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# Framing Chicana Agency in 1980s Los Angeles Punk: The Photography of Patssi Valdez

Rocio Sanchez-Nolasco



**Abstract:** Patssi Valdez, a contemporary Chicana artist best recognized as a performance artist and painter, produced an extensive body of photographic artworks during the 1980s that documented her creativity and marked a crucial period of artistic development in her career. The multimedia approach and distinctive use of color in these artworks, a series of bold photographic portraits, strongly resonate with punk aesthetics. Five artworks were visually analyzed and contextualized by looking at the history of Los Angeles punk rock and design elements of early punk zines. This research project utilizes several digital sources that encapsulate Valdez's reflections on her art practice. Valdez's use of self-fashioning as an artistic praxis parallels punk's Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and rasquache sensibilities, which visually indexes the convergence of punk and Chicano art. This research project sheds light on an understudied area of Valdez's art practice, discusses the influence of Chicanas on early Los Angeles punk, and aims to provide an entry point for future research into Valdez's photography.

**Key words:** Patssi Valdez, photography, Los Angeles, punk, Chicana identity

## 1. Introduction

The photography of contemporary Chicana artist Patssi Valdez remains largely unaddressed in academic discourse and underrepresented in art exhibitions and has yet to be comprehensively studied or showcased. The multimedia approach and bold colors that define these photographic artworks strongly resonate with punk aesthetics. Valdez's connections to the nuanced history of 1980s Los Angeles punk help contextualize our understanding of the aesthetic implications of Valdez's photography. Michelle Habell-Pallan has assessed that the resonance of punk rock for Chicanos is cemented in the cultural similarities of punk's Do-It-Yourself (DIY) practice and *rasquache*. The analysis of DIY aesthetics in punk zines by Teal Triggs offers a foundation to further understand the multimedia techniques and visuals in Valdez's photography. Photography served as a vital stage of Valdez's career that allowed her to formally experiment and continue to develop her artistic style and reassert her personal agency.

## 2. Style in Early Performance Art and Photography

The graphic visual elements and multimedia approach that comprise Valdez's photography can be seen as reflecting and applying a punk DIY approach. Scholars have asserted different reasons for the appeal of punk to Chicanos (Shonk and McClure 2017, 90-91) (Habell-Pallan 2005, 150). The DIY approach embedded in punk subculture calls for personal initiative and freedom in the creative making process, whether it be music, writing, or art, without relying on established institutions and societal norms. The ethics of DIY serve as a catalyst for creating culture outside the mainstream and pushing for egalitarian inclusion. DIY principles parallel *rasquache*, a form of early Chicano art defined by personal innovation and working with limited resources to produce artistic expressions (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, 156). *Rasquache* allows for the expression of criticism and creativity unprecedented in Mexican or Anglo-American culture (Gunckel 2015, 395). Historian and cultural critic

Michelle Habell-Pallan (2005) argues that punk's appeal for Chicanos is rooted in the similarities between punk's DIY sensibility and rasquache (150).

The critical stance towards the status quo and value on qualities such as self-reliance and personal creativity imply significant parallels between punk and rasquache. These parallels offered an opportunity for Chicanos to explore and create new fashion styles, music, performances, and visual culture through a distinctive lens. Although punk is still being historicized, endeavors in punk revisionism are striving to highlight the contributions made by Chicanos and the influence of Chicanos on punk. Valdez's photography showcases one of the ways Chicanas engaged with punk.

The presence of punk aesthetics in Valdez's photographic style is best noted in the use of vibrant colors and mixed media. Valdez's multimedia technique reconfigures her self-fashioning practice, seen early in her career as a member of "Asco." Asco was an East Los Angeles based art collective active from 1970 to 1987, originally composed of Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Willie Herron III, and Patssi Valdez, which expanded to a wide assemblage of artists, writers, and performers. Cultural critic Marci McMahon (2014a) defines self-fashioning as an active process of clothing and styling the body to construct a physical representation as a response to dominant cultural and political norms, which converges style and performance (4). Self-fashioning addresses the body as a site of negotiation between an individuals' intended identity and perception alongside hegemonic conventions (4). McMahon (2014a) uses self-fashioning to discuss how Chicana and Mexican women negotiate racialized and gendered identities in the domestic sphere (4). McMahon's (2014b) work offers a vital understanding of self-fashioning in Valdez's artistic practice focusing on her performances, set designs, and paintings (133). Valdez used self-fashioning in her performances and other artworks that pinpointed systemic disparities experienced by Mexican-Americans and critically addressed representations of Chicano culture (Noriega 2008, 114-115) (Stellwag 2017, 295). For instance, Valdez has a high level of expertise in

