



## Brian Mackey: Artist's bold colors show mankind's struggles

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The first thing you notice about Carlos Francisco Jackson's art is the color.

Each silkscreened image is dominated by just a handful of bold colors: pale yellow shirts here, bright red signs there.

The people are portrayed in just two shades, light and shadow. Black, brown and white (in the language of racial and ethnic categorization) are represented by shades of brown, tan and peach (in the language of the crayon box).

Jackson's exhibit, "Mi America/My America," is on display through March 23 in the Visual Arts Gallery at the University of Illinois Springfield.

VIDEO: Watch Carlos Francisco Jackson's **lecture on Chicano art** at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Jackson's subjects are taken from photographs new and old, all depicting moments in the struggle for equal rights over the past five decades. Martin Luther King is being booked into the Montgomery County Jail ("Montgomery Bus Boycott") next to an image of the people who were among the millions who in 2006 marched in cities across America to protest proposed changes to U.S. immigration laws ("Citizenship").

When you enter the exhibit space, the first image on the left is of another group of modern people, wearing T-shirts and shorts and blue jeans, waiting to hear the fate of relatives trapped in the Crandall Canyon mine in Utah ("Waiting"). Although Jackson uses bold swathes of color that reveal few minute details, their anguish is still palpable.

Next to that scene is one from more than four decades earlier: "Huelga," depicting labor leader Cesar Chavez meeting Bobby Kennedy. The men are surrounded by a throng of reporters, outstretched arms crowding microphones up to their faces. The colors are stark: all black and gray suits under a pale blue sky, punctuated by bright red signs bearing the logo of the United Farm Workers and the word "huelga," Spanish for "strike."

MLK and present-day protesters, RFK and modern mining families — Jackson's prints juxtapose the notable and the nameless. By adding bright colors to black and white photographs, they also span time. So the angry white people yelling at Elizabeth Eckford as she attempts to enter Little Rock Central High School in 1957 ("Little Rock 9") are rendered as vividly as Chicano students learning about their culture in 2008 ("A Pedagogy for Liberation").

The word "Chicano" is critical to Jackson's work. He's an assistant professor of Chicana/Chicano studies at the University of California Davis and has written a book titled "Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte." That was also the subject of a talk he gave last Thursday evening at UIS: "Who Are We?: Chicana and Chicano Art."

Chicano, he explained, is a term of identity for people often known by many other names: Latino, Hispanic, Mexican and more.

It was once used by established Mexican Americans to insult more recent immigrants. Jackson called that internalized colonialism, "a self-hate kind of thing."

The term was an idea, one eventually recolonized as a declaration of selfhood: "Soy Chicano" — "I am Chicano."

"Our goal was self-determination, not for one, but for all," Jackson said.

In a wide-ranging discussion, he looked at the evolution of Chicano art and the role it played in the cultural and political awakening of Latino Americans that began with farm labor strikes in the 1960s.

"I think art is really one of the best ways to discuss Chicano identity. One of the reasons why is because art ... is not bound by borders or rules in any way," he said.

Because of that, art has been a vehicle that has helped dispossessed peoples speak about their aspirations and their place in the world, Jackson said.

During his presentation, Jackson was more academic than artist, talking mostly about the painting, theater and music of others to the exclusion of his own prints.

He focused on the process by which a people found its voice in part through its vivid art. It's a process that's also reflected in the exhibit of his own work.

Paired with each silkscreen print is a pencil drawing at an earlier stage of the work. Like the once-dispossessed Chicano people coming out of the shadows and finding a voice through art, the quiet drawings are just hints of the vivid prints they would become.

Jackson's exhibit continues through March 23 in the Visual Arts Gallery, located in the Health and Sciences Building. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

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