THE ART OF CORN
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Introduction

Corn, or maize (Zea mays), has a long and rich history, with strong cultural ties to native and mestizo populations of the Americas. The crop originated as a wild grass, teosinte, somewhere in southern Mesoamerica (Studer et al. 2011). Genetic evidence places the split from teosinte to corn approximately ten-thousand years ago, suggesting the earliest experiments of domestication by humans (Studer et al. 2011; University of Wisconsin-Madison 2011). Archaeological research suggests that it was in the Oaxaca and Tehuacan valleys of modern-day Mexico, where the crop was first fully cultivated (Benz 2001, 2104). Thus, the spread of corn began. Cultural diffusion carried corn across the Americas, arriving in the lower Amazon basin by 4,000 BC (Bush et al. 1989, 304). The crop spread by sea into the Caribbean, reaching Haiti by 1,450 BC (Staller et al. 2006, 331). Similarly, the crop spread northward, reaching modern-day Ohio over seventeen-hundred years ago. (Riley et al. 1994, 495). Italian explorer Christopher Columbus was exposed to the plant and its uses by the native Taino of the Island of Hispaniola, initiating the crop’s spread across the Atlantic in the 1490s (Jeffreys 1955, 427). By the 17th century, corn was introduced to Asian and African ports from Europe by the Portuguese (Miracle 1965).

Due to a relatively short growing period, corn became a popular crop throughout the Old World. However, Europeans did not take the process of nixtamalization with the crop.
Nixtamal comes from the Nahuatl word *nextil*, meaning ashes, and is the process of soaking the kernels in an alkaline solution and was adopted by native populations throughout the New World (Clampitt 2015, 7). Nixtamalization made the removal of the tough exterior of the kernels and grinding easier and unlocked nutrients like niacin (B vitamins). Without this process, Old World populations that transitioned to a primary diet of corn often suffered from pellagra—a dermatological disease resulting from too little niacin in the diet (Berdanier 2019). However, nixtamalization unlocks corn’s full nutritional value. Once processed, corn becomes an excellent source of protein, niacin, fiber, iron, potassium, selenium, and vitamins A, C, and K (USDA n.d.; Kumar and Jhariya 2013, 7).

Corn is an annual grass, meaning it grows and reaches full maturity in a single growing season. In the US, corn is typically planted in April and harvested by November. The plant is up to eight feet tall and produces one or two ears of corn which harvested by hand or combine. As of 2019, the US planted 91.7 million acres of corn (Capehart and Proper 2019), producing 366 million metric tons of the crop (US Grains Council n.d.) It is currently the largest crop in the US (Capehart and Proper 2019). Additionally, corn is arguably one of the most diverse agricultural products of the 21st century. Not only is corn used to feed people and livestock, but also utilized in the production of a wide array of commodities. Products found in most people’s kitchens such as alcohol, vinegar, oil, and fructose syrups, and starch thickeners are secondary products of corn. Industries also utilize corn to produce textiles, lubricants, rubber, corks, adhesives, commercial binders, industrial biofuels, and bioplastics. Moreover, corn silk has proven to possess medicinal qualities. Aqueous extracts from corn silk have proven to help treat urinary tract infections and other urinary system ailments (Sahib et al. 2012).

For hundreds or even thousands of years, corn was the principal grain and source of calories for many cultures across the Americas. Consequently, corn iconography appeared throughout the New World, seen in sculpture, altars, codices, and rock art that span from the Inca of Peru to the Ancestral Puebloans of New Mexico (Figure 3). Many Mesoamerican civilizations revered the crop and attributed corn to major deities for which they built effigies (Figure 2) and produced offerings (Benitez 2014). Western culture has depicted the crop since the 16th century, painted by Italian artist Giovanni da Udine in the Villa
Farnesina (Figure 3), less than thirty years after the introduction of the crop by Columbus (Janick and Caneva 2005, 71). Moreover, 16th-century ethnographic accounts by Spanish friar Bernadino de Sahagún illustrate the Aztec farming corn in the Florentine Codex (Figure 1). By the 19th century, corn was integrated into American and European still lifes (Figure 5).

Despite the significance corn held in pre-Columbian American societies, once colonialized, many colonial cultures considered the grain food for the poor. During the Spanish occupation of the Americas, the higher classes and nobility ate wheat bread as the indentured Indians and mestizos subsisted on corn products (Hartigan 2017; Montaño 2001). According to accounts by American chef, Helen Corbitt, this classist and racial associations of corn with Indian and more impoverished populations persisted in twentieth-century Mexico, during her visits between 1930 and 1960 (de Cabria and Corbitt 1961). In spite of this, during the 20th century, corn was depicted by Latinx and American artists as part of native and mestizo artistic, cultural, and social movements such as Mexican Muralism, the Chicano movement, and the American Indian Movement. For these movements, corn was an iconographic symbol for shared identity, heritage, and ecology, both past and present. In the 21st century, corn has become a point of contention for rural farmers in Mexico as corn imports from the US drastically increase as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Genetically modified corn imports have altered the price and biodiversity of the crop that sustain many small communities throughout Mexico, which threaten their economic independence and food sovereignty (Gálvez 2018).

In this book, readers will encounter four different essays that respond to artworks that feature corn. Each artwork was created in response to the times and movements that occurred during the 20th century. In each response, the writers address the material, compositional, symbolic, and social role corn plays in each artwork. Moreover, readers are provided with four recipes that feature corn and corn products, which take inspiration from the native cultures of the Americas that have been utilizing the crop for millennia.
**ORIGIN**
The origin of corn is not solid, but it may come from either Mexico or the Americas.

