that his Catholic audience will understand more intimately than perhaps others. Familiarity with the ritual and the Christ figure allows for a reading that considers not only the surface parallels but also the complexities and contradictions of masculinity and its interplay with religion.

Thoughtful compositions also provide insight into the experiences of Chicano males. Karen Davalos' reading of the work of Yolanda M. López offers an excellent starting point for a critical reading of Valdez's use of the Christ figure and related issues of masculinity. López's studies of the Virgin of Guadalupe in her *Guadalupe* series (oil pastels) of 1978, reveal how the image relates to women as a cultural icon. Its very meaning extends beyond the more obvious sacred aspects of the religious figure. López consciously thinks about the space of women and the rights and traditions associated with the female figure. She brings the sacred to the profane, creating a conversation that both addresses and challenges existing traditions. She merges the Virgin's image with portraits of contemporary women, contesting existing labels of femininity, expectations of women, and Catholic notions of the "singular universal woman."²¹ In so doing she offers a view of the multiple layers that construct Chicana identity.²² In removing the Virgin from a religious context, she focuses not on her divine qualities but uses the deconstructed image to explore how women represent themselves.²³ Moving beyond religious iconography in her *Guadalupe* series, she reformulates

the Virgin into portraits of herself, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (oil pastel on rag paper, 22 x 30 inches), her mother, *Margaret F. Stewart: Our Lady of Guadalupe* (oil pastel on paper, 22 x 30 inches), and her grandmother, *Guadalupe: Victoria F. Franco* (oil pastel on rag paper, 22x 30 inches), to successfully create symbols of empowerment.²⁴

Like López, Valdez was not concerned with his subject as a religious icon. He has intentionally led any discussions of *Stations* away from religion to avoid narrow readings of the series;

I always made that statement because for the fear of people jumping straight to the obvious connotation that this is Jesus Christ, this artist must be a very religious, devout Catholic. So I always tried to make that statement before the audience and viewers assumed that I was doing it only for religious purposes.²⁵

However, the significance of Christ as an object of worship allows for Valdez's work to raise questions about the role of men in society and constructions of masculinity based on similar models of idolization. Quite literally drawing parallels with the Christ figure allows for critical inquiries into the way young men are judged and how they judge themselves. By bringing a sacred subject into the realm of the profane, Valdez is able to very eloquently question the structures of masculinity in society today. López challenged the traditional view of women as seen through the eyes of the church and society as a whole. Valdez's use of the Christ figure as a sacred touchstone, allows a similar line of inquiry into societal definitions of masculinity. Presenting his boxer as a "hero" that embodies

physical dominance, critically illustrates the existing worship of this particular construction of masculinity. Valdez continues to mix the profane and the sacred through his elevation of the arena to the level of a church, in terms of its importance. He does so by making the arena sacred in its role for the community, illustrating that both church and boxing ring act as vital gathering places and areas of engagement and reflection for society as a whole.

The parallels between the Catholic Stations and the boxing ring are subtle. However, these connections exemplify Valdez's use of delicate details that have greater meaning beneath the surface. Just like a boxing match, the Stations are divided numerically. At each Station, the spiritual participant follows a ritual observance that includes prayer and reflection before proceeding on to the next. In a similar manner, the boxer negotiates his three minutes in each round very carefully, recalling all that he has trained to do. He methodically carries out each movement, and swing to ensure his survival into the next round. Further, Valdez makes a connection between the three falls of Christ and a referee's three second countdown to a boxer's defeat when he is knocked down. For Catholics, Christ's willingness to suffer through this ordeal is a reflection of the selflessness of his act. To the devout, it confirms his role as savior. For a fallen boxer, his ability to rise before the final count confirms his masculinity.

The connection between the initial drawing of Valdez's series and the first two Catholic Stations illustrates the pressures of contemporary constructions of masculinity. In *Weigh In: Coming in at 140 lbs. 8 oz.* the athlete stands on a scale in the locker room, surrounded by trainers, promoters, and media. He is being

examined and weighed in a very public manner, much in the way Christ was judged by Pilate before he was condemned to death. Although the athlete is surrounded by other men, like Christ in the first Catholic Station he is essentially alone. For Christ, this moment begins his sacrifice. No one defends him as he confirms his identity as the Son of God and readily accepts his fate. In Valdez's drawing, the boxer also stands as a solitary figure. All of his training has led up to this point. It is this moment that matters more than any other. The only concerns are his strength and potential success. The identity of both men is directly tied to their sacrifice. Christ offered himself to die on the cross to save mankind from eternal damnation. This was only possible because he was a man like any other. For the boxer, he would not be seen as a man among his peers and society if he did not willingly participate in the brutal fight.

In the religious series, the second Station illustrates when Christ takes up his cross. While *Weigh In* does not visually show a parallel with this moment in Christ's story, the pressing demands to succeed are alluded to by the crowded composition and references to becoming "King of the Ring." On the wall behind him, the words "The Strongest Man in the World is He Who Walks Alone" communicate victory as his sole option. These expectations of his success are his cross to bear.

Valdez's second drawing in the series, *The Strongest Man in the World is He Who Walks Alone* (2004, 42 x 92) acts as a metaphorical mirror of Jesus's, walk to Calvary. Valdez delicately balances the presence of the clamoring crowd with the hero, seemingly unperturbed, to emphasize the reality that the young man

is ultimately alone in his struggle. The drawing, composed horizontally, shows the boxer headed down the aisle past an excited crowd toward the ring. There are over a dozen people in the crowd, including two security officers holding back the others with their outstretched arms. The crowd is mixed, with some cheering for the boxer – one of the tallest men wears a foam “number one” glove on his right hand and his left hand is held high with his index finger extended to show his support of the athlete – and those that are jeering – a young woman makes a “thumbs down” gesture with her right hand as she cups her left hand at her mouth, likely booing. In the center of the composition are two women who appear to be sad. The older of the two, reminiscent of Veronica – the woman in the religious stations who wipes Christ’s face with a cloth upon which his face then appears – holds a printed t-shirt with an image of the boxer. The younger woman blows a kiss to the boxer as she holds a small child in her right arm and hip. The child reaches her small arm up and toward the boxer. The media is again present; a cameraman is crouched down, walking backward filming the boxer’s procession. The boxer is on the right side of the picture plane, closest to the viewer, and larger in size than any other individual in the composition. He faces left and only a partial profile can be seen, the remainder of his face and head hidden by the dark, robe he wears. Valdez has borrowed the story of Christ to emphasize the solitary pressure his boxer faces. Just as Christ walked toward his fate through a hostile crowd, Valdez’s boxer endures a similar journey in which he must stay strong to prove himself.

There is perhaps no better way to communicate isolation than the ironic display of a hero alone in a crowd of loud people jostling around him. If we consider the crowd and cameras from a different angle, we can also draw another conclusion from their presence – symbols of pervasive societal judgment that can create crushing pressure on its young men. Valdez has captured his “tragic hero,” a “young man struggling in every aspect of the world.”²⁶ His masculinity on display and questioned, the young man is headed into the ring to prove himself through a physical confrontation with his opponent. Subject again to heavy religious comparison, *The Strongest Man* shows a diverse crowd ranging from the non-believers to those who worship him, what he stands for, and what he is about to do. For both audiences he must face his opponent in a physical confrontation to substantiate his worth as a man. Like Christ, to his rivals he must appear undefeatable and unmoved by fear; for his fans he is a proud role model standing tall as a symbol of strength.

Throughout the series, Valdez manipulates the charcoal medium to draw parallels that on the surface appear simply as religious iconography. However, the strength of these details lies not in their religious significance, but in what they communicate in terms of presentations of power and masculinity. In religious works, the presence of a halo serves to identify a subject’s divinity. The bright lights of the arena just above the boxer’s head form a halo and black out all but the front row of the arena in *Main Event*. Visually the lights echo the religious meaning, but in this image they literally spotlight his masculinity, and can be read

as a presentation of the young man's power defined by his strength and presence in the ring.

