

**PROYECTO MISSION MURALS**  
Oral History Audio Transcripts

**EDUARDO PINEDA ORAL HISTORY**  
Berkeley, California, April 27, 2021

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This is an oral history of Peruvian American artist, educator, and curator Eduardo Pineda for the *Mission Murals Project*. I'm Camilo Garzón. It was recorded on April 27, 2021, in Eduardo Pineda's home in Berkeley, California. The voices you'll hear will be those of Eduardo and me.

When I was welcomed in his home, he and his wife, Susie, offered me decaf coffee and a homemade brownie with some nuts. We talked about the perfect size of sweet snacks to combine with an afternoon coffee as Susie was preparing for a biology test for a class she was taking for fun.

This oral history delves into the facets of Eduardo's early life in Peru that led to his career as an artist, detailing his foray into visual art, his educational projects, as well as his curatorial assignments and work. The personal and political reasons for his focus on muralism are clarified as Eduardo takes us on a journey through the expanse of public art he has generated throughout the years.

The oral history also shows how his role in preserving and amplifying Latinx heritage in San Francisco's Mission District led to a close, collaborative friendship with muralists like Ray Patlán.

Here is the oral history.

*Esta es una historia oral del artista, educador y curador de exposiciones peruanoamericano Eduardo Pineda para el Mission Murals Project. Soy Camilo Garzón. Se grabó el 27 de abril de 2021, en la casa de Eduardo Pineda en Berkeley (California). Las voces que oirás serán las de Eduardo y la mía.*

*Cuando me dieron la bienvenida a su hogar, él y su esposa, Susie, me ofrecieron café descafeinado y un brownie casero con nueces. Hablamos del tamaño perfecto de los bocados dulces para combinar con un café de la tarde mientras que Susie se preparaba para un examen de biología para una clase que estaba tomando por diversión.*

*Esta historia oral ahonda en las facetas de las primeras etapas de la vida de Eduardo en Perú que lo condujeron a su profesión como artista, puntualizando su incursión al arte visual, sus proyectos educativos, así como sus encargos y su labor como curador de exposiciones. Eduardo aclara las razones personales y políticas por las que se enfocó en el muralismo mientras nos lleva de viaje por toda la extensión del arte público que ha generado a través de los años. Además, la historia oral desvela cómo su papel de conservar y divulgar la herencia latina en el barrio de la Mission de San Francisco condujo a una amistad estrecha y de colaboración con muralistas como Ray Patlán. Aquí está la historia oral.*

**CAMILO GARZÓN:** Okay. Today is April 27, 2021, and I am very pleased Eduardo Pineda is here with me, and welcomed me in his home in Berkeley, California. I'm talking to him on behalf of the *Mission Murals Project*. So, if you can just say your full name and also where were you born.

**EDUARDO PINEDA:** Okay. I'm Eduardo Pineda, and I was born in Lima, Peru.

**CG:** What do you remember of Lima?

**EP:** Just that it's a memory of my parents. We immigrated to Chicago when I was about ten months old, something like that. And my memories of Lima start, actually, when I visited for the first time—as, you know, like not a kid, but still a kid—when I was about sixteen in 1972. And I was struck by just—it's funny—I guess I was struck by how much it's like San Francisco when I arrived in San Francisco, with all the fog, the moisture. It was exciting. It was exciting.

I stayed in the house that I first lived in as a child. It was now owned by friends of my parents, and it was in San Isidro, which is a pretty nice part of Lima. Very small, tight little neighborhood with lots of trees. *Tiene como un [bosque]* (It has a sort of woods). And I got the opportunity to see a little bit of the city through not just being, not just walking around, but through teenagers, older teenagers, young people that were the sons of my parents' friends.

And so we did some, even a little illegal, archaeological excavations, of which I guess I shouldn't say, but I will say. I brought back some—which, of course, is illegal. So I don't know why I'm telling you this [*laughs*].

**CG:** [*laughs*] It's all good, and at the end of the day it's interesting, because a lot of Latin America has a lot of fossils and many things that we use even for construction. It's more like, in certain countries, it's a more recent practice to have that be illegal, but for the longest time, it was just also something that is readily available, and you just catch it, or excavate and get it.

**EP:** Yeah, I only wish I had known the city better, because then I would have loved to have been able to return back. 'Cause as an adult, I've been back a couple more times to Peru, and always going through Lima, and it was just so incredible.

We drove out on motorcycles to just an area that I would call the edge of the city, but I don't really know the city well enough. It was unbuilt but surrounded by more built neighborhoods.

And just in this very tall kind of clearing, you know, my friend said, “Just start digging.” *Encontramos huacos* (We found objects). And so . . .

**CG:** For people that don't know what that word is in English, what is that word?

**EP:** Yeah, okay, so it refers to archaeological objects, but I think the word actually means thing, or object. So it's kind of like, maybe like a shorthand, at least at that time. Although I think it's still used, and you can actually use it I believe even to describe large pieces of architecture.

But yeah, so I started to do that, and within five minutes I dug up this figure, which I have, and over the years I've tried to identify it just from my own study, but not being the archaeologist, I've always wanted to show it to someone. But I need a trust[ed] archeologist, let's put it that way.

**CG:** Yeah, that makes sense. Regarding the family memories that you have of Lima, as you were saying, about your parents, what are some of those things that you do remember about your parents, or your relationship to them?

**EP:** To my parents? Well, let's just say I was a problem child. And they were as supportive as they could be. I think they were in a really tough position, because although we came to the United States, it was only going to be a temporary stay. It was to be for my father's study. He was studying economics and he got into a program at the University of Chicago. So that's how we ended up in Hyde Park. And that program probably would have taken at most three years. And so it was anticipated that he would study and then we'd go back.

