

## Drawn from the Scraps

### The Finding AIDS of Mundo Meza

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Born on July 19, 1955, in Tijuana, Mexico, and raised in Huntington Park, California, Edmundo “Mundo” Meza was one of the most provocative young talents to emerge out of Southern California in the late 1960s, a period characterized by the Chicano civil rights struggle, organized boycotts, and culturally affirming arts and literary movements. Regarded for his conceptual performance art collaborations with artists Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta and Gronk in 1969–72, Meza took to the streets of East Los Angeles (LA) rupturing the mundane with glittering spectacle, billowing fabrics, and optical trickery. A young painter regarded for his natural skill, he quickly garnered a reputation for large-scale photo-realist acrylic painting, surrealist drawing, and metamorphic self-permutations. He was the youngest member of an influential cohort of Chicano cultural workers that came to define avant-garde practice. Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Willie Herrón, and Patssi Valdez were among the esteemed alumni from Garfield High School developing an experimental vocabulary grounded in experiences of the “urban exile”: racial violence, police brutality, warmongering, and oppressive gerontocracies.<sup>1</sup> Whereas these aforementioned artists came together as the lauded art collective Asco (Spanish for “nausea”) in 1972–87, Meza remained in the margins, embarking on a promising commercial career in LA’s art and fashion industry.<sup>2</sup> That was all about to change, however. On February 11, 1985, Meza lost his battle with AIDS. He was twenty-nine years old.<sup>3</sup>

After a brief posthumous show at Otis-Parsons Exhibition Center in down-

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town LA on September 17, 1985, nearly all traces of his work went missing. The absence wrought by the AIDS crisis had profound implications for Meza's place in Chicano avant-gardism. Arguably, this prevailing void has consequence for our present moment, shaping the archive from which cultural criticism is written. Chicano cultural history, art history, ethnic studies, and literature perpetuate skewed narratives, permeating curatorial treatments and historical interpretations.

His obscurity was visible throughout the Getty Museum's "Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980," which presented a remarkable 170 exhibitions from 130 partnering museums and galleries in Southern California, marking the "birth" of LA as an art capital.<sup>4</sup> Though the festival engendered a historic number of Chicano-themed exhibitions, art publications, and catalogs showing their undeniable influence in the city's visual culture, AIDS cultural discourse was minimally cited. Meza, whose major body of cubist-inspired monochromatic abstract paintings was produced as a metaphorical reflection of his terminal diagnosis, was all but omitted in an amnesiac maneuver that appeared to forget AIDS. Instead, his presence was reduced to a few Polaroid snapshots. His paintings were unidentified sightings in photo-documents of another time, partially glimpsed in backdrops of domestic interiors. Looking for Mundo was an exercise in futility.

I argue that Meza's elision is symptomatic of the inadequacies of empiricist archive methodologies predicated on authorial objects, salient chains of custody, and authenticated whole documents arranged in self-evident record bodies. His absence intensifies a related disciplinary anxiety to privilege "lost art." This refusal to legitimate the nonextant undercuts "the kind of relation to an extant work that a ghost has to a person."<sup>5</sup> Such tendencies even permeate finding aids as systems of document representation encoding and registering their locations in ways that "support the continued existence of records after their migration from one system into another."<sup>6</sup> For racialized queer subjects, these inventories prescribe restrictive taxonomies and categorizations for otherwise complex identities across collection descriptions, perpetuating what Mathias Danbolt sees as the "institutional ideology of 'hard facts' that dominates the humanities—an ideology that excludes the temporary and performative knowledges of queerness."<sup>7</sup> As such, the "evidentiary logic of heteronormativity" falters under the mélange of loss, ruin, and dispersed debris that lies in the wake of AIDS devastation.<sup>8</sup>

Meza's imprint at the borders and corners of photocompositions demands a queer archive methodology that can contend with *near* absence and the unknown conditions of provenance. In this essay, I propose what I term "queer detrital analysis," arguing for the ways that residues, margins, and parts lend queer meaning to the collection and document form itself. By this I mean that the queerness of paper scraps, fragments, and remnants allows for a complex understanding of the artist archive by foregrounding its "failure" and incompleteness. Material instability, decay, and destruction are never quite satisfactory as means of documentation, and thus

evidentiary paradigms founded on record “families,” wholeness, and presence perpetuate a heteronormative logic deeming these traces insufficient.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to falsely presume that all institutional archive collections are inherently “complete” bodies of record. Redactions, omissions, editorial revision, and rediscovered “lost” manuscripts abound. However, it is to posit that the traditional understanding of provenance as “the origins of an information-bearing entity or artifact” is based on “proof of a continuous chain of custody and therefore authenticity of the work.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, reading Meza’s archive through a queer detrital analytic eschews the custodial chains and permits new meaning in the multidirectional loci of finding AIDS. That is, I want to think about the double meaning of finding aids as both a technology for (re)search, retrieval, and description and a navigational system of AIDS cultural memory tracing different archival body configurations in a queer vision for debris.

This essay proceeds with a queer detrital analysis of Legorreta’s “Cyclona Art Collection: The Gay, ‘Chicanismo in el Arte’” at ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives in LA. Acquired in 2001, partially processed, and released for public use ten years later, Legorreta’s collection holds the only assortment of “Mundo art” in the nation. However, rather than consist of fine art paintings, prints, and photography, the series contains detrital remains. Legorreta inventoried these works, writing an adjoining vernacular finding aid. In it, he presents a curious registry and descriptive network of textual annotations bordering on performative, rhetorical, and diaristic appeals. His assembly and bibliographic inventory not only radically rethinks what states of record are required to document the artist’s life but also exemplifies how loss and ruin elicit other archival formations where Meza’s body is found.

