

# Chicano New Media Arte C/S

A Catalogue of the Creative Project  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Art & Art History  
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfilment  
Of the Requirements of the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

By  
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Signature page

# Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfathers, who without them, I would have no idea how to create anything. These men were both makers before being a maker was cool. They made to survive, to save money to provide for their families. They fixed what was broken, because that's what you did in the 50's - there was no money to go out and buy a replacement. My grandfathers have instilled into me the curiosity to create and enjoy learning new skills - and for that I am forever indebted to them.

A special thanks goes out to my wife and family for pushing me and putting up with my crazy ideas. Their unwavering support of my endeavors have allowed me to blossom into the conceptual artist I am today, never once doubting my ideas as foolish or hindering my progress. My boss, Traci Tokunaga, has also been a blessing - she has allowed me to maintain a full time job and go to school, realizing the importance of education.

I'd also like to thank my graduate committee for each providing me their unique set of skills. James Morgan gave me the opportunity to look into his teaching style, a chance to be a TA and showed me how to connect with students on a unique level while explaining this crazy artistic concept of new media. Shannon Wright launched me into my installation practice. Point blank. She single handily taught me how to activate a space beyond the "gaze." It is because of her that I moved beyond my comfort zone and into the realm of installation, realizing the importance of spectator engagement. G. Craig Hobbs, what can I say, A-1 since day-1. Without him, most of my projects would have remained ideas. He provided me a huge guiding and helping hand during my tenure as a graduate student, always with the mind-set that any idea I had was possible "through MAX for Live." I am forever humbled and thankful for having been lucky enough to be around these great professors.

With many thanks,  
Ricardo Cortez

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2	DIGGIN' THE SCENE WITH A GANGSTER LEAN	Sculpture / Digital	2013
3	FUNK'D UP	Sculpture / Digital	2014
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18	FUNK'D UP	Print	2014
19	PALETAS	Print	2015
20	PALETAS	New Media Sculpture	2015
21	PALETAS	New Media Sculpture	2015

***CHICANO NEW MEDIA MANIFESTO***

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***CHICANO NEW MEDIA MANIFESTO***

Chicanos (when I say Chicano, it is the all-inclusive Chicano/a/@) in the arts have been influential for as long as the oligarchy has given them Chicano their proverbial stamp of approval and accepted the Chicano as a fine artist. *Chale!* We've always been influential, regardless of the oligarch's misinformed *basura*, and we don't need no stinking badges! From the greats like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, to Chaz Bojorquez and Estavan Oriol, we have made our mark on the art world, carved a groove in the stone that cannot be erased. We ride on the shoulders of *gigantes*, able to see the past, influence the present and change the *futuro*.

However, one area where I do not see Chicanos as influential is in new media, or at least we are not as celebrated as others. Why is it this way? Why are Chicanos relegated to fixing cars, low riding and making low-brow tattoo art? Why are the stereotypes so ingrained in the persona that we carry? I will not tolerate philosophical conversations about the media mongers' recycling the same content to perpetuate their agendas. It is surprising to find a Chicano in the arts that is not painting. It is surprising to find a Chicano in the arts that is not drawing. It is especially surprising to find a Chicano in the arts that uses technology for more than their lowriders (sarcasm). To place meaning behind art through digital technology is the essence of



Figure 1

new media. To use the digital tools in a way they are not intended, is the essence of new media. What meaning will you bring to the table? What do you have to say that others will care about? You're simply a Chicano, everyone has their assumptions and they know you already, change their minds *vato!* Don't be a basic Chicano, tip-toeing through the technology we have today. Don't be a bystander watching as technology evolves in front of your *ojos*, be a participant, take control from the controllers.

We are more than *dia de los muertos* altars. We are more than a zoot suit and wing tips. We are more than Sunday night oldies. We are more than "Hispanic Heritage Month."

**WE HAVE MORE TO SAY.**

Remediate your oldie collection! Demediate your family history! Hypermediate your *identidad* to the masses! Chicanos in new media have a responsibility to their raza and your intentions should be clear.

***You are the Neo-Aztec. You are the Neo-Pachuco. You are the Neo-Chicano.***

### Thee 10 Truths of the Chicano Media Artist

1. We are to remediate in order to show that we are not the stereotypes of the Chicano shell. Appropriate *THEIR* media of *YOU* and transform it for your purposes.
2. Take into consideration every element of your new media work, it all carries a significance and should be expressed in terms of the Chicano experience. Be intelligent with your choices of material, physical and digital.
3. Structure is key, we come from a lineage of builders - Pyramids to lowriders, as innovators, creators, fabricators. Take pride in what you build.
4. We have a responsibility to shed light on the ways media has skewed our identities.
5. We have an opportunity to right the wrongs of the remediated Chicano soul.
6. We can bridge the gap of Chicano on Chicano violence, for through interaction the immediacy of the experience is attained, and for a moment, our differences can be set aside.
7. In order to engage those unaware of the Chicano experience, new media is the conduit to their attention. Hypermediate your message to them in hopes of understanding.
8. Capture the viewer through the beauty of meaningful Chicano experience.
9. Be an engineer in the spirit of Chicano ingenuity.
10. Use technology for what it is not intended for. Custom culture is running through your veins.

At this moment in time, the Chicano new media artist is an explorer of an ever evolving field. Yes the foundation of new media has been made since the 1920's; Futurists, Dada, Dali, Paik, Cage, Manovich are your spirit guides. We can actualize our potential as artists like never before with the technology at our fingertips, the global village at the flick of a switch, the collective knowledge of all those willing to help an artist. Be persistent with your Chicano artistic visions and carry on the legacy that has been laid down by those before you.

TijuanaRick C/S

“ My work is the remediation of cultural identity, specifically Mexican-American, through interactive new media technology by way of nostalgic aesthetics and sculpture.



***Information  
Technology  
as a basis for  
Cultural  
Semiotic  
Transmission***



**Chicano New Media Truth #7:** In order to engage those unaware of the Chicano experience, new media is the conduit to their attention. Hypermediate your message to them in hopes of understanding.