But within, I believe, within about a year of being in the United States, they—their friends in Lima advised them to stay out as long as possible, just anticipating that things would blow over and it would be a better time for them to return within a couple of years. So this was like 1957, and they basically closed up everything and moved my grandmother with us as well. And this was—at this moment, then, it became a much larger immigration.

My father's eldest brother was the first one to come. He came to study medicine. He was a surgeon, a brain surgeon. And seeing the opportunities, he made my father aware of the programs that could bring him to the United States so that he could study.

My father being—my father was actually very politically active as a young man. And so I think likely our trajectory would have been—if things had gone perhaps as they had planned it—it

would have been that the family would have been, our family, would have been in the United States, in Hyde Park.

He would have finished his economic study at the University of Chicago, gone back to Peru, and then probably continued on and probably worked his way into some kind of a cabinet position in the Peruvian government at the time. But that didn't happen. [*laughs*]

**CG:** That's part of the, I would say, personally, unfortunate history of Latin America, that there's a lot of moving here to the United States out of the complications, nationally, that our families end up going through. And, as you just said, there were a lot of dreams, and promises, or things that would have happened if things had gone differently, but of course they didn't.

And if you think of your art, 'cause we can get into it now—you always have had a concern with social justice, what we have deemed social justice, but also a depiction of Latin American struggles, or struggles of who we are, identity, also. When do you think you started noticing this when you were younger? Like, when was that moment?

**EP:** You know, I don't know that it's a moment. Over the years I've had the opportunity to talk to the kids that I went to school with in Chicago. And it's always, it's great to hear what their impressions of you are, 'cause it's a glimpse of yourself that you aren't aware of. They can also be kind of like not what you want to hear. But I think one of the things is that even as a young person in high school, I was already thinking about possibilities for other worlds, and in the games that we would play. I'm trying to—there was an example, there was a game that—first of all, I'm a mixture of a lot of privilege and also a lot of struggle, I guess.

I just said my parents were both first members in their families to go to college, so they're highly educated. When they came to the United States, they became, what, like working class. And so managing that—you know, I learned a lot from my father, who was pretty accepting and patient with people in general. So, my mom was a little sterner and feistier.

So, but getting back to impressions. This one student that I went to school with had a memory of me in games that we would play. There were these simulation games where it was a simulated government, rather world governments. So you could be Germany, another student would be France, another student would be Argentina, and another would be China. And so the idea of the game was, it was a pre—it was like a pre-introduction to world politics and government.

So basically the game was, had this simulation, and someone would always run it. And that person had control over how much your GNP was and all this kind of stuff, and what would happen and what not.

And so, he remembers me being the pope, so that's how exacting this game was. And arguing that it didn't have to be. There was no reason to have to have our GNP judged by how much production we had, that actually we should be judging on happiness.

Which, I think about that now and it's like crazy, but there are studies on that already—there's already a theoretical thinking. Not that I'm a genius or anything like that. But I just, I was just stunned by that. So that's my way of saying that I'm not exactly sure that there was an exact point. Yeah, yeah.

**CG:** As you're saying, it was more of a way of approaching things, that might have not been a moment, but it was just the way of looking at things, the framework that you put the world through, and even concerns of the world, as you're saying.

Indeed, happiness is such an important element of a lot of economic studies these days. But you as a younger person, it still is the same idea; it still is conceptually what they're saying these days too. It's not new, but it is something that even a younger person understands, that it would be about money.

**EP:** Yeah, really. That's probably a better way to look at it. Like, any kid could tell you that we should be more concerned about happiness than just money. *[laughs]*

**CG:** And that's such an essential thing. And generally speaking, you have concerned yourself with artistic endeavors most of your adult life, I would say. And by artistic endeavors, there's a lot of public art. There is photography, there is informal and formal education, in many senses.

You've been appointed to several different positions for museums like SFMOMA, or the Museum of the African Diaspora, even the Richmond Art Center, Oakland Museum of California—[the] list is very important. But, more than anything, these institutions are institutions, and they have their priorities and their agendas.

You're talking about countries and everything, That same thing happens. You can be at the helm of the country, but sometimes those agendas are driven by other people, not only voters, but other people.

How do you think institutions, even school when you were a younger kid, when you got your bachelor's, and so on in your further graduate programs. How did you feel institutions have worked with you or even at times maybe against you?

**EP:** I usually tell people that I was not—I was really bad in school, but I'm a really good student. And it's because I'm not comfortable in an academic setting, and not always successful. A lot of times I would say I'm not that—not really successful in it. Although at the same time I really value it, 'cause it has the possibility of such deep analysis, and just consideration, and you can really look at motivations, all kinds of things.

At the same time, what happened to me was, I went to this—I was a student at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. So this is a really special school set up by the great American educator John Dewey, and extremely experimental. And so, I went there from kindergarten all the way till I graduated high school. And the trajectory of someone who goes there oftentimes means that they will end up going to an Ivy League school, and going on to what—like, one of our classmates was Valerie Jarrett, is Valerie Jarrett. We have another one who teaches law at Harvard, or maybe now he's retired. So what I'm getting at is that these, the trajectory is toward being in the top of society. And I had—I really didn't understand that.

And so when it came time to go to college, I actually was exhausted from being in school. And so I don't remember much about applying to colleges, except that I really knew that I had to do that. And I ended up at Boston University for about a year and a half, and really disliked it. But at the same time, I got a total introduction to Latinos in the United States. Because at the time, when I entered, they introduced an experimental program in dorm living, in which what they did was they had different minority groups put together onto different floors. So, I know! It's crazy! 'Cause it's kind of like let's set up little ghettos.

So I was on the floor that had Dominicans, Chicanos from Texas, Puerto Ricans from New York. And there was actually even this one Irish kid, who I never really understood how he ended up on the floor. And it was just amazing because I was indignant that I was put into this situation and was complaining to the people in housing to find out how that had happened. And I was told, "Oh, that's because we just organized by Spanish surnames."