Drawing on “body of evidence” as metaphor, queer detrital analysis expands archival body discourse by considering it as an exteriorization of the individual, social, and cultural self in a type of ontological surrogacy constituted by the material record and, in particular, paper. Owing much to performance, contemporary art, and material culture theorists’ redress of the presumed divisions between subject and object, I am interested in the types of agency that emerge from the cohabitation and interdependence of the artifactual, humanist, and private record-keeping assembly. My interest is in keeping with what art historian Hal Foster calls “archival art[, which] is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces . . . these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again.”<sup>11</sup> Much of the “archival impulse” Foster describes takes its cue from the “artist-as-curator,” where institutional and informal archives are arranged “according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and present[ed] . . . in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of texts and objects.”<sup>12</sup> I want to position archival art in Foster’s terms more broadly as mate-

rial processes, detrital ruins, and, in particular, agents themselves performing an “accumulated being,” rather than take aim at administrative systems of information management in site-specific installations.<sup>13</sup>

Doing so, my thinking about the archival body is indebted to Jennifer González’s thoughts on autotopographic memory landscapes and material iconologies of Mexican American women’s *altares* (home alters) as well as Amelia Jones’s ruminations over the intersection of body and archive as both the “repertoire” of experience and “bits of things touched, manipulated, or otherwise used by performance artists, [in] a kind of material embodiment, especially as it is mobilized in historical narratives and exhibitions.”<sup>14</sup> I hang my questions on this body’s rearticulation through impressions, residues, and imprints with paper in its divergent textual, visual, and physical material conditions. Archival body in this sense is a dispersed constellation of record exposing a different experience and subjugation for the alternative record-keeping “self,” especially for queers beseeched by vandalism, confiscation, omission, and erasure. A body whose very survival is exemplary of racial, sexual, and gender cultural neglect, it thus intensifies the significance of the detrital as it estranges the relationship between the historical and evidential. This conjunction is epitomized in Legorreta’s surrogacy of Meza across the scattered debris that followed after his death.

### **Archival Heteronormativity, Queer Evidence, and Other Material States**

From the outset, it is critical that we question the heteronormative power of the document. Imported from the golden age of archive theory is Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s espousal of “unbiased” and “objective” records administration as defined by unbroken chains of custody.<sup>15</sup> His formative approach largely privileged document generation from “official” state-sanctioned and corporate bodies. The document constituted an “untainted” collection unspoiled by threat of mismanagement, inauthenticity, incompleteness, or processual error. In the context of nineteenth-century England, provenance was a clear chain of original order and ownership resulting in the mere transference of organizational papers through the unbiased stewarding of the administrator.<sup>16</sup> Termed *respect des fonds*, it is based on a French archival idea that, according to the Ministry of the Interior on April 24, 1841, “all documents which come from a body, an establishment, a family, or an individual form a fonds, and must be kept together.”<sup>17</sup> Drawing on varied record categories including those organized by family, original order was carefully defended, ensuring that the collection remained completely deposited into a singular institutional repository. This practice guaranteed that the “archival bond” between records sealed the “organic linkage generated between agency and record group.”<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the body of record was stabilized and authenticated from evidentiary “wholes.” Historical truth was controlled in the material possession, preservation, and promise of administrative custody.

Following the polemical work of Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever*, post-modern archive theorists' suspicions and redefinitions of archive led with an eye on "form" and "power."<sup>19</sup> They sought ways to expose the sociocultural politics of archives, demonstrating that the bond or "organic linkage" was built on Eurocentric, colonialist, and, I might add, heteropatriarchal ideologies that favor progressive teleology and what Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurism."<sup>20</sup> This conflation twisting archival practice with the metaphor of family was furthered when critical archive scholars like Joy Atherton, Frank Upward, and Sue McKemmish steered away from life-cycle approaches in record management by better accounting for those interstitial evidentiary acts and multilateral transactions in a "records continuum model," where "the underlying unifying or linking factor in the continuum was the service function to the records' creators and all users."<sup>21</sup> Jay Kennedy and Cheryl Schauder expanded on these ideas, organizing record groupings into "families."<sup>22</sup> Doing so, they "link" archive functions into natural biological norms in information management and archive administration.

Though advocates for this model radically challenged the terms of record keeping from a passive and fixed autonomous body to an active one, advancing through the vision of the regenerative "family" perpetuated a heteronormative preoccupation with progeny—an archival episteme traced to early French conceptions of the *respect des fonds*. This was something unrealized in the lives of queer people and, in particular, gay men, where the consequence of AIDS-related death often resulted in the dissolution, deaccessioning, and looting of private archival collections by biological families. These men's "queer kinships" were routinely denied ownership, property rights, or joint claims to estates; at times they served as floating signifiers for infection, contamination, and disease.<sup>23</sup> Under the "records continuum model," it is difficult to understand what is to become of those orphaned parcels of paper with no recognizable record "family" to belong to. More to this point, the compulsory heterosexuality of this archival thinking pervaded discourses of the document itself.

Such heteronormative "house arrest" is indicative of what Richard J. Cox calls "the romance of the document."<sup>24</sup> By this, he argues that "the pull of the document can be an all absorbing one. . . . Rather than feeling guilty about such emotions, records professionals need to realize that the romance of the document is a powerful means of understanding why our records are important in society."<sup>25</sup> Cox speaks to shifting modes of documentation capturing the "general fascination" of the public vis-à-vis journals, letters, diaries, oral storytelling, and websites (1). Each record type requires different approaches to document storage of cultural knowledge—documents that "[convey] something about this romantic attraction" (12). And yet what this "something" *is* is never quite explicated in Cox's assessment. Just what desire drives this "romantic attraction" for the document? Moreover, if a "romantic appeal" was engendered not by documentary evidence but rather by the

debris that “fails” to meet the barometer of authenticity, then how do we account for other “romantic attraction[s]” that deviate from the document’s normative and appropriate allure (1)? How do we rectify those strange, odd, or queer appeals for evidence consisting not of “untainted” romantic papers but rather of the “taint” of the detrital?

