

## **Marcos Raya Interview**

### **Chicago, April 27, 2019**

[Part 1, 9312]

JR: Thank you so much for your time, Mr. Marcos Raya. We're going to start with some general questions; your background, your upbringing, where you're from. Can you tell us about where you came from?

Marcos Raya: I was born in Irapuato, which is like almost at the center of Mexico, the country. It was a beautiful town. We have very fertile land, we sell our fruit and stuff, it's a lot of business among the peasants. So I had a magical childhood. I met Chavez Morado, a Mexican muralist, he was working on a project. I will never forget when I saw it. I was 10 years old. So it's easy to say that my first impressions of art was murals. And I liked the fact that Chavez Morado kind of represented like a priest, like he was the man who would engage with the people and paint about their history. He was political. I liked that. That was my beginnings.

JR: How does a little kid from a small town meet a world-class artist like that?

MR: The teacher took us there. She took the whole school. From Irapuato to Guanajuato, Guanajuato is a state and it's a very historical town. that's where Diego Rivera was born. They also say that David Alfaro Siqueiros was born in Irapuato, I knew the Siqueiros family. And this lady told me, says, 'they don't want other people know about something in their family, but he was born in Irapuato,' where I was born. Irapuato is in what they call the bible belt, they are extremely pseudo-religious. And Guanajuato is where the ultra-right political party was born -- the PAN. Those are the guys responsible for putting Mexico in such a bad situation. For 80 years Mexico has been poor, by force. And I remember as a little boy, when I would watch the news, I would feel really happy when I saw something related to the students of the university, or in Mexico how they protested against the corruption of the government, I was always happy to see that, there was resistance.

JR: I read that your mother was born in Illinois. I didn't know an explanation for that. Were your grandparents -

MR: My grandfather arrived in Chicago in 1900, which means we've been here for quite a while. My mother was born here, she worked in a factory. She was deported in the thirties when they deported a million Mexicans, she was one of them.

JR: That's a massive repatriation effort, an infamous moment in Mexican American history.

MR: She arrived in Mexico at the age of 8. And she used to tell us about how poor we were, and it was horrible. My father never wanted to come here, my father was an artist too, he was an

artist and a musician. He would make a living as a musician, but he made some really beautiful things. I used to help him, he used to work with wood, and make three dimensional objects, and he'd make them in - he used to make these ships, that looked like the ones with which the Spaniards came, and it was so magical because he made all the details. So then my mother came back to Chicago when I was 2 years old. This is important because this means I grew up without my mother. It could've been worse, but I lived with my aunt and my father and my uncle. I was unruly, I was not a bad boy, just unruly, because I had no-one to give me direction. So by the time I was 15, I had my first drink, which is typical in Mexico, by the time you are 15 you're supposed to be a man and you're supposed to drink, especially in the 50s. That's called the golden years of Mexican culture. It was the alcohol, that was the king. In the movies, and songs everywhere - And now I look at it and I say, 'wow, if you really look at it, I think alcohol kill more Mexicans than two revolutions put together.'

JR: You've talked a lot about alcoholism on the record. Do you think that that started when you were 15?

MR: Oh yeah, and just mention how Mexican nationalized that, they also nationalized the fact that you are supposed to drink, in the movies and so. And you are a victim of circumstances. My father drank. He was a musician, and I grew up in a little street where there used to be the red district at one time, and I saw the characters that used to live there, it was like a Fellini movie, I remember. Boxers shadow [shadow boxing], blind musicians, prostitutes, all things I saw as a little boy. But then my mother was send me some money to go to my uncle's house in Mexico City. My uncle was born in St. Louis, and he was a good looking guy, he became the captain of Aero Mexico, because he was in the Korean War, and he made a nice decision to come into Mexico because they needed pilots, and he became a captain. He lived in a section that looked almost like it was in the United States; it was a gated community, where all the rich politicians lived. Pedro [something] I remember. I stayed there for three months while I was getting my papers, and it was - Back then, the division between the province and Mexico city was big, that's why Chilangos they think they're big, but not anymore because of globalization everybody is connected. But back then, it was considered - It was good because it was like a cultural check for me, from my little town to Mexico City, and from Mexico City to Chicago.

JR: You were fifteen, or sixteen?

MR: Sixteen.

JR: Was that stay in Mexico City part of your arts education?

MR: No, but yeah, I was doing some sketching and doing things at my uncle while I was there. It came out numerically. I did a little thing, like Rodin, sculpture. And I was picking up books here and there. Of course I went to see the murals of the Mexicans, they slapped my face, like 'wake up,' 'wow'. So from there, I ended up in Chicago. I arrived - My mother lived on Taylor street, Italian neighborhood. So by the time I arrived there, the universities was a big empty lot. It was a

big empty lot. It was part of the Chicago renewal thing, and most of the immigrants moved, most of the Mexicans, there were only about two families left on Taylor street. My mom lived there until she died. I never saw my mother walking down Pilsen, she hated it. So I remember when I arrived on a Sunday, and I told my mother, because Taylor street looked pretty disgusting. I say, 'this is ugly, I want to go back to Mexico.' She goes, 'no you're not, you get a job, and you're going to school.' I go 'when?' 'Tomorrow,' 'what?' So, she got me a little job that I hated, but it was a good beginning, because I was - not only did start to like to read books, to study.

JR: Can I ask you a couple of questions about Taylor Street? We've read a lot about that history, Mexican, Italians, other immigrant groups, ethnic groups, living in that area, that became UIC and their displacement. That's how Pilsen gets really Mexican around 1960, I think. Were you part of that, were you witness to that displacement?

MR: Yeah, I was hanging around with a little clique, the Taylor Barracudas, and we as friends hanging out with our girls and stuff. It's easy to say that as a little group, we couldn't fit in to any [other] part of Taylor Street. I don't know if it was racism, or everybody could work together. It's like right now, so divided, and so segregated. But there is one other reason why I decided to leave Taylor Street for Pilsen. All by myself. I left my mother's house when I was around seventeen, between seventeen and eighteen.

JR: So around 17/18, you moved to Pilsen.

MR: No, I moved to Old Town. And I arrived right at the moment of the beginning of the 60s, 1960s, summer of love. So I saw a big change, living in a working class neighborhood, working class issues, into a society that was changing. The 60s was really exciting for me.

JR: What was Old Town like? Was it full of hippies, full of -

MR: It was like Greenwich Village, or whatever was happening in San Francisco. It was the center of the counterculture. I saw the groups that later became famous, like the Grateful Dead or the Jefferson Airplane, and the sit-ins, and sit-ins against warning Vietnam. So it was something new, for me. I wouldn't have that knowledge of things if I would've stayed in Pilsen. I think if I would've stayed in Pilsen, I would've end up another Mexican nationalist.

JR: How did you change, when you encountered the counterculture?