makeup through attending cosmetology school, studying theater makeup, and professional working experience. This skillset is re-contextualized for fine art production. However, self-fashioning also serves to foreground Valdez's transition from performance art to photography.

Valdez's self-fashioning repertoire is based on her personal and technical knowledge of stylization, utilized clothes, makeup, hair styling, and props to embody a range of personas. These personas served as articulations of creative expression and have been noted as Valdez's main contribution to Asco (Chavoya 2000, 240) (Goldman 1994, 230) (Jones 2012, 133) (McMahon 2014b, 133). Despite the use of theatrical wardrobe and makeup in artworks by all of Asco's members, Valdez's capacity to deliver alluring, defiant images has identified her as an influential figure. Scholarly discourse has largely failed to address the technicality behind Valdez's contributions, simplifying her endeavors as the "stylist" of the group and leaving large gaps in our understanding of Valdez's role in the collective and her extensive career. In spite of this, Valdez's skills and contributions solidified her presence in the collective. Any interest towards Asco inevitably leads to investigating photographs of Valdez. Scholars have used a wide array of adjectives attempting to pinpoint the exact nature of Valdez's self-representation, such as *pachuca* (a term originating in the 1940s referring to working class Mexican-American women who wore zoot suits), Hollywood glamour, and surrealist (Garcia 2011, 326-327) (McMahon 2014b, 130). Despite serving as an everyday form of expression, Valdez proves that self-fashioning can also function as a praxis for artistic engagement and as a malleable tool for reclaiming agency.

Valdez, among other Chicanas in Los Angeles, offered a new perspective and a new way to form personal identity through creative productions influenced by punk. Chicanas worked to reinstate their agency and place in the world by redefining punk through the construction of physical and imagined alternative spaces (Habell-Pallan 2012, 250). Music may be the nucleus of punk; however, it also embodies visual and performance art to create an alternative experience to mainstream rock music, politics, and established modes of creative expression (Gunckel

2012, 130). A prominent visual display of DIY aesthetics in punk is the “zine,” an abbreviation of magazine, which offers an alternative form of journalism to disperse information and build community via independent means (Triggs 2006, 69-70). As a prominent feature of punk visual culture, zines are vital to understanding DIY visual aesthetics. Design historian Teal Triggs (2006) analyzes British punk zines to define DIY aesthetics (69). Triggs identifies various features in punk zines such as cut-n-paste letters, photocopied and collaged images, and hand-scrawled and typewritten text as key production techniques (69).

Zine production techniques provide a foundation for understanding the development of DIY aesthetics in Valdez’s photographs, including the early example of *Photo Booth Piece*, which was showcased in the 1975 LACMA exhibition: *Chicanismo en el arte* (Figure 1). *Photo Booth Piece* used seriality and typewritten text to create a contrast between the visual and linguistic content (*Chicanismo en el arte* 1975, 30). The cut-n-paste text included disregards grammar through misspellings, the alteration of uppercase and lowercase letters, and the consecutive repetition of punctuation marks. The photographs exhibit Valdez in a photo booth with voluminous coiffed hair, makeup, and dark clothes in different poses. Valdez’s appearances and poses convey conflicting attitudes of glamour and disinterest. Two photographs portray Valdez with another woman who is pulling her hair, disrupting the sense of glamour, which is further emphasized by the text stating that the narrator (presumably Valdez) was removed from their car, verbally harassed, bruised, and almost arrested by L.A.P.D. Valdez’s assimilation of glamour alongside punk modes of production expands the viewer’s understanding of how racial ideologies dominate the ways that historically marginalized communities are monitored and policed.