So, apparently, in line I met a wonderful, wonderful guy that became a close friend, Joseph Tovares, who became one of the producers of *American Experience* at PBS, and just a very successful media person.

In any case, we became good friends, and he was from Texas. And so I kind of got my first introduction to Chicano culture through him. And then we—not being satisfied with the

situation in Boston—I basically just dropped out and ended up going to San Francisco. And I liked the idea of being in San Francisco 'cause it was all the way on the other side of the continent. California had its mystique too. Oh, it was just all kinds of things.

But out here in California, I enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute. So I was out here by about '76 or '78. And through friends who were here, in the Bay Area, I had a good friend at Stanford, he let me stay at his dorm for too long a time. But through him I met one of his friends, and it turned out that his friend had other friends who came up to visit, and that's where I met my wife, Susie. And so we've been together since then. Out here, I already knew that I wanted to be a painter, and so I enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute.

But it was a very difficult moment because there was—it was basically focused on punk, and punk is just so nihilistic. The school had a very nihilistic feel to it at the time, even though it had other good qualities about it. That's where I took classes from different artists, from like Native American artists. George Longfish was a big influence, just because he was an introduction into the history of contemporary Native American art that goes into earlier periods as well. I was a student of Bob Colescott, and actually he was the only teacher that gave me an honors. Everybody else just pretty much passed me.

But it took me a long time to stick with the Art Institute, and so I ended up leaving for a number of years because what happened was, it was an unusual idea. Their whole premise for admission was that they felt they could not judge whether you were an artist or not. So, I applaud that, actually, because it meant that I didn't have to have a portfolio, and that's one thing I did not have. And at the same time, because of that, it felt like they were actually more interested in my tuition money, [*laughs*] not anything else.

So, as I traveled through the neighborhoods in San Francisco, there were all these muralists, and murals were going up. And I moved to the East Bay, where it was cheaper—I moved to Oakland—and got a studio there. And they were just so welcoming. They weren't—they didn't ask for any credentials. They didn't say, "What's your training?" It was more about, "Would you like to paint? We're doing this project. This is about freedom in Ireland. This is about the antinuclear movement." Things that were really of concern. And so I just started painting with them. And eventually I would go back to get my degree work done, once we had kids.

**CG:** And what you described it's just something that is so essential in the rest of your life, I think. It's just like the encounter with muralists in the Bay Area, which you happened to cross paths with, people like Ray Patlán, which I was fortunate to speak to very recently, and he has been a long-standing collaborator with you. That's another essential part of, I think, your life in art, but also in other aspects, even education, curation. It's collaboration.



How do you describe that specific relationship with Ray? In murals like *Berkeley Reads* or even *Raíces*, or the one that you did in Mission Cultural Center, because this has been a collaboration since '78?

**EP:** Yeah, so what, we've known each other for, I guess—was it really that, has it been that long? Maybe like '80? I don't know, I guess he would know. [*laughs*]

So, basically, what happens is, I start learning about murals through Osha Neumann, who is a Berkeley muralist, and he is teaching mural painting. He's doing projects through a class at Laney College. And part of doing murals is you become much more aware of them, and I started—as I would actually walk around Berkeley more, I began to notice these murals that were really brightly colored. Like Osha's murals are wonderful, but they're not what I would call bright. It's not a criticism; it's just a quality. And so I was attracted to the color, and so I asked him, "Who's doing these murals?" And he said, "Ray Patlán." And it happened—he said also, "He's starting a mural in West Berkeley." So about a five-minute walk from my house right now.

And so I went out there to meet him, and just like any other muralist, talking with him a little bit, he said, "Why don't you work with me? Help me out." And so he and Osha then, really, are my mural teachers.

So Ray and I continued to do separate work. I did a lot of work in Richmond at the time. But then in about 1989, yes, we know each other, but in 1989 he's doing a project called *We Learn from Each Other*. And in that mural is actually where our collaborative partnership begins. He had invited me to work before that and help him out on a beautiful, beautiful project called—at the First New School which is in the old Portuguese embassy, I think it was, in San Francisco. I'm not sure the building is still there anymore. It's kind of like around Gough and Van Ness, around there. And I think all of that has now been rebuilt.

But it was a fantastic mural. That probably was done in, I think 1981, maybe? Or '82? Because first of all, the college itself is fantastic; they were teaching classes that were relevant to the times and to the politics. And so he got this set of murals, two in the library and one in the main stairwell. So the one in the main stairwell is the one that I was helping him on. And we got the opportunity to do the murals before the college even opened up. And since it was such a progressive college, they actually had considered students that would have children. So they allowed me to set up a playpen that they had, brand-new playpen that they had, at the top of the staircase, and we'd keep Jack, my son, in the playpen. And I could paint while also paying attention to him just on the landing.

So we had worked together, but not formally as a team. That really started in '89 with this Leonard Flynn [Elementary School] mural—that's another name for it. And I don't know if he's told you about that one, but it's a fantastic mural that he designed about learning, just education. So it's a jumble of symbols, everything from Mayan, pre-Columbian symbols and figures to letters and numbers, and then this transition to these three giant heads of these three children opening a doorway. Education opens doors is kind of like the metaphor.

And so my contribution in that was to actually be able to obviously help him paint it, but also I got Foster & Kleiser, who is—they eventually become the, I forget the name, it's the biggest media company. Basically, they did billboards. And now they do more than billboards. I forget what the name of the contemporary company is.

And in that project we had them transfer his design onto pounce paper, and then we transferred the entire mural using pounce method. It was crazy, but it really worked. They were able to give us a very discounted, very reasonable, price. It wasn't the best transfer of the design 'cause they didn't know what kind of the flowing lines are. They're much more used to straightforward graphics that were put on billboards.

