

Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Martha Ramirez

Martha Ramirez was interviewed for the Teatro Cometa Oral History project in 2007. Ramirez traveled to Mexico City in 1971 to study muralism with David Alfaro Siqueiros, one of the most talented and famous “Mexican Muralists.” In this clip she discusses her life in Mexico and the intersectionality between the art world and student movements during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Transcript:

Q: And did you graduate from that institution, an art major?

A: No, because I was really fortunate to be able to go study under Siqueiros, and I was kind of totally immersed in the life of Mexico City. This happened in 1971 when I traveled, and my dream was to learn muralism under one of the great masters, who was the last one that was still alive. So as things never happen in a straight line, in order to be able to stay in Mexico City, I needed a place to live, and one of the helpers of the maestro was friends with the Mascarones Theater Group. The Mascarones Theater Group had been founded in 1962, I believe, and they had a commune in Coyoacán. This commune, it wasn't just theater people, it was like teachers and photographers and musicians. So I ended up living there.

Much to my surprise, it was a theater group that had been already invited to San Fernando, but they never made it on time because there was snow in the mountains and they couldn't cross over to come to Northridge. But we were waiting for them. I had already met one of their members, who stayed on. This was, I believe, in 1970 when I first met one of the members of the Mascarones, and he did a presentation at Valley State, which impressed me very much, even though he just did it by himself.

So when I was in Mexico, I realized it was a powerful group. It was a group who was also working to support the movements in different areas. Of course, the student movement was very powerful because in 1968 there was a very important outburst of – well, worldwide, but in Mexico what happened is that the students took on many of the voices of the workers, so all of a sudden there were thousands of people in the streets, which became threatening for the government, especially when the Olympics were going to happen.

Díaz Ordaz, in a neo-fascist kind of way, massacred the students in the Plaza Tlatelolco. That was October 2nd, 1968. So by 1971 the students were still very much organized, although it had, of course, become a very difficult time for the student movement, and in general all the social leftist groups, because everybody was afraid with that.