Beginning in the 1980s, Valdez pursued higher education and further explored her individual art practice. The 1980s became an important transitional period for Valdez, when she decided to no longer be photographed and began to pursue other endeavors. Valdez received a Bachelors of Arts in Fine Arts from Otis College of Art and Design in

1985 (McMahon 2014b, 138). Her dedication to painting, from the late 1980s to the present, would mark the next major body of works in her career and ultimately stage her career into two major acts: performance art and painting. However, Valdez's art practice extends beyond this description and delving into her other body of works, such as photography, offers an insight into the transition between these periods and the cultural impact of Chicanas engaging with punk subculture. Valdez's photography combines punk and early Chicana feminist epistemologies, which are centered on the creation of networks and expressions of resistance.

Musicians Alice Bag and Teresa Covarrubias exemplify how Chicanas used punk to express their identities and claim their own place despite the white male-centric conception of punk (Habell-Pallan 2005, 165). Alicia "Alice" Armendariz, also known as Alice Bag, became a critical figure of the Los Angeles punk scene. As the Chicana forerunner of the first wave of Los Angeles punk, Bag's musical contributions, including shrew lyricism, an aggressive yet emotive stage presence, and an extensive number of performances, are indispensable and illustrate the vitality Chicanas brought to the scene (Habell-Pallan 2012, 249) (Habell-Pallan 2012, 264). Musicians such as Teresa Covarrubias, lead singer of the band "The Brat," demonstrate a continuing engagement of Chicanas with punk. Covarrubias (2016) has shared her experience as part of the 1980s Los Angeles punk scene (113). She has also revealed her interest in grass roots cultural production, confrontations with sexism, and engagement with alternative spaces such as the Vex at Self-Help Graphics (SHG). The Vex at SHG, was one rendition of Joe "Vex" Suquette's venue, moved into SHG in collaboration with the musician and artist Willie Herron III and the SHG founder Sister Karen. The Vex at SHG was a temporary venue during 1980 that initially served East Los Angeles punk rock bands but then garnered attention outside Los Angeles County. SHG, a community arts center committed to fostering the advancement and innovation of Chicana and Latina artists, connected the world of punk rock and the East Los Angeles art scene.

### 3. Self-fashioning in Portrait Photography: *Sylvia Delgado in Purple*

Makeup played a crucial role in forming Valdez's repertoire from her early collaborative performances to her photography of the 1980s. *Sylvia Delgado in Purple* (c. 1980s) (Figure 2) displays how Valdez's extensive knowledge of makeup served to define and delineate a unique artistic style. To create a distinctive form of facture, Valdez utilized her personal style and demonstrated her knowledge of makeup application in the artwork. The artwork portrays a woman with a pale complexion, dark dramatic eye makeup, and bold colored lips. These features were a part of a look revitalized by Chicanas engaging with punk, such as Alice Bag and Teresa Covarrubias, arguably constituting one of the ways Chicanas used self-fashioning to navigate the world of punk and motivate their art, music, and performances.

*Sylvia Delgado in Purple* integrated black and white photography, ink, and pastel to render a captivating image of Sylvia Delgado. Delgado's reclining figure, leisurely poses with her arms behind her head and face, which are directed towards the viewer. The portrait encapsulates a cropped, close-up shot of Delgado's face, eliminating part of the forehead and the right eye. Delgado's gaze moves outwards to directly confront the viewers. The artwork is devoid of naturalistic representation; it does not depict the natural musculature or contours of the face and body. The slightest, subtle attention is evoked by the arm, placed behind Delgado's head with shading indicating the curvature of the bending limb. The ghastly pale face and body and the absence of naturalistic representation render the portrait non-mimetic. These stylistic choices shift the focus of the artwork from representing the subject to expressing a unique aesthetic.

High levels of contrast and dramatic shading redirect the viewer's attention to the artistic style, which is reinforced by the use of multimedia and highlights the importance of facture. The pale striking body at the forefront contrasts with the dark purple and blue hues added to the photograph. The majority of the composition on the right side consists



of an array of dark purple and blue tints. This textured, granular pattern of circles with blotches of color and black contours cover Delgado's body. This portion of the composition conceals the neck to frame the face and contrasts against the ivory skin tone. Delgado's face is rendered in the same smooth, pristine pale tone enhanced by the use of ink and pastel to mimic makeup. The final image represented Delgado as if she were wearing makeup. Delgado's eyes are outlined and covered in a dark royal purple hue reaching beyond the eyebrow. Delgado's lips are outlined in the same shade of purple noted by the exaggerated curvature of the Cupid's bow on the top lip.