So that was the beginning of the project, of our real collaboration, where we really become a business. And the business we call Fresco. The projects then—at first he's getting a lot of the projects. So we did some for the San Francisco Police. There were two projects: one at Marshall School and another one in, it's called *Ombliqo*, which is in a parking lot on 24th at about Shotwell. It's right next to the McDonald's.

So, I don't know, where am I going with this? The way that we're trying to work was, after we got the projects, we tried to meld our style together, and also conceptually we worked on what it should be like, or how we should approach the problem. It involved a lot of drawing, and we would draw on each other's drawings. Really, what I began to learn was that it is possible to come up with a combined style, something that he wouldn't just do, and something that I wouldn't just do. It would actually look like—you could see, depending on how much and how close you are in your work, you could see the roots of it. But in a larger group, you wouldn't necessarily have to even see the looks of it.

That's a different type of approach, and one that I took too, actually in many projects after that, and one which I used to teach at the California College of the Arts [CCA] when I was there for ten years. I just retired last December, so in 2020, after about ten years.

That's—thinking about, returning back to your question about our observation about education and academic education, and then informal or mural training. At the art school, the students are very—we teach them to be the source and genius of all work. It's a very self-centered perspective on creativity.

In the mural class that I taught, I had to reassure them that their work, the final project, might not look like anything in their portfolio and that would be a success. And at the same time, they would have to get comfortable with investing themselves in something that perhaps was not going to look like their work in such a genuine way that they would keep the entire project successful.

So there's a lot of unlearning and learning something new in that. But I think it's very useful, and I think that a lot of the students actually found it very refreshing. And a lot of the students actually found it even more meaningful, because they weren't creating an exercise, or they weren't creating some artwork that would end up in a gallery. But it was a real work that ends up in many places here in the Bay Area. And some continue on for many years. [laughs] They're still up!

**CG:** And that, what you're saying about just education, the unlearning and learning of many things, many aspects of just creating, I do think that—you did mention John Dewey. You did mention pragmatism. Or his school of thought, let's just say it. And to have been in that environment growing up in a school that really embraced his ideas—that's part of it. I just think that you just took it to the next level in terms of it really also is about the way that styles can meld together and create something entirely new, a synthesis, a suppletion of—for example, you were describing your work with Ray, with Ray Patlán. And some of those works that you see from Fresco in 1990 to 1998, you see a lot of that melding together of not something that is just Eduardo, not something that is Ray, but you see aspects of both of you in those works.

And that's just a very important element of your work. It's that signature, or those decisions, but then the joint decisions that you see both of you, and other collaborators you have had, taking, making those decisions. And you did mention just now teaching and education and retiring, which is an interesting and important step as well. How are you feeling about it these days?

**EP:** [laughs] Well, I'm actually feeling a lot better now that I'm vaccinated. That's probably the real difference. I'm actually trying to get a couple of projects started.

The trajectory, Ray and I, we did several really, really great murals. I forget, I think at least a dozen together. Our collaboration probably ends—the big part of it, the most prolific part of it—probably ends about, I think, 1993 with *El mundial*, which is still in many ways—it's such a simple idea, such a simple idea. But I think it's basically the soccer mural, and it celebrates the World Cup championship that was held down in Palo Alto. And it was, I believe, the first time that the World Cup was held in the United States. A sort of recognition of not just Latin America, but of the rest of the world where football is not, football is now *fútbol* [*laughs*].

And that mural was also unusual because our sponsor was Coca-Cola. We're politically aware muralists, and we're fully aware of Coca-Cola's history in Latin America. But what happened there was, they had approached us. They wanted us to do like a—basically a drawing that could be made into posters. And I suggested to them that their intention was to create a market. They wanted a market in San Francisco, and in the Bay Area, for Latinos to buy more Coke—as if you needed to. And so what I suggested to them was that rather than just doing a poster, what if they actually allowed us to do a mural, and on top of that, make the logo extremely discreet, so it's not the center of it. Their name was going to be on it, so they would get all the advertising, but at the same time they would be able to, in a sense, contribute something to the neighborhood.

I must say, I was really impressed that they were willing to listen. The marketer that I talked to was open to the idea and could see in it the possibility. And so that's how that mural came about. The logo stayed on for I think a year, and then after that it disappeared and became the Mission High School logo. And it has a presence there; it did what they wanted. A poster would have lasted only a year as well. But the mural actually stayed on, and people like the mural.

**CG:** And that also speaks to the power of not only murals, but also just public art, I think—just it's something that is, or becomes, part of the environment that it is in, and if anything, becomes the environment now.

It's so interesting that you mention a company, like Coca-Cola or just companies, because at the end of the day, art—you still need to make a living, you need to pay rent, and all these obligations, but I'm very happy to hear that they heard you and they listened to you. 'Cause standing up to a corporation like Coca-Cola for your art is an important, very valuable lesson for artists, anyone listening to this, honestly.

**EP:** Yeah, I often wondered if it also had to do with the fact that the marketing agency was in Canada. And they had, they just had a different view. But I don't really know. I really don't know.

**CG:** At this point, it's just like hypothesis. No, it's true; that makes sense. Eduardo, regarding your curatorial work, what are some of the most significant things that you can tell me about your work as a curator? Why did you choose to also work in this realm specifically?

**EP:** I'll approach the curatorial work like this. So, as I was back in what would have been 1988–89, 1988. So, in 1988 I finished my master's at San Francisco State. And through some—I know Ray was very supportive through his advocacy, and my desire, I actually became the curatorial assistant at Galería de la Raza. It was kind of like a supportive position. They gave me a stipend for working there, but also a stipend toward my finishing up my master's. And so, I was basically the gallery assistant, the paid gallery assistant, for Galería de la Raza for two years under the tutelage of Enrique Chagoya. And aside from being a masterful artist—who I just read in the paper earlier a couple of weeks ago, that he got a Guggenheim. So he's a superstar. But he's a great curator. And so he taught me a lot about curating. And the—it was a really exciting time then too, because there were so—he was getting artists, important artists from Mexico, to exhibit.

