

kaufmann repetto

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Self-determination

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"I live on occupied land in a State, in a country where the imbalance of power still remains between cultures that have been colonized and the ex-colonizers. A two-hour drive South from my home is the U.S. Mexican border fence that privileges freedom of movement to those with U.S. passports. The lands of California, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas were taken from people whose descendants still experience injustices today. These injustices include: lack of fair housing, impossibility to move freely across borders, denial of citizenship, police brutality, inability to celebrate cultural customs and unsafe working conditions. These are just some of the contemporary abusive results of colonialism.

This project expands a body of work begun in 2007 that documented those activists and movements with a political commitment to fight for the right of migrating people and particularly to end the unjust border policies in the United States. Archival materials, photographs and drawings included in this exhibition come from my participation in several local activist movements, such as the *Fight for \$15* campaign, the *Dream Act* and *Immigrant Justice*. This exhibition specifically focuses on archives from the Chicano Brown Beret movement from 1968 to 1970 juxtaposed with current political posters, fliers and photographs of marches from the last five years in the Los Angeles area.

The exhibition includes a video interview from 2012 with Carlos Montes, one of the founders of the Brown Berets, who has dedicated his life to human rights and the anti-war movement. I interviewed him just after the FBI raided his home where he was arrested and charged with six felonies for a student action that took place around forty years earlier. He tells the compelling trajectory of his activism and the under-told history of the Brown Beret movement.

Montes best described the Brown Berets in *Fight Back News!*: "We were a group of young Chicano revolutionaries from the barrios of the Southwest fighting for the self-determination of our people. We organized in our barrios, published the newspaper *La Causa*, ran a free clinic and fought against police brutality as well as against the U.S. war in Vietnam. We evolved from civic participation and assimilation to revolutionary nationalism. The brown beret was a symbol of the pride in our culture, race and history. It also symbolized our anger and militancy and fight against the long history of injustice against the Chicano people in the U.S., especially the Southwest. We claimed the Southwest as *Aztlan*, the original homeland of the indigenous Aztec ancestors and founders of *Tenochtitlan*, now Mexico City. We were from poor working class families growing up with the racism and police abuse."

At the time of our interview, Carlos Montes gave me access to his archives including photos and newspapers such *La Causa*, *La Raza* and *Inside Eastside* documenting the Brown Berets. These archives are displayed alongside contemporary political graphics and my own photos from local marches and protests composed in a 290 page wall work. This allows the viewer to reflect upon aspects of the last fifty years in this ongoing struggle. Contrasting political strategies between the late '60s and now are made acutely evident in the group of drawings on view, that painstakingly illustrate a collection of graphics from the Brown Beret newspapers alongside a group of photorealist drawings of women at contemporary protest marches. A large hanging sculpture made of barbwire cast in stainless steel, wind chimes and neon poetically confronts the injustices of political borders to freedom of movement and the need for radical hospitality. Ultimately the exhibition is summed up by one of the drawings that enlarges a small newspaper clipping from *La Causa*, published in September 1969, where a Che Guevara quote was handwritten in the margins, "At the risk of seeming ridiculous, to be a true revolutionary one must have great feelings of love."

In my practice, I continue to look at local issues that have global significance. This project archives both militant and nonviolent strategies from some of the voices of various and, at times, contradictory movements that activists have used and continue to use in a fight for self-determination on colonized land."

– Andrea Bowers