Strange attractions for other states of evidence are a critical lynchpin in Meza’s archival body, a body whose dissolution and displacement can hardly satisfy Cox’s romantic desires for the “all absorbing” pull of the document (12). Meza’s is a collection of residues that belongs to no “natural” family of record. In fact, efforts to certify and authenticate provenance is hard to delineate with little information about the origin of scraps. Meza’s “queer detritus” requires a remove from these heteronormative archival logics and a move toward other methodologies and evidential possibilities. Queer performance theorists’ understanding of archives through the ephemerality, vanishing, and eclipses of movement, speech, and live presence is quite beneficial. I am reminded of what José Esteban Muñoz argues is “the key to queering evidence . . . by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor.”<sup>26</sup> Muñoz’s position is laudable, sharing an important critique of queers’ “vexed relationship to evidence,” a relationship that can no longer rely on the stable document but rather must rely on queer acts of reembodied cultural transmission.<sup>27</sup>

In light of growing attention to queer feeling as archive, it is perhaps surprising that I want to reconsider other material states of documentation by seeking meaning not through the sutures of ephemerality alone but also through the anachronistic ware of AIDS devastation.<sup>28</sup> I find that fleeting queer performance gestures and Meza’s archival debris are not mutually exclusive but coterminous at the shared vanishing point of disappearance. Neither an ephemeral act nor a concretized object entirely, Meza’s queer detritus lies somewhere in between, expanding the terms of document and evidence showing other materialities—an archival body degrades, dematerializes, and wastes to the point of near absence. These gradients pose ways to read queer lives through a reenvisioning of the debris and the disarticulation of the wreckage. Like Muñoz, I, too, suggest that “the ephemeral does not equal unmateriality,” and so my thinking about Meza’s remains shares much with the fluctuating state of the material record itself as it ruins, wastes, and deteriorates.<sup>29</sup>

As cultural geographer Caitlin DeSilvey argues in her excellent assessment “Observed Decay: Telling Stories with Mutable Things”: “An approach that understands the artifact as a process, rather than a stable entity with a durable physical form, is perhaps able to address some of the more ambiguous aspects of material presence (and disappearance).”<sup>30</sup> DeSilvey’s position seems to circumvent systemic or “traditional” preservationist practices that leave Muñoz suspect, practices that strive for permanence and concretization in a way that evokes Cox’s normalizing “romantic attraction” for documents that “pull” and “absorb.” By drawing on the

mutable states of evidence as processes, it is possible to challenge the reductive terms of document preservation relayed by historian David Lowenthal when he argues that “however venerated a relic, its decay is seldom admired.”<sup>31</sup> Under his premise, decay is something to be abhorred by archivists and historians because it “also symbolizes failure.”<sup>32</sup> Conflating a decaying relic with failure, Lowenthal’s thinking perpetuates heteronormative archival epistemologies predicated on “success” of the new.

As queer theorist Judith (Jack) Halberstam notes, “Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well.”<sup>33</sup> Using this as my cue, we can use degradation as an episteme to rethink archive as failure. I want to embrace archival bodies ruined by decay as “ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success.”<sup>34</sup> After all, DeSilvey claims, “the disarticulation of the object may lead to the articulation of other histories, and other geographies.”<sup>35</sup> Investigating Meza’s discard in its strewn aftermath demands a queer detrital analysis that resists privileging particular modes of heteronormative document authority and rearticulates Chicano AIDS narratives, queer art histories, and material cultures across dissembled margins and detrital parts.

Told through the efforts of Legorreta, I discuss below his collection’s finding aid, looking for Mundo in an unusual arrangement of discard and scrap. Critical ways of thinking about Meza’s other materialities emerge with significant implications for the pair’s life narrative, artistic production, and collaborative performance expression in East LA.

### **Mutating Materials: A Dance of Discard and Scavenge**

In 2001 ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, one of the largest grassroots lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) repositories in the United States, secured an important acquisition from Legorreta, a formative figure in Chicano experimental performance art. A muse and cultural gadfly renowned for his conceptual street interventions festooned in barrio found materials, paints, and thrift store couture, Legorreta’s alter ego “Cyclona” is part urban legend and part scandal. His visual and verbal assaults on unwitting Chicano publics in East LA were the stuff of rumor. Legorreta’s autobiographical discourses about his own artistic becoming are quite fascinating because they closely intertwine with Meza.

First meeting in 1967, Legorreta and Meza were inseparable, finding a mutual affection, feeling of sexual alienation, and shared philosophical belief in “open[ing] people’s minds.”<sup>36</sup> Though Meza was three years younger, he and Legorreta stormed East LA, contesting heteromasculinist social norms and disciplining stares through convincing *chola* female impersonations, confrontational spectacles, and androgynous appearances. Their collaborations in the late 1960s demonstrate the ways that Chicano queers responded to the growing visibility of the gay liberation movement in LA coupled with the burgeoning political ideologies and artistic practices occur-

ring in Southern California's barrios. Legorreta recalls: "We became a team, me and Mundo, running up and down Whittier Boulevard in this semidrag. . . . Of course, there was an element of our society at that time that couldn't dig it."<sup>37</sup>

Adding Legorreta's Garfield High School classmate Gronk to their gender-bending trinity in 1969, they collaborated in a variety of performance pieces, literally drawing on Legorreta's garish embodiments as a self-proclaimed "live art artist" and producing performance art interventions, same-sex wedding actions, and guerrilla liberation activities in LA's schizophrenic urban dystopia, freeway labyrinths, and sublime coastal landscapes.<sup>38</sup> The most iconic and frequently cited example of their brief union was *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* performed in 1969 in East LA's Belvedere Park, where a simulated orgy and staged castration onstage incited the audience, fueling public outcry and explosive rioting.<sup>39</sup>

Legorreta's bodily excess produced an equal level of paper excess in terms of both performance documentation and, more importantly, "live art" figure studies. Taking Cyclona as subject, Gronk and Meza generated several life drawings in pen and ink, graphite, and color pastels, centering his androgynous form and introducing an iconoclastic language privileging the queer, strange, and bizarre in Chicano art. The Cyclona image traveled in paper illustrations, photographic snapshot, mail-art collage, and newspaper and literary journal publications, including *Gay Sunshine: A Newspaper of Gay Liberation* in 1973 and *Regeneración* in 1974.<sup>40</sup> In particular, Meza's work proved memorable because his propensity for surrealist fantasy, optical illusion, and photo-realism was sophisticated for his age.

