

Marcos Raya Interview

Chicago, April 27, 2019

[Parte 1, 9312]

JR: Muchas gracias por su tiempo, Sr. Marcos Raya. Vamos a comenzar con unas preguntas generales; de su origen, su crianza, de donde viene. ¿Nos puedes decir/contar un poco de dónde vienes?

Marcos Raya: Nací en Irapuato, que está casi en el centro de México, el país. Era un pueblo bellissimo. Tenemos tierra muy fértil, vendemos nuestras frutas y otras cosas, hay un montón de negocios entre los campesinos. Así que tuve una infancia mágica. Conocí a Chavez Morado, un muralista Mexicano, cuando estaba trabajando en un proyecto. Nunca me olvidaré de cuando lo vi. Tenía 10 años, así que es fácil decir que mi primera impresión del arte fueron los murales. Y me gustaba que Chavez Morado era como un tipo de sacerdote, él era el tipo de hombre que se involucraba con la gente y pintaba sobre su historia. Era político. Me gustaba esto. Ese fue mi comienzo/origen.

JR: ¿Cómo conoce a un artista de clase mundial un niño de un pueblo tan pequeño?

MR: Nos llevó la maestra. Llevó a toda la escuela. Desde Irapuato a Guanajuato, Guanajuato es un estado y es un pueblo muy histórico, ahí nació Diego Rivera. También dicen que nació David Alfaro Siqueiros en Irapuato, yo conocía a la familia Siqueiros. Y esta señora me dijo, 'ellos no quieren que otra gente sepa algo de la familia, excepto que él nació en Irapuato,' donde yo nací. Irapuato está ubicado en lo que llaman el "cinturón bíblico," son extremadamente pseudo-religiosos. Y Guanajuato es donde nació el partido político de la ultraderecha -- el PAN. Esas personas son responsables de poner a México en tan mala situación. Por 80 años México ha sido pobre, a la fuerza. Y recuerdo que cuando era pequeño, cuando veía las noticias, me sentía muy feliz cuando veía algo relacionado a los estudiantes de la universidad o que en México habían protestado contra la corrupción del gobierno. Siempre estaba feliz de ver eso, que había resistencia.

JR: Leí que tu madre había nacido en Illinois, no tengo una explicación para eso. Tus abuelos eran -

MR: Mi abuelo llegó a Chicago en el año 1900, lo que significa que hemos estado aquí hace bastante tiempo. Mi madre nació aquí, trabajaba en una fábrica. La deportaron en los treinta cuando deportaron a un millón de mexicanos, ella fue uno de ellos.

JR: Ese es un esfuerzo masivo de repatriación, un momento infame en la historia mexicoamericana.

MR: Ella llegó a México cuando tenía ocho años. Y ella nos contaba lo pobre que eran, y era horrible. Mi padre nunca quiso venir aquí, mi padre también era un artista y músico. Se ganaba la vida como músico pero hizo algunas cosas realmente hermosas. Yo solía ayudarlo, él trabajaba con madera y hacía objetos tridimensionales, y solía hacer estos barcos, que se parecían a los que usaron los españoles cuando llegaron, y era tan mágico porque él hacía todos los detalles. Y después mi madre regresó a Chicago cuando tenía 2 años. Esto es importante porque significa que crecí sin una madre. Podría haber sido peor, pero vivía con mi tía, mi padre y mi tío. Yo era rebelde, no era un chico malo, solo rebelde, porque no tenía a alguien que me de dirección. Así que cuando tenía 15 años, tomé mi primer trago, que es típico en México, cuando cumplés 15 se supone que debes ser un hombre y se supone que bebes, especialmente en los años 50. Esos eran los años dorados de la cultura mexicana. El alcohol era el rey. En las películas y en las canciones, en todas partes, borrachos, y ahora lo veo y pienso, 'wow, si en verdad lo ves, pienso que el alcohol mata a más mexicanos que dos revoluciones combinadas.'

JR: Hablaste mucho del alcoholismo en la grabación. ¿Usted cree que esto empezó cuando tenía 15?