The manipulation of the medium seems to form a crown of thorns, reminiscent of Christ's, in *Keep Your Guard Up Son, Now Get Back Out There and Fight!*. The fourth in the series, the drawing shows the young boxer between rounds, collapsed on his corner stool, tended to by two trainers, one on each side. The arena behind him is dark, blackened out save for a large bright light directly above his head. The two trainers stand on either side of the boxer reviving and coaching him. Together they support him physically, each with a hand on the bucket of water placed in the boxer's lap. Here Valdez draws a parallel between the trainers and Simon, the man who was pulled from the crowd to aid Christ in the fifth Catholic Station. The three men provide support in a time of great need. While the trainers encourage the boxer emotionally, Simon supports Christ physically by carrying his cross. The trainer on his right speaks to the athlete pointing his left hand in the direction of the opponent's corner. Although he is noticeably tired, the boxer's eyes are not closed; his gaze follows the trainer's gesture as he listens closely. The man on the boxer's left side also listens while glaring menacingly and protectively at the opposite corner as he holds a sponge above the boxer's head squeezing water down his face and body. The splashes bounce off his head reflecting the light in such a way as to suggest the appearance of a crown of thorns. The fluids running down his face are from his boxing injuries but recall the blood often depicted on Christ's face. The post he leans against and the ropes behind the trio bear a remarkable resemblance to a wooden

cross. The symbolism of both the crown and the cross directly echo the challenges faced by Christ in order to prove himself as the Son of God. The use of this iconography in the boxer's fight symbolizes the pain and injuries the young man must go through to prove his masculinity. It is his male duty to fight.

In *Keep Your Guard Up Son*, Valdez also clearly draws a connection to the Holy Trinity – God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the ultimate symbol of Catholic faith. The care and support between the three can be read as a display of the security found in masculine power. Just as the devout seek strength from the trinity, the young boxer finds power in the bond with his trainers. The significance of this parallel is two-fold. By mirroring his athletic trio after the trinity, Valdez raises their relationship to a sacred level, and questions the devotion paid to such worship of masculinity.

The fifth and sixth images in the series directly mirror the religious Stations by depicting the act of the young man falling to the floor of the ring. The artist is once again using the story of Christ as a metaphor for the young man's struggles, but also presenting critical questions about the relationship of violence and masculinity. *He Then Fell Once More* (2002, 60 x 42 inches) is an image of the boxer knocked to the floor of the ring, his arms and legs weak at his sides. His mouthpiece has been thrown from his body by the force of his opponent's blow. His eyes are rolled back in his head and he appears only slightly conscious. The act of falling in the series alludes to those of Christ in his remarkable journey. Both young men collapse three times in their stories. Although this is the first shown in the boxer series, the title tells us it is not his first fall. Perhaps in another

fight or that same night, his continued struggle is evident. As in life, the young man is frequently knocked down and must continue to get back up, knowing that he will likely fall again.

As expected, *They Say Every Man Must Fall* (2002, 42 x 60), the next in the series, shows the young man once again on the floor of the ring. He tries to prop himself up on his right arm to continue the fight, the agony of defeat apparent on his bloody face. The referee stands over him, shouting the countdown to his loss if he does not rise by the final count. He is weary and almost defeated. His anonymous opponent, whose face is just off the picture plane, turns his back; once again the fallen boxer is on his own. Valdez has once again drawn comparison with the story of Christ. Along with the title, the reference to Christ's own journey suggests a new construct of masculinity. Contrasting the tragedy of the fall with the notion of the young man's duty as a man referred to in the title – he must fall – the image suggests a specific view of the ways in which men are judged. Society seems to worship and commend the behaviors that create this particular type of masculinity based in brutality and destruction. The image and title suggest that in order to be considered a man, the young boxer must fight and he must fall.

Valdez has stated that he intended his boxer to represent a tragic hero that represents human struggle. While he certainly accomplishes this, it is important to look critically at the adverse readings these images permit. In the final three drawings of the series, the boxer is violently knocked out, laid to rest, and resurrected as a young, strong hero. The surface parallels between the boxer and

Christ figure further Valdez's intended message and evoke emotion in the viewer. The similarities between them are striking. The brutality with which the boxer has been defeated and the chaos as his supporters flood the ring in *A Fine Performance By Our Winning Fighter Tonight* recalls the drama of Christ's death and removal from the cross into his mother's arms. The distinct parallels between the fourteenth station where Christ is laid to rest in the tomb and *Laid Out* are unmistakable. *Collect 'Em All* represents the fifteenth Catholic Station which illustrates the resurrection. Although this final Station is unofficial, its broad inclusion in many churches and the event's importance make it an essential element in the Catholic Lenten experience. However, these images that celebrate the worship of the athlete and his sacrifice – which are emotionally strengthened by the religious ties – exploit the image of the hero and contradict the idea of cultural citizenship. Where cultural citizenship considers positive contributions to community to secure a space in society, the negative behavior and structures encouraged by these structures of masculinity are counterproductive.

Boxing as subject matter allows Valdez to draw parallels between the Catholic Stations of the Cross and his own drawings. The Stations depict the final walk and subsequent crucifixion of Christ. For Catholics, they are an opportunity to follow the final moments of Christ and reflect on the meaning of each. Each provides a visual narrative and an opportunity to pray on the significance of these important moments. Valdez's drawings depict a night in the life of the boxer and specifically, a narrative of the fight. The rounds he chooses to illustrate are like the Catholic Stations in that Valdez is marking very specific moments in time to

place significance. Just as the Catholic Stations allow for contemplation, Valdez invites his viewer to reflect on the rounds of the match and how the behaviors within them serve as acts that claim citizenship. Through this, Valdez successfully creates and reclaims spaces through individual and collective expressions. bell hooks argues the power of art for marginalized communities is not simply based in physical representation, but further achieved through creative expressions from shared experiences.²⁷ It is within these connections between personal and collective experiences that Valdez achieves a reclamation of space and establishes cultural citizenship. His inquiries into religion and masculinity are chosen specifically as they are two subjects significant to his community. Through a consideration of these subjects within the context of his drawings, Valdez establishes his work as key in the construction of a unique space for shared consciousness and connection.

¹ Michael A. Messner, *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 19.

² Messner, *Power at Play*, 10-11.

³ Messner, *Power at Play*, 10-11.

⁴ Messner, *Power at Play*, 10-11.

⁵ George B. Kirsch, Othello Harris, and Claire E. Nolte, eds. *Encyclopedia of Ethnicity and Sports in the United States* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2000), 76.

⁶ Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 116.

⁷ Riess, *City Games*, 110.

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- ⁸ Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado, eds. *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 8.
- ⁹ Riess, *City Games*, 95.
- ¹⁰ Riess, *City Games*, 123.
- ¹¹ Kirsch, Harris, and Nolte, eds. *Encyclopedia of Ethnicity and Sports in the United States*, 311.
- ¹² Riess, *City Games*, 116.
- ¹³ Iber and Regalado, eds. *Mexican Americans and Sports*, 8.
- ¹⁴ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, Tape recorded telephone interview, Phoenix, AZ, April, 22, 2010.
- ¹⁵ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.
- ¹⁶ *Vincent Valdez: Art of Boxing*, Mini-DVD, Directed by Ray Santisteban (San Antonio, Texas: Nantes Films, 2008).
- ¹⁷ *Vincent Valdez*, Ray Santisteban.
- ¹⁸ Michael A. Messner, *Sex, Violence and Power in Sports* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1994), 51.
- ¹⁹ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 831.
- ²⁰ "Way of the Cross," New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, accessed September 01, 2010, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15569a.html>.
- ²¹ Karen Mary Davalos, *Yolanda M. López* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press; Minneapolis, 2008), 83.
- ²² Davalos, *Yolanda M. López*, 83.
- ²³ Davalos, *Yolanda M. López*, 81.
- ²⁴ Davalos, *Yolanda M. López*, 86.

²⁵ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.

²⁶ The Galleries at Peeler, DePauw University, press release for Stations,
<http://www.depauw.edu/galleries/2006/valdez/> - accessed January 16, 2010.

²⁷ bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995),
3-4.