The mixed media approach allowed Valdez to focus the viewer's attention on Delgado's face, concentrating on the portrait and emphasizing the importance of stylistic development. Instead of relying on medium specificity, the use of multiple materials indicates a transparent artistic process. This multimedia approach resembles the use of found materials and assemblage techniques seen in DIY and rasquache sensibilities. Both sensibilities call for the incorporation of uniquely sourced materials for both aesthetic originality and democratization of creative self-expression. Valdez continues to find materials from different sources and use different means of production, ranging from her earlier forms of self-fashioning to the documentation of her creatively inspired perception of Sylvia Delgado.

*Sylvia Delgado in Purple* is an amalgamation of Valdez's personal networks and creative toolkit. Valdez posed, styled, and photographed her friends as part of her mission to document her culture and to help change the narrow perception of Latinos exhibited in mass media. The use of self-fashioning skills in her artworks, such as makeup, demonstrates Valdez's self-initiative and ability to creatively reconfigure her existing skills and resources to create artworks with unique style and facture.

#### 4. Cyclona and Patssi Valdez: Continuous Collaboration at New Stages

By the 1980s, collaboration had played a consistent role in Valdez's art production. Following her active participation in Asco, Valdez collaborated with friends who she felt were not represented in mass media through photography (Valdez 1999). One of Valdez's earliest collaborators was Robert Legorreta in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) (Alvarado 2017, 96) (Alvarado 2015, 74). This was Legorreta's first performance as Cyclona, where he wore a black knee-length nightgown and red cardboard corset with dramatic makeup to embody a hyper feminine persona. The performance began with Cyclona entering the outdoor theater at Belvedere Park, undressing from the waist up to reveal his hairy chest, and then undressing his performance partner down to a pair of denim cutoffs. His performance partner was adorned "with a pair of eggs attached to a water balloon within a pair of fishnet stockings," where Cyclona proceeded to pop through a violent simulation of fellatio and manual stimulation (Alvarado 2015, 73). This cemented Cyclona's confrontational performance style, which departed from the hetero-patriarchal norms within the Chicano movement and broader society. While Valdez's contributions as a pair of disembodied lips in the backdrop of this performance were minor, this collaboration demonstrated both artists' common interest in defying patriarchal expectations of femininity (Alvarado 2015, 70) (Alvarado 2017, 96). The 1980s marked the public return of Cyclona in the Los Angeles art scene, a period of collaboration between the two artists, and a distinctive shift in each artist's career.

Although Valdez and Legorreta's first known collaboration dates back to 1969, the 1980s marked a new stage for both artists' careers. Legorreta's personification of Cyclona became the subject of artworks, shifting the presentation of Cyclona from interventionist performance art to fixed images in gallery spaces (Hernandez 2009, 17). This shift is noted in a series of collaborations with Valdez, including photographic works such as *Cyclona* (1981), *Cyclona* (1982), *Electronic Cafe* (1984), and

*Donut Show* (1984) (Hernandez 2009, 17). During the 1980s, Valdez was also less frequently seen in Asco's performances. The majority of Valdez's published and exhibited photographs are dated to the 1980s, suggesting that Valdez redirected her focus to photography and formal artistic training during this period (Carnevale et al. 2017, 1:17:42).

In the portrait *Cyclona* (Figure 3), Legoretta wore a large, tulle pink head accessory, white makeup, thin black eyebrows, as well as neon pink and purple on the cheeks, lips, and eyebrows. These fluorescent tones highlight the feminized self-fashioning that Legoretta underwent to embody *Cyclona*. This portrait contains a series of unsettling qualities juxtaposed alongside exuberant colors. Shadows along the face's musculature and creases delineate *Cyclona's* features, contrasting with the white makeup and saturated color tones. The eye sockets appear as lifeless black voids diverging from *Cyclona's* wide, toothy grin. The nose casts a heavy shadow over the upper lip, and the lines of smile in the outer corners of the mouth contrast with flush pink cheeks. These blunt shadows form a distinctive ambience of the portrait, and *Cyclona's* smile is ambivalent in being welcoming and malevolent.

