

FOLKLORE OF THE FREEWAY

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RACE and REVOLT IN THE MODERNIST CITY

CHAPTER FOUR

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

The Racial Politics of Seeing the Freeway

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A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

The Racial Politics of Seeing the Freeway

There were no paintings of Los Angeles. People then didn't even know what it looked like. And when I was there, they were still finishing up some of the big freeways. I remember seeing, within the first week, a ramp of freeway going into the air and I suddenly thought: "my God, this place needs its Piranesi; Los Angeles could have a Piranesi so here I am!" DAVID HOCKNEY, 1963

In Europe all roads lead to Rome; in Southern California, all freeways lead to East Los Angeles. GOEZ ART STUDIO, 1975

Though his work defined a marketable image of the suburban good life in 1960s Los Angeles, David Hockney never actually painted an L.A. freeway. The closest he came was his 1980 portrait *Mulholland Drive*, but this is a road, albeit a fabled one, not a freeway. Throughout his artistic career, Hockney painted a lot of palm trees, swimming pools, and naked men, but he never really tackled the new freeways that defined the city's identity in its postwar heyday. He did not have to. A British expat settling in the secluded canyons of the Hollywood Hills, Hockney mostly hung out in the gentrifying precincts of West Hollywood, drawing aesthetic inspiration from its commercial strips, its condominium lifestyle, and its burgeoning gay scene.

Thanks to the success of the freeway revolt in Beverly Hills, there are no freeways through the adjacent city of West Hollywood.¹ Beyond the tonier quarters of L.A.'s Westside, however, the freeway earned more prominent recognition in the local art scene. In Boyle Heights, about ten miles east of West Hollywood along Sunset Boulevard, the freeway figures prom-

inently in the visual literary canon of Chicano art, notably in the work of artists like Rodolfo Baeza and Helena María Viramontes. As this area transitioned from a racially and ethnically diverse working-class neighborhood to an undiverse concentration of working-class Mexican Americans, six freeways bullied their way into Boyle Heights, converging on two massive highway interchanges that consumed 10 percent of the local housing stock. By the late 1960s, after the California Division of Highways had completed its assault on East Los Angeles, freeways dominated the sensory experience of daily life in the nation's largest barrio: the roar of traffic coursing above or below surface streets, the shadows cast by soaring interchanges, the dead ends and circuitous detours, the odor of traffic emissions, and the forbidding maze of concrete walls, piers, and embankments.

Welcome to East Los Angeles, where freeways frame the emerging identity of Mexican America. This chapter focuses on the sight of the new freeways in Los Angeles and their portrayal in American art and photography since the age of the interstate. Not only did highway construction spark a gendered critique among diverse American women, but it also invited a divergent set of racialized perspectives. Although the visual record of American art and photography since the interstate era registers these discrepancies, it says little about their origins in the skewed impact of highway construction during the 1950s and 1960s. To argue for a Chicano perspective or a black perspective of the freeway seems straightforward enough, but to identify a white perspective requires seeing the unseen, seeing what has been rendered invisible by historical forces that exempt white artists from a racial point of view. Yet as critical race theory tells us, white perspective and power, like white identity, is most always apparent against the presence and perspective of the Other.²

This chapter extends the dialectical analysis of the previous chapters, drawing general comparisons between the work of East L.A. Chicano artists and Westside white artists during the interstate and post-interstate eras. It considers the freeway portraits of other artists as well, but taken as a whole,

this body of freeway art reflects a shared impulse to paint the freeway and its relationship to the urban built environment. Despite this common focus, however, these images also leave a visual record of the freeway's disparate impact on the city's socioeconomic geography. There is the "up-close-and-personal" portrait from East Los Angeles—a Chicano perspective steeped in the riotous colors of a Mexican aesthetic and in the political ferment of the Chicano movement. Here we get a fine-grain perspective on the freeway and its underbelly—its columns, embankments, and box girders and their framing of daily visual life. From the whiter Westside, however, a more exacting portrait of the freeway emerges. There, artists homed in on the freeway's fragments, undulations, and precise geometry, as well as on its general abstraction from the urban fabric. Westside artists won the acclaim that came late, if at all, to Eastside artists, and though their work evidenced some of the rebellious strains of the 1960s, it found more obvious parallels in the visual iconography of the highway-planning profession and in the elaborate spectacles of popular culture.