MR: I stayed in Old Town for about 3 months, because I was being groomed to go to a private school in Lenox, Massachusetts, with a full scholarship from the University of Illinois. I was part of that thing called 'the war on poverty.' They showed working class kids like me, who had possibilities. My art teacher saw possibilities in me, and he's the one that got me the scholarship. I think it would've been a lot better if they would have sent me to the Art Institute but they send me this little town called Lenox. And I ended up in the school, which was an elite school, where there was 100 boys and 100 girls. I saw people like Thelonious Monk Jr. the

brother of the mama's and the papa's. Steve Scull [Robert Scull?], who was the first one to buy stuff from Andy Warhol. It was rich kids. And it was a cultural thing for me, because I am a working class kid, right? So I spent most of the time in the studio, and the teacher used to take us to New York, at least once a month. And one show that I saw that changed my vision or my position as a student was when we went to MoMa, when we went see the international surrealist show. And it was right on time, because at that time, the youth were being rebellious and we were experimenting with some really heavy duty stuff, like hashish and all kinds of things and - I must say I took them a couple of times, only because I wanted to, like they say, expand my - and it worked. To go into the alleys of your mind, you would never be able to experiment -

JR: What, like acid or -?

MR: Acid, or mushrooms. But only once or twice, and with a sketchbook. I even have the sketches, still. And I must say that, a lot of people don't mention it that they need help but I do, because when someone says 'don't trust a man that doesn't drink,' no, don't trust an artist that doesn't drink, that hasn't experimented with some kind of drugs.

JR: You're in your late teens, at this point, you're in Lenox.

MR: I am 18, 19.

JR: 19, going to New York, expanding your horizons. And that international surrealist show at MoMa, how does it change what you think art is, or what art could do?

MR: Because of the fact that it was my first impression so far was the murals, I came with that in mind when I came to Chicago, but that changed when I saw a picture, not bigger than murals. As a matter of fact, in one of my classes, I was looking at a book on murals and the teacher, he didn't like it, he didn't like it that I wanted to go that way. And now I understand. But back then, that's another time, when there was no Mexicans in school, we had no Chicano studies, we didn't have nothing over there. The only guy that ever wanted to be my friend was a guy from Venezuela. He acted and thought more like a Gringo than a Gringo. So I said to him, 'you can't be my friend.' I think he came from a rich Venezuelan oil [family].

JR: Being a scholarship kid, you must've been a super minority. Do you think that that minority status would have shaped your later vision as an artist at all?

MR: If I go back to, back then the blacks were already revolting. This was round the time they killed Malcolm X, and then Luther King. For some minorities, I feel like we're in the middle of this tension between white and blacks. And then I would tell myself, 'well I am brown,' but I tended towards the things that were happening, like the counterculture. I liked that music, I liked Jazz, I liked blues. But nevertheless, I came to the conclusion, back then I don't know if I still think about it, but I told myself that black power and white power are the two extremes, and they left us right in the middle. And you could see that, some of the Hollywood movies, where the whites

and the blacks are the ones going around the world kicking ass. And the villains who had to die were Mexicans or Arab. And then the blacks, and then in the end the whites don't die. That's Hollywood. I was into a culture that dealt with the history of art, and surrealism helped me to understand, especially Marcel Duchamp, he was still alive, I should have went to look for him, somebody else said 'maybe it's a good thing you didn't go to see him.' I say, 'why?' He goes, 'maybe he would have been an asshole.'

JR: They say don't meet your heroes.

MR: Duchamp said something that stuck to me. He said something like 'I stopped painting at the age of 22 because I saw that painting can be extremely mechanical. The artist can only come out with maybe 5, 6 masterpieces, the rest are just pure repetition.'

[Part 2, 9313]

MR: So by the time an artist dies, a painter dies, you would notice that in his last show, most of the paintings look alike. It's supply and demand. Most of them sell out, but more than anything else, like Duchamp says, I need a type of art that is more cerebral, that push you to think. And surrealism more than anything else was a literary movement. Beautiful poems and stuff. I got involved in all of that. But I didn't say to myself, 'I am going to be a surrealist.' But then I did tell myself one thing. I said, 'if I study surrealism, and if I take surrealism to be my guy, it's easy to say it would take me to the year 2000 and beyond.' Why? Because it's a movement that deals with the mind and the mind is a universe, right. So there's no way I could not reach what I am looking for. Then I dealt with, I was in collage. Until today, a lot of my paintings, they start as a collage, and then I turn them into paintings and they end up as installations.

JR: Is there a connection between surrealism and Mexican muralism, as you had seen in your earlier life at that point already?

MR: No, the only surrealism and pseudo would be one painting by Frida Kahlo. One and only painting, it's called, 'what the water gave me.' There is one that I saw that I still mention to him now and then, even the Mexican museum doesn't know who he is, his name is Antonio Ruiz "el Corcito." The only surrealist that I know of that influenced me and he would do little paintings. And before he would finish them, some big museum already wanted it. There is some one or two pieces at MoMa, there is in Germany. And his work is a mixture of surrealism with social realism. I don't know how you would call it, but something of what I do.

JR: I asked that question because it seems like some of the work like Diego Rivera, Sequiros, Orozco, Frida Kahlo, could all be surreal. Sometimes it has surrealistic elements, so I didn't know if that was a connection you were making, between what was going on -

MR: No, no. Remember, muralism is a total movement that is part of - most of them were communist, the only one that wasn't a communist was Orozco, which is one of my favorite

artists because he doesn't have any documents. And back then the Mexican communists were so divided, they would kill each other before they came to power. They didn't come to power until the 80s, when they finally got united. And thus really, it's also, I think the surrealism was an unfinished project because of the Second World War, they ended up communist. So they kind of broke their whole thing. But when we talk about ideas, about magic and stuff, that's where I love surrealism. What happened was, then, I was drafted and I totally refused to go to Vietnam, for many reasons, almost like the same thing that Cassius Clay was claiming, say, what I was thinking. It would be impossible for me, for a young boy from Catholic Irapuato, to go kill Vietnamese people that I don't even know. Or for who? It doesn't make any sense. So I picked all my little things and I went back to Mexico. And I ended up in Mexico City in 1968, and by then they already killed Che Guevara, I got a vision of what the Marxists were planning to do with the rest of the country by setting up dictatorships, always killing the true Democrats, and setting up dictatorships. Until Today! So, that's when I became politicized. I mean politicized in a way that the artist can see or can paint about the internal contradictions of capitalism.

JR: Tell us about what politicized you. What opened your eyes to the system?