MR: Ah, si, y sólo menciono como los mexicanos nacionalizaron eso, y también nacionalizaron el hecho que se supone que debes beber, en las películas y lo demás. Y eres víctima de las circunstancias. Mi padre bebía. Era músico y crecí en una calle pequeña donde solía estar el distrito rojo, y vi a los personajes que solían vivir allí, era como una película de Fellini, lo recuerdo. Boxeo con las sombras, músicos ciegos, prostitutas, todas cosas que vi cuando era un niño pequeño. Pero luego mi madre me mandó un poco de dinero a la casa de mi tío en Ciudad de México. Mi tío nació en St. Louis, era un tipo atractivo, y se convirtió en capitán de Aeroméxico porque estuvo en la guerra de Corea. Tomó una buena decisión de venir a México porque necesitaban pilotos y se convirtió en capitán. Él vivía en una parte que parecía casi como que fuera los Estados Unidos; era una comunidad cerrada, donde vivían todos los políticos ricos. Pedro [algo], me acuerdo. Me quedé ahí por tres meses mientras esperaba mis papeles. En ese entonces, la división entre las provincias y Ciudad de México era grande, por eso era que los Chilangos pensaban que eran grandes/poderosos, pero yo no porque la globalización conectó a todos. Pero en ese entonces así se pensaba. Fue bueno para mí porque fue un control cultural, desde mi pequeño pueblo hasta la Ciudad de México, y de Ciudad de México a Chicago.

JR: ¿Tenías quince, o dieciséis?

MR: Dieciséis

JR: ¿Tu estadía en Ciudad de México fue parte de tu educación sobre el arte?

MR: No, pero si estaba haciendo algunos bocetos y haciendo cosas en la casa de mi tío mientras estaba ahí. Me vino automáticamente. Hice una pequeña cosa, como Rodin, escultura. Y estaba recogiendo libros aquí y allá. Y obviamente fui a ver los murales de los mexicanos, y me abofetearon y me decían 'despiértate' y 'wow'. Entonces, a partir de ahí, llegué a Chicago. Mi madre vivía en Taylor Street, un vecindario italiano. Cuando llegué ahí, las universidades eran un gran terreno baldío. Era un gran terreno vacío. Era parte de la renovación de Chicago, y la mayoría de los inmigrantes se mudaron, la mayoría de los mexicanos, solo quedaban dos familias en la calle Taylor. Mi madre vivió ahí hasta su muerte. Nunca vi a mi madre caminando por Pilsen, lo odiaba. Así que recuerdo que cuando llegue un domingo, le dije a mi madre que la calle Taylor era bastante asquerosa. Le dije, 'esto es feo, quiero volver a México.' Y ella dijo, 'No, no lo vas a hacer, tú vas a conseguir un trabajo y vas a ir a la escuela.' Yo dije '¿cuando?' 'Mañana,' '¿Que?' Así que ella me consiguió un trabajito que odiaba, pero era un buen comienzo porque estaba empezando a leer libros y a estudiar.

JR: ¿Puedo hacer unas preguntas sobre Taylor Street? Hemos leído mucho sobre esa historia, de los mexicanos, italianos y otros grupos inmigrantes, grupos étnicos, que vivían en esa área que se convirtió en UIC, y su desplazamiento. Así es como Pilsen llega a ser muy mexicano alrededor de 1960, eso creo. Usted era parte de eso, y fue testigo de ese desplazamiento?

MR: Si, me estaba juntando con una pequeña camarilla, los Taylor Barracudas, y como amigos nos juntábamos con nuestras chicas y cosas así. Es fácil decir que como un grupo pequeño no pudimos encajar con el resto de Taylor Street. No se si era racismo o si todos no podían trabajar juntos. Es como ahora, muy dividido y muy segregado. Pero tambien hay otra razon porque decidí dejar Taylor Street por Pilsen: Todo por mi cuenta. Salí de la casa de mi madre cuando tenía diecisiete años, entre diecisiete y dieciocho años.

JR: Así que alrededor de los 17/18 te mudaste a Pilsen.

MR: No, me mudé a Old Town. Y llegue en el momento justo, al comienzo de los años 60, el verano del amor. Y vi un gran cambio viviendo en un barrio de clase trabajadora, con los problemas de la clase trabajadora, en una sociedad que estaba cambiando. Los años 60 fueron realmente emocionantes para mi.