All told, the diverse paintings and photographs explored in this chapter depict the structural disparities of how the freeway is seen. Some, like David Hockney, discovered the freeway; for others, the freeway discovered them. To argue that racial discrimination, class privilege, and public policy frame the freeway's portrait is not to deny the artist the autonomous spark of imagination and creativity but, rather, to affirm the capacity of art to register the dissimilar consequences of modernization and to illustrate how the field of human vision is as charged, politically, as the physical landscape of the city itself.

"WHITE MAN'S FREEWAY"

The interstate era of the 1950s and 1960s encompassed a shift in the mainstream world of American art, from the intense visions of the abstract expressionists toward the cool, detached sensibility of pop, which discovered the "stuff" of everyday life in a suburbanizing, consumer-oriented culture.

In this context, the freeway began to insinuate itself into American art, especially on the West Coast, where artists and photographers discovered a new world of aesthetic possibility from the windshields of their cars. On a cross-country trip to California, for example, Andy Warhol, a Pittsburgh native turned New Yorker, noted the new perspective introduced by the freeway: "The further west we drove on the highway, the more Pop everything looked."³ The freeway's discovery by some L.A. artists produced a decidedly ungrounded vision, one rooted not in the particular perspective of a particular community or neighborhood but, rather, in the individual's determination to render the new geometry of postwar consumer culture and to master the aesthetic challenges they posed.

Roger Kuntz, for example, focused on the freeway to paint his way through the shifting currents of mainstream American art. Developing his painting skills in the 1950s, Kuntz struggled between his inherent talent for figurative painting and his ambition to emulate the abstract forms that dominated the postwar art scene. In Southern California, Kuntz discovered the freeway: a structure that invited a straightforward rendering yet also enabled experimentation in the two-dimensional representation of line, form, color, solids, and voids. Kuntz took to painting the image of the freeway in the early 1960s, departing from traditional portraiture into more abstract modes of representation. His 1961 painting *Arches*, for example, is wholly focused on the road environment, with but a pale-blue sliver of sky interrupting his artful composition of solids, shadows, and voids. Kuntz seems to paint from the surface of the road itself, eliminating all signs of human interaction—no people, crowds, cars, traffic, litter, signs, or smog. Color is sparse in his reduced palette of grays, greens, and browns. In a review for *Artforum*, Henry Hopkins expressed his admiration for these spare compositions, praising "the formal grandeur and functional simplicity of the freeway...affected by the intensity of the raking sun."⁴ To find the right perspective, Kuntz cruised the L.A. freeways in an Aston Martin convertible. He would drive through an interchange several times, from all directions, and at all levels. Using a 35mm camera and slide film, Kuntz took photographs from his car and posted them in his Laguna Beach studio as source material and studio aids. In most cases, he worked from these photographs to produce a recognizable, three-dimensional image of a freeway environment and to further develop his skills for abstraction.⁵ With a nod toward pop art's enthusiasm for machine-made signs and objects, Kuntz also depicted the bold graphics of freeway signs.

Though these large paintings, on the order of five feet by six feet, come close to the real thing in size, the apparent brushwork and cropped framing divulge the hand of the artist. This work belongs in the company of works portraying the "stuff" of popular culture—Jasper Johns's maps and flags, Roy Lichtenstein's comic strips, Warhol's soup cans and detergent boxes, Edward Ruscha's gas stations and supermarkets. We find the same air of detachment that characterizes much of the pop aesthetic. As the first generation of freeway drivers struggled to navigate their way through a high-speed environment of signs, interchanges, lane dividers, on-ramps, and off-ramps, Kuntz delivered a cool abstraction of this kinetic environment—a spare portrait of empty and static arteries. Some critics saw a noble tradition of representing the American West in art, like the one who claimed that Kuntz "romanticized the freeway much in the way that Frederic Remington represented the purple canyons of the West years ago."⁶

Kuntz's paintings might have reinforced stereotypical associations between Los Angeles and its freeways, but in other cities, other artists also confronted the freeway as an aesthetic problem to solve. In the mid-1970s, Los Angeles surpassed Chicago as the nation's second city, provoking San Franciscans to brand their city as the opposite of Los Angeles: an enduring (and endearing) landmark of Victorian urbanism, a cosmopolitan assortment of quirky neighborhoods, from the stately to the seedy, nestled at the hilly tip of a foggy peninsula, beholden to the few cable cars left over from the heyday of American cities before Henry Ford. The relative absence of freeways reinforced local distinctions from Los Angeles, as San Franciscans had denied state and federal highway-building authorities entry into their neighborhoods. Thanks to the success of that city's freeway revolt in the 1950s, San Franciscans proudly shared Harvey Milk's conviction that "people are more important than highways."⁷