Part of my practice involves the appropriation of idea, material, content and structure. Each one of these appropriations carries with it a sense of history, and I as the artist can choose which history to activate. As stated in the Chicano New Media Truth #7 (above); as Chicanos we are to use technology as a means of communicating our artistic endeavors. I was first introduced to Claude Shannon's, *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* by James Morgan professor at San Jose State University. Claude Shannon's work emphasizes the possibility of issues arising when communicating a message through a system, and how to overcome these issues is imperative to the delivery of a clear message. Since learning of Shannon's work, I've appropriated and applied this concept to my new media philosophy, in that; cultural realities exist in semiotic "code" understood by those already within the specific culture. Modes of cultural transmission must be deciphered through a system in order for a broader understanding to occur. For those not fully aware of the Chicano experience, I find that I am compelled, as a Chicano new media artist, to synthesize my experiences, messages and meanings. In a way for my audience to engage the work, I must leave them with a new understanding and attempt by all means necessary to pass along the intent as clearly as possible. Shannon writes:

The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point. Frequently the messages have meaning; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. The significant aspect is that the actual message is one selected from a set of possible messages. The system must be designed to operate for each possible selection, not just the one which will actually be chosen since this is unknown at the time of design.<sup>1</sup>

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Claude Shannon, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication," *The Bell System Technical Journal* 27 (October 1948): 1



In order to adequately communicate my message to the viewer, there must be an artistic system in place; in my case an interaction. The system, apparatus, structure, sculpture, aka my artwork, must be able to provide the appropriate engagement in order to, not only, create a presence but also disseminate the message of the work. The structure in my work is just as important as the meaning that I am communicating. It is imperative that the narrative is carried through both the display and the function of the structure. For example, in my show, *DIGGIN' THE SCENE WITH A GANGSTER LEAN*, the underlying meaning of the work dealt with the nostalgic identity of Chicanos, specifically through remastered film and found object. This message was carried through projected video as well as the sculptural assemblage of artifacts on which the projector was placed. Each element was specifically curated for the totality of the piece. Fruit crates provided a solid foundation, calling back to the *campesino* lifestyle that started many a families' journey in California. The 1940's slide projector signifies a nostalgic call back to media as well as a practical means



Figure 2

to communicate an engaging Chicano portrait. The video displayed, via the projector takes clips from popular Chicano films and remediates them through a lens, reminding the viewer of a still functioning technology long gone from the modern household. Each object carries its own significance to the work; it allows the artist and viewer to create their own stories around the object. The sender-receiver cycle becomes complete through the technical processes that I activate within the work.

Speaking in terms of the original intent of my work being understood by the viewer is the issue that arises during the communication process. Will the viewer's observation of the work align with the artist's intention? The answer is explored in my advancement to candidacy (ATC) show, *FUNK'D UP*, by adopting specific cultural symbols and merging them

with interactive technology, we have a system in place to tackle this question. However, as any artist knows, art is left to the interpretation / critique of the audience. There is no technological process that can evaluate the level of understanding or comprehension of the viewer. As an

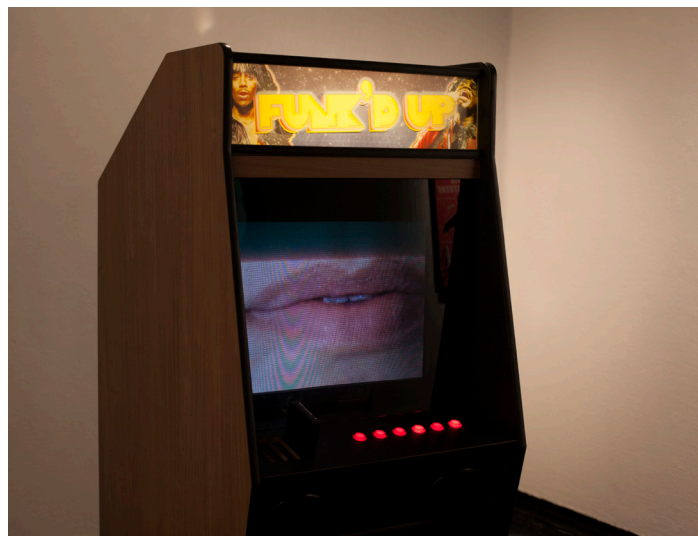


Figure 3

artist, I can try my best to have all the right pieces in place to make the presentation as clear as possible, and yet, the audience may walk away with a completely different notion. It is more of a self-reflective realization that true understanding of the work is at the hands of the viewer - this causes me to strive harder for the distillation of my ideas. It means that broad ideas within my work will not merit a more clear message to the viewer, but through the use of interactivity and a one-to-one connection of viewer-to-art – I can begin to open a dialog to transmit my concept. There is no room for ambiguity or highly abstract concepts within my work. It simply does not

provide a pragmatic means of communication for me, which aligns with Shannon, at all costs I must transmit a clear message via the redundancy of meaning and message; eliminate the noise.<sup>2</sup>

Through the use of the proper decoding tool of the cultural semiotic code, the user is able to comprehend my message. As a user of the proper decoder, we can now experience the nostalgic / cultural state as clear as it was intended in most of my work. However, the artist must intentionally choose the correct forms of dissemination in order to rouse the desired effect. For example, you cannot elicit the nostalgia of funk with an Edison cylinder phonograph. Although both the phonograph and vinyl record are essentially the same, the nostalgic states are drastically different. With instruments, like *FUNK'D UP*, serving as the transmitter of the nostalgic message, we accomplish this through the implementation of various vintage forms of technology. This process begins with the summoning of the nostalgic presence through the pure physicality of the presentation. Through video aesthetic, strategic graphic design and obsolete yet functional technology, the experience to the viewer is delivered in a clean, realistic and engaging installation. The whole premise of my work is to use the proper types of technology best suited for the message I am conveying. Often times, the interactivity that is inherently apart of the technology is what solidifies the efficacy of the communication.



Figure 4

<sup>2</sup> Shannon, *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 24.

There is an underlying concern that Shannon mentions in his work; the issue of entropy. Entropy may be simply defined as randomness. Randomness can cause degradation in the transmitted message, in turn, causing the meaning to be harder to comprehend or lost all together. Significantly reducing entropy by using bits of information will result in a clearer understanding of meanings that can be reached. Shannon writes, "... entropy as a measure of uncertainty it seems reasonable to use the conditional entropy of the message, knowing the received signal, as a measure of this missing information"<sup>3</sup> Entropy is an issue in any project that deals with nostalgia, moreover, technology. As the artist, one cannot possibly consider everyone's various backgrounds, experiences or influences into their understanding of the art work. However, as a new media artist we can set up parameters that narrow the scope of thinking so that the viewer can, hopefully, reason the correct meaning behind the art. The idea of entropy is especially poignant in any work of new media because of the notion of variability. Variability assumes that every interaction with a new media object can result in a completely different experience per user. A user of *FUNK'D UP*



will approach the machine in a different manner every single time.