MR: The student movement because I was there with the students from Irapuato and we were demanding a public dialogue with the president of Mexico, and we wanted to talk about the corruption that led us to the problems of today. For 80 years the Mexican government has made Mexicans poor, and has turned Mexico into one of the most humiliating experiences for Mexicans to live in their own country. So the government repressing, and I was a young man, and it affected me. He tried one day, and came back. I ended up on Taylor Street, because my mother was still living there. But I noticed that there was nothing going on in Taylor Street. I always saw old people looking out the window, and I was with my friends. I was, what, 20, 21. That's when I decided to go to Pilsen. Some students, they had an organization called OLAS, Organization of Latin American students, said 'Marcos come to Pilsen, things are happening.' Okay, so I went to their office, which was on 17th and Halsted, and I became artist in residence. That's why I say most of my studios have been free. I lived there like a ghost. Nobody knew I lived there. I lived there for 2 years with gas, light, and everything. It was an abandoned church but it was a nice abandoned church, so I hung out with the students, and I did my first commissions. And I did some wonderful work. This is before I got, I call it, when somebody stops you from doing what you're supposed to do, interrupted. I was a young man interrupted. While I was in that studio I did some wonderful pieces, that right now they ended up in the Mexican museum. But I look back and that was only good stuff.

[Part 3, 9314]

JR: Can I back up and ask you one question about the political awakening that you had in Mexico. How does it affect your artistic practice, how does that translate onto the brush or the canvas?

MR: I arrived in Pilsen, the first 3 years I was doing my own thing. Some of those paintings I did were so - One of them is hanging in the museum of Fine Arts in Houston, and I was only 20, 21 years old. It is a masterpiece. I can tell you it is, because it shows it has a main, it's called 'The Anguish of Being.' When I arrived in Pilsen, Pilsen was an abandoned neighborhood. It looked like the set of the movie by Orson Welles, called 'Touch of Evil.' It was dark, it was dangerous, it was poor. And there was like 4 to 5 bars in every block. Working class, drugs. It looked like Tijuana in the 50s. And I've never been to Tijuana but I imagined this is how it looked like. The reason why I want to write a book is because I want to say exactly what I think. Most of the economy was based on the black market. In the 70s Pilsen became known as, and it seems like I am the only one that knew, became the empire, one of the empires of Narco-trafficking in the world. So, you see that, and you have aspirations to become an activist and an artist, if you like this, it's like an octopus, a monster, that is destroying society.

JR: What would have been trafficked through Pilsen in the 70s?

MR: I think I saw it all, right. So I start at the beginning. You see how your block changes or your town or your neighborhood. What I saw is, Taylor street, some of the gangs that used to be on Taylor street, moved to Pilsen. Some of them are still around. But the ones that I saw in the 60s, they were gangs that looked more like that came out of the movie from West Side Story. They didn't really kill each other, there was nothing to fight over. But the moment when Richard Nixon created the War on Drugs, everything changed. So it's very easy to think that it was a conspiracy. Not only to the yesterday's poor neighborhoods, but to yesterday's nations in the world. So let's say I start in Pilsen when I see that gangbangers started to carry weapons and fight for their territories and killing each other like flies. And unable to organize, even the brown berets, who were the ones that the old Casa Aztlán, who were supposed to be activists, and they couldn't stop anything. I even think they were part of the problem, because I mention about Mexican infant nationalism. **Mexican infant nationalism** reminds me of the whole thing that the PRI created. PRI, which is a Mexican partido, and kept every Mexican sleeping, waving their flags and their hats and turn into - themselves into stereotypes with images like Virgen de Guadalupe, Frida Kahlo, and Día de los Muertos. And I think that all that created, ended up into what is today, so infantile, so absurd that it gets me angry because what happened last year. The Terra Museum gave millions of dollars to cultural institutions, including the Mexican museum, and the aim was to rescue the art that was done in the 1800s up until 1975. And those were the muralists. This woman who was well educated, curated a show on the South Side, with the black community, and they had a show in the Smart museum at the University of Chicago. I went to see the show, I knew the guys, I met him at the beginning of the mural movement. I remember William Walker, because the mural that we were going to see today, the Anti World War, we went out to paint that in William Walker's neighborhood on the South Side. We were walking around, and we noticed that there is no walls, they were already destroyed neighborhoods, and there were no walls to paint. I remember very well, he says 'I don't want these white liberals to tell me what to do, I don't want to paint no World War mural in my neighborhood, we have our own wars, we have prostitution and addiction!' And I say, 'you're right!' and we got the hell out of here. And I took them, let's show a new wall, which is 18th and

Western. That's why he can say, we don't go all the way over there, it's way over there, it's in the neighborhood, for crying out loud. And so that's why we painted it there. Anyway, going back to the exhibit last year, the woman did such a terrific job that that show ended up in the best magazines, in the New York Times, in the art forum. Right now as we speak, some of these artists are still alive, they are about my age, like 70. They are commending 500,000 dollars for their work, there is some that go over a hundred million dollars.

JR: Did you say the name of that exhibition?

MR: I think it's called, 'Now is the time.'

JR: We'll look it up. [The time is now!]

MR: A total success. She revived that movement, for obvious reasons, it was never part of the mainstream. Some friend of mine, who went to see, he goes, 'you know what, those guys did a lot more than wherever they were involved up there.' And then I look in - They are happy, I am happy for them, there are books, there are movies, everything. And some of the white folks also, saluting themselves and getting recognition. But then next thing I go, what happened to us? We're being so famous for our murals, where the hell are we? What happened to the Mexican museum? What did they do with the money that they received from the Terra museum? Well, the curator, and I am going to mention his name, shows to bring sculptures done by some pseudo Mexican from the 1800s. They look horrible, they were not Mexican, they were sculptures aimed at the international show of Chicago.

JR: 1890 Columbian Exposition?

MR: Yeah, it is. You can say, there was no Mexican culture, Mexican art at the time, it's not until the Mexican muralists arrive and throw away everything that had to do with Spain. But it was, to me, it was a slap in the face, because they could have used that space to do some academic research on where were they from 1970 to today. Nothing. It was an infantile style, like always.

JR: You've used this phrase, infantile, a few times. Can you tell us what you mean by that?