JR: ¿Cómo era Old Town? Estaba lleno de hippies, lleno de -

MR: Era como Greenwich Village, o lo que sea que estaba pasando en San Francisco. Era el centro de la contracultura. Ví grupos que después se volvieron famosos, como los Grateful Dead o los Jefferson Airplane, y las sentadas, y las sentadas que advertían sobre Vietnam. Era algo nuevo para mí. No hubiera tenido el conocimiento de muchas cosas si me hubiera quedado en Pilsen. Pienso que si me hubiera quedado en Pisen, me hubiera convertido en otro nacionalista mexicano.

JR: ¿Cómo cambiaste, cuando te encontraste a la contracultura?

MR: Me quedé en Old Town por alrededor de 3 meses, porque me estaban preparando para ir a una escuela privada en Lenox, Massachusetts, con una beca completa de la Universidad de Illinois. Era parte de lo que llamaban "la guerra en la pobreza." Mostraban a niños de la clase trabajadora como yo, que tenían potencial. Mi profesor de arte vio potencial en mí y fue él quien me consiguió la beca. Creo que hubiera sido mucho mejor que me mandaran al Art Institute (Instituto de Arte) pero me mandaron a un pueblo pequeño llamado Lenox. Y terminé en esa escuela, que era una escuela de élite, y habían como 100 niños y 100 niñas. Vi a personas como Thelonious Monk Jr., el hermano de The Mama 's and the Papas, Stephen Scull, que fue el primero en comprarle algo a Andy Warhol. Eran niños ricos. Y fue algo cultural para mi, como era un niño de la clase trabajadora. Así que pasé casi todo el tiempo en el estudio y la profesora/el profesor solía llevarnos a Nueva York, por lo menos una vez al mes. Un show que vi que cambió mi visión (o mi posición) como estudiante fue cuando fui al MoMa, donde fuimos a ver un show de surrealismo internacional. Y fue justo a tiempo porque en ese instante, los jóvenes estaban siendo rebeldes y estaban experimentando con algunas cosas realmente fuertes, como hachís y todo tipos de cosas y - debo decir que también las tomé un par de veces, solo porque quería, como dicen, expandir mi [mente] - y funcionó. Abriendo los callejones de tu mente, jamás lo podrías experimentar -

JR: ¿Que, como ácido o -?

MR: Ácido, u hongos. Pero solo una o dos veces, y con un cuaderno de bocetos. Todavía tengo los bocetos. Debo decir que mucha gente no menciona que necesitan su ayuda pero yo sí, porque cuando alguien dice 'no confíes en un hombre que no bebe,' yo digo, no confíes en un artista que no bebe y que no haya experimentado con algún tipo de drogas.

JR: En este instante estás en los últimos años de la adolescencia, estás en Lenox.

MR: Tengo 18, 19 años.

JR: 19, yendo a Nueva York, expandiendo tus horizontes. Y ese show de surrealismo internacional en el MoMa, ¿cómo cambia lo que piensas sobre el arte, o lo que el arte podría hacer?

MR: Por el hecho de que mi primera impresión hasta ese momento eran los murales, llegue a Chicago con eso en mente, pero eso cambió cuando vi una imagen, no más grande que los murales. De hecho, en una de mis clases, estaba mirando un libro sobre murales y al profesor no le gustó, no le gustó que yo quería ir por ese camino. Y ahora lo entiendo, pero en ese entonces era otro tiempo. No había mexicanos en la escuela, no teníamos estudios sobre los Chicanos, no teníamos nada por ahí. El único niño que quiso ser mi amigo era un tipo de Venezuela. Actuaba y pensaba más como Gringo que un Gringo. Entonces le dije, 'no puedes ser mi amigo.' Creo que él venía de una familia rica petrolera venezolana.

JR: Siendo un niño becado, debes haber sido una super minoría. ¿Crees que ese estatus como minoría formó tu eventual visión artística de algún modo?

MR: Si vuelvo a ese entonces, era cuando las personas de raza negra ya se estaban rebelando. Era alrededor del tiempo que mataron a Malcom X y después a Luther King. Para algunas minorías, siento que estamos en la mitad de esta tensión entre blancos y negros. Y yo me decía, 'bueno soy moreno,' pero me incliné hacia las cosas que estaban pasando, como la contracultura. Me gustaba esa música, me gustaba el Jazz, me gustaba el blues. Sin embargo, llegué a la conclusión en ese entonces, no sé si todavía lo pienso, pero me dije que el poder negro y el poder blanco eran los dos extremos y que nos dejaron justo en el medio. Y uno lo podía ver, en algunas películas de Hollywood, donde los blancos y negros eran los que estaban dando la vuelta al mundo 'pateando traseros' y los villanos que tenían que morir eran mexicanos o árabes y después los negros, y al final los blancos no morían. Eso es Hollywood. Estaba en esta cultura que trataba con la historia del arte y el surrealismo me ayudó a comprender, especialmente Marcel Duchamp, que estaba vivo. Debería haber ido a buscarlo, pero alguien me dijo 'tal vez es algo bueno que no lo fuiste a ver.' Yo le dije, '¿por qué?' y él dice 'podría haber sido un idiota.'