**GLOBE CIRCULATION**
- **8000 BCE**: Mexico – a grass called teosinte
- **7000 BCE**: difficult to eat; sturdy exterior
- **5000 BCE**: spread to North America and southern Peru
- **1490s**: seeds were taken to Europe
- **1600s**: corn spread to Africa and Asia
- **1880s**: invention of combine harvester machine to collect corn
- **1930s**: research on corn origin
- **2000s**: different types or "hybrids" of corn
- **2010s**: corn grows faster and spreads to 60+ countries

**MEDICINAL PROPERTIES**
**CORN SILK:**
- bladder infections
- inflammation of urinary system & prostate
- kidney stones
- diuretic chemicals
- changes blood sugar levels
- proteins, vitamins, fiber, carbohydrates, minerals
CORN THROUGH THE AGES
CORN PLANTING AND HARVESTING

APRIL
BEST PLANTING TIME: MID-APRIL, LATE MAY
SEED GERMINATION AFTER SEVEN DAYS
PEST CONTROL (SEEDS ARE TREATED)
HERBICIDES (PREVENTS WEEDS)

MAY
GROWING PLANT (LEAVES, HEIGHT INCREASE)
MORE HERBICIDES ARE ADDED IF NEEDED

JUNE
MOIST SOIL
POLLINATION
TASSEL AND SILK FORM
GRAIN AND KERNELS MATURE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

AFTER HARVEST, FALL FERTILIZER IS ADDED TO THE SOIL

THE LIFE CYCLE OF CORN

SEED
GERMINATION
FRUIT WITH SEEDS
SPROUT
SEEDLING
FLOWERS
PLANT WITH FRUIT
6 MAIN TYPES OF CORN

DENT CORN
- OTHER NAMES: yellow dent corn, white dent corn
- TYPE: field corn
- Has lots of starch
- Developed by James Hinch in mid-1800s
- Uses: cornmeal, flour, corn chips, tortillas, rice cakes, plastics, fructose (sweetener in foods and sodas)

SWEET CORN
- OTHER NAMES: sugar corn and pale corn
- Has lots of sugar
- 1771: brought from Asia to European settlers
- Often eaten as a vegetable, not a grain
- Cannot be stored for long

FLINT CORN
- OTHER NAMES: Indian corn or osage corn
- Kernels have high water sugar (63% by weight)
- Kills bacteria to keep the endosperm soft
- Cultivated by Native Americans
- Corn cultivation in modern day US before 1000 BC

POPCORN
- OTHER NAMES: popcorn, pop-corn
- Kernels puff when boiled, endosperm shatters
- Hull shatters and kernel grows 20-50x bigger
- Domesticated about 10,000 years ago in modern day Mexico
- Has a soft endosperm, slim pericarp
- USES: make corn flour

FLOUR CORN
- OTHER NAME: wild maize
- Not wild, a mutant
- Has leaves or pods around kernels

WHAT CAN BE MADE WITH CORN?

FOOD PRODUCTS
- Cereals, snack foods, salad dressings, soft drink sweeteners, gum, peanut butter, grits, taco shells, flour products, white or blue corn, popcorn

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS
- Soaps, paints, corks, linoleum, polish, adhesives, rubber substitutes, wallboard, dry-cell batteries, textile finishings, cosmetic powders, candles, dyes, pharmaceuticals, lubricants, insulation, wallpaper, other starch products

ANIMAL FEEDS
- Distiller's dried grain, gluten feed, gluten meal, high-oil feed corn for cattle, swine, poultry, and fish

FERMENTATION PRODUCTS AND BYPRODUCTS
- Industrial alcohols, fuel ethanol, recyclable plastics, industrial enzymes, fuel octane enhancers, fuel oxygenates, solvents
The oil painting *Woman Grinding Maize* (1924) by Diego Rivera (1886-1957) depicts the strenuous labor that women in rural or low-income households had to deal with on a day to day basis. The attributes that come with the labor work are unequal but are normalized in different culture’s such as with the Mexican heritage. The artist behind this work is, Post-Impressionist and Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera. Rivera was born in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1886. Rivera reflects on Mexican history and their daily lives, but most importantly focuses on the social inequalities of the laborers and peasantry. Some works hold a lot of controversy but that was the statement he was trying to achieve. During the Mexican Revolution, Diego Rivera was abroad in Europe and Italy where he took interest in Renaissance frescoes. A year later he returned to Mexico and became involved in mural paintings that reflected the Mexican Revolution that had just ended. The painting of *Woman Grinding Maize* has the main focal point showing a woman on her knees, hunched over, a metate or large grinding stone, working to smooth out the maize. The woman is shown wearing a loose white dress that takes up about a third of the surface, but the warm hue of her skin tone causes the eyes to then focus on her arm. Her arms are stiff and flexed showing the exertion that needs to be applied when working on the metate. The face of the woman is cast with a shadow and the bottom half is covered by her shoulder making it hard to see her distinct features. There’s a simplicity with the colors and lines being used in the piece but that leads to the symbolism that’s behind it. As imagery of a woman grinding maize is presented, I will state why Diego Rivera opened a window into social issues regarding the motif of women laborers in Indigenous and Mexican Cultures. The use of these women plays a strong role in explaining the societal roles that the lower class play and how this socially-engaged artwork has brought that to light. I will explore the unity
that women have with agriculture, the outlook towards the lower-class in Mexican society, to tie those topics together to explain how not only this one piece, but many of Rivera’s works brings awareness towards labor workers.

Diego Rivera portrays the relationship between women and agriculture in such a powerful way that this new female image [challenged some of the early twentieth century sexist cultural biases against women in a progressive and vibrant manner] (Mirkin, 103). In several of Rivera’s works he depicts women accompanied by corn. Some of these the woman maybe laboring over the corn or simply sitting in the presence of it. In other works, such as Woman (1924-1927), the peasant figure’s pose resembles the Chicomecóatl, the Aztec goddess of corn. Chicomecóatl is responsible for the abundance of corn that is produced during the growth cycle. To honor this goddess, sacrifices had to be held, because of this Rivera believes that those Prehistoric rituals caused the suffering of the underprivileged classes of Mexico up to the post-revolutionary period] (Mirkin, 106). This belief toward the suffering explains not only why Rivera includes women with agriculture but why he portrays them as having peasant characteristics. Women throughout time have been associated with agriculture and civilization due to their nourishing qualities and ability to supply food. Due to the up bring of women, from such a small age, they are used to providing and caring for others through their inherited domestic role. Women are more apt to observe and discover the nascent processes in nature and consequently to induce and reproduce them artificially] (Mirkin, 101). Rivera recognized the unity women had with nature and the laborious work that was put into maintaining that functional atmosphere whether it was work related or domestic.