While Gronk gradually departed from the triad, preferring to collaborate with Asco in 1972, their artistic activity continued through informal artist networks and social circuits in the "gay funky dances" organized through the Gay Community Services Center at Trouper's Hall.<sup>41</sup> The old auditorium on South La Brea served as the setting where photographer Anthony Friedkin developed a focus on East LA Chicano queers in his 1972 series *Gay: A Photographic Essay*.<sup>42</sup> Meza, Legorreta, and transgender artist-collaborator Jaime Aguilar were compelling subjects for the budding nineteen-year-old social documentarian. Just as Friedkin had discovered, Trouper's Hall was an undeniable cultural nexus for Chicano avant-gardists, urban fashionistas, and *cholo* bon vivants "living [their] art."<sup>43</sup> He recalls: "Suddenly, I'm in Trouper's Hall and all these young Chicano kids are coming into this gay dance. And they're coming into these restrooms, and they are so expressive [that] not only did . . . the women and the men have fantastic fashion and wardrobe and makeup, but they were open about who and what they were."<sup>44</sup> Gay liberation dance spaces catalyzed collaborative possibilities and social formations for East LA's youth acting out experimental ways of being in outrageous adornment and glamorous facades, a queer cultural infusion largely unacknowledged in Chicano cultural history and the story of the Chicano art movement, overall.

Though Meza and Legorreta's artistic collaborations waned later in the



Figure 1. This untitled pen-and-ink illustration by Mundo Meza is found in the “Silverlake Terrace Drawings” sketchbook (1979), one of the last compendiums of the young artist’s works-on-paper from the Cyclona Collection. Ink on paper, 8 × 6 in. Cyclona Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries. Courtesy of Pat Meza, Elizabeth Signorelli, and Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta

1970s, their friendship persisted. Even when Meza ended a difficult relationship with his then boyfriend, Carlos, in 1979, he retreated to Legorreta’s Silver Lake Terrace apartment, where he produced a small sketchbook of intricately lined figurative drawings, quoting German expressionism, pre-Columbian iconography, and post-punk style motifs derived from New Romanticism, a flamboyant fashion import personified by Leigh Bowery, Boy George, Steve Strange, and other Blitz Kids from the UK underground club scene in the late 1970s (see fig. 1).<sup>45</sup> In the collection, Meza’s fragile spiral-bound notepad titled “Silverlake Terrace Drawings” remains one of the last compendiums of his works-on-paper.<sup>46</sup> Influenced by his extensive work in window display installation, mannequin aesthetics, and fashion merchandising at Maxfield Bleu’s and Melon’s on Melrose Avenue, Meza collaborated with Legorreta on a performance art series titled *Frozen Art* in June 1981.<sup>47</sup> These exercises signal Meza’s burgeoning attention to duration, stillness, and the tableau vivant form, gesticulations forwarded in his collaborations with photographer Steven Arnold, who shared a mutual interest in suspended animation and the artist’s “freeze frame eye.”<sup>48</sup> When Meza died, Legorreta was deeply bereaved. So immobilized by grief, he refused to go to the funeral: “[I] could never see him dead, it really affected me very, very badly. He was like my best friend of twenty-five years. . . . That [affect] was a very, very weird thing, and a very, very psychic thing.”<sup>49</sup>

From this loss, the Cyclona collection developed, appearing several decades later. Stewarded under the auspices of gay historian Stuart Timmons, it arrived at ONE in an assortment of black garbage bags, plastic shopping sacks, and battered

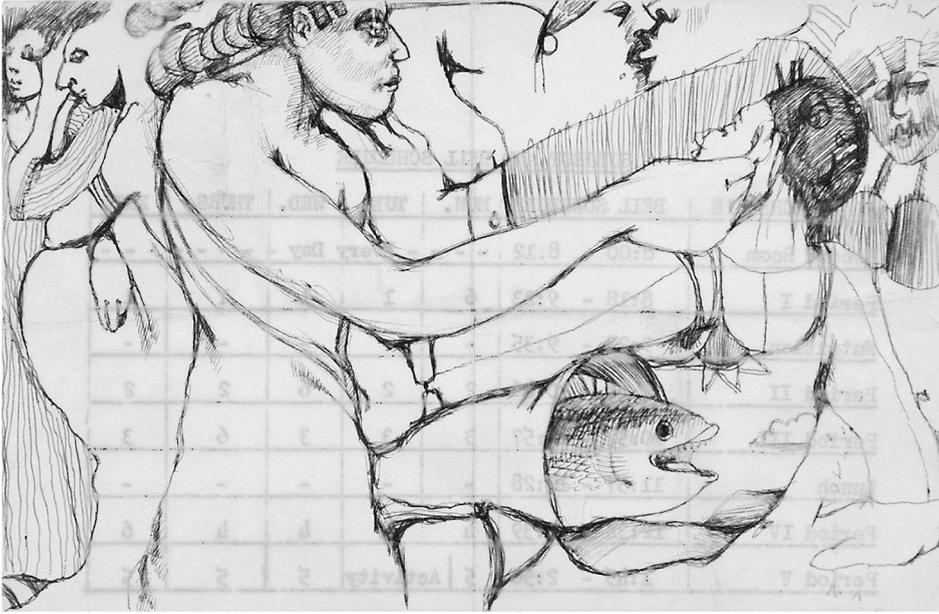
cardboard boxes. The unruly excess of this amorphous archival form mimed the disordering chaos of garbage. Professional techniques founded on “original order,” “evidentiary value,” or “authenticity” were meaningless in Legorreta’s conceptual repudiation of linearity, chronological arrangement, or document allure. Efforts to process and organize the collection also proved haphazard.<sup>50</sup> The enormity of his assembly, which included scraps, costumes, photographs, pornography, and props, remained only partially processed and made available to the public in 2011.<sup>51</sup>