And it's not to say that there aren't other—like, the other thing that I loved about Galería was that Chicano artists from all over the United States would always come through. So it was my introduction to Chicano art in a much more personal manner. Not that we were friends, but just the whole idea that I had an opportunity to meet who made the work that I was hanging.

And so, to just get back to the curatorial work, he taught me a lot about just how to set up an exhibition, and the power of an exhibition. That, and the shows at Galería, which were exciting and always had a—they did have a mix. Some were definitely much more popular than others. Some were maybe a little bit conceptual for the audience that we were around. But they were still just really, really dynamic.

That curatorial experience actually opened the door for me to get hired at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art as part of the on-call crew. So, it wasn't a permanent job. But every, say like, three months, sometimes it could be two months, there would be a show that they would have to put up, and so they would need additional help from—to support and augment just the regular crew. And so, that's how I first got into SFMOMA. Kent Roberts, who hung the most shows ever at that museum, hired me in 1990.

Now, within that time period, that first year, a couple of unusual things happened. First of all, the museum had on its list of exhibitions the *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* exhibit, the first national Chicano art exhibition. And it was in direct response to a study that I believe had just come out, within a couple of years, called the Infamous Jeff Jones report, in which it

was pointed out how the major museums—so, SFMOMA, the Fine Arts Museums, which includes the de Young, and the Legion of Honor, the opera, the symphony, the ballet—all got the majority of tax monies to basically fund their programs. And there was a burgeoning neighborhood arts program that was in full swing. That's what made the Mission Cultural Center possible and the Neighborhood Center in Chinatown, the one out in the Western Addition, the one out in Bayview, even the one in North Beach.

The disparity between public funds for just regular people to be able to have art services and the money that went to these highly elite cultural institutions was really scrutinized. And so SFMOMA, as a defensive matter, put that show on their exhibition calendar. I found out about it through not only being in the, well, actually, from being outside the museum, through the Chicano community, through Ray and through Amalia [Mesa-Bains]. And well, actually, I forget. But definitely not through the museum. But what it allowed me to do was it gave me the opportunity to write to the curator of education at the museum at the time, and say, "Look, you have this show coming in on Chicano art. You would really need someone that knows the organizations that you're going to want to partner with. I know the organizations." And then I also reached out to Amalia Mesa-Bains and asked her for her support since she was on the committee of the museum—it was an advisory committee—to support the show.

And so, remarkably, at that moment, a newly hired coordinator in their education department, whose job it was to diversify the programs, unexpectedly died. I think her name was Bessie Mar-Ladden, a highly renowned educator and community artist or community center person. And so, I didn't plan that much. But that's how I was, with the support of Kent, I was able to move into education, into a temporary position and help out with that show.

It was after that I was able to stay on as a coordinator and then, through the move to the Botta building, the first building in Yerba Buena, and then through their [re]modeling, until I worked my way up from coordinator into being an assistant director. And then, for about a year, as co-director of the department as we transitioned to a new curator. Curating opened the door for me to get involved at SFMOMA, and I stayed there for a long time.

While I was there, there's a number of things that were really, really important that happened. So, the first thing is that it's really unusual to be hired in the nineties, I definitely represented Latinos, the potential diversity of museums. And that's a very important thing that is happening. I knew that I was not the first Latino that was ever hired there. And more importantly, I also knew that there actually had been a Latino curator. And that Latino curator was hired in the seventies. His name was Rolando Castellón.

One of the things that I found interesting as I got, as I looked deeper, was that in fact Rolando had collected a lot of work by contemporary artists—Latinos, Filipinos, African

Americans. Not like local, local artists. And that work was never on display. And so, it still exists in their collection, is what I'm getting at. And it made me rethink how the—what the role is, in working in institutions. I stayed on there for as long as I could, in a sense, because I felt that it was valuable and we needed to have some kind of continuity there.

I think they find themselves in a tougher position because so little has been done. I think that continues to be a problem, less on the part of the staff as much as by, perhaps, the board. There doesn't yet seem to be enough of a change in their attitude.

The only thing I learned very quickly, actually, in my stay there was—when I began, it was clear that all of the resources, so this is 1990, all the resources of the museum were being directed toward the building of the new museum, the Botta building, that opened in '95 in Yerba Buena. So, the scope of my role there was to build a family, and youth, and teacher program. Now, the question always becomes, well, what did you do before that? And the history that I was given was that it didn't exist. They didn't really have that before.

The programs, as I started to work with and build them, people would bring their children and begin to tell me how they used to go to school there, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. And so as I got more access into different parts of—this is the old building at Civic Center—the conservation department and labs were built in what used to be the education spaces. So they actually had these student lockers that were never removed, but were there, relics of when it was when they had programming. I can safely say that I did a good job. I was able to really, not just myself, but with a lot of hard work, be able to rebuild that program and leave it there.

But by the time I was leaving, the community focus that I had was already being pared back. And just by simply cutting it, the move was—it takes so many years for a museum to build up so much trust and reputation. And SFMOMA, even with its track record, I think it was able to do some of that repair. But what I found amazing was that, just like when they had cut all the programs in a focus toward building a new building, there was no problem with discontinuing an effort that took so many years to build in order to redirect the focus of the museum somewhere else. So, I was shocked, but it gave me a real concrete sense of institutional scale. And that again reminded me of what, kind of just in general, what the role here is.

We need to have murals—not just because they're beautiful and they're public art, but because they really remain; they still remain the possibility of expressions for communities, and peoples, and neighborhoods, and just people who don't have a history represented in the larger institutions that we have. And if those larger institutions maybe even do collect some of the work, if they don't show it, then there's no real effort to include the broadness

of our culture. So that gave me a much deeper recognition of the possibility of even exhibitions.