In my piece, *1-800-JOAQUIN*, I create an interactive experience with a pay phone that takes the idea of entropy as its fundamental function. Each button of the pay phone, once pressed, will playback a stanza of the Chicano poem *I am Joaquin*. The order in which the user presses the buttons plays no bearing on the message conveyed in the work. They can be pressed at random, in sequential order or follow the phone number *1-800-JOAQUIN*. Rather than an identical experience each time, the phone becomes a conveyor of the

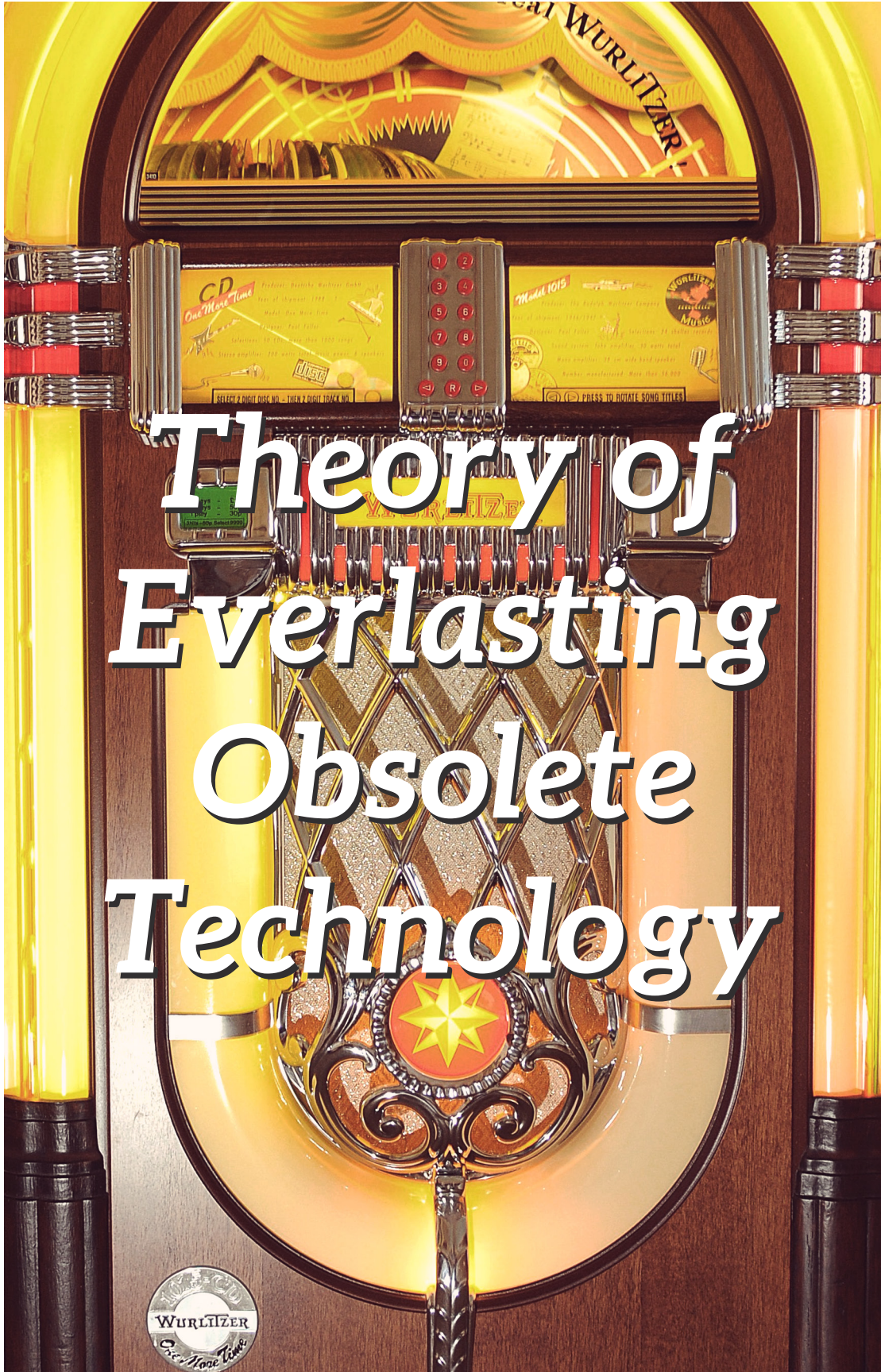
Figure 5



Chicano experience through the leverage of randomness. Instead of identical copies, a new media object typically gives rise to many versions; tailor made experiences.

I tend to embrace these variations of interaction through the functionality of the technology used; there is something positive to be said of an artwork constantly changing its expression as long as the end message remains clear. It is important to note, however, that I build certain safeguard mechanisms to continue the facilitation of the transmission of the message. Since bits of information are used to clearly transmit a meaning opposite entropy, new media uses the property of modularity to minimize the effects of entropy. Looking at *FUNK'D UP* (and most of my other work) the work is built on the premise of modular components. Each module works separately as a solo functioning object as well as in conjunction with other components to build an all-encompassing work. This modularity allows the user to experience bits of transmission via the individual components i.e. 8 track tapes, arcade buttons, audio, video and tactility. All of the modular components (carrying their own meaning) ultimately serve the same purpose in my art; they all relay a coherent message to the user.

As an appropriator of technology, media and theory, I find it necessary to apply Shannon's writing to my practice. There is an importance for me to relay a message to the audience. I am not concerned with observational artwork or abstract art. There is a place for this kind of art, but for me, there is an importance to engage the viewer in a manner that causes them to leave with a comprehensive experience.



*Theory of  
Everlasting  
Obsolete  
Technology*



**Chicano New Media Truth #2:** Take into consideration every element of your New Media work, it all carries a significance and should be expressed in terms of the Chicano experience. Be intelligent with your choices of material, physical and digital.