Chapter 3

REPRESENTATION

The Fluidity of Identity

Many things bind people regardless of color, race, or religion. Perhaps none is more powerful than the basic human need for acceptance. Marginalized groups, including communities of Latinos, are no different in wishing to be recognized as members of the larger society in which they live. Individuals within these groups desire acknowledgment as present participants. They seek to achieve this through contributions they make to the overall quality of culture. Latinos recognize the value of social participation and look to achieve and maintain full citizenship but, at the same time, understandably, insist on acceptance of their cultural differences. This concept of cultural citizenship allows for membership to be established based on community and cultural participation and belonging rather than legal status.¹ It is critical that throughout this process, communities have the ability to define and organize their values, rights, and beliefs, with focus on the importance of cultural belonging.² This is a fundamental prerequisite for the concept of cultural citizenship.

Cultural citizenship is essential in the development of identity. It allows both communities and individuals to define themselves on ideas such as shared culture and social participation.³ As suggested earlier culture can be seen as a highly individualized yet fluid concept. Defining a broader Latino identity suffers the same challenges making it difficult to assign a single description. Regardless, one thing is clear – many Chicanos find themselves in more than one world,

negotiating the challenges of living in multiple cultures while developing and expressing an identity and sensibility that is unique to their experiences.

Many visual attributes can be given to Valdez's work – vitality, dynamic composition, emotional exuberance, drama, and a sense of occasion. Even his medium, charcoal, possesses a certain sensuous richness. Looking back through the history of art, these descriptors have been used before – the baroque style.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the baroque in Europe arose in response to rigid, anti-idolatry ideals of the Protestant Reformation.⁴ Encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church, the drama of the style was intended to portray emotional and dynamic elements within religious works. It was further a sign of the religious and political environment in which “the European baroque became the art of a changing society swirling behind the rigid mask of orthodoxy.”⁵ Correspondingly the baroque style that arose in Latin America as a result of colonization was reflective of the political, economic, and religious turmoil of the period.⁶ During colonial power, native peoples were forced to negotiate their lives and identities under a rule that imposed foreign ideals. Within this new environment the shifting nature of the baroque, served as a “mirror” to the ever-changing identities of the conquered peoples.⁷ The art of the baroque created a space to negotiate between imposed cultures and their own, reflecting the nature of living “between the destroyed Indian world and a new universe that was both European and American.”⁸ The flexibility of the style allowed indigenous artists to create works “born out of the encounter between European colonization and the Mesoamerican tradition” that visually represented the tension between the two

cultures.⁹ These artists incorporated multiple techniques, converted introduced elements, and altered references to create new forms born from the combined culture.¹⁰

Recalling this history permits today's historians to consider contemporary works within a baroque framework that rejects reductive or dualist views that limit interpretations.¹¹ Varying definitions and characterizations of the baroque illustrate the complexity of the style and the multiple ways in which it can be applied to interpretations of visual art. Carlos Fuentes argues the continuous nature of the baroque denies "anyone or anything a privileged point of view" and permits negotiations of conflict between differing worlds.¹² Victor Zamudio-Taylor discusses the development of the baroque as the result of continuous dialogue between cultures that encourages mestizo forms and expressions.¹³ He employs Cuban author Severo Sarduy's description of the style as a "pearl" that acquires varied cultural and linguistic layers to discuss how the style "permits a non-linear narrative with multiple foci."¹⁴ Octavio Paz' ornate reflection on the baroque illuminates the challenge in definition and the opportunity that comes with that difficulty:

Baroque is a word whose origins and meaning is incessantly and eternally debated... A definition always in the process of being defined, a name that is a mask, an adjective that as it nears classification, eludes it. The baroque is solid and complete; at the same time, it is fluid and fleeting... No less varied than the theories that attempt to define it are its manifestations.¹⁵

The varied contemporary expressions of the baroque permit self-expressions of mixed cultures and identities.¹⁶ Zamudio-Taylor argues the flexibility of the style serves as a platform to present and address contradictions while also acting as the “key to interpretation of hybridity in visual culture.”¹⁷

A discussion of the baroque strengthens the understanding of the complexity of the identity narratives presented by Valdez. It enables various readings and interpretations of how Valdez mixes opposing subjects of boxing and religion to communicate the varied layers of identity for himself and for the community. The tradition of the style is evident both thematically and visually in *Stations*. Visually the baroque is expressed through the tension, movement, and sheer emotional force of Valdez’s work. He uses the richness of the charcoal, and his dramatic compositions to create an emotional and complex narrative. The baroque style is thematically present in both the new forms that result from combining images of sport and Catholicism and the diverse readings Valdez’s work allows.

Valdez’s series *Stations* presents a view of the varied layers of both collective and individual identity, specific to Chicano cultural experience. Illustrating external factors that influence how a young man defines his identity such as societal scrutiny, daily life experience, the importance and support of the community, and the duplicity of roles he must play within multiple cultures, Valdez presents an identity that expresses ambition, persistence, pride, strength, and self-reliance.

Valdez's appreciation and inclusion of the collective experiences of his community also allows *Stations* to be read as an autobiographical work. The artist illustrates the layers of his boxer's identity, and by extension his own. Then, with careful attention to the consciousness and sensibility of the histories and culture of his heritage, he is able to expand his narration to include not only self-identity but also that of his community.

Roles: An Element of Identity

Throughout *Stations*, Valdez provides an insider view of a very specific, Chicano male identity, illustrating multiple roles a young Chicano man must negotiate to survive in his community and larger society. Like Sarduy's baroque pearl discussed prior, the layers of identity Valdez presents in the series build upon each other to present the multiple foci that construct both his and his community's identities. The viewer is introduced to a young man whose identity is defined by his ability to balance the various challenges of his life as alluded to through images of his fight. Although family and community support are important and displayed in the series, his worth as a man lies in his bravery, self-reliance, ambition, and persistence to endure whatever confrontation he must face. These aspects are the foundation of his identity.

Weigh In: Coming In At 140lbs. 8oz., the first drawing in the series, shows the boxer weighing in before his fight surrounded by a trainer, promoters, and the media. The small space is packed with people only further cramped by the back wall full of posters pushing everyone toward the viewer and a media microphone reaching across the composition just above the young man's head. The men are

crowded into the intimate space, leaving very little personal room for the boxer as he is weighed. As discussed in Chapter One, the presence of the athlete's trainers and promoters in such a tight space informs the viewer of the pressure the young man must bear in his quest for success. Further, Valdez's illustration of the boxer's reaction speaks to the experiences of many young males. Considering the continuous history of prejudice in the United States, it is not unrealistic to draw parallels between the assessment of the boxer and a minority youth's experience with intolerance. In a society that often draws conclusions of people and communities by their appearance, the judgment of someone on the basis of their dress, looks, and skin color is a daily occurrence.¹⁸ The awareness of public scrutiny likely affects an individual's behavior and self-image. Valdez illustrates this experience through the boxer's stoic demeanor. He avoids their gazes, holding his body strong and proud with no indication of any emotional undercurrent. He chooses not to react, avoiding any revelation of fear or concern. Protecting oneself from public examination and judgment is undoubtedly a shared experience that speaks to male viewers of *Stations*. Young men are programmed to show their pride and strength in public, while carefully guarding any emotions that reveal sensitivity. For Chicano men, such defensive displays of masculinity are perhaps a reaction to the limited availability of traditional roles in which men claim their political and economic authority and form their identity.¹⁹

The second drawing, *The Strongest Man in the World is He Who Walks Alone*, provides a view of the solitary young man against a large, uproarious crowd. Despite the obvious support from some in the arena, the young man is

isolated on his way to his fight. Valdez illustrates that no matter how much support he may have from his community, the athlete is ultimately alone in his challenge, “Once he enters into the ring, it’s only himself [sic] and he has to take all of his trust and reliability in himself.”²⁰ As in the first drawing, the compact composition lends to the feeling of a visceral sense of pressure for the boxer. The crowd shouts and presses forward against a security guard who pushes back to keep them away, while a cameraman crouches down in front of him, walking backward and recording every moment. The title of the work suggests the young man’s power is dependent on his self-reliance. As he bravely heads toward the ring, he proves his masculinity and worth as the “strongest man” who “walks alone.”

