

# **JOLLAS INTRODUCTION**

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In the autumn of 2015, the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Office of Latin and Latin American Studies (UNO-OLLAS) organized the first of what aspire to be many exhibitions of art made by and for Latinx audiences. Buttressed by speakers, workshops, and panels, that exhibition laid the groundwork for what would become this issue of *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies* focused on Art of the Latinx Diaspora. Our questions are direct and without presupposition: What is the Art of the Latinx Diaspora at this moment in its history? How does it manifest? What are its concerns and assertions? To what histories does it refer, and from which does it draw inspiration, imagery, and symbolism? Is it even possible to map such art or such a diaspora?<sup>1</sup>

To my great joy, the answers have been rich and richly discussed by the authors and artists who are gathered herein. Latinx is a wildly elusive term, indeed one that has been recently rejected by the Real Academia Española. Though originally constructed to subvert the gendered endings of the Spanish language, I hope to employ this term to seek an even greater and less conclusively defined multiplicity and diversity. X, here, is not a replacement for the limitations of gendering but, instead, an invitation to probe and prod the boundaries of Latinicity and those to whom it may apply or by whom it may be claimed. If we aspire to undo the binarisms of gender, why ought we not work towards the explosion of any such exclusivities and refusals?

This question is anything but rhetorical, and one of our great assets is that it is an inquiry both conceptual and material. As we define Latinx, we also determine those included within such a group. I would assert that inclusion in the Latinx diaspora must be made radically available to all to whom it might apply. I say this self-consciously and self-reflexively. As editor of this journal, I have attempted to include the broadest set of voices available. Our contributors live, work, and have histories with locations as diverse as Nebraska, Colombia, Brazil, and across the borderlands of the United States and Mexico. Their scholarship attends to individuals and materials that range from Spanish colonial maps to United Farm Workers strikes in the last half of the twentieth century to contemporary protests in the streets of Brazil. These are juxtaposed with artistic endeavors that focus on everything from documentation to trafficking, indigenous cosmologies to conceptual iconographies. The diversity is immediate and resonant.

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted to my colleagues at the Office of Latino and Latin American Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, particularly Jonathan Santo and Ramon Guerra, for their expert guidance of this journal, and Cristián Doña-Reveco, Director of UNO-OLLAS. Deepest gratitude is also due to our intrepid designer and layout artist Ana Gavia (also UNO-OLLAS) who molded our raw materials into this final form.

This has also been a labor of self-actualization. Latinx art, though certainly not a new field within the History of Art, is still new to many. Indeed, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, this journal's home, Latinx art has been the catalyst to interdepartmental collaboration, the emergence of artists who were not otherwise visible or represented in their own art scenes, and an ever-expanding body of actions and activities that will explore this landscape for years to come. Beyond this local example, entities as divergent as the scholarly associations US Latinx Art Forum and Latino Art Now!, institutions such as Chicago's National Museum of Mexican Art, Omaha's El Museo Latino, Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies, the proposed Cheech Marin Center at the Riverside Art Museum, and websites like Remezcla continue to keep the dialogue moving and current. Something critically important is happening in real time.

This journal issue is our submission to this broader discourse. It pointedly collects an international group of scholars from diverse fields and methodologies, paired with a grouping of artists that similarly manifest the multiplicity within Latinx culture. This is a deliberate attempt to refuse any boundaries that might divide us, whether literally or figuratively. It is a negation of everything from the siloing of academics into departments separated more by semantics than substance to the absurdist calls for walls at America's southern border.

This is a deliberate statement that, in 2019, Latinx voices are as necessary as ever, particularly amidst the cacophony of fear and xenophobia that fill our airwaves and bandwidths. It is an argument for collaboration and unity across borders and boundaries, an embrace of dissolving these same distinctions that impede both true scholarly interdisciplinarity and the recognition of the brilliance and breadth of those who create and study art of the Latinx diaspora. It is, hopefully, one more step towards a fuller understanding of who, what, and how we are.



Artist: Hugo A. Zamorano

Hugo A. Zamorano is a Los Angeles-born, Omaha-based painter and muralist. His painting career began as a graffiti writer and artist in LA and has continued to explore the intersection of subversive image making and Latinx cultural heritage. A 2015 graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), where he held the Susan Thompson Buffett Scholarship as a first-generation student, Zamorano continues to exhibit and paint murals across the city. He has lectured and participated on panels at local cultural institutions such as the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Film Streams, and the Union for Contemporary Art and was a visiting artist at the Segura Arts Studio at the Notre Dame Center for Arts & Culture. Zamorano also serves as an Artist Mentor in the Joslyn Museum of Art's Kent Bellows Mentoring Program.

Zamorano's contribution to this issue of *JOLLAS* is an extension of the collaboration that began when he was an undergraduate student in the Art & Art History program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. During his undergraduate career, Zamorano was instrumental in the organization of the 2016 Latino/Latin American Artists: Exhibition and Conversations exhibition and lecture series, the events that first brought this author into contact with UNO's Office of Latino/Latin American Studies. When this issue was being organized, Zamorano seemed an instinctive inclusion and, given his work in merging visual languages, he was a perfect match to compose the Frontispiece. Departing from its original hierarchies, Zamorano has nonetheless maintained the iconographic complexities and references of earlier, especially 17<sup>th</sup> century, such works. In this piece, Zamorano fuses his languages of graffiti and painting into a meditation on boundaries, blockades, and the heightened tensions of borders and security in contemporary America. His use of ambiguous, ghostly figures refers to the anonymity and dehumanization faced by migrant and minority populations and reminds us that the intimacy of images and storytelling are among the most impactful ways to revisit these histories and return to these individuals their deserved fullness of identity and rights.