In regard to presenting the woman in Woman Grinding Maize (1924), Diego Rivera wanted to show the strenuous, tiresome, labor that a woman will partake in for the household. As far back as to the Aztec’s it was always to woman’s job to spend several hours on her knees working away at the corn to form masa. Over time the metate bowl would form into the shape it is today, the opened faced, three-legged, slab of stone. The way the painting focuses on the body of the woman with her arms toward the center of the plain shows the viewer that they are looking at the work that is being put into the grinding motion. The face of the woman is not of importance but the action that is being presented is the topic. People of the lower class do not have the luxury of just going out to by tortillas or premade tamales. They are the ones providing the other persons consumption of those items. The women have to go through this process, cook, and then sell so they can have making a living. No one really pays attention about how some items come to be and it is not until it is brought to their attention do they really take the time to understand.

Diego Rivera’s artworks were meant to bring awareness to the Mexican society to show how the lower class is being stapled in their own county. Not much had been done for them after post-revolution. The way Rivera reviles the work being done by the figures in his paintings is by either focusing at the task on hand or exaggerating the labor task. That focal point allows the viewer to make the decision that there is a deeper meaning that is being presented then what is necessarily being shown.
In early 20th century Mexico, there was a post-revolutionary moment. At that point in time there were many advances as far as economics and architecture went, but the working class faced oppression from incredibly powerful political leaders. The fight for the purpose of the common man or workers, as well as land rights were very prevalent and the poverty across the land seemed to continue to fester the longer that politics became the priority in the country. Porfirio Díaz, the president of Mexico at the time, was probably more concerned with societal reformations rather than the social or the liberal ones. There was a mix of Mexican citizens who supported Díaz and others who did not, and fingers were pointed at him for being involved in “conspiracy and treason, inhumanity, brutality, and duplicity” (Garner 5). Díaz and other officials reigned in the majority of power in the country and seemed to care quite little in regard to the toil of everyday farmers or lower-class laborers, instead focusing on industry expansion along the lines of making roads or factories. In this way, artists became more interested in expressing themselves with leftist politics and in documenting this political turmoil in Mexico.

Assunta Adelaide Luigia Modotti Mondini, whose name was eventually minimized to Tina Modotti, was born on August 16th, 1896 in northeastern Italy and she died on January 5th, 1942. Modotti became an accomplished photographer, an actress, and a model in the early twentieth century. Modotti’s uncle’s skills in photography helped Modotti fulfill her wish to be an independent art maker and to support herself financially. Learning how to expertly photograph the world around them was a skill set that ran in Modotti’s family blood line. One notable black and white photograph of Modotti’s vast collection was titled *Mexican Revolution, Guitar, Corn and Ammunition Belt* and it was captured in 1927. I will argue that Modotti’s post-revolutionary work is
significant to the social role of food because the idea of heritage in this photograph, specifically through the usage of the corn crop, helps to demonstrate aspects of the 1920s Mexican identity.

Drawing attention to the piece itself, there are three main elements to focus on: the imagery of the guitar strings, the drapery of ammunition belt, and the ear of corn. According to Karen Barber, Modotti’s piece “reflect[s] equally the tenets of modernist photography and the experience of post-revolutionary Mexico” (Barber 2018). Each of these items are generic symbols in both authentic Mexican culture and to post-revolutionary history in Mexico.

In the sixteenth century, Spain had two major instruments that were like the guitar, which included the “six-course vihuela and the four-course guitar” (Koonce 2006, 1). The vihuela was virtually identical to the dimensions of guitars in today’s society. The origin of the guitar was thought to be from the culturally rich country of Spain, but this type of guitar (only recognizable by the neck or strings of it in Modotti’s photograph in particular) appears to be an acoustic one. When strummed, the acoustic guitar loudly reverberates through the hollowness of the instrument. The reasoning behind using this specific type of guitar in Modotti’s photograph may be a nod to the idea of traditionalism. This could highly allude to the fact that, while the working class is facing all of this poverty by the priorities of their government, there is an uncertainty that nothing is going to change — or remain traditional. It may be that human rights are not going to be attended to under the ruling of president Díaz. The guitar is also a reference to the long-standing tradition of music in Mexico.

The ammunition belt is another significant item in the photograph taken by Modotti. More specifically, the theme of war or post-revolutionary Mexican society is depicted with the imagery of the ammunition belt. The belt holds the bullets that will be fed into a gun, and for this reason this element in Modotti’s photograph “is symbolic of the Mexican revolutionary” (Shaw & Dennison 2005, 362). With the visual addition of the ammunition belt, the meaning of the entire photograph changes and connects it in regard to the revolution. Probably one of the most prominently used weapons that were employed in early twentieth century Mexico was the Madsen light machine gun (Marley 2014, 204). This machine gun was used in combat and was especially consistent in its quality, which was why it was purchased by so many. Without the ammunition belt, a common tool used during the vast majority of armed conflicts at this time period, the connection to war would have never been made, and the idea of Modotti’s photograph would simply be more agriculturally (the corn) based or creatively (the guitar) focused.

As for the theme of agriculture, the main focus of Modotti’s photograph seems to be portrayed by the ear of modern corn. The corn sits in the very center of the composition and is in between the guitar and the ammunition belt, therefore putting a greater emphasis on its importance in Mexican culture. Modotti’s photograph shows a relationship to food because the role of the corn crop is to build cultural authenticity. Corn in Mexico is consequential to a high degree due to the fact that it has been a part of Mexico’s historical foundation for so long. The origin of corn, according to Christina Santini, is “from a [domesticated] grass called teocintle by the peoples of Meso-America approximately 10,000 years ago” (Santini 2006). In this sense, indigenous communities utilized the teocintle, or early type of corn grass crop, for pure survival. Generation after generation cultivated and harvested the corn. According to Santini, Oaxaca native Aldo Gonzalez says that “a handful of maize seed is the legacy [they] can leave to [their] children and grandchildren” (Santini 2006). By passing down corn, the method of survival and celebration continues among communities. Corn is used not just
for meals or feeding, but also socially in festivals, in celebrations, and in the making of crafts. In fact, to ancient Mayans corn was so incredibly vital because of its spirituality. Maize was thought to be used in the creation of people through different types of corn. The multitude of colors helped to provide an insight on this mythology, as “white corn was used for the bones, yellow corn for the muscles, black corn for the eyes and hair, and red corn for the blood” (Álvaro 2019). Corn is part of the creation story in all of Mayan culture.