The few freeways that were built, however, nonetheless found representation in the acclaimed corpus of Bay Area art. Wayne Thiebaud, for example, had earned national recognition for painting cakes, gumballs, and other staples in the diet of blue-collar America. In the early 1970s, this graphic artist turned figurative painter bought a small house as an extra residence and studio in the Potrero Hill neighborhood of San Francisco, a gentrifying neighborhood in the steep hills south of the city's financial district. There he began painting the San Francisco cityscape, with its precipitous streets, perchlike intersections, and rows of blocky architecture. Some critics branded Thiebaud's work as pop, though the bulk of this work emerged before pop's heyday. With formal training in advertising, poster art, and layout design, Thiebaud balanced his interest in the work of Jan Vermeer, Piet Mondrian, Edgar Degas, Richard Diebenkorn, Edward Hopper, and others with his fondness for the vernacular objects that impressed him with character and presence.⁸

The same visual delight that Thiebaud took from neckties, pies, toys, and hot dogs, he found in the form of the freeway. By the mid-1970s, the city's two major freeways flanked the Potrero Hill neighborhood: State Highway 101, which connected to Interstate 80 at the Oakland Bay Bridge, and Interstate 280, which emptied traffic into the nearby South of Market neighborhood.

From his hillside vantage point, Thiebaud saw the San Francisco freeway not as an environmental problem—as did most of his fellow San Franciscans—but as a problem in formal composition, making it a subtheme in his rendering of the cityscape. His inspiration from the freeway traces back to his early experiences on family road trips between Southern California and southern Utah, where his Uncle Lowell, a road builder himself, taught Thiebaud how to drive. Later in his life, Thiebaud made extensive road trips across the nation, often between Los Angeles and New York,

or between San Francisco and Los Angeles, straight down Interstate 5, to Laguna Beach, where Thiebaud shared a home with his family. The visual experience of freeway driving introduced new perspectives and images, problems to be worked out on canvas. He took special notice of the symbolic markings on the freeway, such as the paint applied to make lines, arrows, and words on the road surface. The long black marks of tires skidding on pavement also impressed Thiebaud. This is what he called the "patina of travel"—the traces of human activity encoded on the surface of the road.⁹

With his love of cartooning and commercial art, Thiebaud searched for "the push of things like the caricature of proportion, the caricature of light, the caricature of color where you overstress or understress certain aspects of, for instance, the freeway."¹⁰ Indeed, such caricature shapes Thiebaud's portraits of the freeway: the exaggerated contortions of the road (*Freeways*, 1975–79), the improbable inclines (*Diagonal Freeways*, 1995), the long and heavy brushstrokes that dramatize movement and direction (*Heavy Traffic*, 1988; *Towards 280*, 1999–2000). Thiebaud also modified his vision to realize this effect. Looking at San Francisco's freeways through the lens of a telescope, Thiebaud sketched the lines of his flattened and slightly distorted view.

He brought these sketches into his studio, producing an image on canvas that was mostly the product of his imagination, with some reliance on memory and technology. Thiebaud's freeways are of his imagination, not of the city in which he lived. Their line, shape, and color suit only the aesthetic imperatives of the picture itself and the artist's lifelong determination to meet the challenges of representation.

Thiebaud was not known for being shy in his use of color, but his freeway portraits exhibit restraint. Concrete and asphalt left Thiebaud with a more subdued palette, banishing the bold colors that defined his early work.

His 1979 etching *Freeway Curve* rejects the exuberant pigments that colored his famous portraits of America's favorite foods.