MR: What I mean is when you want to represent your identity, and you offer an easy spark. It's so easy to copy imagery from the aztecs or the Mayans, that even in primary schools they don't let you do it, in Mexico. I think it's something that started with the gangbangers when they wanted to show their identity, they would go for aztec something because they see themselves as warriors. We say 'ah but not conscious warriors,' because they were really good in killing each other for all these decades. Some they call themselves like Aztec warriors, or call themselves guys from South America, or Inca's, Supreme Inca's. And that's what he says, right. But somebody like Ray Patlan, who was the guy that painted Casa Aztlan for the first time, a guy who went to Vietnam, came back all fucked up, you can see his infant nationalism. He did not go the way to study in depth, like he studied the Mexican muralists. He only did a little

copying of the [?] building, very ugly figures a la Siqueiros or when they paint their hands coming out - You can see them all over the United States. Not a deep study, in architecture, or history, or nothing of that so back then he got away with it. I still think he still came away with it. But he became the infante terrible of the 60s for the liberals. But I look back and I was never ... **because I use the word because that's what it is, infantile stuff. It's not political, it's not aesthetically well done, it's not, it's nothing.** It says for me, that's what represents us, about today. Like when I told you that kids are growing up to think that it's the right thing to do, to identify with the Aztecs and with Frida Kahlo and all that stuff. So when you come into the neighborhood, and you're looking for something, you're going to any cafe, and what I see in every cafe, now, is I see taco art. Now you want to explain what taco art is, but this is what taco art is. **Taco art** is the kind of art that is done by an artist who couldn't deliver, and in order for him to pay the rent he has to go commercial, so he will paint the dictates of people who own taqueria's or restaurants. And most of that has to do with creating a self-image of stereotype Mexican.

JR: That's stuff is very beloved right now. Every time we come to Pilsen, it feels like there is more of that kind of stuff on the walls, including inside business, outside walls. It's very charismatic, so what would you say to somebody who would say -

MR: What do you mean by charismatic?

JR: It's charismatic because it's drawing people in, you see it on social media, people taking selfies and stuff. Why do you think people are so drawn to those kind of motifs that you're talking about?

MR: Okay, first of all, what I have experienced all my life, because most of my work is almost militant, in a message. It's not that they're not interested, it's just that the media and people that deals with culture in Pilsen, they have nothing to do with culture. They are totally ignorant about what culture is. So they go to the easiest part, to see the Mexican sleeping on their cactus, is funny. And they have a hard time looking at something that I wanted to say, like let's say I want to paint something against the U.S. invasion of Venezuela, I would do it. Which is what I did in the 80s when I painted the people of Central America toppling Samosa. They don't want to deal with it. They're not interested. Why? Because of the Mexican infantile nationalism.

JR: But this is a tension we've traced from the 70s to the present in our research, is looking at that tension between the impulse to commercialize muralism, public art, and the politics. If I could make an editorial claim for a second, you seem like you're on the political side and you've been able to avoid the commercialism. How did you do that?

MR: When I decided to become an artist, ... I came to the conclusion that I will be an artist and I will be a freethinker. And for me to do it, I was going to walk through hell. Meaning, I never had any money. Always living according to my possibilities. I never got paid for anything that I ever painted on the walls of Pilsen, I had never received any kind of salute or nothing. It's like I don't

exist. Second, I was never part of the Mexican nationalists because I had other worries. While they were worrying about the neighborhood, I was worried about the whole continent. Was worried about the moral doctrine, reimplemented today through other means, technology, and globalization. It's very bad, and I know how it's going. And it's terrifying. It's terrifying because they set up a machine, it's called the death machine, it's global.

JR: A what machine?

MR: Death machine, where it's easy for them to kill what we call, it's a war against the youth, because the youth has always been the warriors for change in society. There is a war on the poor. All the murals that I've done people are not interested because they want to see fun and nice things, and globalization makes sure that's what they get. At first, identity. For instance, imagine on one side you have the people that are pro-trump. They're poor, they're poor, they are pathetic, they're waving their flag, that say 'fuck Mexicans, fuck muslims, fuck everybody, we are for Trump.' Those are nationalists, white nationalists. And then we have the Chicano nationalists. How can you fight today or ever, how can you fight nationalism with nationalism? You can't.

JR: What's the alternative?

MR: The alternative is to join other forces, other groups, grow as a force against the machine. Not in your little neighborhood. That's why all the artists in Pilsen ended up isolated, they don't exist.

JR: I want to ask you something about the commercialization of art in Pilsen. These motives that you talk about that seem to get on your nerves, but one thing that strikes me as you're talking about that is that your work, World War III, that work has been one of the longest standing pieces of public art in Pilsen.

MR: That's because I painted it three times.

JR: Can you tell us about that?

MR: Well the first time, I went up and I said, I have to repaint it because this mural is very significant, the message is very strong. I went to Carlos Tortolero, the director of the museum, to see if he could borrow or lend me 500 dollars, which is nothing, he said no. Three times I asked him for 500 dollars.

JR: Is this in the 80s?

MR: 80s, 90s. And this last one, they refused to give me any money. So, I went around asking for friends. I raise about 2000 dollars. For materials. And that's how I kept her alive. And I guess

edit that image of Trump, which is, when we painted that mural, against that world war, U.S. -  
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[Part 4, 9315 ]

MR: with how we painted it right, before the election of Ronald Reagan, okay. And it's funny that before I put the face of Trump, it was a few days before he got elected.

JR: Why did you feel like you had to revise it? It had been standing there kind of unrevised for decades, why did you feel you needed to revise it in 2016?

MR: Because of the events. You know, this is what's happening, okay, **why I am upset and frustrated when it comes to public art**. So, most of my career as a muralist was out of my own pocket, and with my own vision. I never believed in inviting all kinds of people to have a big cultural fiesta and bring them mariachis all day and I didn't believe that I always believed that, like Orozco when somebody asking me, he only had one arm, we said, 'can we help you?' he said 'no thanks, one arm can do it.' He also, so he [is] probably the most important artist in Mexico, he never got paid for his murals. Never. What he get paid for, was his studio work, and he happens to be one of the best expressionist in the world. So without my own vision of what I wanted to do I stayed away from groups like the ones that Jose Gonzalez was organizing back then, according to him, 'bringing Chicano culture to pilsen'. And again, the mural that he was painting back then was this pure copies of **Aztec trash**, I call it Aztec trash, because it does go under the term of kitsch. That's what it is, its kitsch. And that's all he did, okay. And remember what I say, a muralist is supposed to be a teacher, a professor, someone who educates, not to entertain because that's what everybody does today. Everybody wants to entertain and to have fun. That's the difference. A muralist has many ways of doing a mural. He can do a historical mural, he can do political mural, he can do all kinds of murals. But they're murals, and they have a history, that go back to the Aztecs, you go back to the renaissance, but Mexicans modernize it and we have what's happening today, which is decadent. It's decadent because it went mainstream. Today, the last time I saw a muralist from Pilsen, the connection between the murals and the alderman is kind of funny because the alderman tells her, 'paint a mural for me, and make me look good and I give you money.' So she goes and paint this bullshit mural, and she gets 20,000 dollar, or 25,000 dollars and the alderman gets reelected. What the hell is this? So, today, everybody talks about murals, but they're not murals anymore. They are a mixture of murals, graffiti, and street art. You can't tell the difference anymore. And it's all for entertainment.

JR: So you don't want murals for entertainment? You want murals that educate, that politicize?