Modotti’s photography piece expresses Laura Jane Smith’s notion of having heritage as an experience because the corn is a part of cultural knowledge and memory. Smith communicates that the experience is part of what makes food a form of heritage, “not the mere fact of [its] existence” (Smith 46). Corn is part of Mexican heritage and experience. When biting into corn, or any food for that matter, there is a sense of achievement that is felt because of the natural need to consume for survival. By photographing the ear of corn in the center of the composition, the understanding of authenticity is amplified. This is because Modotti employs the role of food in such a way that it describes a connection between sentiment, where corn is tied to specific memories, and storytelling, where the corn crop is tied to ancestry.

In the ear of corn depicted, there is a sense of self. The photograph expresses how corn coincides with genealogy and heritage. Modotti’s photography piece also ties to Smith’s notion of identity because corn “fosters the feelings of belonging and continuity [in society]” (Smith 48). There is a long list of popular dishes in Mexico that are still used today which traditionally involve corn in its ingredients. For example, corn plays a massive role in the creation of beverages, soups, tamales, chips, and tortillas to name a few. Corn also forms the paste or dough for these ingredients to come to fruition, and the exterior husks of corn are used to wrap tamales for proper cooking. Medicinally, corn protects the body against ailments like tumors, kidney failure, hypertension, and also diabetes. According to Álvaro, the maize crop was valued because of the fact that “it grew well in the climate, it was easily stored, it could be eaten in a number of ways (e.g. whole or used as a type of flour), and had many other uses (e.g. for baskets, fuel, etc.)” (Álvaro 2019). These reasons, among others, are why corn is so imperative to cultures and identity. Modotti placed corn at the epicenter of the photograph to show this.

In conclusion, Modotti’s Mexican Revolution, Guitar, Corn and Ammunition Belt shows both the value of Mexican culture and the long cultural history behind the objects in the photo. The guitar represents the creative and musical side attached to Mexico, the corn represents the rich agriculture and survival of preceding Mexican generations, and the ammunition belt represents the strife of war in post-revolutionary Mexico. Modotti’s work is notably important to the idea of heritage and 1920s Mexican identity.
Emmanuel Martinez’s *Farm Workers’ Altar* was created in 1967 and first unveiled in March of 1968 to celebrate the end of Cesar Chavez’s twenty-five day fast meant to rededicate his farmworkers’ rights movement in California to nonviolence. *Farm Workers’ Altar* was first presented at a Mass in Delano, California, that marked the end of Chavez’s fast. A crowd of over six thousand attendants gathered for the Mass and included United Farm Workers (UFW) supporters, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and other civil rights leaders (Kennedy 1968; Larsen 1968). The 38 by 54 by 36-inch plywood and mahogany altar is painted on five sides in acrylic and is currently in the collection of the Smithsonian American Museum of Art. The top features a stylized Cross. One side features a crucified dark-skinned Jesus Christ, while on the opposite side, an indigenous woman holds small corn stalks and grapes, flanked by corn on the bottom corners. The other sides feature a Cross made of corn, and opposite, four fists of different colors wrap around the UFW eagle insignia. Grapes are a recurring motif on the four main sides of the altar, their vines framing each scene depicted. The grapes are an allusion to a series of boycotts against non-union California table grapes from Delano. Cesar Chavez and the UFW organized the boycotts to advocate against poor working conditions, and grapes became an important symbol for the UFW platform and inspired Chavez’s "Wrath of Grapes" speech. Moreover, corn appears on two sides of the altar: two ears of corn flank either of a woman who holds…
several stalks of corn and forms a quincunx on another. The corn alludes to the shared mestizo history of pre-Columbian and colonial lifeways shared by Chicanos like Chavez, Martinez, and the laborers that were active participants of the agricultural workers’ rights movement.

Chavez and the UFW’s efforts were part of an overarching movement that was occurring by the 1960s, called El Movimiento, also known as the Chicano Movement. El Movimiento was one of change and focused on improving the agency and civil rights of disenfranchised Chicanos, which were Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States (Hernandez 1975). Mexicans and their descendants are the results of a long and often violent process of native and colonial encounters that resulted in a mixed, but separate, mestizo culture. The term mestizo describes someone or something that is the product of mestizaje, or mixture, and often used to denote the result of both European and Amerindian cultures and ancestry. Chicano mestizaje is “the trace of this historical material process” (Pérez-Torres 1998, 154).

Martinez defines social struggles on mestizo terms by incorporating Western and indigenous elements into his artwork, indicating a complex and diverse heritage.

Chicano artist and Colorado native, Emanuel Martinez was born in 1947 in Denver. His artistic endeavors began at a young age with a pension for drawing in charcoal. At age thirteen, Martinez painted his first mural (Martinez 2018). Martinez worked and studied under famed Mexican muralist David Siqueiros several times in the late 1960s. While living in Xochimilco, Mexico, Martinez assisted in the production of Siqueiros’ The March of Humanity in Latin America (1964-71) (Dewalt 1995, 23; Martinez 2018). Today, Martinez continues to create large, community project painted murals. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Martinez was an activist and produced silkscreen...
Martinez's Farm Workers' Altar

Martinez's Farm Workers' Altar

Printed posters for El Movimiento. Martinez worked intimately with movement leaders "Corky" Gonzalez and Cesar Chavez and their organizations—Crusade for Justice and UFW, respectively—and assisted with Plan de la Raza Unida (Dewalt 1995, 23). Martinez would later enroll in formal artistic training at the Metropolitan State College and Juarez-Lincoln University in Denver (Martinez 2018). In the 1980s, Martinez expanded his interests to bronze casting and began to show his canvas works in galleries (Dewalt 1995). As a painter and sculptor, Martinez has produced large murals and metal sculptures for cities and community organizations across the US. Farm Workers' Altar is unique because wood is not Martinez's usual medium and represents the only known altar in Martinez's portfolio.