Valdez's multimedia approach in this work combines photography and paint to replicate the makeup application process and enhance the artwork with striking neon colors. Similar to *Sylvia Delgado in Purple*, Valdez uses paint to adorn *Cyclona's* face, covering the cheeks and lips in neon pink and the eyelids in a vivid lavender hue. The reproduction of makeup perpetuates the hyper-femininity embodied by *Cyclona* and reveals the layers of self-fashioning required to construct this persona. *Cyclona's* backdrop and clothes also indicate Valdez's exploration with color use. To embody the outlandish persona of *Cyclona*, Legorreta wears a hot pink headband along with fabric draped around and across his shoulders. The fluorescent yellow backdrop contrasts with the saturation of neon pink in the portrait, especially the large tulle confection that consumes the top half of the composition. Through the use of color and proportions, the headband plays a striking role in the composition, drawing the viewer's gaze and signaling the role of self-fashioning in the

construction of feminine identity and agency.

The contrasting dynamics from the shadows along the face, the white makeup, and the paint mimicking makeup application creates a bold, graphic element in the figure's portrait. This artwork showcases the use of makeup and accessories in self-fashioning by placing Cyclona's exaggerated model at the forefront. Legorreta's artistic practice as Cyclona confronts societal regulations of through whom and how femininity should be presented. Valdez's photographic approach executes multiple layers of facture to enact her own stylistic agency while supporting the intentions of her photographic subjects and friends. The primary attitude or sensibility of making do with what you have, seen in rasquache and punk DIY, is layered into the production of this work. This attitude spans from Valdez's selection of her subjects, Legorreta's embodiment of Cyclona, to Valdez's repurposing of her self-fashioning skills to produce the final collage.

## 5. This is where it's at: Valdez's *Downtown Los Angeles*

*Downtown Los Angeles* (1983) (Figure 4), a triptych photo collage, brings to life downtown Los Angeles through DIY aesthetics and the illusion of movement. *Downtown Los Angeles* personifies a key location for a new wave of punk and artistic production in the 1980s with the emergence of alternative art and cultural centers. Parallel with this, downtown Los Angeles became a hub for punk venues, marked by the shift of the Vex (formerly at SHG) and other venues to downtown. The photo collage fuses elements of portrait and landscape photography to construct an identity and experience linked to the built environment.

Early efforts in historicizing Los Angeles punk present a binary narrative of east versus west where racial discrimination led Chicanos to build their own community (Covarrubias and DeSavia 2016, 113) (Shonk and McClure 2015, 99) (Gunckel 2012, 128) (Alvarado 2012, 164-165). This perspective of 1980s punk is also rooted in the conflict between the gate keeping of "real" punk and the commercialization of punk promp-

ting wider interest. Nevertheless, Los Angeles Chicano culture played a crucial role in the evolution of American alternative rock music preceding punk rock (Covarrubias and DeSavia 2016, 111) (Shonk and McClure 2015, 91-93). Before the Vex at SHG, punk bands relied on a circuit of backyard parties and other events to perform, one of the difficulties in historicizing Chicano contributions to Los Angeles punk (Alvarado 2012, 159-160) (Covarrubias and DeSavia 2016, 113). While punk offers a divergence from mainstream music, it is a part of a continued legacy of alternative Chicano music and a stylistic tool for articulating Chicana feminist ideologies of resistance (Habell-Pallan 2005, 173)(Shonk and McClure 2015, 89).