So, the other thing I'll say is that, as Ray and I begin, what happens to our collaborative effort is, I just get too busy. By the time the Botta building is built in 1995, I now have to take on a full-time job. Before that, I was able to keep it as a part-time job and then have enough time to be able to do mural projects. But that's no longer possible by 1995. And so, what's good is that the curating skills that I built were able to allow me new entrées into other museums. And so it's a way that I've continued to do my work, but translated through exhibitions, and translated through museum exhibitions.

I didn't curate any shows at SFMOMA, or at least that were recognized as curation. The closest thing, I think, at SFMOMA, was the organizing of a show at the very end of the stay at Civic Center. It's called *Gronk in the Galleries*. So, one of the members of the development department—a really progressive woman who is now the director of the Oakland Museum, Lori Fogarty—had this idea of, what would happen is, when the museum moved out of the Civic Center into the new building, the staff would have six months of preparation work in the new building without any public.

So, we needed to have a presence somewhere. And so the idea was to pare down [to] the bare minimum of artwork in the Civic Center. And so she said, "What if we did a project, a mural project, in the museum?" And so we combined it with an education project where students from the School of the Arts would work with Gronk, the Chicano—fabulous Chicano painter from LA—and they would paint murals directly on the walls of the museum space. So, two rooms. And that would be an exhibit that you could come and look at while they're actually doing it, and then after it was done. And then it had a public program that included Gronk, included Amalia Mesa-Bains, included a number of other artists, Chicanos, and artists who could talk about contemporary art.

So it was a really, really interesting and dynamic work. And also it became this mural within the museum. It was probably the second mural exhibition the museum ever did. The first one was, I think, in 1978, Rolando Castellón did it for—it was, no, maybe it was '76, the bicentennial year. That's right; it was the bicentennial for the US. And so, it was a fantastic museum, with the Asian, Latino, African American muralists all doing these response murals to the celebration of the United States in its two hundredth year. Fabulous show. I didn't see it in real life, I saw it in the catalogs.

**CG:** What you just spoke about has been an issue, as you were saying—just there's been a lot of opportunities for not only SFMOMA but other institutions to truly do their part in this way



that you're establishing. And I think you're being very fair, but at the same time recognizing what has been done—but also the room to really be fair with what has existed and what it is in the collections themselves. And I think that's just an essential thing for the future. They already own, or have in their collections, several works of art from which they could create these kinds of curated exhibitions that could become one more interesting thing to look forward to as Latin Americans, as Chicanos. There's so many different nuances there that could be explored, and I just appreciate all your words, because that speaks to the future of, hopefully, what can be, and the possibilities of that.

I think I have just a couple of final questions for you, Eduardo. One is very much a question that I've been just asking everyone I've been interviewing. It's a very open question. That is: what do you think you need to tell me, or what do I need to know, so that I can understand you? And take that "you" as general or as specific as you want to take it.

**EP:** [*laughs*] Wow, that's interesting.

I guess one of the maybe key things is that I'm really committed to murals, but I see them related in all different types of settings. I mentioned before that we, our collaboration, Ray and I had a collaboration for I think seven or eight years, and that we had to—I just got too busy with the museum work. I needed to have a much more secure, steady income for our family. Not that I was the biggest breadwinner.

But, more importantly, he's someone that—we could look at murals in so many different ways, and we wanted to. And we did a lot of curatorial efforts as well. Not a lot, but we did one that was extremely successful and unusual, in which we combined this idea of looking at murals in three different arenas. One is the work of collaborators, and that component of the exhibit was held at the Mission Cultural Center, one that looked at the work of muralists as individuals, and that was held at the South of Market Cultural Center. And then one show that looked at the murals that never got realized, in a sense; they were censored, and never could become.

And that was really, that's where the idea began. 'Cause I was feeling like, by 1997 the murals that we were doing, all fantastic, but they kind of felt like we had a certain consistent perspective, almost maybe too limited. And I knew that many of us had these designs and these possibilities that were just stopped for one reason or another. And it could show the breadth of the possibilities of the way that muralists think—that it wasn't always about approaching the politics as good against evil. It wasn't always just approaching the inclusion of everyone by just a rainbow of people. It's not to criticize it, but it's to show that the imagination was actually still working amongst the muralists. And because of that, because I

was able to get that show at Capp Street, we were able to build these other facets and make it into a suite of exhibitions.

And so, when I say I hope you can—and I think you already do—appreciate the different ways that I've worked, there is always that underpinning of consistency that I really want the muralists, the recognition of different communities. To put them in a place where we can appreciate their imagination and at the same time nurture that imagination so that no one feels like they can't make something, they can't think of something, they can't see a new vision. 'Cause that, I think, is—the older I get, the way times go, you really begin to see how we're falling into a certain, real deep prescription for our existence.

And getting a little preachy here, but—so, that's one, that, I would say, is, I don't know. I said a million things. But that's one thing that I would want you to get to know about me, is there is a through line in all the things that I do, and I appreciate the opportunity to say that.

**CG:** I think that anyone that listens to this conversation that I've had today with you, hopefully can see the through line. That's something that I've been trying to do also just by asking you questions about various different aspects of your professional life and just your life in general. And I do think that the most telling aspect of your answer, in my opinion, was that I asked you about you, and you still chose to say we. And I feel like that just speaks to just all of the interconnected parts of who you've been as a person. Not only as an artist, but just as a person, just a lot of collaboration, a lot of learning and unlearning, and just being with each other, being with people and I do think that it does translate.

