

A Visual Analysis of *The Chicano Mind* (1973)

Guillermo Martinez's 1973 work *The Chicano Mind* is a large and compelling artwork depicting vibrant colors, striking patterns, and a myriad of repeating figures. The work sits within the second floor stairwell within PCC's C building and takes up the entirety of the wall that it is situated on. The large work consists of two canvas palettes and appears to be painted with acrylic paint. The composition features a circular spiraling structure with diagonal lines of repeated figures emanating from a central figure of a man with arms out in a pose akin to a crucifixion.

The Face of the Man is warped and distorted pointing towards the sky with an anguished and pained expression. He appears shirtless with long strands of muscle fibers wrapping around his chest and arms and the skin of his torso is removed to display an abstracted image of his innards. A nail is driven through his right wrist into an empty space between his two arm bones. The color of his bones is the same shade of his skin perhaps alluding to his malnourishment before his crucifixion. Unlike the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, this figure's hands are enclosed fists, these fists are repeated outwards towards the edge of the composition and are displayed in every different color of the rainbow. The fists on the right side are also accompanied by an elbow or a knee in the same repeated fashion as the fists.

Moving away from the central figure are an assortment of heads displayed in a similarly repeated fashion to the fists, the heads are arranged in a looping manner almost like beads on a string to a prayer necklace. The heads themselves are also depicted in a range of colors and show the faces of exclusively men. These men come in a wide range of age and attire with their eyes appearing as if they were gouged out aside from two faces on the bottom right side of the piece. Interestingly, these two heads are of men with native american headwear as opposed to the

sombreros, military side caps, and spanish conquistador helmets that some of the other men are wearing. Each expression of the men display a solemn almost empty expression save for the aforementioned native american men whose faces are more of a neutrally positive expression with slightly upturned lips. There are three other faces that break this mold as well with heavy abstraction, these faces are entirely made of white stars, red, blue, and yellow outlined shapes, and blue circles and can be seen near the center of the artwork.

Right next to these faces appears to be a scene encapsulated by a ring of banners and flags and a Mexican eagle holding up the flag of Mexico and clamping down on a red and white striped snake right above the crucified figure's head. The scene depicts a patriotic American scene of a pale white "Uncle Sam" figure driving stakes into and stabbing the back of a Chicano man sprawled out beneath an American flag. This scene is repeated multiple times within the small area to signify how America's negative treatment of Chicano people isn't a one-off occurrence.

Following this ringed scene is another pair of rings wrapped around the central figure's hips, the outer ring depicts a repeated image of a six sided die showing the fifth side on each of the faces followed by an inner ring of outlined glyphs that appear to be of native American influence.

One of the most interesting elements of the composition is along the bottom center of the space. This arrangement depicts various battle scenes with repeated figures on horseback brandishing swords and rifles pointed towards each other on the left hand side, and more figures on horseback with one waving an American flag in the center. Moving more right, a series of crucifixes and wooden walls followed by a group of archers and more figures on horseback with spears and shields is depicted. These figures are arranged in a way that spells out "*Viva La Raza*"

which directly translates to “long live the race.” However, *La Raza* has particular importance in Chicano culture as it specifically refers to “Hispanic People of The New World” or Latin Americans of mixed-race.

Lastly, The background of the piece consists of a striking red and white striped pattern which draws the viewer’s eye toward the center and alludes to the stripes of the American flag. A space on the far left hand side of the composition is broken up by an earth toned series of shapes and designs that resemble Aztec or Mayan relief carvings.

Looking at the piece in general one can gather the rich symbolism in all of the different figures as they allude to the story of the Chicano people and the many different parties that were involved in their creation. The piece in general has a somber tone with all of the various expressions of the floating heads, but it’s juxtaposed by the striking colors and central figure breaking out of all of the concentric rings around him. I take this to be a message of finding pride in one’s grief-filled past, looking and recognizing everything that went into making the Chicano people who they are today and how even though they might still suffer, they can always break out of the molds that society has placed on them to become something greater. This is reinforced by the battle scenes spelling out *Viva La Raza*, a strong reminder that the Chicano people have fought and will continue to fight for a better life.