Continuous metaphors for defeat in life are shown throughout the series. In the fifth and sixth drawings, *He Then Fell Once More* and *They Say Every Man Must Fall*, the boxer lies on the floor of the ring, knocked down by his rival. The previous discussion of these images in Chapter One focused on the parallels with Christ. For the purposes of a discussion of identity it is relevant to re-visit them as evidence of the athlete’s persistence. As suggested in the titles, these are not first times he has fallen, or likely the last. These drawings serve as metaphors for life’s ups and downs. Although he bravely faces his opponent in the ring and does not succeed, he must continue to rise up no matter how many times he is pushed down. The persistence with which he faces his challenge speaks to his determination and resolution to overcome his obstacles.

Laid Out, the ninth drawing in the series, speaks to the athlete's isolation. In deep contrast to the visual chaos and implied action of the rest of the series, the boxer lies alone on a table after the fight. His eyes are closed, and although he is still wearing his shoes and trunks, his gloves have been removed. All other individuals are absent; there are no trainers, promoters, or fans in the composition. The boxer is alone with his thoughts. When all is said and done, he is on his own.

Throughout these images, Valdez illustrates the experiences that impact his boxer's identity. What results is a portrait of a persistent and self-reliant man who, although he is alone, shows strength and pride in his struggle. Both romantic and tragic, Valdez eloquently communicates the complexity of his boxer's identity.

Autobiographical Aspects of *Stations*

Chon A. Noriega and Wendy Belcher argue the self-writings of Chicanos/as are expressions of experience that extend beyond the individual to include and speak for the community.²¹ Indeed there are many examples since the Movement by men and women alike. Rodolfo Gonzales' 1969 poem "I Am Joaquin" is a declaration of self identity that speaks to the collective consciousness of the community. Likewise, although fictional in nature, the experiences of the working-class protagonist of Jose Montoya's 1970 "El Louie" are relatable in such a way to as to confirm the experiences and sensibilities of many. Early writings by men provide a particular view that, although socially informed, are arguably individualistic and male oriented. Later in the 1980s, feminist writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa used their self-writings to continue the

discourse against marginalization based in race while also considering the experiences of gender not fully considered by her male peers. In her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa rejects male-centered constructions of Chicano identity to propose a feminist-centered “Coatlicue State” that would serve as the space in which the community can be “re-membered.” The space she builds from multiple languages and cultures continues the engagement against domination and marginalization but allows for a “new mestiza consciousness” that challenges the continuing patriarchal structure of Chicano society.²²

These varied moments of Chicano history and literature inform the work of Valdez and bring the artist to a different place than previous Chicano artists. From his unique position, Valdez succeeds in using a fictional framework to create a socially oriented narrative of individual and collective identity. In the tradition of the genre, as developed by Chicana writers, these aspects allow the series to be read as an autobiographical work. Consideration of the artist’s awareness to his communities’ experience, history, and culture and the importance of these aspects to his own identity is key in reading his work in this manner. When selecting models and settings for his drawings, the artist was very careful to choose those that hold personal meaning to him;

I still feel that I’m very selective about who I use because I have to feel some sort of connection. I have to feel that they are a part of me and I’m a part of them. Whether they are friends or family, because these pieces are all very personal pieces, they are all an

extension of me. Even down to the environment and the landscapes of those pieces. They have always been carefully selected and locations that have symbolism to me because I'm a part of that place and vice versa.²³

In defining his identity, he cannot separate himself from his community. *Stations* is socially oriented in that although Valdez is expressing a young, male Chicano identity, the works narrate a collective identity and experience. Using the likenesses of people from his life in his work, Valdez spotlights various roles of the community. In so doing he commits to not just telling the tale of an aspiring young boxer, but that of his whole community.

Valdez's use of the subject of boxing can be read as a metaphor for his community's struggle. Through the sport's negative aspects of destruction and violence, and physical and spiritual trauma, to the positive hope for success and the will for survival, Valdez's boxer is a representative of the Chicano community and its history. Additionally, the artist's own effort to create charcoal drawings of such a monumental size is an extension of this metaphor. A discussion with Valdez revealed how emotionally and physically demanding the project was for him. He viewed the work as a labor of love that, at times, made him question his ability to complete the series.²⁴ Opening on August 17, 2004, at the Marion Koogler Museum of Art in San Antonio, Texas, *Stations* was Valdez's first solo museum exhibition.²⁵ Asked to complete the series by the museum's drawing curator, Lyle Williams, Valdez worked tirelessly for six months and views his

effort as similar to that of a boxer's training. On the subject of a fighter's preparation he states;

You had to train for an endless amount of time for this one night. You had all the training and support system of your trainer, your audience, promoters, and sparring partners. I liked the idea that the closer the fighter gets to the ring on fight night, each level is stripped down bare. So when he's nine months away from the fight, he's got a tremendous amount of support system in the gym, his coaches, his sparring partners. Half-way through his training time until fight night he hones in on his skills. He starts polishing off and refining his technique. And when he's walking into the ring finally on fight night he's shed away all that support system.²⁶

He expands the discussion of his preparation of *Stations* to draw parallels with that of the boxer;

I think that in many ways I made myself believe or immersed myself as a self-portrait of this character who was preparing for eight months for this one event, this opening that was my first museum show that was a huge deal to me at that age. I think I was twenty-four or twenty-five. So there was a lot of pressure on my shoulders. I locked myself in the studio and I really got wrapped up in my own world in that one room for six months and felt very much cut off from the entire world... Very much so did I feel that I morphed into this character. I think a lot of that time was spent

figuring out how to put myself into that mode of training. To slip into that mode, I almost morphed myself into that one character.²⁷

For Valdez, the pressure to succeed as a young artist mirrored that of the solitary boxer.

Valdez draws inspiration for his characters from real people to create a fictional narrative that illustrates an intimate portrait of his community. His deep emotional connection to family and friends is evident throughout the series. Including them offers Valdez the opportunity to recognize the support their support of him;

These faces that I have personal relationships with, whether it be my parents or my closest friends. They are always those that help to give me foundation. By including them it gives them a place in history, a place in my world, an acknowledgement of at this one moment in time when I'm creating these pieces it's acknowledging those that have helped put me at that one specific moment.²⁸

Perhaps most significantly the boxer, present in all images, has been modeled from the image of his brother, Daniel. In the second drawing, *The Strongest Man in the World is He Who Walks Alone*, the artist himself appears as a beer vendor on the far right, and his mother and sister are in the audience, holding a t-shirt with an image of the boxer and a child, respectively. The trainers in the fourth image, *Keep Your Guard Up Son, Now Get Back Out There and Fight!*, are modeled after his father, Arthur Valdez, and his artistic mentor, Alex Rubio. His

use of family and close friends throughout the series creates a very intimate portrait of Valdez, and speaks to how important community is to the artist.

Valdez's use of the likeness of Joe Diaz, the first to collect his work, introduces another layer of identity presented within the series – that of the collector as a promoter of the community through the collecting of art. Center-left in the first drawing, *Weigh In: Coming In At 140lbs. 8oz.*, Diaz, shown in the image as a promoter, takes a long draw from his large cigar as he gazes intently, sizing up the boxer. His concern for the boxer's imminent performance can be read as a metaphor for the collector's interest in works by Valdez. A review of Santa Monica Museum of Art's *East of the River: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous* explains the collector's role in the promotion of self-assigned identity in the visual arts. The 2000 exhibition focused on a group of individuals whose personal art collections shared a commitment to supporting expressions of individual and community identity by Chicano artists.²⁹ Generally it is understood that a personal collection is an extension of an individual's own "tastes and values, identity and desires, wealth and social standing."³⁰ However, while the *East of the River* exhibition revealed how the collectors see themselves it further illustrated how this group's act of acquiring particular works expressed their collective vision of community.³¹ In Valdez's drawing, the boxing promoter is certainly concerned with his financial investment in the athlete. For a collector, the investment in the artist is a reflection of his interest in the support of collective identity and heritage.

Diana Taylor's theory of the archive and the repertoire allows us to explore and understand the relationship between physical records or objects and expressive acts as a new way of knowing. Taylor defines the archive as "enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)" and the repertoire as "embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)."³² Addressing Taylor's theories allows additional reflection on Carlos Fuentes' assertion that a baroque framework refuses privilege to any particular point of view. While the archive consists of physical objects and texts that are currently a primary source for analysis, Taylor suggests first-hand observations of the repertoire should be included in research to gain a fuller understanding of the subject of inquiry. Using this theory, a collector's collection is understood as part of the archive, and the support of community identity and heritage as the repertoire.³³ Taking this further, the conclusion can be drawn that the drawings of *Stations* are part of the archive, the citizenship they represent is part of the repertoire.