And I think one of the things that I do really appreciate about your legacy—and I'm not saying *legacy* as the word that we normally talk about, as someone that is gone exactly—but it's just something that is present for anyone that wants to just see, in plain sight. You created this website, a few years ago, called Storytelling Walls. And it's such a magnificent way of understanding just not only murals and the people involved, but you've written a lot in there, about your reflections, about even just different aspects of what muralism is. And murals have been around, in one of your posts, if anything I think the first one, or the "About" post of the website, you've described petroglyphs. You've described so many different specific forms of art that have come since rupestrian art that speak to the same kind of art form that has evolved, or that has aspects of that.

And I want you to know that that is a very important public service that you've also done. And that that effort is recognized, at least by me. And I just want you to know that that is a very essential resource for anyone that wants to really understand not only the murals here in the Bay Area, and the *Mission Murals Project*, which [is] what this project is currently about, but

also the through line throughout history, even outside of your own work. So, I guess that's more of a comment than a question.

But, before I let you go, is there anything else that you would like to add or say that you feel like you would want to?

**EP:** Yeah, so I'm glad you appreciate the website. So, the website—I created the website after retiring from the Museum of the African Diaspora. And it was a fantastic experience to be there. I really felt privileged because the museum really had that—it was a new conceptual type of museum, a different type of museum. It wouldn't be a collecting museum, although its collection was stories, stories of the African American community. And actually, it would eventually grow to be larger.

And it had this central—not conflict as much as tension—between African American identity in history, and then also the diaspora. And with so many people from Africa immigrating into the United States from many different nations, there was this what would seem to be a simple interconnection, yet because we're people in different times, and different experiences, the tension there was really, really difficult. And so I really felt on top of that the privilege of being allowed to be their first education director.

So when Denise Bradley hired me—she was the first director at the time of opening—it was just a fantastic sense of recognition. And then to just be able to go almost to the same place, next door to SFMOMA, and have a real change in the culture and the attitude, was so refreshing. That, unfortunately—it's the classic story of a start-up. I came from a big museum; I cost them a lot of money. And as much as I think I did a good job, and they wanted me, they couldn't afford it.

So when I left there, working with them in order to plan the transition, I wanted to return back to mural painting and so that's how the website came about. It was actually designed by a student at CCA who was taking this wonderful class about learning how to make websites and media. But it was actually taught from the perspective of doing that with a community focus. And so, the instructor, he designed it so that he would get different organizations that needed websites and select maybe one or two artists a semester that were doing work, community work, that they could—students could then design websites.

And so, I knew pretty much what I wanted, in a sense, with my experience from SFMOMA's approach to media. It wasn't necessarily inquiry-based, but at the same time—or really, what I wanted was something that was more than a portfolio. Because I knew myself; I'm not a

gallery artist. So I don't really have a consistent portfolio that I can put up and that people can buy or get to know my work. My work is just a little bit broader or conceptual.

And so I felt like they needed to have a concept of what I'm about, and then a place where I could show them more recent work. The work that's there, that isn't recent, was work that I've done that didn't have a form. It didn't really have a place to be shown. It's not the work that is—it's not the superstar work that you see in mural books about community murals.

The first mural that I did in San Francisco is there. It was a really interesting project, and it's called *Retablo de los padres* (Parents' altarpiece). In San Francisco in, I guess, the eighties, definitely in the eighties—but I'm not so sure—there was a mural resource center, and it begins maybe in the seventies, and it lasts till, I think, not quite the middle of the nineties. It [was paid for with] money that came from the federal government through community block grants that existed at the time. And it was part of this whole reimagining of how arts could be funded in a public manner. And the resource center was maybe one of the only existing city municipal programs that was dedicated to the making of murals. So a lot of the murals of that period in San Francisco [were] actually funded through that. And it's a part of that, because it was a public process, that mural that I did, *Retablo de los padres*, involved having to go out and actually introduce yourself to the neighbors and then get them to sign a petition that would support your project.

So that's another introduction I got to the Mission, through knocking on doors and actually meeting people. But that mural was about parenting—but also about disabilities. It's a mural that—getting actually back to Ray, before we had our collaborative, our collaboration, the formal collaboration, he was the founding director for Creativity Explored of San Francisco while I was at the San Francisco Art Institute. And I did a project for it one semester interning there, in order to develop a mural process for adults with developmental disabilities. And so the regular—it was Ray, the regular instructor, Chuy Campusano, and then me. Real early on, so I think this was maybe '83. And in that we saw this kernel of the possibility of being able to have adult artists with developmental disabilities actually do murals. And so later I got a California Arts Council grant, in '86, in order to work at Creativity Explored on a set of murals that we did.

So one of Ray's—really, what I think he considers more of one of his most important murals, *Y tú, y yo y qué*—he actually allows the disabled artists to come and paint on that wall and add to it. And that leads into this vision of what *Retablo de los padres* would be. Because in that—this was at the old Sunshine School facility, which is right there at York and 26th or 27th. That facility was built in the thirties as one of the first places that you could have people with disabilities get into a public swimming pool. And at the time that I'm doing the

mural, that swimming pool has already been covered up; underneath, I believe, was a dance floor, or some kind of other floor, because it had become too expensive to maintain. But the disability history continued there through a program of introducing—or supporting disabled babies and children. And so it was like a, basically, a toddler program, infant and toddler program for disabled children.

And so what I envisioned was including even those families in the mural. They had young parents too. And so that wall was based on this concept of retablo boxes from Peru that originally started out as religious boxes that told Bible stories. But in contemporary work, particularly by a fabulous artist, Nicario Jiménez—he used that form as a way of talking about history and contemporary events. And so that was my first work in San Francisco.

Yeah, and it also led to another wall called *New Visions* by Susan Greene and Jane Norling and Miranda Bergman, which included portraits of some of the artists that I've worked with and was on Folsom. They invited me to work with them to be the facilitator for the artists, the disabled artists, in their contributions to that mural. 'Cause by that time I was the person that had the experience.