MR: To educate, exactly. I'll give an example. A year ago, or a couple of years ago, the owner of the old Casa Aztlan, who was supposed to be the very image of Chicano resistance in Pilsen, that wall was mine, a 100 percent mine, I painted it 3 times. I have 3 versions of the facade of Casa Aztlan, the three times I painted it. What happened? The owner, the new owner, some

white developer, bought the building, and he just went and erased it, without a warning. And this set up a protest that helped the new alderman become the alderman, because he was in the street demanding affordable housing [et cetera]. But I wanted to stop it, because they were going to bring Ray Patlan from San Francisco to do it, and I said, 'no that guy was gone for forty years, I've never seen the guy here, or any of the brown berets, they never came back.' They left after three years, then came out on the front page of the Tribune saying they were mismanaged in funds, so they disappeared, including Ray Patlan. Now they bring him back, only because there is money involved. And maybe some fame, he would be - and I was opposed to it, not because of the money, because I never ask for money, because there was going to be any money involved. We should get that money, and give it to some of our local artists, some are extremely talented, grab a wall that is not Aztlan, and paint the history of Mexicans in Chicago. That's what I wanted. And I wanted to have a voice, because that was my mural. And they totally disregarded me. They made me disappear. I still live in Pilsen. I am probably one of the only ones that is still there. And I felt really bad, I felt like I was abandoned and I got betrayed by everybody, including the Mexican museum. And ever since I have not been feeling so good.

JR: I want to ask you some follow up questions on that. We've studied the Casa Aztlan controversy; if you would have had your way, what would have happened to that particular building? It's fascinating to me that it was redone, Ray Patlan, being a big part of it, but if the developer painted it over and you didn't want Patlan to redo it, what did you want to happen to that building?

MR: Nothing, absolutely nothing. Why? Because I knew that the owner was going to demand what he wanted on the wall, not what the others wanted. There was going to be no political decisions, of how political this wall was going to be, they just follow. They erased all my Latin American Heroes, because according to Patlan, Che Guevara doesn't belong in Pilsen. But he wanted to pay his stupid ego, which has nothing to do with Chicago. This is not Aztlan. This is not San Francisco or California, this is Chicago. He didn't give a damn, he went and painted his farm workers eagle anyway. Why? Because this is so absurd. Talk to a native, don't talk to the people of the neighborhood, they don't know nothing about culture. I am telling you, they are being brainwashed ever since. They can't be able to escape aztec trash. Because that's what they painted, Huitzilopochtli on that wall, it doesn't - look, I didn't finish what I was saying about that show and the guys selling their stuff for 500,000 dollars. It's because they painted their experience of being black in oppressive Chicago, you can see it on the walls, you can see it everywhere. It makes sense! But you want to get something of Casa Aztlan or the neighborhood, the artists didn't paint the experience of being Mexican in the barrio, most of them are obsessed with their lindo Mexico, you know. They forget that they're standing in Chicago, that's the problem.

[Part 5, 9316]

MR: I also want to talk about this new thing that is going on right now, that people are like, really happy, and I'm not. It's that they want to create some kind of data where they can protect the murals of Chicago.

JR: We'll ask you about that. I wanted to ask you about, you're saying, don't put stuff that's not about the Chicago Latino experience/Mexican American experience, the farm workers stuff, the aztec stuff, what would a representation of the Chicago Latino experience look like to you?

MR: Okay, it's not strange to know that the ones that are very well known are the Chicanos of the West coast. Maybe it's because there's more chicanos over there maybe because they've been longer, maybe because that's what the Chicano movement studied. Chicago artists copied everything from them. Everything. Even the infantile doctrine of Chicanismo and Aztlan. They borrow some of the writings of Vasconcelos, and twisted it around a little. But there's really no deep study of Mexican culture. It's just a facade, ... Aztec trash. And that's negative for the youth because even right now, that's the way they're going. I hate to go to a - I went to this high school, Latino express something, and I see the walls and I see nothing but ugly, fucking aztec murals. I go, 'what the hell is this,' and of course they were done by Aurelio Diaz. Aurelio Diaz is a young man that came from Michoacan in the late 70s and that guy had so much energy, he went around painting pyramids and eagles all over the fucking neighborhood. Nobody could stop him. And what made me sick was, he had an audience, everybody! And I said, 'oh my god, this guy is going to turn us all into Aztecs and dancing with their feathers.' So I went to this high school not long ago, and there it is, the students are graduating right in front of his stupid mural and I go, 'oh my god wake up and change!'

JR: Are they recent murals?

MR: No, they're from the past, he has followers. It's maybe because I failed - no not that I failed, I wasn't interested in creating some kind of center, a cultural, center, where everybody could be part of - because that's what we need, that's what we always needed in the neighborhood, a cultural center. Not a museum, with *fine arts*, we needed a cultural center where we can grow all together. What happened after 30 years, what grew was a Mexican museum. What didn't grow was the entire neighborhood.

JR: One thing that we've read and heard from a lot of people about murals is that they're a communal experience; they're a communal art form. I think you're the first person we've talked to that says 'no, a mural is the vision of an artist.' Why and how have you resisted this communal nature of murals? Can you tell us more about it?

MR: I think that, like I said, because we lack - instead of building a museum we could have had a community cultural center where all decisions would be made by the artists and the people. Instead what we have is everybody that got involved with cultural issues or murals were people that not even artists or were not cultural workers or anything, it was just opportunistic people that wanted to make some money. So they make the decisions. The artist in Pilsen is the most

devalued person, and I am talking about the truth, okay. There has never been any art market in the neighborhood, not only because people are poor, it's that we become so isolated that we only exist within the communal neighborhood. The galleries are the worst. Another thing that is very important: you would not hear the word 'modern' or 'contemporary' in the whole neighborhood. It doesn't exist. And it's promoted by the Mexican museum. So we have a problem. We're always going to be this *fiesta people*, singing about pinatas and the day of the dead. No. For the people of course, because they can go out on the streets and have fun, but for an artist, an artist is supposed to be a thinker, for crying out loud.

JR: It sounds like you're arguing for seriousness to the murals, that you think is lacking. Is that a fair -

MR: I'll say it. The problem today is this: not everything you see out there is a mural. It's a mixture of all kinds of things. And it has come to the point where it's all control and it's all censor and it's all fun. And, the fact that today's murals are not for today's neighborhood, because Chicago is going towards being another New York, everybody is being pushed out, it's a fact. It's happening everyday. Even me, I am about to move out of Pilsen after 50 years, and I am not going to make it public, I am just going to have to look for another place.