Covarrubias, a prominent Chicana figure of Los Angeles punk and lead singer of the band The Brat, has discussed her experiences with punk and why spaces like the Vex at SHG were pivotal. Covarrubias was introduced to punk via British punk zines and radio shows, which exposed her to a new wave of music with figures of “wild music” that offered an alternative view of femininity and womanhood (Covarrubias and DeSavia 2016, 112). By 1979, The Brat had composed original music, but faced difficulties performing in the Westside. For Covarrubias, this marked the end of the “golden age” of punk where the openness that previously defined the early punk rock scene was gone (Covarrubias and DeSavia 2016, 122). She stated that these restrictions led to the creation of the East Los Angeles punk scene, which brought bands together and bridged art and music networks. The Vex at SHG opened in March 1980 in collaboration with Willie Herron III and Joe “Vex” Suquette for only eight months, but offered a unique venue to index punk and created an environment for East Los Angeles artists, musicians, and writers to network among the creative visionaries in East Los Angeles (Alvarado 2012, 158) (Alvarado 2012, 169) (Gunckel 2012, 136). These circuits of Chicano artists continued to work together and replicated the multifaceted aspect of the Vex at other venues. The Vex saw its final days located in downtown Los Angeles, and Valdez’s photographic collage reflects the vivacity of the people and places that punk brought together in Los Angeles.

Along a black and blue background, *Downtown Los Angeles* showcases the vibrancy and variability of urban scenery with distorted shapes, lines, and gradients. The landscape is organized into three disjointed scenes, attempting to express cohesive movements in a shared space. Space is depicted as a collage of mismatched images, which emphasizes an artistic DIY aesthetic. Each part demonstrates a unique scene with people and architectural features replicating the bustle of downtown Los Angeles. The right and central scenes contain skylines of undecipherable blue buildings blending together. Los Angeles City Hall, the tallest building at the center, adds asymmetry to the composition and is positioned at an angle to resemble viewing the building when walking through downtown Los Angeles.

The left scene of *Downtown Los Angeles* depicts a crowd of people walking in different directions at the forefront with a bridge over a series of train tracks in the background. The red train disappears into the frame of the central scene to reemerge in the right scene. Beyond the bridge, the sky is composed of navy and black blocks of color, organic swirling lines, and a neon yellow shape which appears to be mid-motion blurring towards the center. In the right scene, a woman poses with her hands on her waist, face turned away from the viewer, and wears a neon yellow halter dress with red trim matching her bangles and earrings. To top off the striking pose and outfit, her short hairstyle is perfectly coiffed with a voluminous set of bangs and teased out hair. In contrast to *Sylvia Delgado in Purple* (Figure 2) and *Cyclona* (Figure 3), Valdez augmented the woman's clothes rather than her facial features.

The central scene presents a vision of downtown Los Angeles with a recognizable architectural building, a coherent skyline, traffic lights and a red theater sign. At the forefront, a prominent trio gazes at the viewer. This is also seen in Valdez's 35mm film *Hot Pink* (1980), which captures the fundamental value of self-fashioning and DIY aesthetics in the Chicano punk movement (Stellwag 2017, 295). Using a film still from *Hot Pink* helps further contextualize a nuanced perspective on the landscape of downtown Los Angeles.

## 6. *Pyrah*: Portrait, Media, and Materials

*Pyrah* (1980s) (Figure 5) is composed of three layers of collage culminating into a mixed media portrait. The first layer, a black and white photograph of a woman at the center, occupies the majority of the composition and asserts the primary focus of the artwork by serving as a foundation for Valdez's stylistic exploration. Similar to *Sylvia Delgado in Purple* (Figure 2) and *Cyclona* (Figure 3), the woman's face is the only thing depicted, yet her facial features are not augmented. The woman wears a tranquil expression with her eyes and mouth closed. Unlike *Sylvia Delgado in Purple*, this photograph is dominated by black and white hues producing soft shading across the face and rendering the subject as a three dimensional, referential figure. In *Pyrah*, shading and ambience express a tone of tranquility and solitude, which is then ruptured by a contrasting color palette. The additional media placed over the photograph frames the photographic subject and incorporates Valdez's bold use of color.

The second layer consists of black pieces of paper placed over the photograph to create an asymmetrical diamond-shaped opening to view the photograph. This partially obstructs the photograph's composition and emphasizes the woman's face. This layer demonstrates how collage can serve as a simple tool to focalize the woman's face by creating contrasts and limiting the amount of positive space.