Accompanying the gift was an equally curious finding aid written by Legorreta, titled “Cyclona Art Collection: The Gay, ‘Chicanismo in el Arte.’” Reappropriating *Chicanismo en el Arte*, a historic exhibition cojuried by the Vincent and Mary Price Gallery at East Los Angeles College and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1975, Legorreta’s counterdiscourse denies these institutions’ curatorial authority and historical representation of Chicano art.<sup>52</sup> In a conceptualist gesture, he authors a truer iteration of the past, archiving “The Gay” and affixing it to the original title. His intervention stages a reencounter with the show, uprooting its grip on Chicano art history and actualizing our complacent acceptance of the museum as an apparatus of cultural propaganda. Such political liberation could happen only through Cyclona’s “mind-bending” mediation in this postmodernist archival form.

Unbound and handwritten on nearly sixty pages of text on loose-leaf notebook paper, Legorreta’s vernacular finding aid presents a series of four Chicana/o artists: Gronk, Roberto Gutierrez, Meza, and Valdez. They are joined not by their aesthetic unity but by their mutual points of encounter with the Cyclona figure, a discourse omitted from the original *Chicanismo en el Arte* exhibition in 1975. The registry writes Legorreta’s narrative, relaying personal memories, career highlights, anachronistic citations, and social documentation in accordance to his artist subjects. Legorreta’s descriptive verse navigates the discards. His inventoried set of annotations inscribes an interpretative schema onto the collection, displacing more traditional practices founded on the unseen hand of the archive administrator.

Empirical proof is inconsequential to Legorreta’s fact telling in a maneuver that similarly echoes Muñoz’s thoughts on queer evidence “hanging in the air like a rumor.”<sup>53</sup> For example, regarding a scant illustration drawn by Meza, Legorreta writes: “Self-Portrait of Mundo in his First week at Garfield High School. He looks somewhat puzzled. Didn’t we all [?], Circa 1971 East, L.A.”<sup>54</sup> Whether this drawing is Meza’s self-portrait from high school is a minor consideration when compared to Legorreta’s affirming appraisal. His historical citation pivots from third-person to second-person narrative writing with a style that merges performance oration with library science. “Didn’t we all [?]” is a clever rhetorical shift taking the reader from visual interpretation to corroborating informant, appealing to the inventory user directly. The reader becomes an incidental collaborator.

Legorreta marks each discard with a number in purple ink, generating a corresponding code retrieval system. In the series “Mundo Art,” which forms the bulk



**Figure 2.** Mundo Meza's *Laughing Fish* (ca. 1970) was found on the inverse side of a school bell schedule from Garfield High School in East LA. Ink on paper, 4 ½ x 6 ¾ in. Cyclona Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries. Courtesy of Pat Meza, Elizabeth Signorelli, and Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta

of the collection, careful classification and lengthy diatribes follow detrital castoffs, interlinking extratextual layers to the seeming frivolity of the material itself, material that appears more scrap than document romance. For instance, item 7 refers to a surrealist illustration titled *Laughing Fish*, circa 1970. The diminutive drawing discovered on the back of a Garfield High School class bell schedule was presumably produced during an ordinary school day (see fig. 2). Between 1970 and 1971 Meza was briefly enrolled there, attending alongside Asco members Gamboa, Gronk, Herrón, and Valdez. The illustration contains no title or date, hinting at its happenstance production. With no formal evidence of transfer, we might deduce that the drawing was orphaned, discarded, or gifted.

If record appraisal must defer to the "source in the order designated by the originating agency," then Legorreta's "thick description" provides sufficient support from which authenticity and validation are satisfied.<sup>55</sup> His annotation attributes a name, but the lack of title in Meza's penned hand suggests the scrap's ambiguity, hanging onto the inventory itself for meaning. The entry continues: "The piece depicts Mundo's coming of age with his sexuality. The piece shows androgynous characters and has in most of Mundo's early art. He uses his body within the characters drawn. Mundo was in harmony with both parts of his sexuality. Also depicted in the piece is Cyclona on the upper right corner of drawing."<sup>56</sup> Legorreta's inter-

pretation allows for more explicitly personal, relational, and biographical details to appear anchored in Meza's pen and ink work. His observations elevate the ordinary paper scrap as an interface, a picture window where Meza is seen. His body is drawn into the interlocking nude figures compositing the androgynous arrangement. Quoting the Cyclona figure in the far right perimeter of the image allows Legorreta to unify his alter ego with Meza's body in a harmonious transgender and trans-species ecology. The autobiographical testimony he enlists through the registry furthers this permeability by showing how the paper fragment is a critical means of finding Mundo and traces of his bodily imprint.