Current scholarship has mostly ignored Farm Workers' Altar. Much of the writing for Martinez's altar is for exhibition publications, such as an essay by Victor Sorell or the Smithsonian Institute. Additionally, these publications have only engaged in cursory analyses of the mestizo religious imagery of Farm Workers' Altar, ignoring the importance of food imagery in activating the piece as a whole. As the work is a response to the times and shared experience of the Chicano community, it brings to light the importance of food in Chicano heritage and identity of Chicanos in the 1960s. This paper argues that Martinez's work legitimizes and commemorates the resistance and resilience of Chicano communities, through syncretic imagery of corn and grapes. Imagery such as the quincunx, represented by corn on the altar, ties pre-Columbian iconography to the concept of Aztlán and a shared 20th-century Chicano heritage. The grapes and corn stalks, evocative of the Eucharist, root the altar as a transformative object within the Chicano resistance for workers' rights in the exploitative agricultural systems of the 1960s.

This paper will first explain why the work's function as an altar transforms the meanings of the foods represented and lends itself to the commemoration of Chicano heritage and farmers' rights. Next, the paper will explore the importance of corn to the heritage of Chicanos and its ties to Aztlán. Then, it will engage in a formal analysis of the subjects depicted on the altar, particularly corn and grapes, and their symbolic and social role within the artwork.

The power of an altar is to connect the corporeal world with the spiritual realm and is a stage for change. The Catholic Mass that commemorated the end of Chavez's twenty-five-day fast utilized Farm Workers' Altar as the main altar (Smithsonian Institute n.d.; Sorell 1995, 27). Because Martinez created the work as an altar, it acts as a powerful link to politics, community, and spirituality (C. Holmes 2016, 77). El Movimiento was a movement of change and focused on improving the agency and civil rights of Chicanos. Similarly, the altar is a platform of transformation. The phenomenon of transubstantiation occurs on a Catholic altar, where wine and unleavened bread undergo a metaphysical conversion into the body and blood of Christ, respectively, through consecration (Waterworth 1848, 78).

Similarly, the images of corn and grapes depicted on Farm Workers' Altar become consecrated and transformed further, beyond symbols of indigeneity and workers' rights. The function of Farm Workers' Altar as an altar transforms the foods depicted into actual parts of a mestizo identity that is shared by the Chicano community that persists despite the hardships past and present.

As a way to reclaim their identity in the racially hostile environment of the mid-20th century United States, "the conceptual base of Chicano thinking absorbed elements from various pre-Hispanic cultures," (Mesa-Bains 1993, 44). Martinez himself said the inspiration for Chicano art took much from the...
ancient Indians that were the ancestor of modern mestizos (Martinez 1972, 350). Corn has long been tied to Mexican and Chicano identity and identified as the staple crop for native populations of Meso-America, who were the indigenous ancestors of the modern mestizos. Corn has close associations with indigenous bodies. Cosmogonies of the Maya state that the current incarnation of men is created from maize—corn (Tedlock 1996, 63-64). Likewise, the Aztec revered the maize goddess, Chicomecoatl, and discussed in the Florentine Codex: "indeed, truly she is our flesh, our livelihood, through her we live, she is our strength" ( Sahagún 1950-82,2:64). In the 21st century, corn is still regarded as an integral part of mestizo identity. Gustavo Esteva and Catherine Maireille emphasize the importance of corn as part of a shared history and ecology in their 2003 book, Sin maíz no hay país [Without Corn There is No Country]. Esteva introduces his topic by arguing that, "corn is our collective invention. And corn, in its turn, invented us" (2003, 11).

Martinez depicts scenes on Farm Workers’ Altar in a Chicano homeland. The scenes’ setting on Farm Workers’ Altar is in an idealized landscape: rich brown soil, lush green grass, hills, and sapphire blue water. This landscape is reminiscent of a mythical land, and lends itself to the concept of alternative geography, nascent of the coming ideology of Aztlán that would fully manifest two years after the completion of the altar. Aztlán, from the Nahuaat Aztatlán, is the mythical homeland of the Aztec, situated north of modern-day Mexico (Mesa-Bains 1993, 47; del Castillo and de León 1996, 131), what is considered today as the American Southwest (Urista and Gonzales 1969, 5). This region is also where the majority of Latinos, including Mexican and Mexican descendant populations, existed in the US during the 1960s (Haverluk 1997, 137). Aztlán was an alternative geography—a space of cultural resistance and identity-performance—of the Southwest (Bolger 2012). Aztlán became part of the fundamental ideology of El Movimient0, which acted as a focal point for Chicano nationalism (Noriega 1969). These concepts of Aztlán and Chicano nationalism were made concrete in the manifesto El Plan de Espíritual de Aztlán adopted in 1969. As the Director of Cultural Activities for the manifestos’ publishing organization, Crusade for Justice, at the time, Martinez contributed to this manifesto (Sorell 1995, 27). So, the idea that Martinez anticipated the cultural mandates of the manifesto comes as no surprise.

Moreover, Martinez further recognizes the role of corn in Mesoamerican societies and its associations with belief systems and religious iconography. On one panel of Farm Workers’ Altar, Martinez forms a Cross with the ears of corn. However, the depiction of the Cross symbolizes more than a Christian Crucifix, as one would expect on a Christian altar. Additionally, the corn forms a quincunx—a form created with five points in the shape of a four-sided cross with the fifth point in the center—which has an intimate connection with corn (Stross 1994, 20). The quincunx pattern is a common Mesoamerican cosmogram, in both Maya (Stross 1994, 25) and Aztec belief systems (Aguilar-Moreno 2006, 302). Both the Maya and Aztec mapped the cosmos by the four cardinal directions and an axis-mundi that transcended through and beyond their mortal worlds (Aguilar-Moreno 2006, 302; Stross 1994, 25). Often arranged in a similar four-quartered format, religious calendars form quincunxes in the Maya Madrid Codex and the Aztec Codex Féjervary-Mayer. Modern Tzeltl Maya still plant corn in a quincunx formation— they dig a center and four surrounding holes marking the cardinal directions, each filled with five seeds (Alcorn 1984:341)—as a sort of recreation of the cosmos. Artist and writer Dylan Miner expand Esteva’s concept of Sin maíz no hay país, specifically concerning El Movimiento, adding "sin maíz no hay Aztlán [without corn there is no Aztlán]"
Martinez’s Farm Workers’ Altar (2014, 196). So, by utilizing corn to return to indigenous values and iconography, Martinez once again alludes to a shared past and homeland, the idea of which later materializes in El Plan de Espiritual de Aztlán.