The artist's mother and sister appear in *The Strongest Man in the World is He Who Walks Alone*, the second drawing in the series. Valdez's mother stands solemnly in the center of the crowd holding a t-shirt printed with a photo of the boxer. His sister stands to her left holding a small child and blowing a kiss to the boxer. The artist draws a parallel between his mother and Veronica, the pious woman in the Catholic Stations who reached out to wipe away Christ's sweat and blood, attempting to care for him in his time of need. The impact of her gesture is such that although there is no written recording of her act, it is observed in the

sixth of the religious Stations, and well known to many Catholics as a symbol of the people's love of Christ. The presence of this woman as a Veronica figure in Valdez's *Stations* communicates another role within his construction of community identity. For Valdez to have used his mother's likeness as a Veronica figure allows the viewer to draw assumptions of her feelings for the boxer. Contrasted with the rowdy crowd around her, her expression and that of the younger woman next to her, is one of worry and love. Knowing what lies ahead for the boxer, her concern is not for the outcome of the fight, but rather his well-being, now and after.

Another look at the fourth drawing, *Keep Your Guard Up Son, Now Get Back Out There and Fight!*, shows how Valdez has used the likenesses of members of his own family to illustrate the importance of family to his identity. The drawing shows two men supporting and caring for the athlete in his corner between rounds. The young man sits on his stool battered and fatigued while the trainer to his right, the likeness of Valdez's father, provides guidance for the next round. The other trainer, Rubio, protectively supports the athlete, washing and caring for his wounds. As stated before, the boxer is modeled after the artist's own brother. The identity he has illustrated for him is of a brave, ambitious, and persistent young man. The trainers provide the guidance and support that a young man might get from his father and mentor in real life. The image of these three men is one of trust, guidance, protection, and care. It is easy for the viewer to draw parallels between the relationship of the men in the image and that of the artist and these men in his life. The whole composition expresses a deep respect

and admiration between a boxer and his trainers – between man, father and mentor.

While the trio represents the importance of community support to the boxer, and by extension the artist, the image of their unity also promotes an idea of masculinity based in fraternity. Considering the term not as a social club, but rather a gathering of men brought together with a common purpose or goal, the image shows a group bonded by adversity and brotherhood. In this view, one reading of the title suggests a familial bond for the boxer in the use of the word “son.” This illustrates a deeper meaning in the reference to community as an extended family. Together they face the opponent and, perhaps as a metaphor for the young man’s battle in life, society. The bonds formed in training are expressed in their support and encouragement to their “son.”

A close look at *A Fine Performance By Our Winning Fighter Tonight* reveals another image of support by the boxer’s trainers. In this final image drawn from within the boxing ring, the boxer has been knocked out for the final time while his victorious opponent celebrates in the background. The devastation of his defeat is shown in the chaos of the ring as people rush in and trash is thrown from the crowd. The boxer’s own face is absent from the image as it is mostly blocked by splashes of blood that are also pooling on the floor of the ring. As expected, the same trainers from *Keep Your Guard Up* are crouched down in an attempt to help the defeated boxer to his feet. Valdez’s inclusion of the tattoo on Rubio’s left hand to identify him speaks to the artist’s attention to detail to create an ongoing narrative throughout the series. Again, the presence of men from the

artist's life speaks to their importance in his life. Shown supporting and advising the athlete in the prior image, here they are coming to his aid at the boxer's most vulnerable moment.

Narratives in Charcoal

The significance of Valdez's choice of charcoal for *Stations* lies in its narrative and metaphoric qualities. To some, drawing has long been seen solely as a process-oriented act, used by artists in the creation of other works of art. However, there exists a tradition of respect for the act of drawing. Drawn works have been collected since the Renaissance with various revivals of collection and exhibition over the centuries.³⁴ Most recently, exhibitions such as *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions* display the attention paid by artists and patrons to the art of drawing. Often used to investigate the artistic process, drawings can be considered secondary to more popular forms of art such as painting and sculpture. However, in *Stations*, Valdez drawings are not simply investigations. He uses his drawings as a narrative to communicate a story with deep meaning and understanding of his community's experience. His mastery of the medium and attention to detail offers the viewer a carefully planned and well-thought contribution that proves drawings position as a "higher" form of visual art. Not merely a sketch or plan, the works in this series represent the life of Valdez and his community in a way that "refers as much to the language of life around us as it does to fine art."³⁵ For Valdez, drawing is not a process but a finished product, a narrative of his reality.

The charcoal drawings that comprise *Stations* bring to mind black and white film stills that further lend to the storytelling aspect of the work. More than a static representation of a moment within a film's plot, a still "condenses an entire drama."³⁶ It must display the emotion and action of the film in a way to capture the attention of the potential audience in one single image. Through careful composition, dramatic lighting, and attention to detail, the still must intrigue and entice the viewer, creating a curiosity for the rest of the story.³⁷

Valdez's careful compositions of *Stations* are much like film stills. The energy of his drawings, shown with careful attention to detail, light, and dark, carries the viewer through the story of the boxer. Capturing the emotion and action of the ring, the works evoke a palpable reaction in the viewer. *The Strongest Man in the World is He Who Walks Alone* serves as an excellent example of how Valdez has used film still qualities to draw the viewer into the drama of his narrative. Each character in the scene has been carefully chosen to communicate an aspect of the chaos of the boxing arena before the fight. Shown largest in the composition, the profile of the boxer is pushed towards the viewer to emphasize his position as the main subject while a row of shouting spectators are held back by arena security officers. Hats and flags fly in the air and cameras flash to record the moment. As research for the project, Valdez watched Super 8 black and white films of boxing matches. He reflected the process of capturing the action of the boxing arena in a silent, black and white format;

I would sit in my studio at night after I was finished working for the day and I would watch these reels... I think the thing that

appealed to me most was that I saw instantly the connection between what I was already doing and what I was finding in these old films and it was that silence. The silence of the image that was contrasted by the expressive faces that I was drawing but it was figuring out whether you were looking at the drawings or watching the films. It was imagining, creating those sounds that these silent images were actually making. When I was watching these films a lot of them were slow motion. To see these crowds going wild, but they were completely silent. I could hear it in my head. I could hear the sounds, things that they were yelling, the slaps on the faces, the punches and the grunting, bells ringing. It felt pretty exciting that this is exactly what I was already trying to do and I felt that especially in the second station *The Strongest Man* when he is making his procession, it's exactly that quality. It's this still two-dimensional image but at the same time the whole point of creating that so that you the viewer could imagine what the sounds were in that environment. Again I think that by creating these things so realistically and making them believable it's like a frozen movie screen without the actual sound and without the actual motion.³⁸

The way in which Valdez has captured the moment provides not a simple view of the boxer's procession, but rather an action-packed and emotion-filled scene in which the viewer can feel and hear the excitement of the space.

However, the significance of the film still extends beyond its narrative qualities. Arthur C. Danto's discussion of Cindy Sherman's 1970s series "Untitled Film Stills" provides insight of how a still also impacts the identities of a viewer. He argues the still has entered into popular culture, a "mass-culture artifact, part of the common cultured experience of movie theaters everywhere."³⁹ He concludes movies impact the ways in which viewers see themselves, further creating a relationship between the viewer and a still's subject.⁴⁰ His concern is not with Sherman's works as self-portraits, but rather how she communicates an identity she shares with other women; "They are portraits at best of an identity she shares with every woman who conceives the narrative of her life in the idiom of a cheap movie."⁴¹ In this way her work provides a view of a feminist, collective identity. This theory furthers the previous discussion of Valdez's work as a portrait of collective identity. The film still quality of *Stations* is one of the ways in which the artist is able to reach his audience. Developing an approachable work of art in which a viewer can see themselves creates a link between the subject of the work and the audience.

Further, the status of drawing as inferior to other forms of art, such as painting, in the history of art serves as a metaphor for the artist's and his community's status in society. Seen as secondary for their difference, marginalized peoples are often not regarded as full citizens in the United States.