Many wonder why I use such old technology, why is it that I feel it necessary to de-mediate and remediate simultaneously? Old stock 8-tracks cassettes, decommissioned pay phones, obsolete slide projectors, are all in a category that belongs at the local antique shop. Yet, I find myself gravitated to them and reactivating these forms, beyond the Duchampian found-object aesthetic. Foolishly, popular culture feels as though old technology is easily replaced, no longer relevant as new technology appears to re-invent or remediate pre-existing means of communication. We can observe this phenomenon in the evolution of music media. Looking at vinyl records as a means to playback music and ending with streaming mobile devices, one could easily think that the stream is a much more reliable and convenient means of enjoying music. Yet, in 2014 vinyl record sales peaked for the first time in 15 years.<sup>4</sup> There has been a resurgence in the de-mediation of technology, from the digital back to



the analog. I feel a personal responsibility to embrace these obsolete forms of communication. It is imperative that as our technology progresses, we continue to activate their histories and present them to newer generations.

We have been trained to think that the new is about to overcome the old, but that's just an illusion. Because the failure rate of the new is much, much higher than the failure rate of the old.<sup>5</sup> For the perishable, meaning technology

Figure 6

4 Keith Caulfield, "Vinyl Album Sales Hit Historic High in 2014, Again," <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/6422442/vinyl-album-sales-hit-historic-high-2014>, (December 31, 2014).

5 Kyle VanHemert, "Why Are Old Technologies So Hard To Kill? Nassim Taleb Has A Theory." <http://www.fastcodesign.com/1671964/why-are-old-technologies-so-hard-to-kill-nassim-taleb-has-a-theory>, (February 26, 2013).

that needs to be updated through hardware or software, every additional day in use translates into a shorter life expectancy,<sup>6</sup> waiting for the next item to take its place - it moves towards replacement. For the non-perishable, like analog technology, every additional day may imply a longer life expectancy. A vintage record player can easily be fixed, a replaced bulb can give new life to a slide projector, but an old iPhone found at a garage sale more often than not will be inoperable and thus left to be discarded. People do not take the time to fix new technology because the latest and greatest is just around the corner, thus the life span of new tech is much shorter than a 40 year old vacuum tube radio, per se.

Digital files can remain “pristine” through the years, but the reality is that hard drives fail; file formats become unsupported, old computers are replaced with newer ones. However, the phonograph has endured the test of time, so much so, that they are still being produced as a rich audio experience. There is a reason why dot matrix printers are still used in many industrial shops, because they are reliable and hard wired, rather than the finicky wireless printers of today. Why is it that Polaroid cameras and film have had resurgence in production? Not only has there been a new interest in its aesthetic, but the simplicity of the first “instant camera” simply works, it lacks the need for extensive learning. It has endured the test of time and made its indelible mark on photographic culture.

Rather than highlight the latest and greatest tech, I merge them together in nostalgic vignettes. Not only does it provide reliable functionality, it gives the user a lesson in technology that they may not be privy to and finally it physically manifests nostalgia. There is nothing wrong with obsolete technology; in fact, in many cases it is better than new technology.

The obsolete form not only conjures up the memory of a time that has passed, but it evokes an emotion for the viewer. The obsolete tech becomes the sender of the nostalgic experience and is also the decoder at the same time. This is a very peculiar

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Kyle VanHemert, “Why Are Old Technologies So Hard To Kill? Nassim Taleb Has A Theory,” (February 26, 2013).



insight for me. How can an object be both the sender and the receiver of the transmission? Easy, should one interact long enough with an outdated piece of hardware, a learning environment will begin to foster. The obsolete object becomes the teacher and the user the student. Yes, the object can be the transmitter and with interaction the user takes over the role as receiver. It is through these obsolete forms that allow me to manifest the mediated Chicano experience. Through careful curation of object, mindful use of interaction and exploring the histories that these “obsolete” artifacts; I can relay the cultural essence of my work.

If we revisit the Polaroid example, we see that the obsolete has become relevant once again, but in a re imagined form. At some point, it was a good idea to digitize the Polaroid process into an app; Instagram. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future.<sup>7</sup> *FUNK'D UP* and *DIGGIN' THE SCENE WITH A GANGSTER LEAN* are no different than Instagram, it is a remediation of the obsolete and this is what keeps the obsolete in a cycle of rejuvenation. Rather than being replaced, it continues to be rediscovered by those seeking an authentic experience with media. My work attempts to satisfy this need in an engagement with the media, history of the object and a functional reactivation of the media itself.



Figure 7

7 Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents1.” (2007).



*Real Dreams  
of  
Nostalgic  
Realities*

**Chicano New Media Truth #8:** Capture the viewer through the beauty of meaningful Chicano experience.

Nostalgia is defined as “pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again.”<sup>8</sup> My work uses nostalgia as leverage for the user experience. There are some assumptions, however, that need to be made on both the artist and user side. These assumptions presuppose that the user has the ability to deduce how to use old technology. For example, the 8 track player in *FUNK'D UP*, is specifically chosen because of its generational similarities. When the revelation signals that these cartridges are like those of Nintendo or Sega Genesis systems; the generational gap will be bridged instantly and cannot be broken. The music video compilation of *ELECTROPHONIC FUNK* assumes people will recognize the rhythms and can hear the lineage of funk in today’s pop music. The pay phone, of *1-800-JOAQUIN* assumes the user even knows what a pay phone is. On one hand, older generations will immediately know how to interact with these objects. On the other hand, younger generations will take some time to



Figure 8



figure it out. In *1-800-JOAQUIN*, the pay phone serves as a reminder of a bygone era of public communication, because of its similarity to the mobile phone interface an immediate connection can be established. From this point forward the user has gained new knowledge of an obsolete form and has internalized its usage to something familiar; nostalgic and contemporary at the same time.

While observing users of my work, I notice that people were happy to talk to each other and explain how to engage the particular project. Not only was the instruction verbally communicated between patrons, but also an association between people was being developed. The use of nostalgia also has physiological implications that must be noted. Nostalgia often makes people more generous to strangers and more tolerant of outsiders.<sup>9</sup> In the case of *FUNK'D UP*, nostalgia is serving as a precursor to curiosity and self-reflection. Causing the viewer to remain engaged and share the experience with those around them all the while internalizing this experience to their own personal histories.

Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into “local” and “universal” longing possible.<sup>10</sup> We can also break down nostalgia into two parts, especially with *FUNK'D UP*; Restorative nostalgia stresses home and attempts to reconstruct history in terms of a past time. Reflective nostalgia thrives on the longing and delays the home, throwing the nostalgia in a cyclical pattern of longing and reconstructing.<sup>11</sup> What this means in terms of my artwork, is that every person that encounters it is willingly establishing a connection to the work. Since my work is typically dealing with nostalgia as a foundation, the viewer begins to internalize this encounter to their personal histories. They begin to reflect on the experience and become nostalgic as a result, furthering their connection to my artwork which now has become a part of their nostalgic history. They now become the carriers of my artwork. Meaning that one day they may recall a time they had an experience with my artwork. They

9 Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents1.” (2007).

10 Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents1.” (2007).

11 Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents1.” (2007).

may not remember me as the artist specifically, but their internalized experience of my artwork is now a part of their existence.

Nostalgia of the first type (restorative) gravitates towards pictorial symbols and oral culture. Nostalgia of the second type (reflective) is more oriented towards an individual narrative that savors details and memory. All of my work plays with the notion of symbols through the use of strong cultural / period-specific aesthetics, imagery and sound. Once this has been presented to the viewer, the reflective nostalgia takes over and the viewer then begins to reminisce about their encounters with the arcade form, the old slide projector, the 80's music video etc. This is the key to my work; it has an ability to appeal to anyone. Regardless of the cultural themes within the work, the nostalgic feelings elicited through the work break these barriers and allow a well received artistic experience.

As I continue to build these nostalgic art items I cannot help but agree that “Nostalgia is colloquially a form of longing for the past, but its modernist variant is less a longing for an unredeemable past as such than a longing for the fantasies and desires that were once possible in that past.”<sup>12</sup> Nostalgia of the past is long gone, now I yearn for what I cannot attain – but this pushes my artwork to embody this state even more. During my ATC show, there wasn't a single person who did not identify in some way with the arcade machine I had constructed; everyone had a story to tell me about their experiences with arcades. This, to me, is a successful conjuring of the nostalgic experience.

Nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups, between personal and collective memory. My works functions as a means to activate these personal nostalgias of my own and merge them with the experiences of the viewer. The audience now becomes a part of the artworks' nostalgic history.

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12 Ekaterina Kalinina, “Refashioning Russia: Mediated Post - Soviet Nostalgia in Contemporary Russian Culture.” 2014.



Figure 9

**-DIGGIN' THE SCENE WITH A GANGSTER LEAN-**

*This is a Mexican altar digitally transformed. These are my memories - projected for you to experience. Like recalling a dream that forever repeats itself, these slides are snippets of a time surrendered to the past. Accompanied by the sounds of vintage radio, you will be taken back to a place that you can't recall, but are still familiar with.*

*Grab a crate, take a seat and dig the scene.  
Con Safos - Tijuana Rick*

My first show as a graduate student, *Diggin the Scene with a Gangster Lean*, explores the myth of the Chicano reality through the use of popular remediated-chicano films like *Zoot suit*, *American Me* and *Mi Familia*. These films portray a less fictional account of the chicano experience from the 1940's to the 1990's. Rather than grabbing clips and simply super-cutting them together, I watched more than 20 hours of film to extract the most cinematic clips within each of these films. Then using editing software I looped these clips capturing subtle movements and made them into animated gifs, as popular internet artform; the cinemagraph. The cinemagraph is a method of animation that utilizes digital tools to manipulate a scene. The scene appears to be completely still except of a very subtle movement in a specific part of the scene i.e. hair subtly blowing in the wind, water flowing or smoke billowing. Once merged into one long series of over 50 clips, I then gave them a vintage slide show treatment and displayed them through a hacked 1940's slide projector.

Within the slide projector i used an open source mini computer about the size of a credit card called a Raspberry Pi connected to a mini display screen which fortunately, fit perfectly in place of the normal slide. Once programmed to work together, these components successfully display any video I program it to play. Using the stock lens on the slide projector, I was then able to magnify, focus and play my Chicano video clips through a seemingly stock appearing slide projector. I also added sound clips from 1940's-1960's radio programming and commercials in order to take the viewer through a nostalgic journey from the perspective of the chincao reality. *DIGGIN' THE SCENE WITH A GANGSTER LEAN* is an intimate experience that occupies a middle ground between the remediated experience and the chicano experience beyond much of our realities.





Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

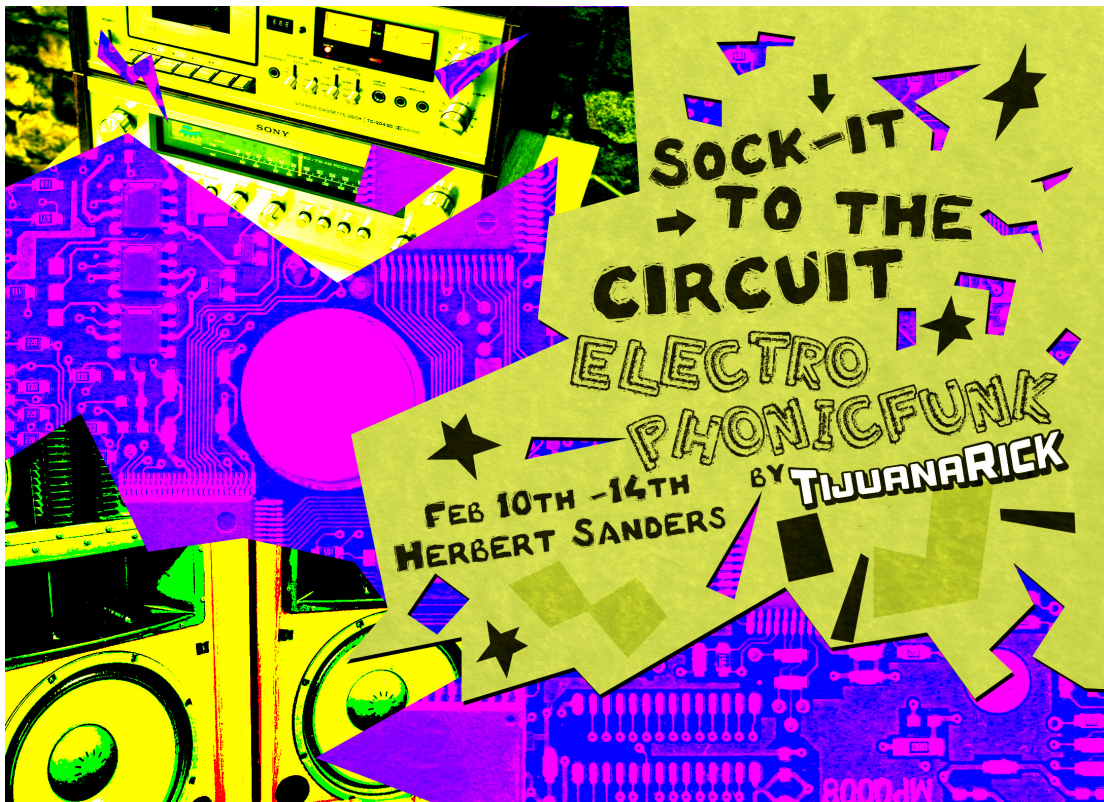


Figure 13

**SOCK IT TO THE CIRCUIT: ELECTROPHONIC FUNK**

*Funk music has been the theme music for my life. Early funk music videos pioneered the technology of the time and pushed the boundaries of the genre and the aesthetic. Electrophonic Funk is a median between the visual and the audio experience of the music.*

*- Tijuana Rick*

My piece “Sock it to the circuit, Electrophonic funk” explores the visual concept of light generated by sound through structure. I delve into the sound genre of funk music, not only because of its attractiveness to the ear, but also to harken back to the nightclub scene. I use the raspberry pi to provide the video playback on a Craigslist sourced television set and highlight the entire experience via a wall of balloons. Light strands are hidden behind the balloons that serve as light capsules to capture and envelope the spheres in light, thus activating the space from dark to light in rhythmic fashion. The speakers that were sourced online as well are from the 1960’s famed for their 360° degrees of sound production. Rather than facing in a horizontal plane, the speaker cone is facing upward and a cone is then placed on top to spread the sound in all directions. These speakers were specifically chosen due to their nostalgic sound production quality and functionality while the funk music and videos take the viewer to a past era.

This piece was heavily influenced by Nam June Paik’s work, *The electronic superhighway*. I’ve always admired Paik’s work, and what he does with remediated content in *The electronic superhighway* caused the viewer to be immersed in the experience. The sheer size alone is enough to overwhelm the viewer, I attempted the same feeling by creating a larger than life structure of balloons. Paik also uses appropriated and remediated video of various United States, while playing them at varying speeds with accompanying audio. The funk music videos in my work play in a sequential order, not as frenetic as Paik’s but nevertheless appropriated content.





Figure 14

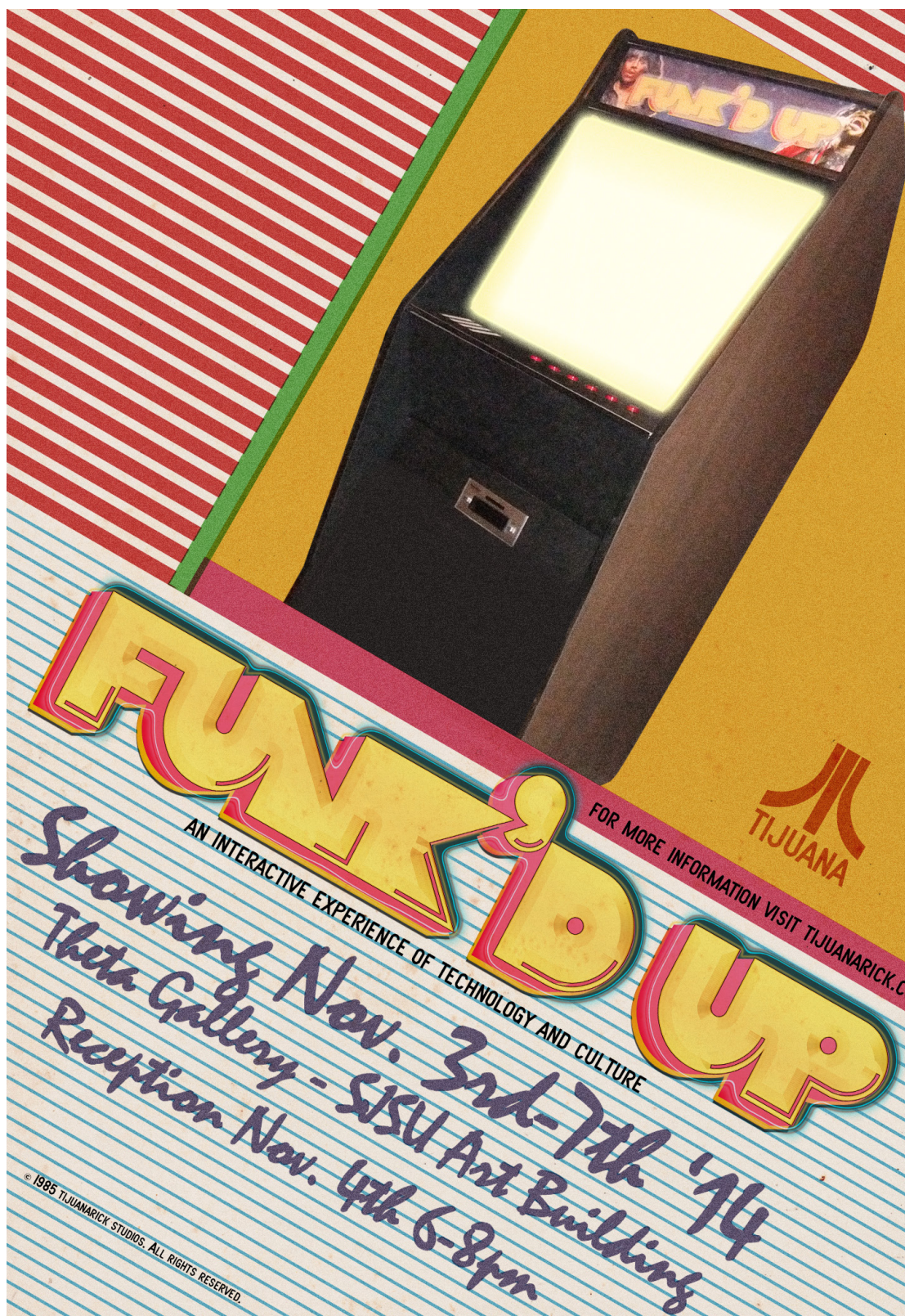


Figure 15

**FUNK'D UP**

In Funk'd Up, I have created a nostalgic trip down 1980s arcade culture through a custom built videogame cabinet. Accompanied by funk music as an audible invitation to interactivity, viewers are encouraged to select and insert their desired 8-track tape that's pre-recorded with a sub-genre of funk. Guests control the video experience, harmonizing rhythms of the funk through a digital form of beat-boxing. Funk'd Up appeals to all: as those who grew up playing upright arcade games will remember the form while lovers of music will recognize the groove.