But I just wanted to throw that in too, because it really did shape me a lot, this whole recognition of the privilege I have for being able to be considered normal and, what, complete. Which oftentimes you have to question yourself, because the unconditional love that you could get from the artists at Creativity Explored was unmatched. I mean, they'd hug you; they loved to spend time with you. They were direct about the way that they approached expression.

I went to an art school that was striving to have that type of directness to art making. So, I was being trained to do that. Yet it was clear that some people don't need to be trained—or trained in the way that we think about as academics. And so, yeah.

**CG:** I couldn't have predicted such a beautiful coda to this conversation.

Thank you so much for that, which you just shared. And not only your time at Creativity Explored, but also just this part of your Peruvian heritage being part of your mural work. And just the—not only the reclamation of a specific motif that it's been part of the culture, but also just as a reframing of it.

And I think that that's just such an important lesson for anyone that is an artist, as well as what you just explained about some people don't need to be trained about expression, and sometimes a disability in a way can also be quite the ability in many other ways too.

So, Eduardo, thank you so much for your time today, and I appreciate everything that you have told us today.

**EP:** Well, thank you; thanks for listening.

**CG:** A couple of days after our oral history, Eduardo reached out to me in an email, saying, “Is it possible to add to the interview? I know you have been very generous with your time, and I totally understand if I am pushing the limits of this opportunity. It’s just that I realized my thoughts are incomplete.”

In the interest of being fair to his thoughts and stories, I am happy to present what he sent me on May 6, 2021, as an addendum to our oral history:

**EP:** I am very interested in collaborative work because it can open up personal creativity and also help continue major project work while allowing collaborators to continue other stable work. For me it was my museum education work. And for Ray, it was his directorship of Creativity Explored of San Francisco. Our last mural as the mural team Fresco was the *Raizes* ceramic tile mural in 2000 at José Coronado Park in the Mission District.

My next mural in the Mission was the *Right to Good Health* mural at the Mission Neighborhood Health Center in 2011. This was with collaborator Joaquin Alejandro Newman. The health center has three murals from the first wave of Chicano murals, painted by Michael Ríos and Graciela Carrillo at the entrance on Shotwell Street, and inside by Fran Valesco, that I think no longer is visible. All three were painted in 1976. It was an honor to join those three in decorating this health institution.

Our mural was for the reception area just inside the Shotwell entrance in a collaboration with the medical staff and anthropology students. I was invited by San Francisco State University professor Mariana Ferreira, to join the human rights summit at San Francisco State University in 2011 and lead a mural as part of Mariana’s introductory anthropology methods class.

We used a service-learning model for the class. Mariana and I saw a parallel between community mural process and community-based participatory research in anthropology. The mural process and the anthropology research process center community needs and give community members an opportunity to decide what’s important to them, and to guide the mural or the study.

The anthropology students did a research project on public health in the Mission District and a specific study of health concerns at the health center. They provided research that Joaquin

and I could not do, like interviews, surveys, analyzing different studies, stuff like that. We used their findings to directly design the mural so that themes were relevant to the clinic patients.

The students also generated visual images that expressed what patients, doctors, social workers, administrative and facility staff shared with them. This introduced students to a creative role too. Some students also helped install the mural. It was painted on canvas at Joaquin's studio in Alameda. And when we installed, the security staff at the clinic sang corridos as we did touch-ups on the scaffolding.

Joaquin and I started collaborating in 2007 after I returned to mural painting at the end of my museum education career. Like with Ray, our collaborations were creatively close. But instead of a business partnership in the form of a small company, we took turns leading projects and paying each other. Joaquin introduced me to a more entrepreneurial approach. He's a prolific painter and designer that combines digital and analog methods. He helped me develop my digital art skills, a skill set that eclipsed me while I was an administrator. I saw the relevance of digital training in my students at the California College of the Arts. It really made me feel old.

Joaquin is a teaching artist, studio painter, and graphic designer. One of his signature painting series is riffing on Mexican movie posters from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema in the thirties and forties. He combined the period poster aesthetics with Día de los Muertos imagery. It's thoughtful, playful, and culturally rich. Together we also collaborated on public art projects. He now runs the art programs at the REACH Ashland Youth Center, where we were commissioned by the Alameda County Arts Commission to create cast concrete amphitheater embellishments and tile designs for the courtyard when the facility was first built in 2013. The Arts Commission supported our deep community engagement, a rare vision for a civic arts commission.

I first met Joaquin when I hired him for a family art activity at SFMOMA. But really, much later, through his wife, Evelyn Orantes, who was my intern at SFMOMA and was subsequently hired by the Oakland Museum of California. She excelled in the education department and went on to become a community curator at the museum. Evelyn is now an independent museum consultant with a deep commitment to co-creation in genuine community partnerships between cultural institutions and their publics. There are strong parallels between museums and murals as vehicles for people to express their identities and publicly reflect on their lives.

When I was invited back to the Museum of the African Diaspora to paint a mural illustrating the transatlantic slave routes, first for an exhibition and then for their meeting room, I

invited Joaquin to help me. It was empowering to be recognized initially as their director of education when they first opened up to the public in 2005, and then as a muralist in 2010, after I left the staff, something I just couldn't imagine at SFMOMA.

**CG:** This oral history of Eduardo Pineda was a collaborative effort, like murals also are. The team behind it was:

**ERICA GANGSEI:** Erica Gangsei

**MYISA PLANCQ-GRAHAM:** Myisa Plancq-Graham

**CG:** Who served as executive producers.

**JAVIER BRIONES:** Javier Briones

**KEVIN CARR:** Kevin Carr

**CHAD COERVER:** Chad Coerver

**CARY CORDOVA:** Cary Cordova

**STEPHANIE GARCÉS:** Stephanie Garcés

**MELISSA SAN MIGUEL:** Melissa San Miguel

**CG:** And it was produced and mixed by me, Camilo Garzón.

The *Mission Murals Project* was organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

Thanks for listening.