Further, by recreating a Cross on Farm Workers’ Altar with corn, Martinez is showcasing the syncretism of colonial and native belief systems and exhibiting the religious iconography on mestizo terms. During the colonization of the Americas from the 15th to the 19th century, the Catholic Church attempted to adapt Christianity to indigenous traditions often by finding overlapping concepts and iconography of the colonized (Pandian 2006, 230). The overlapping forms of a four-pointed quincunx and a crucifix is one such example. Syncretic use of the Cross by Catholic missionaries occurred throughout the Americas, one of the most famous is the Atrial Cross at Acolman in Mexico, created for a 16th century Augustine monastery, which utilizes a syncretic form of the Aztec World Tree and Christ’s Crucifix. Martinez inverses this concept by utilizing corn and the overlapping forms of a four-pointed quincunx and a crucifix to harken back to indigenous belief systems.

Similarly, on the adjacent panel of Farm Workers’ Altar, an indigenous Mexican woman holds a grape bunch and a handful of grain stalks (Smithsonian n.d.; Sorrell 1995, 27). The raw ingredients prefigure the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The grains the woman holds are the color and size of wheat, the cereal grain used for the making of unleavened Holy Communion bread. However, the forms appear almost bulbous: a cone-like shape with the kernels bunched close together rather than a long, narrow, double rowed physiology typical of the plant. Despite the size and color, the kernels’ shape something closer to corn: a round base that narrows towards the tip and kernels that wrap around the entire form. Rather than wheat, Martinez is most probably depicting an early ancestor of corn, closer to its wild ancestor, teosinte, cultivated by Pre-Columbian Mesoamericans, which was smaller than today’s crop and was similar in size to wheat. As wheat holds significance in Christianity as the finest crop bestowed by God (Deuteronomy 32:14; Psalm 81:16; Psalm 147:14), and its product, bread, used to represent the body Christ, corn holds a similar symbolic value as a divine crop and the substance of the body in Mesoamerican cosmogonies. The overlapping size and forms of the two plants are taken advantage of by Martinez. By depicting an ancient New World crop that closely resembles Old World wheat in both form and religious significance, it further develops the syncretic nature of the altar.

The two ears of corn on either side of the woman further ground the scene in an indigenous environment. The ears of corn are iconographic symbols as a sort of pictographic label. Calling upon associations mentioned earlier of native lifeways to corn, Martinez uses the ears of corn to claim the visual elements of the scene depicted, much like a glyph or signature. Martinez claims not only the woman but the grapevines and the prefigured symbols of the Eucharist as part of Chicano identity, which showcases the mestizaje of Chicano religious heritage. Moreover, the native associations of corn juxtapose the grapes that surround the scene.

Martinez’s depiction of grapes represents both the blood of Christ and an ongoing struggle for rights. The grapevines permeate throughout the entire artwork, included on every panel of Farm Workers’ Altar. Unlike corn, grapes do not have a deep cultural association with Mesoamerican cultures. As a working altar for a Mass, paired with a depiction of a crucified Christ, the grapes prefigure the Holy Communion wine that becomes the blood of Christ. However, the grapes are also a direct reference to the grape boycotts that were occurring by 1967. The boycotts were
for better pay and working conditions for agricultural workers, many of whom were Chicano (T. Holmes 2006, 303). Delano, California, was the site of the first major strike organized by Chavez in 1965 and is the very same place where the six-thousand-person Mass occurred (Larsen 1968) and where Farm Workers’ Altar was first utilized (Smithsonian n.d.; Sorell 1995, 27). Parallels exist between the suffering of Christ on the Cross, the suffering of Chicano laborers, and Chavez’s twenty five-day fast. The overlapping themes of unjust suffering and sacrifice create a new meaning for the grapes. The grapes of Farm Workers’ Altar now also represent the blood of the Chicano workers that have suffered at the hands of the farming industry.

Moreover, the depiction of grapes on Farm Workers’ Altar and the fact the altar was used on the site of the first grape strike incorporates the grape imagery and boycotts into a 20th-century Chicano heritage. The grape imagery flags and reminds the audience of the reason and context in which Martinez built the altar (Smith 2006). The presence of the grapes in every panel, both visually and socially, frame the images and symbols of Farm Workers’ Altar. The grapes are a reminder of the resistance by the UFW and Chicano community against the inequalities imposed on workers by the commercial agricultural complex, which began with the grape boycotts. Anthropologist Laurajane Smith states that heritage is an ongoing process rather than just static meanings (2006, 47). The act of remembering is part of forming these new meanings (Smith 2006, 44). Martinez’s depiction of grapes and the site of the Mass are both acts of remembrance that engaged with the present, both during the historic Mass and in a modern museum context. Smith also argues that heritage sites are formed through heritage performances—utilizing the space to create or convey identity (2006, 48). So, the physical use of Delano as the site for the historic Mass, with its associations with the grape boycotts, initiated Delano into a heritage site for the Chicano community (Smith 2006, 46).