JR: Te dijeron que no conocieran a tus héroes.

MR: Duchamp me dijo algo que me quedó grabado. Me dijo algo parecido a 'Pare de pintar a los 22 años porque ví que la pintura puede ser algo extremadamente mecánico. El artista sólo puede crear como 5 o 6 obras maestras, el resto son pura repetición.'

[Parte 2, 9313]

MR: Así que en el momento que muere un artista, muere un pintor, no te darías cuenta que en su último show casi todas las pinturas se parecen. Es oferta y demanda. La mayoría de ellas se venden, pero más que eso, como dice Duchamp, necesito un tipo de artista que sea más cerebral, que te empuje a pensar. Y el surrealismo, más que nada, fue un movimiento literario, con bonitos poemas y cosas así. Me involucré en todo eso pero no me dije 'Voy a ser un surrealista,' pero sí me dije una cosa. Me dije, 'si estudias el surrealismo, y si tomo el surrealismo como lo mío, es fácil decir que me llevaría hasta el año 2000 y más allá.' ¿Por qué? Porque es un movimiento que trata con la mente y la mente es el universo. No había manera de no poder alcanzar lo que estaba buscando. Y empecé a hacer collage. Hasta hoy, muchas de mis pinturas empiezan como un collage y después las convierto en pinturas y terminan en instalaciones.

JR: ¿Existe una conexión entre el surrealismo y el muralismo mexicano, como ya lo había visto en su vida en ese momento?

MR: No, el único surrealismo y pseudo surrealismo sería una pintura de Frida Kahlo. La única se llama "Lo que me dió el agua." Hay una pintura que ví que todavía menciono de vez en

cuando, hasta el museo mexicano no sabe quién es, se llama Antonio Ruiz, 'el Corcito.' Él es el único surrealista que yo sepa que me ha influido. Él hacía unas pinturas pequeñas y antes de que las terminara, algún museo importante ya las quería. Hay una o dos piezas en el MoMa, hay una en Alemania. Su trabajo es una mezcla del surrealismo con el realismo social. No se como lo llamarías pero es parte de lo que hago yo.

JR: Hice esa pregunta porque me parece que algunas de las obras de Diego Rivera, Sequiros, Orozco, Frida Kahlo, podrían ser surrealistas. A veces tienen elementos surrealistas, así que no sabía si era una conexión que estabas haciendo, entre todo lo que estaba pasando -

MR: No, no no. Recuerde, el muralismo es un movimiento total que forma parte de - la mayoría de ellos eran comunistas, el único que no era comunista era Orozco, que es uno de mis artistas favoritos porque no tiene documentos. En ese entonces los comunistas mexicanos estaban tan divididos que se mataban antes de llegar al poder. No llegaron al poder hasta los años 80, cuando finalmente se unieron. Y así, realmente, también creo que el surrealismo fue un proyecto inconcluso de la Segunda Guerra mundial, terminaron siendo comunistas. Así que rompieron todo lo que eran. Pero cuando hablamos de ideas, de magia y esas cosas, ahí es donde me encanta el surrealismo. Lo que pasó fue que, en ese entonces, fui reclutado y me rehusaba completamente a ir a Vietnam, por muchas razones, casi como lo mismo que Cassius Clay estaba afirmando, digamos, lo que estaba pensando. Hubiera sido imposible para mí, un niño de Irapuato católico, ir a matar a personas vietnamitas que ni siquiera conocía. ¿Y para quién? No tiene sentido. Así que empaqué todas mis cosas y volví a México y llegué a Ciudad de México en 1968, y para entonces ya habían matado a Che Guevara, y pude ver lo que los marxistas planeaban hacer con el resto del país estableciendo dictaduras, matando siempre a los demócratas verdaderos y estableciendo dictaduras. ¡Hasta hoy en día! Entonces, fue cuando me politicé. Me refiero a la politización de una manera que el artista puede ver o pintar sobre las contradicciones internas del capitalismo.