*Laughing Fish* elucidates the mutability of the paper's material form. The reversibility of the visual picture plane bends the textual surface back, revealing Meza's body inscribed beneath. Legorreta's finding aid consists of these ephemera shape-shifters expanding the utility of remnants and scraps. Abandoned pencil studies, frayed paperboard, and torn drawing paper demonstrate Meza's human impressions in word, mark, and image. A pink phone message slip doubles as a homoerotic sketch of male nudes in graphite. A temporary parking pass from Barnsdall Art Park in Hollywood reverses to show an offhand pen-and-ink illustration of abstract lines and amorphous shapes. A trivial wrapper for Zig-Zag tobacco paper popularly used to roll marijuana cigarettes mutates, becoming the stage from which the "Zig-Zag Drag Queen" appears. Arguably, Meza's multiple reuse of refuse was not uncommon, particularly among Latina/o artists with limited means. In Chicano cultural studies, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto refers to it as a *rasquache* sensibility, a vernacular expression finding "resilience and resourcefulness . . . from making do with what is at hand," drawing "its essence within the world of the



Figure 3. According to Legorreta's finding aid, Meza frequently used newsprint in the absence of sketch paper. This illustration, ca. 1974, is one example later recovered in the Cyclona collection. Ink on newspaper, 7 ¼ x 11 ½ in. Cyclona Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries. Courtesy of Pat Meza, Elizabeth Signorelli, and Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta

tattered, shattered, and broken.”<sup>57</sup> A similar practice might be observed in Meza’s artistic expressions on paper.

This aesthetic is indicative in item 48, where a piece of newsprint is “one of the many newspaper drawings done by Mundo on a spare moment while there was no paper around” (see fig. 3).<sup>58</sup> Meza’s multiple uses of newsprint indicate that his art practice “with what is at hand” was common in the absence of sketch paper.<sup>59</sup> The versatility of the printed surface was not only a matter of limited means in Ybarra-Frausto’s sense but also a method of visual messaging and artist communication. Meza and Legorreta’s personal transactions took place on commercial paper materials. Phone messages, birthday greetings, and playfully coded referents to drug paraphernalia were conveyed in mimetic illustrations of the occasion. Art and life blur in a way that recalls Gronk’s comparable approach, about which he says: “I think if you look at the drawings in my journals, it is me biographically. It’s just like automatic writing in a way, but with drawings.”<sup>60</sup> Together, these artists demonstrate analogous modes of experimental writing and social documentation in Chicano avant-gardism, especially if we consider Gronk’s related artistic expressions on paper napkins.<sup>61</sup> However, Meza and Legorreta’s practice is explicitly relational, withstanding Gronk’s more monologist visual psychography. Reliance on formal written communication was less characteristic of their correspondence. Bits of paper, text, and picture trail their interactions.

In addition to identifying Meza’s imprint in *Laughing Fish*, Legorreta makes similar claims elsewhere in the finding aid, observing the artist’s body residues in fashion design illustrations, androgynous subjects, and surreal fantasy landscapes. For instance, in item 21 he regards a water-stained pen-and-ink sketch of mannequin sculptural heads as a self-portrait exercise: “Mundo was still working on his image. [He] drew several face shapes and personality shapes on each face, circa 1978, Hollywood.”<sup>62</sup> Legorreta finds Meza plotting himself through unstable bodily surfaces, artistic allusions, and oscillating personas. His apparent rescue of these drawings in varied stages of physical distress says as much about Meza’s image production as it does the causal relationship he held for his work. If these drawings could be produced at a “spare moment” on widely available paper materials mined from the barrio, how does this explain Legorreta’s collecting of them mutating the borders between art, record, and waste?

The multiple detrital discards that proliferate in Legorreta’s finding aid not only provide critical insights into Meza’s nearly careless relationship with his works-on-paper but also expand the definition of provenance. For instance, the lengthiest annotations in the inventory are items 3 and 3b, a set of four “spiritual and cosmic” pen-and-ink illustrations on poster-board pieces, remnants perhaps from a completed art project. In a three-page entry, Legorreta claims that the *Orange Sunshine* series, a reference to the popular psychotropic drug, was produced by a twelve-year-old Meza in late 1967 at Doc’s People, an alternative art space named after

H. G. Wells's 1896 science fiction novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.<sup>63</sup> In January 1968, Legorreta joined this cadre of mostly Chicano teen artists unified in their literary fantasy of mutant rebellion and interspecies splicing, an apt metaphor given the violence and nihilism engulfing East LA at this time. As he describes: "[I] found these pieces scattered all over [the garage] floor. So I said to myself, 'Who would throw these fabulous pieces of art away?' So I picked them up, took them home, [and] put them away. Several years later I mentioned these to Mundo. . . . I showed them to him and he said, 'Yes! That's me!'"<sup>64</sup>

Legorreta's finding aid establishes that these orphaned discards appear with minor consideration of self-preservation, record keeping, or the art marketplace (something unimaginable for most young, self-taught Chicano artists at this time). They are evanescent creative expressions, and much like the trailing newsprint drawings, they can happen "on a spare moment." In the finding aid, the *Orange Sunshine* series gains legibility and, in turn, evidentiary value only when Meza confirms artist attribution in declaring, "Yes! That's me!" However, his initial self-citation in the *Orange Sunshine* series does not end here, suggesting Legorreta's resistance to more conventional definitions of provenance. Through the inventory, he contends that the paper scraps do more than authenticate the record creator; they literalize Meza's "power," "energy," and rebirth "cleansed by the flames of life and now reach[ing] beyond himself."<sup>65</sup> While it is not clear if Meza supplied this metaphysical assessment after the lost drawings' rediscovery in 1968, Legorreta inscribes this view in his weighty annotation.

Observing that Meza's self-picturing reaches beyond human mortality toward higher ways of being, Legorreta's found scraps are anything but ordinary, providing clairvoyant portals into Meza's lifespan. The found drawings speculate AIDS-related loss, a loss that can be seen and prophesied through the discarded picture planes. Legorreta continues: "Mundo was a very old wise spirit. . . . [He] would be on Earth for only 29 years and left a body of incredible artwork."<sup>66</sup> Writing his finding aid retrospectively in 2001, several years after Meza's death, Legorreta in his annotation discursively bonds anachronistic moments of creation, death, and rebirth, "finding AIDS" in the queer detritus recovered from an East LA garage in 1968.