In conclusion, Martinez’s Farm Workers’ Altar integrates both Christian and indigenous iconography to illustrate a mestizo identity and heritage of Chicanos in the 1960s through food. The function of the altar transforms and elevates the foods and forms depicted on the altar into real aspects of Chicano identity. Corn, and its associated forms, call back to pre-Columbian culture and religion and its overlapping meanings in Christendom. Grapes take on meaning beyond the blood of Christ, but also the blood of Chicanos who resisted the institutional oppression of farmworkers. Additionally, the depiction of grapes in the context of the grape boycotts and historic Chavez Mass incorporates them into 20th-century Chicano heritage. Together, these aspects make of Farm Workers’ Altar a site to actualize Chicano agency and legitimizes the heritage and resistance of the 1960s Chicano community.
For centuries Native American people have been displaced from their homelands at the expense of greedy corporations. The Tuscaroran Indians of New York and Ontario fell victim to this devastation in 1958 when the Power Authority of New York decided they wanted to flood the Native people’s land to build more power lines. This meant that their land, homes, and crops would all be destroyed. Corn has always been a significant crop to Native American tribes and this loss brought on by the Power Authority would not only be damaging to their way of life but also to their spirits. Corn is so much more than a food source for the Native American people it was ceremonial for them, “Native Americans of both North and South America had elaborate rituals to ensure a good crop and show their gratitude when harvest time rolled around” (Clampitt p. 159).

This historical event that took place between the Tuscaroran Native American’s and the New York Power Authority impacted their people forever, and an artist and Native American woman, Jolene Rickard’s made something beautiful out of it all.

The Granddaughter of Clinton Rickard the Tuscarora chief who fought for his lands in 1958 is a woman named Jolene Rickard’s. She is an artist and professor of Art History at Cornell University and has spent all of her artistic career striving to represent Native American culture through her art. One artwork of Rickard’s I would like to focus on is “Corn Blue Room” an emotionally engaging exhibit made up of flashing images of scenic landscape and an elevated bundle of blue corn hanging lonesome at centerfold. This specific artwork is very in line with Rickard’s personal style and subject matter displayed in most of her other art. “Corn Blue Room” is made up of different images presented on electronic screens, and every one of these images shows landscape scenes, powerlines, water, and dams. All of the
images represent the story behind her art which is the story of the fight between her Tuscaroran people and the Power Authority. Rickard uses her art to educate her audience on the displacement of her Native American ancestors and the importance of corn in ceremony, hoping that when visitors observe and feel her exhibit they will better understand what her people have gone through. In this paper, I will argue that Rickard’s heritage influenced her to create this socially engaging art piece “Corn Blue Room” and then go into further detail on why the artist chose to display the crop corn because of its essential social role in Native American ceremony and lifestyle. In this paper, I want to go into further detail on the vital role corn played in representing Native American people and their practices. As well as explain why Jolene Rickard’s chose to insert it into her artwork.

Previously in this course, we have discussed socially engaging art and all of the features it is made up of. Regarding “Corn Blue Room” I found it carries every aspect of socially engaging art. After reading excerpts of Pablo Helguera’s book “Education for Socially Engaging Art” I decided I wanted to use it as evidence for my argument because he goes in depth on what can and cannot be categorized as socially engaging art explaining, “What characterizes socially engaging art is its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence” (Helguera p. 2). There is a deeper emotional meaning behind this artwork and every visual detail Rickard’s added to it represents the story of her Tuscaroran people and everything they fought for. What makes her artwork so unique to the exhibits around it is that she wants her audience to learn from it and walk away with a better understanding of the history that influenced it. The images she chose all represent aspects of the Tuscaroran Indians’ way of life such as pictures of their beautiful land, crops, and the heartbreaking powerlines and dams that threatened its existence. Although this exhibit is simple and is mostly only made up of images these pictures of land can show the audience what their home was like before the displacement. And that is why these pictures and what they show are so imperative to understanding the social issue behind the art piece. Helguera explains in his book that when an artwork depends on a social issue or the artist has been influenced by this problem and it is the backbone of the creation of their art, then it can be classified as socially engaging and this is everything Rickard’s has done in her art. The exhibit displays the pain and loss her Native people suffered through, while simultaneously presenting the beauty of her culture still lives on and deserves recognition beyond their history of displacement. The reason why “Corn Blue Room” is socially engaging art is because Rickard’s wanted the audience to learn about her Native peoples’ through the experience of viewing her art piece.

Going into more detail on the features of her artwork, there are two key components that support presenting Rickard’s deeper meaning: her image selections and the ambiance of the room. The artwork itself is composed of numerous screens with flashing images and short films. Each screen either displays landscapes, dams, powerlines, or flowing water. This segment of the artwork is meant to show the viewers what the Tuscaroran Indians’ life was like before and after their displacement. The images showing picturesque undamaged landscape represent the territory they cherished as their home, while the powerlines and dams reveal the residues left behind by the New York Power Authority. One thing I found thought-provoking about this artwork was its atmosphere in comparison to the exhibits surrounding it. It is dimly lit and intense while the rooms in the museum around it are all brightly lit, to me this
choice of setting helps symbolize the mindsets Rickard’s wanted her audience feeling when learning about this story. These are all just theories and ideas I pondered when researching “Corn Blue Room” that help support my argument that Rickard’s work is socially engaging. I think that she made these aesthetic choices to help convey her subject matter to the spectators, and in hopes that it would make them feel empathy for the Tuscaroran Indians’ loss. It is hard to show pain and loss in a bright warm room like the exhibits surrounding hers, and the room an art exhibit is placed in is just as important to delivering the feelings and message of the artwork as the work itself.

Corn played an extremely social role in the Native American people’s lives and without their agricultural contributions the crop would not be as widespread as it is in America and other countries. Jolene Rickard’s described “Corn Blue Room” as more of a ceremony than a work of art which explains her choice of including corn as the center piece of her exhibit. I mention this because this particular crop plays a great role in traditional Indian ceremonies. Rickard focuses on the landscape a lot and I believe this ties back to the history of the Pilgrims reaping off of the Native Americans harvest and introduction to crops such as corn, and in return to this sharing of ceremony they destroyed their land and killed them off. Cynthia Clampitt an author who studied corn and its influence on the United States remarks in her book, “In a way, festivities that gave rise to one of our oldest national holidays were in celebration of corn” she is referencing our national holiday Thanksgiving and how the celebration of corn changed our history forever (Clampitt p. 160). And Rickard’s wanted to demonstrate that although peaceful tribes such as the Tuscaroran’s helped in the production of corn they were used and mistreated by large corporations in return and their land used for farming this crop was stolen away from them. Plus, this choice to include blue corn hanging in the middle of the exhibit embodied Rickard’s wants to display this overall history of corn being a vital part of both Native American and colonizer societies. She wanted viewers to look up at the corn husks hanging from the ceiling and take away an understanding of the meaning of this particular crop to her people and other Native American tribes all around the United States.