JR: That's totally shocking, you've been in Pilsen for such a long time

MR: Yeah, and do you think that anybody cares? No. I am an artist, I mean I've been here all my life. I have given my 20s and 30s to the neighborhood. Nobody cares. I am not a good person. I am just - you're probably talking to the only artist that has taken art to the level of someone who thinks, a thinker. There is a difference between an artist and a painter. I just told you in the museum of Contemporary Art, they say that Marcos Raya is the Chicago artist who got mistaken for a muralist. And so much so that lately I've been trying to say that I am not from Pilsen, and I wasn't born in Pilsen, I am from Mexico. But with that, maybe I am inventing this in my mind, but that's why I want to write a book, I am against all branding, 'well here is a Pilsen artist,' no I am not a Pilsen artist. I am disappointed. I am thoroughly disappointed of the whole experience. Because why? Show me something of the history of Mexican art in Pilsen that speaks about the experience of being a Mexican in Chicago. Not in the neighborhood, in Chicago. Why the ended up in this little town, because that's what it looks like, like a little town from [a place in Michoacan] with images of the Virgenes of Guadalupe on every corner of the neighborhood, knowing very well that the Virgen of Guadalupe don't even exist and it was fabricated in space to steal the body and souls of the Mexicans, and everybody knows it. I have never seen a Mexican painter from Mexico paint a Virgen de Guadalupe. At least not a Mexican muralist. Why can't they borrow ideas from the Mexican muralists, who took muralism to the highest limits. There is no way you can be the Mexicans. And most of them ended up abstract. You can start something and go into something else. But not in Pilsen. Pilsen became infantile.

JR: Do you think you could coexist with the newer generation of artists that are doing a lot of crowd pleasing stuff?

MR: No. I am too old for - although, a young woman just wrote a book, and this is what we lack. She went to school in France, she is from Mexico. I met her here, and I met her in France, and she's got a degree she's got a doctor's now. She just wrote a book. And she included me, in that book, and she mentions - I should've brought it with me, I just got it yesterday - she mentions that one time I was involved - that I am the only artist who dealt with social realism at one time, but now I am fixing it with the post human, you can see it in some of my paintings. So she wrote this whole essay about how I am mixing social realism with technology. And it's really interesting, the words that she uses. This is when we really get serious about being academic. What we lack in the neighborhood is some serious writers or critics, we have nothing of it, so everything you see is just pure children tales.

JR; You said a few minutes ago that everything that goes onto the walls of Pilsen right now is controlled, it's not someone just finding a wall and just painting. Who is in charge, who is controlling?

MR: Globalization. The alderman. The city of Chicago. When Rahm went up there and say 'I am going to put some millions of dollars and I give them to the poor people so I can paint the murals,' I say, no thanks, I don't need no stinking murals, what we need is our neighborhood back. I say, you sound like Ronald Reagan when he gave cheese to the poor. That's what he sounds like. And when you talk about culture coming from the city, you sound more like 'alright, so we have Michael Jordan, the best basketball player in the world, okay we are going to build some park so you guys can all go and play basketball, and become Jordan one day.' It's married to, it's totally infantile. **It takes away the fact that murals should be radical.**

JR: Murals should be radical, that seems like a recurring theme. You don't think that corporate sponsored, or government sponsored, art, can fulfill this mission that you're talking about, of education, of doing the cultural work that you're advocating for. I am truly trying to understand if there can be new art going up on the wall that is sponsored but that's still fulfilled -

MR: Let me give you an example of how certain things are. Lately, you've been seeing in the news, that for the first time, the city is going to take care of the murals and they are going to make a ... so nobody can erase it. They're putting as an example a guy who painted bubble art, bubble art, you can see it anywhere in the world, it all looks the same. So my question is, since when it became art? Second, why don't they create some kind of a group of people who can go then and detect what is garbage and what is not. Because not everything that shines is gold. Not everybody that gets a commission to paint a mural is an artist. People do it because of the money they give them. It's easy to say that the nice work, the nice murals, the nice imagery, you'll find them downtown or in the north side. And in the poor neighborhoods you'll see garbage. So, they did include Casa Aztlan, it has one of the walls that should be preserved. Why? That building is a fucking hotel. No Mexicans will go in there, ever. So with the years that are coming, what you see in Pilsen is just the beginning of what is going to happen to the neighborhood. And you know very well what is going to happen. Casa Aztlan will be an eyesore

to all the surroundings and is going to have to disappear. Because, again, what does Quetzalcoatl have to do with me being a Mexican living in Chicago? Absolutely nothing! When we're in front of casa Aztlan, and the TV was there, I was standing next to Hector Duarte. And they ask us a question; 'so what do you think Marcos?' i said, 'I think we should leave this wall alone, we'll get another one and paint something else.' And then Hector, I thought he was going to be on my side, he goes 'oh no, can you imagine? That would be like erasing the pyramids!' 'Excuse me? The pyramids are in Mexico, we're in Chicago. We're like 2 minutes from downtown.' Do you know how it's going to look 10 years from now, when the whole neighborhood changes, they want to say your pyramids here, the middle of the neighborhood is going to be upscale and all white.

JR: Tell me more about protecting murals, this is something that we've thought a lot about, and we don't have answers, what level of protections should murals have, in Pilsen, or anywhere else?

MR: I just told you, it's a lot of people who are involved with these issues, they're not even artists. They don't have a clue of what it is to be an artist. Not a clue of culture in general. What I say was, where this thing is going, it's very easy to see. A lot of the people that I met, some people that I met that are doing murals aren't muralists, they just want to get paid. However, if you look at what happened in New York, where these three guys, they painted something on this three story building, and it looks like graffiti, but they call it art. So people just go with it, 'oh yeah that's art.' So what happened? They got 9 million dollars from the owner. They demanded him, and they got 9 million dollars. And it's not art! Graffiti is a movement that came out of some of the poorest neighborhoods in New York and LA. And they've been around since the 70s, and they're not supposed to last, why protect them?! It's street art, it's meant to disappear. Murals, on the other hand, Mexican murals, they're indoors. 99 percent of the murals in Mexico are indoors. 99% of the murals in Chicago are outside. What, you're going to create a funny museum of murals in the city of Chicago? Absolutely, no, nothing that unites them except that everybody wants to be famous or - that's the only reason why they ever painted Casa Aztlan. You got all these guys - because Patlan didn't touch that wall, he made other guys paint it for him, which is what he's been doing all his life. He just stood back and got the money and left. That's what is making people create murals.

JR: I am going to ask you a couple more questions, first one, following up on that. What role did you play in the original Casa Aztlan plan or painting?

MR: When I arrived, the brown berets were still there but they didn't last, they disappeared, like I said, including Ray Patlan. Then we got a new director, and it was a group of volunteers. I stayed in the casa Aztlan for 12 years because I volunteered, a lot of years. Most of my twenties and my thirties. But then again, not everything was well, because that's exactly what I needed; I needed a space where I didn't have to pay rent, so I was an artist in residence. And that's when I managed, to maintain my ambition. One thing I did not do is to join the Chicano movement, and it was symbolism. I was never interested in that. I wanted to introduce some more radical

approach to politics and that's how I got introduced to Che Guevara. And there's a picture of when I met Che Guevara's sister, Celia Guevara. And the wall they give us for Casa Aztlan was in the beginning of the 1980s, when most of the volunteers were students from University of Chicago, it's where - [end of video]

[Part 6, 9317]

MR: ... And that's when they created - they were part of the movement where that united blacks and help Herold Washington become the mayor.