Legorreta assumes the role of the scavenger recovering the residues, protecting the detrital, and safeguarding the waste. He finds meaning in Meza's bodily discards strewn along the floor like trash. Meza, however, functions as the discarder, orphaning drawings, scattering materials, and dropping personal affects in his path. Together, they choreograph a dance of presence and absence, lost and found, a contentious duet that relieves itself in the "live art" embodiments and found object personas that defined their experimental performance art practice.<sup>67</sup> Meza's momentary acts of artistic creation and Legorreta's propensity to acquire enabled closer correlations between the material record and body surface, engendering other ways of being Chicano in this tumultuous period of social unrest, a queer racialized

subjectivity drawn from the scraps.<sup>68</sup> It comes as no surprise that Legorreta's later archiving work continued this formative conceptualist practice, looking for Mundo against the dissolution of AIDS in the remnants, surrogacies, and castoffs structuring his transgressive archival body.

### **Between Lost and Found: Toward Queer Detrital Analysis**

Finding AIDS at the ends of material culture, the search for Meza intensifies what constitutes "document" and "evidence," particularly considering the neglect of queer racialized cultural histories in both mainstream and gay and lesbian repositories. Though Legorreta initially gifted his materials to ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (now an affiliate of the University of Southern California [USC] Libraries), his queer vision for debris proved overwhelming, prompting the formation of an equally eclectic collection titled *The Fire of Life / El Fuego de la Vida*, acquisitioned by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Chicano Studies Research Center in 2004. His occupation of both institutions is a strategic intervention, showing queer Chicano cultural remains irreconcilability in a singular repository, especially in sprawling LA. In identitarian terms, the incompleteness of these organizations, one gay and the other Chicano, necessitated acts of archive promiscuity, resulting in Legorreta's simultaneous depositing across public record administrations and institutional thresholds.

Throughout this essay, I have questioned the heteronormative bias undergirding conventional archive methods and practices predicated on families of record, document desire, and untarnished chains of custody and ownership. The perspective I posit gleamed from a queer detrital analysis expands the terms of bodily remaining, the mutability of remnants, and the navigational possibility of finding aids in wading discards, imperceptible debris, and textual incompleteness. Thus the fragments that compose Meza's archival body lead one to ask: What state of documentation must be mined to sufficiently articulate an artist's life? What tests of evidentiary meaning must be met to satisfy document authority and authenticity? How do detrital states of things challenge the uneven assignment of historical and literary "significance"? More specifically, how does a direct confrontation with the queerness of record "failure" allow for other archival methodologies founded on *near* absence?

For those of us working on the fallout occurring in the early years of the AIDS crisis, queer detritus is a familiar experience. The castoff is often all that is left, and so the restoration of missing artworks in conventional archival, historical, or curatorial discipline is hardly satisfactory. Returning archival bodies to some heteronormative evidentiary logic or measure of document validity is equally discomforting.<sup>69</sup> I echo what art historian Bethan Stevens poses, that "artworks whose whereabouts is unknown . . . make rewarding objects of study in their own right. . . . Like memory, lost works can turn disciplinary definitions on their heads."<sup>70</sup> As I

continue to explore the wreckage of Meza's discards, some reports have surfaced offering the whereabouts of his vanished art collection, but as Muñoz eloquently reminds us, "it hang[s] in the air like a rumor."<sup>71</sup> Not yet publicly accessible in its entirety, it looms in what Diana Taylor calls "repertoire," existing as bits of speculation or gossip.<sup>72</sup> According to Gavin Butt, gossip has a crucial role keeping sexual knowledge in "discursive play" due to the "paucity of sexual evidence."<sup>73</sup> Like Butt, I parlay "art rumor" as another evidentiary facet shaping an extratextual layer of the Meza archive. A direct path to these vanished works beyond the talk is unclear and, in queer detrital terms, even necessary. Instead, we must embrace other states of things and interpret the residues, allowing for a queer vision of debris in the fragments of paper and picture to come through. Thus the archival bodies emerging from this plague ask that we expand the terms and methods where queer evidence is used, finding *AIDS* at the brink of ruin and human loss.

### Notes

1. *Urban exile* is a term famously coined by Gamboa. See Harry Gamboa Jr., "Urban Exile," in *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr.*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 51–55.
2. Several new art-historical texts have been invaluable to unfettering the relationships between Chicano avant-gardists. See, e.g., C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez, eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure; A Retrospective, 1972–1987* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz), 2011.
3. Meza's last years are touchingly retold in elegiac and witty prose by his former lover, roommate, and fellow window dresser, Simon Doonan. See Simon Doonan, *Beautiful People: My Family and Other Glamorous Varmints* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks), 2005.
4. Adam Nagourney, "Los Angeles Stakes Its Claim as a World Art Center," *New York Times*, October 13, 2011.
5. Bethan Stevens, "Remembering Lost Paintings: Vanessa Bell's *The Nursery*," *Memory Studies* 3, no. 3 (2010): 250.
6. Chris Hurley, "The Making and the Keeping of Records: (1) What Are Finding Aids For?" *Archives and Manuscripts* 26, no. 1 (1998): 60.
7. Mathias Danbolt, "Touching History: Archival Relations in Queer Art and Theory," in *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive*, ed. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley, and Louise Wolthers (Copenhagen: Nikolaj, Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, 2009), 36.
8. *Ibid.*, 37.
9. James M. O'Toole, "On the Idea of Permanence," in *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), 490.
10. Shelley Sweeney, "The Ambiguous Origins of the Archival Principle of 'Provenance,'" *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 43, no. 2 (2008): 193.
11. Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October*, no. 110 (2004): 5.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Greg Noble, "Accumulating Being," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2004): 233–56.