When you enter Jolene Rickard’s exhibit “Corn Blue Room” you are not merely visiting an artwork, you are taking part in a ceremonial practice. As you walk around the room and observe each image displayed you are slowly learning about the tragic displacement of the Tuscaroran Native Americans, and in the center of the room hangs a bundle of corn that is there to represent the importance of the crop in Indian ceremonies much like the one you experience in this exhibit. Jolene Rickard’s used her art to engage her audience on a deeper and more emotional level and wanted to invite each viewer to experience the ceremony of her people.
**Tortillas**

**Ingredients**

- 2 cups masa harina
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 ½ cups water
- Lard (optional)

**Method**

Mix masa and salt in a bowl. Stir in 1 1/2 cups water, mix with your hands until cohesive.

Knead until dough is firm. If the dough is crumbly add water by a single teaspoon until the dough becomes springy but not smooth, it should look slightly dry. A good rule of thumb is if it looks and acts like Play-Doh, it is near perfect.

Take and roll a golf ball size amount to flatten on a tortilla press. If tortilla crumbles, dough is too dry, and add more water one teaspoon at a time.

Heat a large skillet, recommend cast iron, over medium-high heat. As the skillet heats begin forming tortillas. This can be done with a tortilla press or, you could use a rolling pin.

Alternatively, you could form the tortillas by hand. This is how indigenous peoples made tortillas for centuries. This produces a thicker, fluffier tortilla. Be sure to wet your hands to prevent sticking. Taking a golf-ball sized piece of dough, press it into your one of your palms with your fingers to begin forming a disk. Pass the dough between your hands, from the palm of one to the fingers of the other, almost in a slapping motion, pressing the top half of the dough. Repeat. With every pass you want to angle the hand passing the dough towards yourself. This rotates the dough with every pass, allowing for a more even tortilla. Repeat this until your tortilla has reach your desired size. Do not be discouraged if your first tortillas come out lumpy or uneven, it takes a considerable amount of practice to make tortillas in this fashion. Just keep trying.

Place the tortillas on the skillet and cook each side and when very deep brown spots start to develop and the edges start to curl, approximately 1-2 minutes. Thicker, hand formed, tortillas may take longer.

Additionally, consider melting a tablespoon of lard for each batch of tortillas fries the tortillas creating a crunchier, almost confectionary like crust. However, lard fried tortillas are often less pliable for folding.

Cover and store in a cloth towel until ready to serve.
**Bannock (Fried Corn Bread)**

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups cornmeal
- ¾ cup water
- ½ cup blueberries, fresh or frozen
- 5 Tbs. vegetable oil
- ¼ cup oil for frying

**Method**
Mix cornmeal, water, and 5 Tbs. oil. Fold in the berries, gently, as not to crush them.
Heat the oil in a large pan, preferably cast iron, on medium-high heat.
When oil is up to heat, drop the batter by small spoonful into oil. Fry until golden brown and then turn, about 5 minutes per side.
Drain and serve warm and fresh to ensure exterior is crispy. Great with coffee or tea and optional dollop of yogurt, cottage cheese, or sour cream.

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**Za (Sweet Corn Drink)**

**Ingredients**
- 6 cups or 12 ears sweet corn, fresh
- 4 cups water
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup honey or agave syrup

**Method**
Slice off the kernels from the ears and put in a blender. Add water and blend very fine.
Filter through a colander into pot, put on stove over medium-low heat. Stir occasionally until the pot is brought to a low boil, approximately 10-15 minutes.
When the first sign of boiling starts, turn off the heat and put aside.
When still warm, mix in honey and stir until combined.
Serve warm or pour over ice. For a fun twist, try adding flavors that you enjoy when heating on stove like mint, cilantro, or cinnamon.

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1 The Bannock comes from Healthy Traditions: Recipes of Our Ancestors by Janice Goodwin and Judy Hall of the University of North Dakota.

2 The Za recipe comes courtesy of co-authors Katelyn Mays and Jesse Latimer. Inspired by the Mexican-Mayan Cookbook by Alejandra Bolles.
Roasted Corn Succotash

Ingredients
- 2 cups or 4 ears of sweet corn, fresh
- 1-2 chili or bell peppers
- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil
- 1 cup diced zucchini squash
- 1 cup chopped tomato
- 1 cup cooked lima beans
- ½ cup scallions thinly
- ¾ cup low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 minced clove of garlic
- 1 tbs. white wine vinegar
- 2 Tbs. chopped parsley
- 2 tsp. chopped tarragon
- ½ tsp. rubbed sage
- Salt and pepper to taste

Method
Turn oven on broil and place pepper on a backing sheet on highest rack. Let broil for 1-5 minutes, depending on size of pepper. Flip once when one side of the pepper is black, repeat.

Remove pepper from oven and wrap in foil to let rest. After resting long enough to handle safely, peel away the burnt skin, discard, and chop the pepper. Set aside.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place kernels on baking sheet or whole ears on rack. Roast corn until kernels are tender and cooked through, approximately 10-15 minutes.

Alternatively, roast corn and pepper on grill over high heat to add char and a smoky flavor.

When corn is cool enough to handle, pull away husk and silk. Cut kernels from cob and reserve.

Heat oil in a large pan over medium-high heat. Add corn and zucchini. Sauté, stirring occasionally, for about 2 minutes. Add minced garlic and continue cooking 1 minute.

Add tomato, lima beans, scallions, sage and broth. Simmer, stirring occasionally until all ingredients are cooked through, approximately 5 minutes.

Take off heat and stir in chopped pepper, vinegar, tarragon, and half of parsley.

Top with remaining half of parsley and serve warm. Alternatively, let rest overnight in the fridge and serve cold or as a vegan tamale filling.

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3 This recipe is inspired by a similar dish served to co-author Jesse Latimer at the Mitsitam Native Food Café at the Museum of the American Indian.


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