JR: Kind of interracial coalitional movement?

MR: Yeah. And right next to him was Chuy Garcia, who went on and took his place. Those were his golden years, for me, because I was treated very nice. And during the other administrations it was a mess, nobody knew what they were doing. One day we went to a retreat, to come up with an idea of what we were going to do with Aztlan. We were there and I say, well why don't we turn it into a cultural center? The needs are here, the money is here, and the enthusiasm and the artists are here. And of course, because I am a volunteer, instead of telling you how great it is to have you around, you don't exist. It's like in a capitalist society, where they tell you the poor don't exist. That's how I find myself in the history of murals in Pilsen. **I don't exist.** Because of my perspective of making a radical movement of the murals, and being a little on to the left. On the left is not a communist, on the left is, with communist ideas. So you go back into anything you read about the history Chicanismo in Chicago, it was all written with that idea of finding some kind of new world for the people but I found it a little too easy.

JR: Lots of folks that we have talked to are celebrating the blurring of the lines between graffiti and muralism. And really embracing graffiti's influence, it's primacy in muralism right now. It sounds like you have a strong disagreement with that. Why are you so adamantly anti-graffiti? Maybe that's overstating your position there, but why are you so passionate about the difference in graffiti and muralism?

[Part 7,9318]

MR: Do you think I am doing graffiti?

JR: It looks like graffiti.

MR: Yes, but it's not graffiti. This is what I call freeline. Where you draw a line and from all of that line you can get this image. Salvador Dal called it, schizophrenia, or something that had to do with psychology. Graffiti can go that way, can make you crazy. You can go beyond graffiti. Graffiti has been around since the 70s and much of it hasn't changed. It doesn't mean it won't. Let's think about 10, 20 years from now, what are the kids going to come out with? I think what it is, is because I arrive in the neighborhood it was so bad and not even crazy people would like to

live in Pilsen. They have no idea what happened in the 70s. Nobody wants to talk about it. They all talk about how happy Mexican people are with their tamales and their atoles and - no, no no. Pilsen has a history of violence and greed. Mexicans and the blacks were the only guys in Chicago that destroyed the youth by selling drugs. It didn't happen with other races, not among the Italians, not among the Irish, they're not that stupid. You should've walked the streets of Pilsen in the 70s, kids would kill each other right in the middle of the day. Three, four, every week. Guns everywhere. And one of the reasons why we lost Pilsen is because nobody really set roots in the neighborhood. We like to blame it on the white man, we like to blame it on this and that, but you know, I mean I've seen it all. I am 70 years old, what the hell. I should speak. I never saw the Mexicans the business people, the ones that had money, they had their own planes, I never saw them build anything to last, I never saw them buy entire blocks, so that they can pass it on to their kids, or leave one stone at least. They didn't leave nothing. They all think about going back to Mexico, it's true. So there's really no roots, solid roots, in Pilsen, to claim that any of it was ours. What we had was, it became an eternal, poor, neighborhood, because of the traffic of people coming from Mexico, extremely poor. And it is one of the reasons I say is that Pilsen is the only neighborhood in Chicago where *manana* never came. It's true. My neighborhood ended up looking like one little town, worse than a little town in Mexico.

JR: So what do you make then of gentrification in Pilsen? Do you lament the arrival of big money, big developers? Do you embrace it? What's your take on gentrification?

MR: On a personal level, I'll tell you what. I had a little painting in this Mexican restaurant, very famous, I am not going to say the name. And I left it there, so he could maybe buy it someday, or sell it. He didn't do either. One day I go, and the waitress said, 'Marcos, the owner told you to take your painting with you.' 'what?' 'He found out you're eating somewhere else.' I go okay. I grab my painting, I don't say nothing, and I walk out. How I ended up, in this bar, it's called Harbee's bar, is by things that happened to me, it's like magic. I don't know the guy, I say my name so and so, I just open the bar, it belonged to my uncle, it has been here since the 1800s, one of the oldest in Chicago, Harbee's bar. And I show him my [?] says 'how much,' and I sold the painting. So that was the beginning of a nice relationship. That man is white, I don't care, he's educated. Not only that, he is a real collector. And I didn't know that he's a collector. I said, look I have an opening for you, and bringing the people. But, I don't want to come and bring my paintings and hang them and don't buy nothing. You are going to have to buy stuff from me. He goes, yeah. To make it sure, up until now, he's still buying. When you walk into that bar, it looks like my private museum. I sold him a painting long ago for 60,000 dollars. It's just, the more I sell, the more I think, that's nothing. My work should go up to 300,000 dollars. And you work, you got my son play music for us, because he's a musician, it was crowded, and today it's *the* bar. So, to all those kids that are protesting about this and that, obviously they would say say a little something like, I sold out. One thing that they don't understand and they don't want to know is, of the 50 years that I've been in Pilsen, I have never ever sold a painting to one single Mexican. Why? Because I don't do taco art. That simple. Should I go down to their level of understanding, of what culture is? No, I shouldn't. I'd rather become something else or sell paletas or something. Another example. Some guy introduced me to this guy who is about to

open a restaurant, that guy has money, and he told me 'these guys are from Jalisco, you know, watch out,' but they had money. And I say, well, I am going to go, maybe they change, maybe this is a different generation. I went into his restaurant, and it looks almost as big as a McDonalds, so he said 'you got two walls over here, and you got two walls over there.' and I say, what do you think what I do. He goes 'we should show the Mexican culture, we are so proud of it.' and I say, okay what are you thinking? 'Well, how about a pyramid over there, and some aztecs here,' 'oh my god.'"

JR: Wrong answer!

MR: But listen to this, and this is how they had been all these years. I say, I was thinking of someone else. I say, I'll give it to someone else. They don't care what they paint, as long as they get paid, the taco artists. I go, so how much are you thinking of, what is your budget. He goes, budget? What do you mean? I thought you would bring here your stuff to show it to the people. Free! And they always be like that, they think it's free! Somebody went around, not charging, for all these years, so they think it's free. Any stuff that you see hanging in any cafe, in any restaurant in Pilsen, it's given. They didn't buy them. Nobody likes to buy art. No matter if you are poor or rich, they don't buy art. So, I went all disgusted. A couple of weeks ago I was looking for a social security office, and I ended up right next to the restaurant, and I went in, I should've taken a picture. Oh my god, ugly fucking shit, man. Fucking ugly! Aztecs, with baseball players, the cubs, just disgusting stuff. How low can we get? Why? Who do you protest to? Why are they wearing around that way? I keep asking myself that question.