14. Jennifer González, "Autotopographies," in *Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies*, ed. Gabriel Brahm Jr. and Mark Driscoll (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995). "Repertoire" references the key text by Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Amelia Jones, "Lost Bodies: Early 1970s Los Angeles Performance Art in Art History," in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California*, ed. Peggy Phelan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 117.
15. On the development of the "golden age" of archive theory, see Terry Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria*, no. 43 (1997): 17–63. Also, the intersections of archivist and historian are debated with attention to Jenkinson's early theorizations of archive record administration. See Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
16. See, e.g., Sweeney, "Ambiguous Origins."
17. *Ibid.*, 197.
18. Blouin and Rosenberg, *Processing the Past*, 30–31.
19. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and also Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002): 1–19.
20. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.
21. Xiaomi An, "An Integrated Approach to Records Management," *Information Management Journal* 37, no. 4 (2003): 25. Also consider Sue McKemmish, "Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice," *Archival Science* 1, no. 4 (2001): 333–59.
22. An, "An Integrated Approach to Records Management," 25. See also Jay Kennedy and Cheryl Schauder, *Records Management: A Guide to Corporate Recordkeeping*, 2nd ed. (South Melbourne: Longman, 1998).
23. I draw on the term *queer kinship* with specific allegiances to key works on the matter. See, e.g., Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 293–314.
24. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4; Richard J. Cox, "The Romance of the Document," *Records and Information Management Report* 22, no. 1 (2006): 1–13.
25. Cox, "Romance of the Document," 12.
26. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 65.
27. *Ibid.*
28. See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
29. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 81.
30. Caitlin DeSilvey, "Observed Decay: Telling Stories with Mutable Things," *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 3 (2006): 324.
31. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 143.
32. *Ibid.*, 147.
33. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.
34. *Ibid.*, 2.

35. DeSilvey, "Observed Decay," 324.
36. "Cyclona and Early Chicano Performance Art: An Interview with Robert Legorreta," by Jennifer Flores Sternad, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 481.
37. Ibid.
38. Robb Hernández, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta–Cyclona Collection* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], Chicano Studies Research Center, 2009), ix.
39. Ibid., 6–8.
40. Selections of Anthony Friedkin's photo shoots with Mundo Meza, Jaime Aguilar, and Cyclona were featured in *Gay Sunshine: A Newspaper of Gay Liberation*, September–October 1973. An illustration of Cyclona and Meza by Popcorn, one of Gronk's alter egos, appeared in *Regeneración*, 2, no. 4 (1974–75): 16.
41. Joey Terrill, interview by the author, August 23, 2007, Los Angeles, CA.
42. See Anthony Friedkin, *The Gay Essay*, ed. Julian Cox with Nayland Blake and Eileen Myles (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 66–71.
43. Terrill, interview.
44. Anthony Friedkin, interview by the author, September 4, 2010, Santa Monica, CA.
45. Van Dyk Lewis, "Music and Fashion," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, ed. Valerie Steele (New York: Berg, 2010), 525.
46. For more, see "Silverlake Terrace Drawings," 1979, item 22, Mundo Art, "Cyclona Art Collection: The Gay, 'Chicanismo in el Arte,'" finding aid, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California (USC) Libraries, Los Angeles.
47. Hernández, *Fire of Life*, 18.
48. Peter Weiermair, ed., *Steven Arnold: "Exotic Tableaux"* (Kilchberg/Zurich, Switzerland: Edition Stemmler, 1996), 9.
49. Quoted in Hernández, *Fire of Life*, 20.
50. On the alleged deaccessioning of Legorreta's collection at ONE, see *ibid.*, 29–31.
51. Legorreta developed *The Fire of Life* for the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center under librarian Yolanda Retter, a former archivist of ONE. See Frank Morales, "Liberating Unleashed Latino/Gay-Themed Artifacts," *Orange County and Long Beach Blade*, July 2004, 60–61. For insights into Legorreta's relationship with Retter, see Herndon Davis, "A Home for L.A.'s Gay Latin Performers, Dr. Yolanda Retter's Quest to Preserve the Past," *Frontiers* 25, no. 3 (2006): 179.
52. Jeanne D'Andrea, *Chicanismo en el Arte*, exhibition catalog (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and East Los Angeles College, 1975).
53. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65.
54. *Self-Portrait of Mundo*, early 1970s, item 54, Mundo Art, "Cyclona Art Collection Finding Aid." Note: Legorreta has publicly addressed his personal learning difficulties due to dyslexia. I transcribed all entries and take full responsibility for any error of word or meaning.
55. Sweeney, "Ambiguous Origins," 199. Also, "thick description" refers to Clifford Geertz's regarded ethnographic approach in cultural anthropology. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
56. *Laughing Fish*, ca. 1970, item 7, Mundo Art, "Cyclona Art Collection."
57. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Shifra Goldman et al. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991), 156.
58. Newsprint drawing, ca. 1974, item 48, Mundo Art, "Cyclona Art Collection."

59. Ibid.
60. Quoted in Jennifer Flores Sternad, "Painting Stages / Performing Life: Gronk," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15, no. 3 (2005): 341.
61. For example, consider Max Benavidez, *Gronk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 7, 63.
62. Pen-and-ink self-portrait of Mundo's face, ca. 1978, item 21, Mundo Art, "Cyclona Art Collection."
63. H. G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (London: W. Heinemann, 1896).
64. *Orange Sunshine* (series of four drawings), ca. 1967, items 3 and 3b, Mundo Art, "Cyclona Art Collection."
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid. Similar sentiments are relayed by Legorreta in Hernández, *Fire of Life*, 20.
67. Hernández, *Fire of Life*, ix.
68. Ibid., 14.
69. See Danbolt, "Touching History," 36.
70. Stevens, "Remembering Lost Paintings," 250.
71. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65.
72. See Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*.
73. Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.