Subcultures, community identity and ethnic associations are at the root of Americana. Often cast aside and stereotyped, these subcultures provide a rich and undeniable presence in mainstream pop culture. Through the use of emerging technologies married with obsolete form, I regenerate an aesthetic experience of these subcultures. Every artwork I create embodies the style, look and feel of a bygone era, staying true to the aesthetics. From the reconfiguring of a 1940' slide projector to 8-track tapes, I strive to be as true to the technology of the period as possible while incorporating new modes of technology to serve my new media intentions.

I am a Chica-new media artist, priding myself as a creator and an aficionado of the obsolete – using personal experience and cultural identity as a framework for my artistic expression.



In the first week of October I finished my latest project Funk'd Up, which was one of the largest undertakings of my graduate career to date. It is a late 1970's styled fully functional arcade cabinet. But there is a twist. The way a user interacts with the work is by selecting one of four labeled 8-track cassettes (Boogie, Modern, Arcade and Sampled Funk) and places them into the player where you would normally drop a quarter. Upon inserting the 8-track funk music sounds out through the arcade speakers, lights are activated to the sounds as if an old Organ Light, followed by the interaction with the arcade buttons. On the display is a mouth that is controlled by the arcade buttons. Each press triggers a video clip of a beat boxing mouth. Beat boxing is a form of hip-hop popularized in the 80's. Where beats and rhythms are made by percussions produced by expertly forcing air through the beat boxers lips. I've also degraded the quality of the video to resemble that of an old VHS tape, to stick with the vintage aesthetic.

My work explores areas of Americana often cast to the sidelines of popular culture. But it cannot be denied that these pseudo-American cultures are what make up the media consciousness of many groups. I consider myself a hacker in the physical form, my ideas are open source and my technology is used and appropriated. All of these concepts and components is what makes me into an artist, but not just any artist a Chicana media Artist.