JR: Cuéntanos de qué te politicizó. ¿Que le abrió los ojos al sistema?

MR: El movimiento estudiantil porque estaba ahí con los estudiantes de Irapuato y estábamos demandando un diálogo público con el presidente de México. Queríamos hablar de la corrupción que nos llevó a los problemas de hoy. Por 80 años el gobierno mexicano ha empobrecido a la gente mexicana y ha convertido a México en una de las experiencias más humillantes para los mexicanos vivan en su propio país. Entonces el gobierno estaba reprimiendo y yo era un joven, y eso me afectó. El trató un día, y volví. Terminé en Taylor Street porque mi madre todavía estaba viviendo ahí, pero me dí cuenta que nada estaba pasando en Taylor Street. Siempre veía a gente mayor viendo por sus ventanas y yo estaba con mis amigos. Tenía 20, 21. Es cuando decidí ir a Pilsen. Algunos estudiantes tenían una organización llamada OLAS, la Organización de Estudiantes Latinoamericanos, me dijeron 'Marcos ven a Pilsen, están pasando varias cosas.' Así que fuí a su oficina, que estaba en la calle 17 con Halsted, y me convertí en su artista residente. Por eso es que digo que la mayoría de mis estudios han sido gratis. Vivía ahí como un fantasma. Nadia sabía que yo vivía ahí. Viví

en ese lugar por dos años con gas, luz, y todo. Era una iglesia abandonada pero era una bonita iglesia abandonada, y me juntaba con los estudiantes e hice mis primeras comisiones. E hice unos trabajos maravillosos. Esto fue antes de que tuviera, lo que yo llamo, cuando alguien te impide hacer de lo que se supone que debes hacer, interrumpido. Era un hombre joven que fue interrumpido. Mientras estaba en ese estudio hice algunas piezas maravillosas que ahora mismo están en el museo mexicano. Miro hacia atrás y veo que fueron solo cosas buenas.

[Part 3, 9314]

JR: ¿Puedo retroceder un poco y hacerte una pregunta sobre tu despertar político que tuviste en México? ¿Cómo afecta tu práctica del arte y cómo se transmite al pincel o el lienzo?

MR: Cuando llegué a Pilsen, estaba haciendo mis propias cosas en los primeros tres años. Algunas de las pinturas que hice eran tan - una de ellas está colgada en el Museo de Bellas Artes en Houston, y solo tenía 20, 21 años. Es una obra de arte. Te lo puedo decir, porque muestra que tiene algo principal, se llama 'The Anguish of Being' (La angustia del ser). Cuando llegué a Pilsen, Pilsen era un vecindario abandonado. Se veía como el set de una película de Orson Welles, llamado 'Touch of Evil' (Toque del mal). Era oscuro, era peligroso, era pobre. Habían como 4 a 5 bares en cada cuadra. Drogas de clase trabajadora. Se veía como Tijuana en los años 50, nunca he ido a Tijuana pero así me lo imaginé. La razón porque quiero escribir un libro es porque quiero decir exactamente lo que pienso. La mayor parte de la economía se basaba en el mercado negro. En los años 70 Pilsen se hizo conocido como uno de los imperios narcotraficantes del mundo y parece que yo soy el único que lo supo. Entonces, ves eso, y tienes aspiraciones de convertirte en activista y artista, si te gusta eso, es como un pulpo, un monstruo, que está destruyendo la sociedad.

JR: ¿Qué se habría traficado a través de Pilsen en los años 70?

MR: Creo que lo vi todo, así que empezaré al comienzo. Vez como cambia tu cuadra o tu pueblo o tu barrio. Lo que vi es que algunas de las pandillas que solían estar en Taylor Street se mudaron a Pilsen. Algunas todavía están por ahí. Pero las que ví en los años 60 eran pandillas que se parecían más a las que salieron de la película West Side Story (Amor sin barreras). No se mataban entre sí, no había mucho por que pelearse. Pero todo cambió cuando Richard Nixon creó la Guerra contra las drogas. Es muy fácil creer que todo eso fue una conspiración, no sólo para los vecinos pobres del ayer pero también para las naciones del mundo de ayer. Así que empecemos en Pilsen cuando empecé a ver a los pandilleros empezaron a portar armas, a luchar por sus territorios y a matarse unos a otros como moscas. Y eran incapaces de organizarse, ni siquiera los brown berets (boinas café), que eran los de la vieja Casa Aztlan, que se suponía eran activistas, no podían detener nada Incluso creo que fueron parte del problema, y por eso menciono el nacionalismo infantil mexicano. **El nacionalismo infantil mexicano** me recuerda todo lo que creó el PRI. El PRIIm que es un partido mecivano, mantuvo a todos los mexicanos durmiendo, agitando sus banderas y sus sombreros y convirtiéndolos en estereotipos con imágenes de la Virgen de Guadalupe, Frida