Storytelling

Each image in *Stations* is a snapshot of action, and within ten drawings Valdez tells a complete story of one night for his boxer. Valdez's linear

organization of the drawings carefully highlights the events of the evening leading his viewer through the boxer's story. He balances the seriousness of the weigh-in ceremony with the excitement of the crowd as the boxer walks toward the ring. The viewer is then introduced to the bravery of the boxer as he waits for the fight to begin, followed by a scene that illustrates the toll the fight has begun to take on him as he is coached by his trainers in his corner between rounds. Two images in which the beaten and bloodied boxer has fallen to the floor of the ring are followed by a series of four smaller drawings showing the graphic violence of the match. His opponent's triumph is contrasted with his collapsed figure on the floor of the ring, immediately followed by a solitary image of the boxer lying on a table or gurney after the fight. Valdez chooses not to end the story with the boxer's defeat, but rather an optimistic portrait of the young boxer that perhaps shows the bright future that lies ahead for him.

His careful attention to detail captures a very specific moment in time further lending to the storytelling aspect of his work. A careful look at three of the drawings, *Weigh In*, *Keep Your Guard Up*, and *Fine Performance* reveals details that freeze the moment of each image. In *Weigh In*, the image in which the boxer is examined before the fight, time is paused in such a way that the smoke from his promoter's cigar lingers in the air as he takes a slow drag. The trainer gazes intently at the boxer's chest as he listens closely to the boxer's heartbeat. In what is certainly a busy time with last minute preparations for the fight, the viewer is privileged with a chance to study the scene. Drops of blood, sweat, and water hang in mid-air in *Keep Your Guard Up Son*, *They Say Every Man Must Fall* and

Get Outta There, capturing the action of these scenes in a very dramatic and shocking way. In *A Fine Performance By Our Winning Fighter Tonight*, the boxer's blood pools on the ground. *He Then Fell Once More* provides a view of a moment when the boxer has just been knocked to the ground. Valdez's manipulation of his medium in drawing the mouthpiece makes it appear as if it is still in motion as it flies away from him.

Valdez uses the action of some scenes and the titling of others to provide a ongoing dialogue to the series. The title *Main Event*, with an image of the boxer dominating the composition, gives the viewer the sense of hearing the announcer calling the fight to order. Later, the announcer's voice is heard again in *A Fine Performance By Our Winning Fighter Tonight*, as the boxer lies on the ground in defeat. The encouraging voice of the athlete's trainer is heard in *Keep Your Guard Up Son, Now Get Back Out There and Fight*. In some images, the composition of the action of the scene creates a more visual dialogue for the viewer. The action of the crowd in *Strongest Man* is cleverly balanced by the boxer's stoic demeanor allowing the viewer to at once hear the shouts of the crowd while feeling the silence of the athlete's concentration. In *They Say Every Man Must Fall*, the image of the referee counting down crouched over the boxer with his arm raised above his head creates the sound of his voice shouting although there is no written reference to this action. And finally, in two images Valdez combines a visual image with a dialogue in the title. The crowd's anger and frustration shown visually as they throw their arms and hats in the air in *Get Outta There* is

reinforced through the title of the work. *A Fine Performance* combines the chaos of the announcement of the winner with the actual announcement in the title.

Throughout the series, Valdez varies his compositions, balancing the action of the ring with intimate views in which the viewer is focused on the boxer alone. In *He Then Fell Once More* and *Laid Out*, Valdez has visually isolated the boxer from all other action and figures. The way in which he has done so strengthens the part of the narrative of the solitary boxer. In these images he is quite literally alone. In *He Then Fell Once More*, Valdez sets the fallen boxer against the rough mat of the boxing ring. Viewed from directly above, the light tone of the empty background contrasted with the dark shadowing of his body communicates the helplessness of the athlete. Removing all other distractions – the crowd, his trainers, and opponent – Valdez is very clearly able to illustrate the boxer's pain and fatigue. In contrast, Valdez has set his boxer against a dark background in *Laid Out*, but also shows the boxer's vulnerability. In each of these drawings, the viewer's perspective is very close to the body of the boxer, making it impossible to avoid seeing and feeling his defeat. Looking away is not an option. In a third image in which the boxer is the only figure, *Collect 'Em All*, Valdez has used the same technique of a blank background. However in this drawing, the young boxer is no longer defenseless but rather poses with his fists raised and is a vision of youthfulness. Here the view is focused on the boxer in a different manner, to see only his strength and power.

Valdez's use of storytelling and baroque aspects in his work speak to the multi-layered and fluid identities he is portraying. He uses auto-biographical

methods to communicate emotion through his drawings. For Valdez, it is important to choose characters that are close to him, as he sees his work as an extension of himself, and wants his audience to feel that connection. These qualities/methods allow Valdez to present the complex and layered identities of his boxer, his community, and himself.

¹ Blanca Silvestrini, "The World We Enter When Claiming Rights: Latinos and Their Quest for Culture," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights*, ed. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 44.

² Norma Klahn, "Literary (Re)Mappings: Autobiographical (Dis)Placements by Chicana Writers," in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*, ed. Gabriela F. Arredondo, 114-145 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 115.

³ Silvestrini, "The World We Enter," 53.

⁴ Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 195.

⁵ Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, 195.

⁶ Serge Gruzinski, "The Baroque Planet," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Victor Zamudio-Taylor (La Jolla, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2000), 116.

⁷ Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, 195.

⁸ Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, 195.

⁹ Gruzinski, "The Baroque Planet," 120.

¹⁰ Gruzinski, "The Baroque Planet," 121-123.

¹¹ Gruzinski, "The Baroque Planet," 123-124.

¹² Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, 201.

¹³ Victor Zamudio-Taylor, "Ultrabaroque: Art, Mestizaje, Globalization," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and

Victor Zamudio-Taylor (La Jolla, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2000), 144.

¹⁴ Zamudio-Taylor, "Ultrabaroque," 157.

¹⁵ Octavio Paz. "The Will for Form," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Victor Zamudio-Taylor (La Jolla, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2000), 167.

¹⁶ Serge Gruzinski, "The Baroque Planet," in *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Victor Zamudio-Taylor (La Jolla, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2000), 123.

¹⁷ Zamudio-Taylor, "Ultrabaroque," 141.

¹⁸ A compelling example of this can be found in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*. Within the fifth chapter of this book, "The Act of Blackness," the author communicates his personal experience as a black man who very often is faced with racial judgment by Anglo society.

¹⁹ Maxine Baca Zinn, "Chicano Men and Masculinity," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 10:2 (1982: Summer): 39.

²⁰ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, Tape recorded telephone interview, Phoenix, AZ, April, 22, 2010.

²¹ Chon A. Noriega and Wendy Belcher, "Autobiography Without Apology," in *I Am Aztlán: The Personal Essay in Chicano Studies*, ed. Chon A. Noriega and Wendy Belcher (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2004), vii.

²² Klahn, "Literary (Re)Mappings," 118.

²³ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.

²⁴ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, Gallery conversation in *Stations* exhibition, Mesa Contemporary Arts Center, Mesa, AZ, April, 2, 2010.

²⁵ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.

²⁶ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.

²⁷ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.