Freeway Curve, like most of Thiebaud's freeway paintings, adopts a privileged vantage point. This is what Jacobs criticized as "the Olympian view": a lofty perspective of the city favored by the mandarin architects and planners of high modernism. In *Seeing Like a State*, the anthropologist James Scott argues that this has been the perspective of power, a perspective detached from the on-the-ground experience of daily life yet, in its clean symmetry and stark geometry, compelling on paper. It is not necessarily a modern way of seeing the city, as kings and emperors since at least the Renaissance saw the world from this angle, but it acquired a particular force during the twentieth century, when modern bureaucracies of both totalitarian regimes and liberal democracies

utilized new technologies—airplanes, helicopters, and satellites—to render the city’s complexity in legible terms and to justify bold interventions on the urban fabric.¹¹

In the United States, highway planners deployed this perspective not only for the determination of vehicular paths but for other applications as well, including highway research, design, planning, maintenance, inventory, and project review. During the 1920s and 1930s, in order to affirm their plans for construction, architects and planners drafted top-down perspectives of proposed highways, such as Robert Whitten’s sketch of Boston’s Central Artery in the 1930 *Report on a Thoroughfare Plan for Boston* (Figure 4.1).¹²

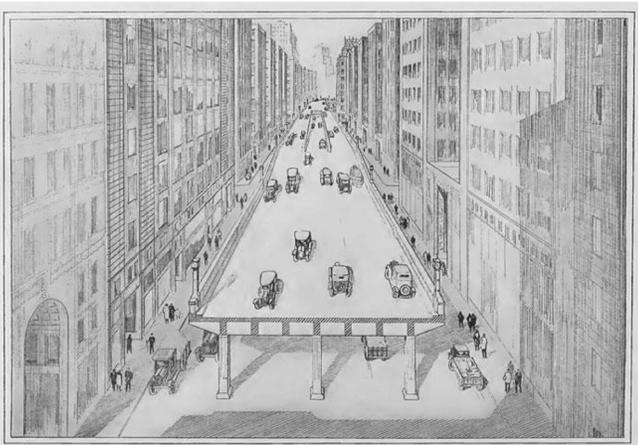


FIGURE 4.1. THE OLYMPIAN VIEW. IN *REPORT ON THE THOROUGHFARE PLAN FOR BOSTON*, PREPARED BY THE BOSTON CITY PLANNING BOARD, ROBERT WHITTEN, CONSULTANT, 1930.

During the interstate era, however, state highway departments used more advanced technologies, such as “photogrammetric mapping” to aid traffic engineering, contracting photographers and pilots to produce large-scale aerial photographs of designated traffic paths or existing highway facilities on a scale of 1 foot to 200 inches. Ultimately, these images provided highway engineers with an effective and efficient means of communication, both with each other and with the public at large, yet like many of the paintings surveyed in this chapter, the aerial photograph also represented a form of caricature, exaggerating the legibility of urban form and the freeway’s compatibility with the city.¹³

Even as opposition to highway construction mounted on the ground during the 1960s, American artists continued their fascination with the God’s-eye view. Thiebaud takes this perspective again in *Urban Freeways* (1979), hovering over the city to explore the visual qualities of a highway interchange. Here the layered curves of intersecting freeways pose a seemingly organic contrast to the right-angle geometry of the built environment, with but a narrow stretch of grass and a perfect row of upright palm trees adding a modicum of color and flora to this otherwise man-made landscape. The freeway’s contortions define the composition, much as in the rare image

of a freeway produced by the nature-loving photographer Ansel Adams. For *Interchange, Los Angeles Freeway* (1967), Adams hovered over Los Angeles in a helicopter to capture the sinuous lines of a highway interchange. Although the possibilities for caricature seem less available to the photographer than to the artist or architect, Adams nonetheless delivers his own abstraction of the freeway environment through a cropped framing of a looping highway interchange, denying the freeway its technical aspects and making it conform to the passion for organic form that inspired his prodigious output of creative work and environmental activism (Figure 4.2).¹⁴



FIGURE 4.2. ANSEL ADAMS, *INTERCHANGE, LOS ANGELES FREEWAY*, 1967. COLLECTION OF THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA. COPYRIGHT 2013 THE ANSEL ADAMS PUBLISHING RIGHTS TRUST.