The final layer of the composition consists of ripped pieces of green, red, yellow, and black paper. Small pieces of paper are scattered throughout the composition and layered over the image of the woman. These pieces of paper appear to be torn apart, noted by their rough edges and uneven cuts, which add texture to the work and visibly display the creation process. Red and green pieces of paper are placed alongside one another, creating disjointed lines radiating over the woman's face and moving outwards into the composition. Furthermore, the use of complementary colors creates additional contrast and visual appeal.

The photograph in *Pyrah* demonstrates illusionistic space and realism while incorporating different materials to redirect the viewer's attention to the artistic style. The multi-layered composition in *Pyrah* and *Sylvia Delgado in Purple* provides insight into Valdez's artistic DIY and rasquache inflected process. In *Pyrah*, the imprecise quality of the torn paper collage mirrors the DIY production technique seen in zines. Furthermore, the use of bright fluorescent colors that define the work are a common element in punk visual culture, which conveys the disruptive notions of punk rock. Valdez's multimedia photo collage *Bonne Nuit* (c. 1980) utilizes the same photograph seen in *Pyrah*. The repurposed images and collage method reflect punk DIY and rasquache tendencies, demonstrating a high level of attention towards material and formal experimentation.

While the solitary figure is suspended in an abyss of negative space disrupted by the collage of red and green, the use of black paper begins the collaging process and the final layer disrupts the pretext of simply framing the photographic subject. By surrounding the photographic subject with red and green papers and overlapping the woman's expression, a disjuncture between the photograph and paper collage elements takes place. The intrepid use of color in Valdez's photography demonstrates her unique vision and appreciation of vibrant colors, a quality seen throughout her performances, set designs, and paintings.

## 7. The Artist as Subject: Agency in Self-Expression

Valdez eventually made the decision to no longer pose before the camera and set out to photograph her culture and the people who inspired her. Nevertheless, in *Self-Portrait* (1987) (Figure 6) she revisited her role as the photographic subject through DIY aesthetics. Valdez stated that a common critique she received from feminists during her involvement in Asco was that she allowed male members to portray her in a submissive manner (Goldman 1994, 230) (Valdez 2013, 25:50). However, Valdez addressed these claims by stating that she did not "let" anyone do



anything to her that was not an expressive reflection of herself. Valdez admitted that this period in her life contained “darkness” due to alcoholism in her home life, which placed her in a position where she felt she was silenced and had no control. This divulgence exemplifies how critics of Valdez’s artwork have failed to fully recognize her personal perspective, experiences, and agency.

*Self-Portrait* demonstrates how punk aesthetics contributed to the creation of alternative imagined and physical spaces by allowing Chicanas to express themselves without dogmatic judgment. The main components of *Self-Portrait* alongside Valdez’s photograph are a neon pink serpent, a long stemmed cherry, the artist’s initials, ooze, and Christian iconography –an image of Jesus Christ and two crosses. The striking use of neon colors with black details creates a graphic image which enhances Valdez’s image. Valdez is rendered in brown warm tones, possibly with sepia toning, and is placed slightly off the center in the bottom half of the composition. A close-up shot of Valdez leaning back facing and confronting the viewer’s gaze is emphasized by thin, dark eyebrows and eyeliners. These features contrast with Valdez’s pale complexion to create a sense of theatrical flair.

The top composition has black thin vertical lines surging from black clusters, with a green backdrop mimicking slime or ooze dripping down from the frame. The flat curvilinear shape of a vibrant pink serpent cascades towards Valdez’s face and covers her mouth. The direction of Valdez’s gaze confronts the viewer, expressing a sense of defiance over the viewer’s speculations or presence. A yellow vertical, centered backdrop leaves the farthest areas of the composition free, and these areas are occupied by an array of tumbling spray-painted initials. The initials “PV” are scattered throughout the work and appear to be spray painted with a stencil typeface.

A torn image of Jesus Christ is collaged and placed on the left of Valdez’s image. The black and white faded image of Christ is proportionally smaller than Valdez’s and is upside down. Two small crosses are included in the artwork: one is upside down, placed diagonally over the

yellow backdrop, giving the illusion of being suspended in place, and another appears to be suspended over the yellow backdrop in closer proximity to Valdez's portrait and is placed above her face. Historian and cultural critic Michelle Habell-Pallan argues that religious imagery is a valuable convergence point between punk and Chicana identity because religious imagery, especially Catholic imagery, can serve as a visual indicator of the unique cultural index created by Chicana contributions to punk subculture (Habell-Pallan 2005, 147-148).

