

# Art As A Weapon Of Struggle

by Cathy Espitia

Since its founding of the CMPP in 1993, the CMPP has been one of few pro Raza liberation groups that has survived many trials and tribulations and is consistently doing work around the question of prisons and exposing the capitalist colonialist Prison Industrial Complex. During these 15 years of struggle, the CMPP has used a variety of means –conferences, forums, street demonstrations, house meetings, newsletters, flyers, Internet, and so forth– as a means to educate our communities as to the oppressive and racist nature of the so-called United States Criminal Justice System. One of the activities we have used to raise consciousness have been Pinto (prisoner) Art Shows.

## SHOW DISPLAYED THE BEAUTY, BRILLANCE, AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PINTO/A ART

On Saturday, November 15, 2008, the Chicano Mexicano Prison Project (CMPP) once again organized a pinto art show. Besides educating our communities on the issue of prisons, the 2008 pinto art show also had as an objective to honor Compañero Raul Salinas –ex-pinto, poet and activist– who passed away this year. [Please read the short biography printed in the last issue of Las Calles Y La Torcida, also found in our web page: [uniondelbarrio.org](http://uniondelbarrio.org)]

The show was held at the Centro Cultural de La Raza in Balboa Park. It included one of the largest exhibit of pinto (prisoner) art ever held, as well as a panel discussion summing up the importance of art as part of the struggle for Raza self-determination and the role that pinto art can play in educating our community to the realities of prison life. The CMPP understands that the Courts, Pigs/Placas, and the Pinta are undemocratic, bureaucratic, backwards, brutal, controlling, cruel, oppressive, and repressive tools of the system. Therefore, the art show had several objectives: (1) Showcase the beauty and brilliance of pinto art; (2) Inform our community that pinto art is an inseparable component of Raza art and culture; (3) Use the show to educate others to the realities faced by Mexican/Raza prisoners when they are doing time in the pinta; (4) Open the eyes of the community to the necessity of supporting the basic human rights of prisoners; (5) Expose the criminal justice and prison systems for what they really are: tools to oppress Mexicans/Raza and other poor people, and money making institutions for a small clique of rich racist capitalists; and (6) To win support for the work of the CMPP and get people involved in the struggle for Raza liberation.

The Pinto Art Show was attended by over 100 people, and featured drawings, paintings, and photography by various artists, as well as the sharing of collections/sample of art from many individuals and groups. The list of exhibitors included: •samples of art from local ex-pintos Arturo Singh (long time Chicano Park artist) and Rocky Vinole (Longshoremen worker from the ILWU, Local 29) •Teresa Zaragoza (Norwalk, Califas) •Jose Moreno from Oxnard Califas •CMPP's Pinto Art Collection from various artist which included Jason Treas, J. Mendez, Luis Garcia, Victor Lugo Jr. (Pelican Bay/Crescent City, CA), Guadalupe Hernandez (Salinas Valley State Prison/Soledad, CA), Benny Tapia, George Ramirez (Corcoran, CA), Jesus Estevez (Kern Valley State Prison/Delano, CA), and Jose Sierra (Calipatria, CA) •Contribution from Tlaloc Bustillos (tattoo artist) •Joseph Creamens and Jesus "Indio" McGann, artists representing Brown Berets de Aztlan-SD

## CABRONES LOWRIDER AND MOTORCYCLE CLUB SHOW SUPPORT FOR PINTOS

We must especially recognize Los Cabrones (Lowrider and Harley Viela Club) for the display of their pinto art collection and classic lowriders and custom Harleys. Partial list of local participants de Los Cabrones were: Rick Alvarez-arte & viela, Arturo-46 Chevy Panel, Mike Bello-viela, Isaac Casares-viela, Carlos C. de Baca-arte & viela, David C. de Baca-67 Chevy & arte, Victor C. de Baca-60 Chevy, Victor Cordero (painter of displayed viela), Ronnie Counts-viela, Eddie Galindo- art and viela, Peabody arte & other items, Danny Rangel-39 Panel, Rigo Reyes-46 Chevy, Trino-54 Panel, Vida Loca-48



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GMC truck & arte, Monchi Villalobos-54 Chevy & arte.

The pinto art show was successful and a victory for our work and La Raza for many reasons, including: (1) it illustrated our project's on going commitment to organize, struggle and come together as a community; (2) it represented our continuing struggle to stand up in unity against the racist-injustice prison system that violates the basic rights of pintos on a daily basis; (3) it enabled the CMPP and the many art show participants to expose the system's discrimination, genocidal, and racists policies faced by the poor and working class of our raza.

## SUCCESS OF ART SHOW REPRESENTED HARD WORK OF CMPP MEMBERS

It is important to note, the work put into organizing the art show was difficult, time consuming, and stressful. CMPP members and friends labored hard to organize the show. Due to the absence of the full participation from some members and the lack of resources under which groups such as the CMPP exist, we thought we were not going to be able to go forward with the pinto art show and almost cancelled the event due to various unforeseen obstacles. We expected certain things that were agreed upon, but didn't materialized, and we had no other choice but to struggle around them and went forward with what we had (a lesson learned).

Therefore, it is important that we recognized and give thanks to some of those who made the show possible: Stephanie de la Torre, director of the Centro Cultural de La Raza for the use of the space to organize the pinto art show; all the pinto artists for sharing their ingenious pieces of art (names mentioned above); panelists Teresa Zaragoza (Danza Cuauhtemoc/Norwalk Califas), Victor Ochoa (muralist/artist), Ariana "Tita" Gallegos (Xispa Radio Show) and Ernesto Bustillos (CMPP); DJ Rick Macias for creating the ambiance with his old school tunes; and organizers of the art show, Irene Mena (long time activist), Adelina Lopez, Roberto "Chino" Creamens, Christian Carbajal, Jose Olague, and Catalina "Cathy" Espitia (members of the CMPP).

Special recognition goes to Monica Bernal for taking on the responsibility of coordinating the pinto art show (a job very well done). This effort would not have had materialized without all the people in struggle before us and the peoples presence, sacrifice, and the collective support of the community in and out of the torcida, mil gracias a todos.

Que Viva La Raza!  
Unidos Venceremos en La Lucha!