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- ²⁸ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.
- ²⁹ Chon A. Noriega, "Collectors Who Happen to Be..." in *East of the River: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art: Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2000), 10.
- ³⁰ Jennifer A. Gonzalez, "Windows and Mirrors: Chicano Art Collectors at Home," in *East of the River: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art: Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2000), 38.
- ³¹ Karen Mary Davalos, "In the Blink of an Eye: Chicana/o Art Collecting," in *East of the River: Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art: Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2000), 46.
- ³² Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.
- ³³ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20 – my emphasis. This conclusion is drawn from Diana Taylor's reflection that a recording of a performance cannot be a performance, "The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself (*the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire*)."
- ³⁴ Simon Downs, *Drawing Now: Between the Lines of Contemporary Art* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 11.
- ³⁵ Downs, *Drawing Now*, 12.
- ³⁶ Arthur C. Danto, "Photography and Performance: Cindy Sherman's Stills," in *Untitled Film Stills* by Cindy Sherman (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 13.
- ³⁷ Danto, "Photography and Performance," 9.
- ³⁸ Vincent Valdez, Interview by author, April, 22, 2010.
- ³⁹ Danto, "Photography and Performance," 9.
- ⁴⁰ Danto, "Photography and Performance," 9.
- ⁴¹ Danto, "Photography and Performance," 10.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSIONS

Vincent Valdez intended *Stations* as a metaphor for human struggle. For Valdez, the trials of his boxer communicate a universal message of life's spiritual and social challenges. The dramatic way in which he illustrates the physical and emotional aspects of the fight creates a powerful story to which many can relate. At its core, the athlete's tenacity in the face of adversity represents a timeless acknowledgment of the strength needed to endure the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Beyond this, his work can be interpreted in other ways. There are two interwoven concepts that are fundamental in recognizing the layered meanings of *Stations* and the ways in which the series speaks to his audience. The first is the establishment of space. The second is how Valdez represents and affirms the identities of himself and community. Drawing upon two meaningful subjects, boxing and religion, Valdez has created a series of drawings that accomplishes both of these. These two ideas are at the heart of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship refers to the variety of ways in which marginalized groups of people create, fight for, and retain space, identity, and rights within American society through acts of daily life. In other words, the development and claiming of space and self-definition of identity are inherent within *Stations*. Valdez's creation and affirmation of space, and his illustration of individual and collective identity are, key to understanding his work as an act of cultural citizenship.

Constructions of Space

Valdez's illustration of his boxer's strength and pride creates community spaces in two ways. First, space is identified through expressions of belonging, shared culture, and collective consciousness. Second, it is created in community engagement through creative expression and self-representation. In terms of cultural citizenship these concepts are inseparable. A sense of belonging within one's community is fostered through mutual experiences. These experiences, in turn, lead to a shared consciousness. As would be expected, Chicanos desire and need to feel connected within their community. A space like this where mutual experience is encountered provides validation for one's own experiences. Bonding with others leads to the development of collective consciousness, allowing for further opportunities of expression, self-representation, and engagement. As a body of work that creates unique spaces by engaging the community through articulation of shared experience and representing the subsequent community's consciousness, *Stations* is an act of cultural citizenship.

Valdez specifically chooses the subjects of boxing and religion for the ways in which they can be read by the community and the endless metaphors each enables. The significance of each subject lies in its ability to transmit shared experience between members of the community. While boxing can offer the potential for one kind of success for a young athlete, it also offers an opportunity for community engagement through an increased sense of pride. Community members bond vicariously with a boxer, his accomplishments felt as if they were their own. Together they share the experience of conquering adversity, defeating

one's opponent, and satisfaction of achievement. In *Stations* a viewer may often see a detail that is tied to their own life or experience connecting them to his drawings in a dynamic and active way. The determination of Valdez's boxer – as a young man struggling to overcome adversity and find success, even if for only one night – expresses a shared consciousness and understanding of a marginalized experience.

The parallels that Valdez draws with the Catholic Stations of the Cross further cultivate space through a feeling of common culture and community belonging. The religious subject lends itself to the shared experience of Valdez's Catholic viewers who together observe the religious ritual annually during Lent.

The themes of boxing and religion are further entwined when one considers questions the work raises regarding both masculinity and male citizenship. It extends the concept of cultural citizenship further by questioning these traditional structures and definitions. Valdez's unflinching portrait of the physical dedication and perseverance on the part of the athlete speaks to the role of masculinity in current society and success. It allows his audiences to inquire about constructions of masculinity and roles in society. In these images, the athlete's masculinity and male citizenship are defined by his physicality, the domination of his opponent, and his role as hero of the community. Valdez elegantly portrays the worship of a young athlete and what his strength represents for a community. However, the brutal way in which he has depicted the violence of the fight allows us to question these practices and the lengths young men will

go to find acceptance. He pushes the viewer to reflect on structures of masculinity and the high regard for them.

Highlighting the complicated and conflicting interpretations of masculinity, Valdez looks critically at the trial a young man must confront to be respected as a man. To further this analysis, his use of religious iconography and parallels drawn with the Catholic Stations of the Cross strengthens questions of power, challenges, and masculinity in society today. His use of the Christ subject eloquently communicates the irony of society's worship of a specific kind of masculinity – one based in power, sacrifice, and domination.

Representing Identities

Through his drawings Valdez represents and expresses the varied identities of both himself and his community. This expression is an important aspect of cultural citizenship. With its focus on every day activities, the concept of cultural citizenship allows for individuals and communities to define identity based on common culture, a sense of belonging, and mutual understanding. Shared culture – which is affected by language, arts, religion, histories, etcetera – in turn, contributes to the development and affirmation of identity. The complex interplay of identity with shared culture contributes to the multilayered and fluid nature of Chicano identity. Valdez expresses the various identities of his community using an array of methods.

In the tradition of the baroque style, Valdez uses a complex and layered narrative in a rich and dynamic fashion that allows for diverse interpretations of the works. In combining two seemingly opposing subjects – boxing and religion –

through a baroque framework, Valdez is able to express the complexity of Chicano identity and allow for multiple readings. In the history of art, the baroque style is understood by the emotional qualities it evokes, while also bearing new forms created out of the joining of multiple subjects. Valdez's work reflects both of these notions. First, the passion of the style is seen visually in the drama and tension that he presents, and additionally, the ability to draw various conclusions on the meaning of his work.

A second method is the use of an autobiographical framework. The challenges Valdez presents show the balancing act young men face, defining his boxer's identity and by extension that of other young Chicano men. In the tradition of Chicana autobiographical writers, Valdez uses his own experiences to present an identity based in courage, independence, passion, and perseverance. His use of family and friends illustrates their importance to his identity but also reaches beyond the individual to draw a portrait of community identity. He illustrates the various roles of his community to narrate a collective story of struggle, will, and hope.

Finally, Valdez's use of the charcoal medium and intimate compositions furthers the storytelling and metaphoric aspects of the series. Each drawing and their subsequent arrangement recall black and white film stills that lead viewers through his story. Further, the accessibility of the film style creates a connection between the viewer and the drawings. His masterful use of charcoal communicates his high regard for the medium, but can also be read as a metaphor for his community's status in society. The seriousness with which he handles the

medium speaks to how he feels his community should be considered as well. Each can be overlooked as secondary, but Valdez promotes their beauty and complexity. Finally, the way in which Valdez composes each drawing creates a dialogue both within the work and with the viewer. The bonds he creates between viewer and art strengthen the narrative qualities of his work.

Traditions: Old and New

As discussed in the introduction, Valdez follows in the traditions of past Chicano artists. His works speak to the histories and identities of a group of people with common culture and experience. Understanding of these issues continues to evolve and recent writings such as those regarding the *Phantom Sightings* exhibition, which focused on the work of artists since the Chicano Movement, can shed new light on his work.¹

The Chicano Movement began as a social protest, concerned with validating the largely unrecognized culture, experiences, and concerns of the Mexican American community. From its beginnings, Chicano art was an important expression in the communication of the community experience. Early Movement artists boldly celebrated Chicano culture and experience to create spaces and define an identity for a largely ignored group of people.² Through their murals and posters, early artists gave voices to their community, establishing the social aspects and public elements important to Chicano art.³ A sense of community, belonging, and acceptance were at the heart of these early years.

Since the 1970s, the Movement has been shaped by sociopolitical and cultural occurrences, such as the introduction and advancements of feminist and

queer theories, developments in art discourses, and the dynamic physical changes of neighborhoods due to increased immigration, and such. No longer is the Movement solely a social protest agenda.⁴ The *Phantom Sightings* exhibition presented the varied themes, subject, and media explored by artists considering events such as these. Delilah Montoya's photography exemplifies one such concern. Like other artists who attempt to illuminate situations and people who – although very much a part of culture and society – are vastly unnoticed and disregarded, Montoya uses her camera to record a very human aspect of the undocumented citizen's experience. In images such as *Humane Borders Water Station* (2004), she captures images of migrant campsites, shelters, and water stations to “reveal the existence of unseen populations moving through unknown perilous places.”⁵ In this light, Valdez's *Stations* reaches beyond the scope of social rights for an entire community to illustrate broader experiences of individuals within the community. As presented in this project, these drawings allow consideration of various aspects of the masculine experience. Valdez's work illuminates the societal and self-imposed pressures young men face as well as the literal and implied violence that is an intrinsic part of many masculine roles.