Kahlo y el Día de los Muertos. Creo que todo eso creó, terminó en lo que es hoy, tan infantil, tan absurdo que me da rabia por lo que pasó el año pasado. El Terra Museum dió millones de dólares a instituciones culturales, incluyendo el Museo Mexicano, y su objetivo era rescatar el arte que se hizo desde el siglo XIX hasta 1975. Y esos eran muralistas. Esta mujer que tenía una muy buena educación fue curadora de una exposición en el South Side con la comunidad negra, y tuvieron una exposición en el Museo Smart de la Universidad de Chicago. Fuí a ver el show, conocía a los chicos, y lo conocí al comienzo del movimiento muralístico. Recuerdo a William Walker, porque el mural que íbamos a ver hoy, el Anti Guerra Mundial, salimos a pintarlo en el barrio de William Walker en el South Side. Estábamos caminando y nos dimos cuenta que no había paredes, los vecindarios ya estaban destruidos y no había paredes para pintar. Me recuerdo muy bien, él decía, 'no quiero que estos liberales blancos me digan qué hacer, no quiero pintar ningún mural de la Guerra Mundial en mi vecindario, tenemos nuestras propias guerras, ¡tenemos prostitución y adicción!' Y yo le dije, ¡tienes razón! Y nos fuimos de ahí. Y los tomé, 'mostremosle un nuevo muro', que es el de la calle 18 y Western. Por eso él puede decir, no vamos hasta allá, está por allá, está en el vecindario, por el amor de Dios. Y por eso lo pintamos ahí. De todos modos, volviendo a la exposición del año pasado, la mujer hizo un trabajo tan estupendo que esa obra terminó en las mejores revistas, en el New York Times, en el Art Forum. Ahora mismo, mientras hablamos, algunos de estos artistas siguen vivos, tienen más o menos mi edad, como 70. Están elogiando 500.000 dólares por su trabajo, hay algunos que superan los cien millones de dólares.

JR: ¿Dijiste el nombre de esa exposición?

MR: Creo que se llama, 'Now is the time' ('Ahora es el momento').

JR: Lo buscaremos. [The time is now! (¡El tiempo es ahora!)]

MR: Un éxito total. Ella revivió el momento, por razones obvias, nunca fue parte de la corriente principal. Un amigo mío, que lo fue a ver, me dijo, '¿Sabes qué? Esos tipos hicieron mucho más que en cualquier lugar en el que estuvieran involucrados,' y luego miró hacia adentro: están felices, yo estoy feliz por ellos, hay libros, hay películas, de todo. Y algunos de los blancos también se saludaban a sí mismos y obtenían reconocimiento. Pero luego, lo siguiente que dije fue, ¿qué nos pasó? Somos tan famosos por nuestros murales, ¿dónde diablos estamos? ¿Qué pasó con el museo mexicano? ¿Qué hicieron con el dinero que recibieron del museo Terra? Bueno, el curador, y voy a mencionar su nombre, muestra esculturas hechas por algún pseudo mexicano del siglo XIX. Se ven horribles, no eran mexicanos, eran esculturas destinadas al show internacional de Chicago.

JR: ¿La Exposición Colombina de 1890?

MR: Si, esa es. Se puede decir que no había cultura mexicana, arte mexicano, en ese momento, no hasta que llegaron los muralistas y se deshicieron de todo lo que tenía que ver con España. Pero para mi se podría decir que fue como una bofetada a la cara porque podrían

haber hecho una investigación académica sobre dónde estuvieron desde 1970 hasta hoy. Era un estilo infantil, como siempre.

JR: Has usado esa frase, infantil, unas cuantas veces. ¿Nos puedes decir a qué te refieres con eso?