JR: That's a big question. I will ask you another big one. How would you get people out of that mentality, of looking for the taco art, whether it's artists, business owners, tourists, anyone? How do we get people more serious about what they want to see in Pilsen?

MR: I suppose we are going to have to start revising anything that comes out in the media, which is impossible, because the media loves that shit. You know, to give the people what they want. And of course the thing they want is garbage. When you walk into any store like the one by the corner of my house, or any other store, Mexican store, you will see the same thing. It's like, what the fuck is this? They only either watching a soap opera, or soccer. All day! What does that tell you? It's been around for a long time, it's what keeps people ignorant. The images of Virgen de Guadalupe, the pseudo-renditious things, the day of the dead, it's all part this, i don't know what I call it, I am disgusted with it.

JR: My last set of questions would be about advice for us, as researchers. We're interested in Pilsen, we're interested in Public art in Pilsen. What should we be looking at, what advice do you have for us as researchers?

MR: I personally, if they would ask me to go into the neighborhood and do a drive by and look at all the murals, what would I do if I had a job to either paint new ones or erase them? I would probably erase 50 to 60 percent of the murals in pilsen and start all over again, because it got

out of hand, it became - there is no reason for them to exist, especially now. There is a building on 16th street, and it has the same history as Casa Aztlan, which is this. The local activists, the guy is the alderman now, he was demanding for 80 percent of affordable housing, inside Casa Aztlan, which is totally absurd, the owner says, 'I might as well give it to you, don't you think?' And of course, they repaint the mural. So they did get the money to repaint the mural, but they did not get, not once, nothing in regards to affordable housing. So the guy came from San Francisco, he got his money, and closed case. He left us, to me one of the worst murals in Chicago. Now, there is another house on 16th and carpenter, it has written little Aztec designs. When they revealed that building, beautiful big building, they promised affordable housing. A mural, blabla. So, you go and stand in front of the building, and there is no Mexicans coming out of the building, it's all white people. That is not affordable housing. But they have a mural by a local artist. Big, big copy of a fucking Aztec calendar. If I was a tenant of that building, I would protest, and would say 'wait, I have to deal with this, it doesn't have to do with me!' and they have the right. One other problem with Mexicans is we don't put ourselves in the shoes of the other person.

JR: What does that mean?

MR: Meaning, we don't see ourselves doing wrong, that everything we do is for Mexico. But no, there is a lot of things that don't make any sense. For instance, let's say, within my little town, and out of the blue this 1000 gringos move into my town. And they build their own museum. But they only want gringos to show up in my town. That's a position of the Mexican museum right now. He only trusts Mexicans. And he refused to show anyone else, or he does not want anything to do with contemporary or modern art. And that stops people from growing. Stops Mexicans from competing with everybody else. And it shows, last year how most of the city of Chicago got a good exhibit of what they've been doing, but not us. Our local artists are bummed. My compadre, who is one of the best, it's why I made him my compadre because I thought he was going to be the king of muralists, poor guy doesn't even have a bed to sleep in. The news and the media always talk about these imaginary murals in Pilsen, and the mural isn't there, and we don't get it, and muralism is bad. Muralism, less pay in the neighborhood. And i see this go on all my life. And you ask me that question, how did i survive? And when we talk about this, why do I sound upset, it's because it's upsetting. Nobody is writing the history that I know. It's all about imaginary fiestas and fiesta people. The true identity of Mexicans who live in Chicago, for instance, like the history of my mom who worked in a factory all her life, or the that that she got deported, those histories are not there. And to top it up, it's all copied by pseudo -

[Patlan gets up to show taco art]

MR: This is my manifesto of anti-taco art.

JR: How is this a manifesto against taco-art? It's using those tropes and -

MR: This is the repetitious type of things that you see in Pilsen for the last 50 years, without any chance of changing. And taking those into the 21st century. The question again, is this. Does this show the experience of being a Mexican in Chicago? Do we glorify Chicago as a town? Do we create inside Chicago because of its racist policies? No. None of it. Do you get my point?

JR: I get your point, definitely. I just want to ask you a last question, and thank you again for your time and honest opinions. What comes next for you?

MR: I am having an exhibit at this new gallery at the north side and its supposed to be political. I did this one for that, I got some other political pieces. ... some installations. I spoke to Wesley Kimler, who is probably the most famous and prominent artist in Chicago right now, I went to his studio, he has a giant studio, he invited me to show with him. And it's an honor to be with a god like him.

JR: Where will that show be?

MR: in his space. And it's funny because where he has his studio - if you want to talk about the gallery district, it doesn't exist right now, they keep moving. Some of the big names just moved next to his studio.

[Part 8, 9319]

MR: I know, like artists attract. Some artists attract gentrification, or galleries and stuff. They moved it to his street. So I say, yeah, let's have a show. So, this is one of the things that we don't discuss, or nobody discusses, how Pilsen artists, if you want to call them like that, like you call Pilsen artists like we are, some kind of collective group, we have never been ever organized, like everybody just do their thing. I don't know who to blame. I am sure that maybe the fact that the Mexican vision was never ever really involved with murals, never, let alone the history of art in Pilsen. Then I want to do it now, which is a little too late. So we are all divided. We don't know each other, and nobody knows nothing, and everything that has to do with culture or money or anything ends up in the Mexican museum, so we ended up like orphans. And one time, there was independent workshops, independent studio's, independent entities that disappear a long time ago. All we have is, like I said, all we have is the Mexican museum.

JR: We have found it extremely difficult to find archival information about muralism.

MR: There isn't any!

JR: We went to the museum first, and they had nothing for us, to my astonishment. And then it's helpful to hear you say that there isn't any, because I thought 'wait I am a scholar, I should be able to find this stuff!' but I am just not finding it

MR: I think that one of the problems with the neighborhood, or the fact that the Mexicans never really hire someone with a PhD or someone who is a true scholar, true... what happened in Pilsen, there is no books, there is no nothing. There is the books that I printed, and I painted it with my own money.

JR: What we're doing is building a digital archive that would put everything we can find related to Pilsen or muralism in particular, and make it available to the public, so that a highschool kid writing a paper, or a serious phd student, you can find some sourcing.

MR: You know, I had some murals in Casa Aztlan, I don't know if you ever found them

JR: yeah, yeah. And that leads to a question about whether or not you have materials that you would allow a scholar like me, our team, to scan and/or photograph for our archive. Not today, but we'd love to come back and look, if you'll let me.

MR: Sure, I would be glad to see that.

[MVI\_9319.MOV - 8 second long clip, unknown where this goes in the interview]

MR: But the Chicano movement, and all the Chicano stuff, it's all based on aztecs.