In the *Phantom Sightings* exhibition catalog, Rita Gonzales, Chon A. Noriega, and Howard N. Fox discuss how artists have reacted to globalization and social changes since the Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, many artists used realist styles and identity focused agendas to celebrate Chicano culture and establish new iconographies to represent the community. Wayne

Alaniz Healy's *Ghosts of the Barrio* (1974), a mural painted on one full side of a building in East Los Angeles, quite literally illustrates the Chicano neighborhood identity and experience. The contemporary men of the community – dressed in their khaki and “Dickie’s” style pants with button up, white t-shirts – sit on the steps of a modest home and are surrounded by images of a Mexican revolutionary, a Spanish conquistador, and an Aztec warrior. The image illustrates the various experiences and iconographies that construct the early Chicano community identity.

Noriega argues some artists working during and since the Chicano Movement represent a break from tradition in their consideration of new genres and the more ambiguous and fluid ways in which they approach identity. He examines the ways in which artists in the *Phantom Sightings* exhibition use conceptual strategies to explore the varied experiences of today’s society and where these artists fit within the art world.⁶ Ruben Ochoa and Marco Rios play on images of life and death in their collaboration *Rigor Motors* (2004-2006). These sculptures of customized coffin materials married with the fabric of speaker boxes and car parts, consider the physical positions the human body takes seated in a car or at a desk while alluding to a position in death that mirrors this experience.⁷ Like these artists, Valdez combines seemingly opposing subjects in an expression of experience and identity. These explorations of new methods do not completely separate Ochoa, Rios, and Valdez from early Chicano artists. Each of the three have a unique way of mixing old and new traditions. *Rigor Motors* reflects the influence of lowrider cars – a significant aspect of Chicano culture and history –

on the work of Ochoa and Rios. Valdez's realistic and figurative methods draw directly from original Chicano art traditions. The non-traditional is very notably apparent in the artists' chosen media and the forms they create. While Ochoa and Rios use automotive materials to reference life and death, Valdez chooses a medium which is not often exhibited, much less in such a large scale.

Additionally, Valdez innovatively borrows from another artistic tradition. Mixing the sacred and the profane is not a new practice in the history of art. Adapting this tradition, Valdez uses a new strategy – merging two disconnected subjects – to address issues of masculinity in an original way.

Both Gonzalez and Fox argue that artists working since the Movement have expanded their concerns. Just as the Movement grew to consider global happenings, these artists' considerations flexed as well.⁸ Gonzalez points out that the identity concerns of recent artists are not essentialist, but rather focused on personal situations and experiences.⁹ Gonzalez also argues the artists' fluid concerns about identity mirror their “non-hierarchical approach to media” in their use of various forms and genres to communicate the flexibility of their message.¹⁰ Valdez's choice of medium breaks away from any previous hierarchies. His use of charcoal in a large scale format for his first major solo exhibition demonstrates his interest in innovation and pushing boundaries. His autobiographical methods and the inclusion of close friends and family in his work speak to his concern in communicating the unique experiences and identities of his community from a very personal place. Additionally, his exploration of masculinity issues is

evidence of his willingness to explore outside the borders of traditional Chicano subjects.

The artists in *Phantom Sightings* depart from the original artistic concerns of the Movement that “call to claim or reclaim a homeland” and “reject the burden of affirmation representation and protest narrowly cast readings of their work.”¹¹ Fox argues the concept of Aztlán as a homeland by its nature is “a desire for places and times past” and has become less important, perhaps irrelevant, to the “social realities, the needs, and the aspirations of a diverse American society.”¹² Indeed the artists considered in *Phantom Sightings* don’t solely identify with a need to recover Aztlán or validate Chicano culture and are more interested in how Chicanos negotiate life and identity in the diverse society of the United States.¹³ Taking from these experiences, Fox argues the artists included in the exhibition use these varied experiences and roles, adapting and mixing them in their work with a refusal to define themselves in essentialist cultural terms.¹⁴ So while Aztlán and the history of the Movement are important to the foundation of these artists, Fox argues the mythical homeland and “radical Chicanismo” are no longer separate from the reality of life today but rather “appears to have been absorbed, subsumed, and consumed into a different history and civilization – different, but not separate.”¹⁵ For these artists, community identity is less about membership in a distinctly defined group, but rather the concern is how their identity is shaped by the “ever-shifting” nature of their daily lives; at home, work, school, and “anyplace else where individuals are aware of how they present themselves and are perceived by others.”¹⁶ Following this new tradition, the space

created through Valdez's work differs from that of early Chicano artists. Rather than seeking a concept such as Aztlán, Valdez is more interested in the spaces that result from contemporary experiences. While he is certainly aware of the foundation the Movement, its history, and artists have provided him, Valdez's concerns reach beyond to explore the ways in which members of his community negotiate today's society.

For the purposes of this project, cultural citizenship provided rich insight into Valdez's series *Stations*. The concept served as an excellent framework for reflecting on the parallels between the artist's subject choices and how these relate to constructions of space and representations of identity. However, there remain many areas of inquiry to reflect upon. Although the central thesis of this project argues *Stations* is an act of cultural citizenship, there are concerns regarding the ways in which these images contradict the concept. Further analysis can be done to consider how the images of the hero is exploited and his violence and sacrifice are celebrated.

Valdez's use of boxing and religion also allows for consideration of issues of the hero as a commodity and the ways in which this changes the message or meaning of an object. Valdez ends his series with *Collect 'Em All*, a drawing which closely resembles a sports trading card. This image invites a line of inquiry regarding the hero as a commodity. His image is co-opted, marketed, and in the end, even in his absence, he becomes a product to be sold. Religious parallels are also relevant to this area of study. Prayer cards depicting various saints and holy figures, including Christ, are very present in the everyday lives of

Catholics. The objects are a highly marketable item in religious bookstores and are often purchased for personal use or given as gifts. In this way, these images, including Christ's, also become commodities.

An additional area of analysis is the trading card as a form of devotion. In each community, sport and religion, these cards reflect the importance of the figure depicted. However, when these items are purchased and sold, a monetary importance is applied. An important line of inquiry is to consider the ways in which monetary value affects the levels of devotion.

Also, it is important to study the circulation of objects with cultural and religious significance. The ways in which an object's meaning change through circulation is a valid consideration. Within this inquiry, parallels can be drawn with other religious images, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, to reflect on how various manifestations alter the significance of a figure. Considering the ways in which the Virgin's likeness has been adopted and used for various unrelated purposes, from contemporary religious paintings to beach towels to magnets, will strengthen research and discussions of the circulation of Valdez's boxer images. Finally, beyond *Stations*, Valdez continued to explore the image of the boxer in works such as *Death of a Prizefighter* (2006), *My Chances Really, Were a Million to One* (2006), and *Winner* (2006). These works add to the issues presented in this project but also show his continued interest in the subject. Focusing less on religious parallels and more on contemporary images of male boxers, Valdez continues to question structures of masculinity and violence in these images.

These additional examinations and the remaining questions offer endless opportunities for analysis.

¹ *Phantom Sightings* traveled to the following institutions between 2008-2009, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Tamayo Museum of Contemporary Art, Mexico City; Museum of Contemporary Art, Monterrey, Mexico; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; El Museo del Barrio and the Americas Society, New York; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix.

² Howard Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," in *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 76.

³ Rita Gonzalez, "Phantom Sites: The Official, the Unofficial, and the Orifical," in *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 47.

⁴ Gonzalez, "Phantom Sites," 48.

⁵ Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 81.

⁶ Chon Noriega, "The Orphans of Modernism," in *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 20.

⁷ Noriega, "The Orphans of Modernism," 26.

⁸ Gonzalez, "Phantom Sites," 48, and Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 76.

⁹ Gonzalez, "Phantom Sites," 48.

¹⁰ Gonzalez, "Phantom Sites," 48.

¹¹ Gonzalez, "Phantom Sites," 49-50.

¹² Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 76.

¹³ Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 76.

¹⁴ Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 76.

¹⁵ Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 76.

¹⁶ Fox, "Theater of the Inauthentic," 76.

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