MR: Lo que quiero decir es que cuando quieres representar tu identidad, ofreces una chispa fácil. Es tan fácil copiar imágenes de los Aztecas o los Maya, algo que no te dejan hacer hasta en las escuelas primarias de México. Creo que es algo que empezó con los pandilleros que querían mostrar su identidad, entonces usaban algo azteca porque se veían a sí mismos como guerreros. Y decimos 'ah pero no guerreros conscientes,' porque eran muy buenos matándose unos a otros durante todas estas décadas. Algunos se llaman a sí mismos guerreros aztecas, o se llaman muchachos de América del Sur, o Incas, Incas Supremos. Y eso es lo que dice. Pero en alguien como Ray Patlan, que fue el tipo que pintó Casa Aztlán por primera vez, un tipo que se fue a Vietnam, volvió jodido, se le puede ver su nacionalismo infantil. Él no se profundizó en su estudio, como que estudió el muralista mexicano. Solo copió un poco del edificio [?], unas figuras muy feas a la Siqueiros o cuando se pintan las manos saliendo - se las puede ver por todo Estados Unidos. No es un estudio profundo, en arquitectura, o en historia, o en nada de eso, así que en ese entonces se salió con la suya. Sigo pensando que se salió con la suya. Pero él se convirtió en el infante terrible de los sesenta para los liberales. Pero cuando miro hacia atrás, y yo nunca fui... **porque uso la palabra porque eso es lo que es, cosas infantiles. No es político, no está hecho estéticamente, no lo es, no es nada.** Lo que me dice a mí es que eso es lo que nos representa hoy en día. Como cuando te dije que los niños crecen pensando que eso es lo correcto, identificarse con los aztecas y con Frida Kahlo y todo eso. Así que cuando vienes al vecindario y estás buscando algo, vas a cualquier café, y lo que veo en cada café ahora es taco art. Ahora quieres explicar qué es el taco art, pero eso es lo que es el taco art. **Taco art** es el tipo de arte que hace un artista que no pudo entregar y, para que pueda pagar el alquiler, tiene que comercializarse, así que pinta los dictados de los dueños de las taquerías o de restaurantes. Y eso tiene que ver con crear una imagen propia del estereotipo mexicano.

JR: Esas cosas son muy queridas en este momento. Cada vez que venimos a Pilsen, parece que hay más de ese tipo de cosas en las paredes, incluidos los negocios dentro y fuera de las paredes. Es muy carismático, y ences, ¿qué le dirías a alguien que dijera -

MR: ¿A qué te refieres con carismático?

JR: Es carismático porque atrae a la gente, lo que ves en las redes sociales, la gente se toma selfies y esas cosas. ¿Por qué crees que la gente se siente tan atraída a ese tipo de motivos de los que estabas hablando?

MR: Ok, en primer lugar, lo que he experimentado toda mi vida, porque la mayor parte de mi trabajo es casi militante, en un mensaje. No es porque no están interesados, es porque los

medios y las personas que tratan con la cultura en Pilsen no tienen nada que ver con la cultura. Son totalmente ignorantes a lo que es la cultura. Entonces van a la parte más fácil, ver al mexicano durmiendo en sus cactus, es chistoso. Y tienen dificultades para ver algo que yo quería decir, como digamos que quiero pintar algo sobre la invasión estadounidense de Venezuela, lo haría. Que es lo que hice en los 80 cuando pinté a la gente de Centroamérica derribando a Samosa. No quieren lidiar con eso. No están interesados. ¿Por qué? Por el nacionalismo infantil mexicano.

JR: Pero esta es una tensión que hemos rastreado desde los años 70 hasta el presente en nuestra investigación, observar esa tensión entre el impulso de comercializar el muralismo, el arte público y la política. Si pudiera hacer un reclamo editorial por un segundo, parece que está en el lado político y ha podido evitar el comercialismo, ¿Cómo hiciste eso?

MR: Cuando decidí convertirme en artista, ... Llegue a la conclusión que seré un artista y seré un librepensador. Y para poder hacerlo, tendría que atravesar el infierno. Es decir, nunca tuve dinero. Siempre viviendo según mis posibilidades. Nunca me pagaron por lo que pinté en las paredes de Pilsen, nunca recibí algún tipo de reconocimiento ni nada.

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. - [got cut off bc end of video]

[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, the 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 developed 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-renditionous 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 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.