Figure 16

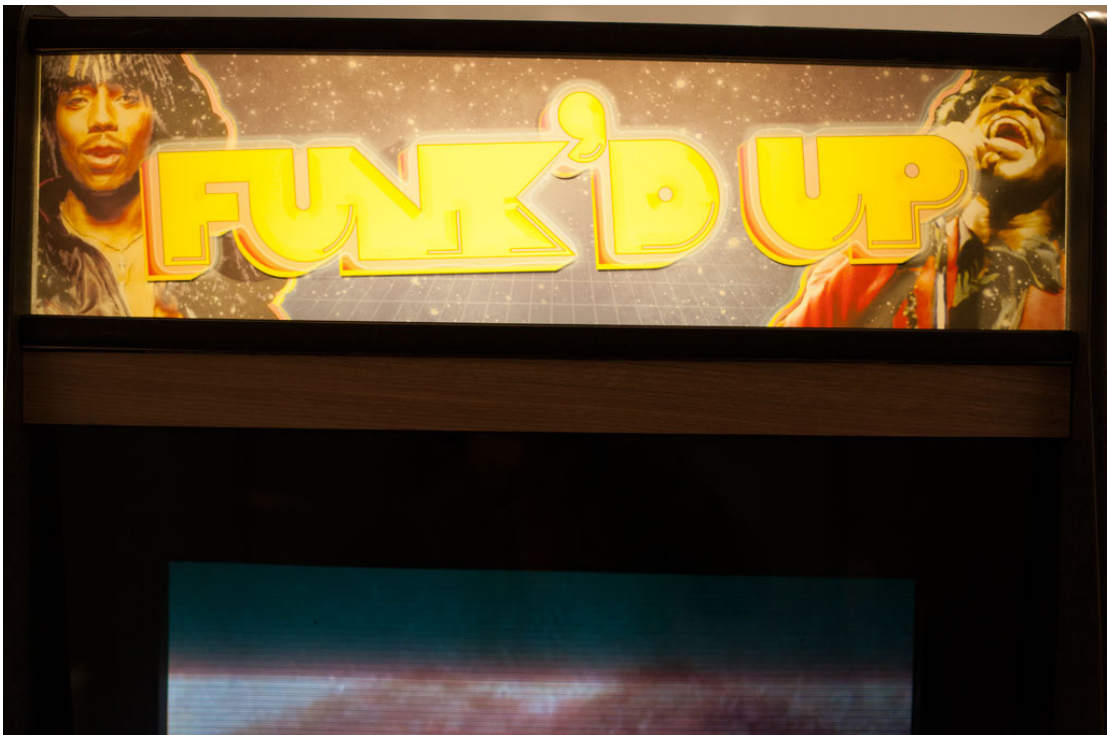


Figure 17



Figure 18



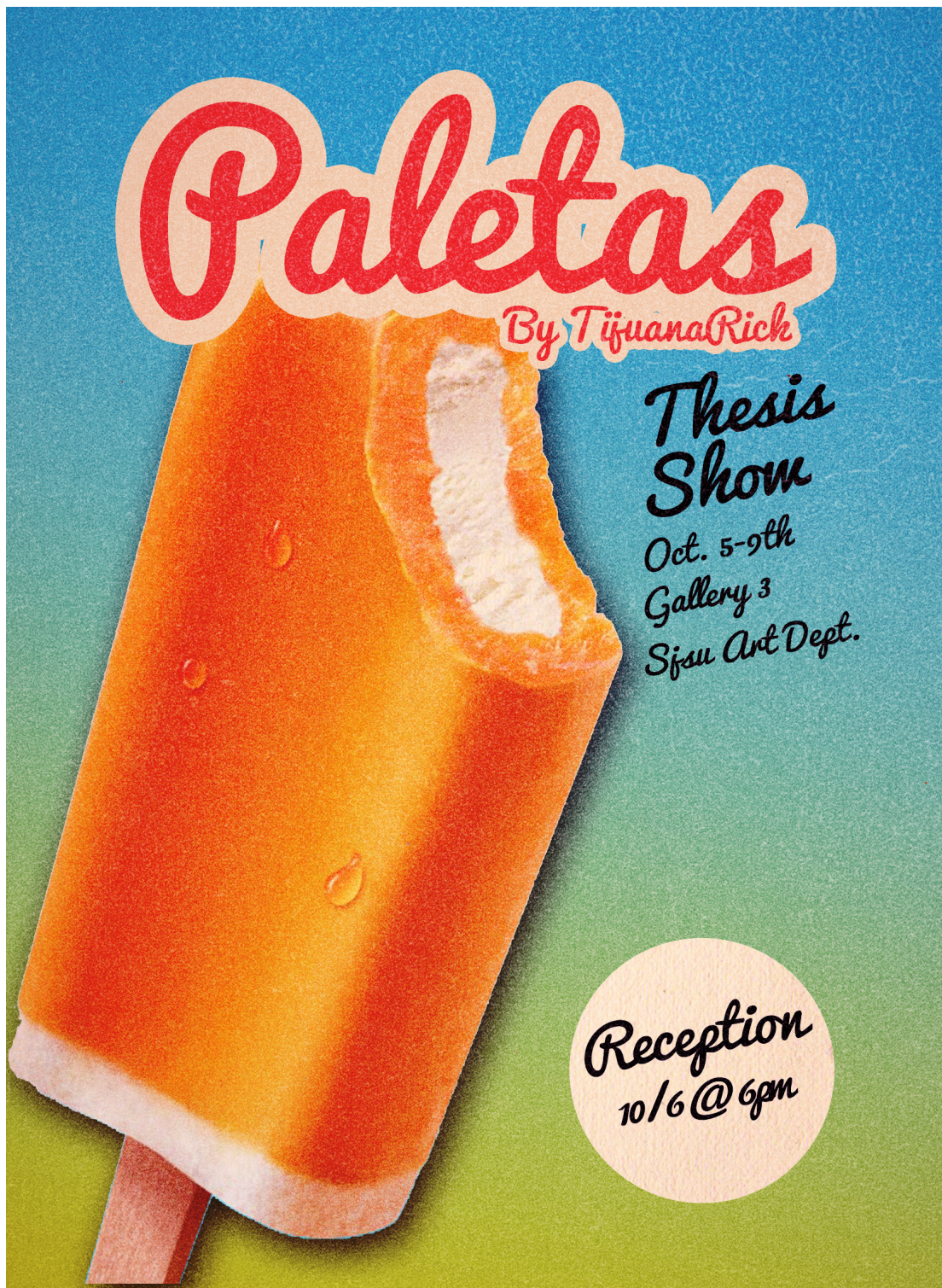


Figure 19

**PALETAS**

This thesis show is an on-going collaboration with Alex Nuño-Liu. Three years ago, she described to me her vision depicting the non-stereotypical lives of immigrant families. Often, immigrants from Mexico and South America are portrayed as laborers, janitors, landscapers etc. which overshadow the individual and their unique diverse journey to a better life. This thesis show is an evolving interactive and mobile version of Alex' original vision; a digital archival of these family histories.

The interaction requires at least two people. Stand where the Paletero would stand and place your hands on the metal handle. This will activate the family stories. Once you let go, the video will reset until the next person places their hands on the cart handle.

Participants were asked four questions.

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. What brought you to America?
4. What do you miss the most?

These stories, rich in visual detail, were then animated into mini-vignettes.

This was a very personal project for me. As a child I grew up buying many ice creams from the paleta man in my grandparents neighborhood. Everyone one has a history and this cart serves as an interactive storybook for these histories. Although the cart itself did not take up much physical space, the audio is what played a crucial role. The acoustics in gallery three are the best of all the galleries and I strategically chose this space for this piece. Rather than affecting the room with spatial structures, it was filled with audio that enveloped the viewer in the experience harkening back to the tactics of Paik.

As written in my manifesto, there is an obligation to the Chicano artist to change the stereotypes that surround our culture. Paletas, has served this obligation. By interviewing those that are marginalized and unfairly categorized by society, I am able to bring their personal histories to life. Many of the stories are filled with nostalgia, and through the use of visual aesthetics within the mini videos we can realize their nostalgic experiences of traveling from Mexico to the US. The form chosen is of a familiar paleta cart (ice cream) and the interaction further emphasizes the spectators experience with the stories. In a long line of new media artists and art work, my work

is begging to follow a new direction, that of a storyteller for others. I now have the ability to create these morsels of information to be digested by the user, the form allows for easy engagement into an otherwise overlooked people. Paletas serves as a time capsule for the immigrant coming to America, stories that can be passed down to the next generation via new media.





Figure 20



Figure 21



# Conclusion

When I was young, I used to tell my mom that I wanted to be an inventor when I grew up. As I began to develop skills passed down from my grandfathers, my interest in making became more than just a hobby, it became an obsession. I would sit for hours dismantling an old VCR, I would retro fit model cars with motors to make them hop like lowriders on hydraulics; never really taking the time to stop and think, “why am I doing this?” As I became a commercial artist for the City of San Jose, I had a yearning for more fulfillment in myself. There was a need to remain tactile, to utilize the technology that I was reading about in Wired Magazine; I needed to create. The Digital Media Art program at San Jose State University (SJSU) has provided me an invaluable life experience, not only introspectively about myself but retrospectively about my past. It made me realize, that the little boy that used to play with LEGOS was destined to be where I am at today, a new media artist. Without the guidance and knowledge received at SJSU, I would be another Chicano fumbling around with an Arduino - without direction, without concept. Now my direction is clear, there is a need for me to represent my cultural heritage in ways that have yet to be realized by others in my practice. There is a need for me to use these emerging technologies to highlight the rich beauty of my people - taking it to the masses. Expose the nuances of the Chicano identity through ubiquitous commonalities within our popular culture.

*I am a Chicano new media artist, a connoisseur of the obsolete, a historian of the nostalgic, a regenerator of the past.*

**I am the ChicaNew Media Artist.**

C/S

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