Valdez's multimedia approach plays a critical role in composition, and more importantly, in her ability to reconstruct her own agency. By revisiting her own image and role as the photographic subject, Valdez reformulates her role to build an aesthetic sentiment of punk DIY. This aesthetic serves to reclaim personal agency, and contributes to a wide range of Chicana punk cultural productions that brought a new perspective to Los Angeles punk and offered Chicanas a new stylistic marker to navigate their complex identities.

## 8. Conclusion

The bold, exuberant use of saturated colors and material experimentation in Valdez's photography exhibits the multiplicity of Valdez's artistic style. Valdez provides valuable insight into the fine art photographic facet of punk aesthetics previously neglected by the art historical canon and punk history. She contributes to a wider lens of punk, not only a music-centric subculture but a multifaceted genre that prompted a new style for Chicanas to explore their identities and rearticulate feminine subjectivity. The photographs discussed in this paper offer a peripheral view of the vibrant mode through which Valdez set out to change the limited perception and representation of Latinos in mass media. Inspecting this selection of her photography draws out several questions about the trajectory of Valdez's career. Regarding this potentially extensive body of artworks, there is still plenty of work to be done in comprehensively studying Valdez's photography and more closely understanding her photographic practice.

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Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, 155-161. Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery.

### Figure References



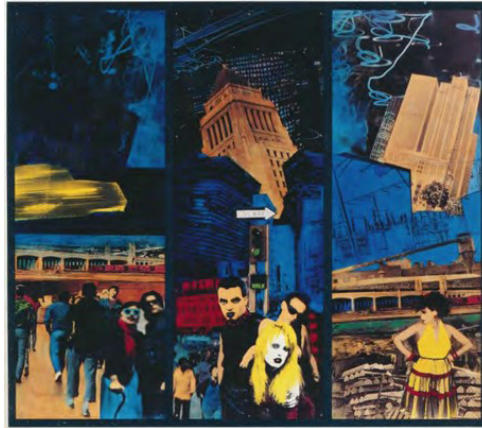
**Figure 1:** Patssi Valdez, *Photo Booth Piece*, c. 1975. Collage with photographs, 11 x 15 inches (Collection of artist). In *Chicanismo en el arte*. Los Angeles: LACMA, 1975, page 30. [http://www.archive.org/stream/chicanismoenelar00losa\\_page/n29/mode/2up](http://www.archive.org/stream/chicanismoenelar00losa/page/n29/mode/2up).



**Figure 2:** Patssi Valdez, *Sylvia Delgado in Purple*, c. 1980s. Hand painted photograph with ink and pastel, 20 x 36 inches, Collection of Joel Wachs, <https://www.thecut.com/2017/08/axis-mundo-queer-networks-in-chicano-moca-los-angeles.html>.



**Figure 3:** Patssi Valdez, *Cyclona*, 1982. Hand-painted photograph, 13 x 7.75 inches. Collection of Robert Legoretta, <https://cruisingthearchive.org/gallery/pst-project-group-3-2/>.



**Figure 4:** Patssi Valdez, *Downtown Los Angeles*, 1983. Hand-colored photo collage, triptych, 80 x 96 inches (Collection of Gunter Joetz). In *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* edited by Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano. Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991, catalogue number 116.



**Figure 5:** Patssi Valdez, *Pyrah*, c. 1980s. Mixed media photo collage, 22 x 28 inches, Collection of artist, <http://www.ugeducation.ucla.edu/2018/07/19/art-gallery-publishes-ucla-undergraduates-research-on-artist-patssi-valdez/>.





**Figure 6:** Patssi Valdez, *Self-Portrait*, 1987. Mixed media photo collage, 40 x 32 inches. (Anonymous collector). In *Vexing: Voices from East L.A. Punk*. Claremont: Claremont Museum of Art, 2008), page 6.