Adams was not the only California photographer of the interstate era to take notice of the emerging freeway system. Julius Shulman, the visual poet of midcentury modernism, ventured out of the poshest enclaves of Los Angeles (where he photographed the residential architecture of Richard Neutra and other mandarins of midcentury modernism) to take a few incidental shots of the city’s new freeways. In a way, the very construction of those freeways forced Shulman to discover that world, as he had left his childhood neighborhood of Boyle Heights just as it yielded to the onslaught of six major freeways. This was precisely where Graciela Valenzuela arrived with her family to stake a claim to the spaces abandoned by a prior generation of Jewish immigrants. In his youth, in fact, Shulman had lived in a house on North Cummings Street, which had been truncated by the construction of I-5 in the 1950s. Eventually, Shulman settled in Laurel Canyon, taking a home designed by

the Case Study architect Raphael Soriano. His migration from Eastside to Westside, from Boyle Heights to the Hollywood Hills, follows the general trajectory of the city's Jewry, who left the working-class precincts of East Los Angeles for the Westside. As construction of two massive highway interchanges began in Boyle Heights, the Eastside Jews packed up and left, taking their shops, synagogues, and cameras with them. In their place, a generation of Mexican immigrants stepped in, confronting a dearth of socioeconomic opportunity and a surfeit of new freeways.¹⁵

On the Westside, where the freeway revolt claimed a few victories, Shulman discovered the photogenic world of Southern California's good life, built in the modernist idiom of glass and steel. His voluminous corpus of work is a catalog of Southern California's distinctive brand of architectural modernism, proving that the region was fertile ground for design innovation as well as for progressive nouveaux riches who housed themselves in steelframed glass boxes. Though Shulman took few photographs of L.A. freeways, he noticed their seductive lines and sleek form. He climbed freeway embankments to photograph the layered tiers of a new highway interchange, and he shot the freeway at night, slowing shutter speed and increasing exposure to create light trails on the freeway (*Figure 4.3*).



FIGURE 4.3. JULIUS SHULMAN, *CITY AT NIGHT (LOS ANGELES, CALIF.)*, 1956. COPYRIGHT J. PAUL GETTY TRUST. JULIUS SHULMAN PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE, RESEARCH LIBRARY AT THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, 2004.R.10. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

By dramatizing the flow of commuter traffic and creating a dazzling effect that found recurring expression in the pages of *California Highways and Public Works* and other official trade journals, Shulman brought a distinct glamour to the freeway, blurring the boundaries between art, fashion, architecture, and photography. Leaving the wreckage of East Los Angeles in the 1950s, Shulman emerged as the freeway's fashion stylist, making it fit into the iconography of midcentury modernism and Southern California's suburban good life.¹⁶

Another photographer who has captured the iconog-

raphy of L.A. freeways in more recent years is Catherine Opie. Opie first emerged on the city's art scene in 1993 with *Portraits*, a controversial set of studio portraits of gay, lesbian, and transgendered men and women, many of them associated with the drag and S and M subcultures of San Francisco and Los Angeles. As a "queer out dyke artist," Opie included herself in these portraits, many of which included backdrops of intense color.¹⁷ In 1994, Opie produced *SelfPortrait/Pervert*, depicting the photographer bare-chested, her head encased in a tight, eyeless black leather mask. Needles piercing her skin at precise intervals run down the length of her arms, and the word "pervert" is inscribed in decorative lettering on her chest, like a bloody tattoo etched by a razor.

As Opie herself stated, "I thought it was important, if I was going to document my community, to document myself within that community."¹⁸ From the fringes of California's gay and lesbian community, this was the visual expression of identity politics to the max, waged at the height of the culture wars in the 1990s to lambast settled notions of normalcy.¹⁹

After such provocative work had thrust Opie and her world into the spotlight of fame and notoriety, her fans in the queer community might have been puzzled, if not disappointed, by what came next. In 1994, Opie produced a series of platinum prints of L.A. freeways, inspired by her daily commute on I-5 between Irvine and Los Angeles. The series *Freeways* (1994-95) marked a sharp break from her previous work. These were images of freeway interchanges and overpasses, shot early on weekend mornings, rendered without people, cars, or signs. The undulating lines of these compositions veer toward abstraction, denying the freeway its function in the lived reality of suburban life. Reviewing Opie's midcareer retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in 2008, *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter wrote that her freeways acquired the "chill, glamorous monumentality of spaceships...as if viewed through the mists of a distant planet."²⁰ To produce this effect, Opie used a panoramic camera to produce negatives that she developed as small contact prints, on the order of 2¼ inches by 6¾ inches. The small scale of the photographs versus the expansive images of freeways built a tension that, at least according to one critic, imparts a "beauty and tenderness" to the freeway and "hints at a certain collective appreciation."²¹

It dawned on Opie in her commute between Los Angeles and Irvine that freeways belonged to Southern California's sprawling suburban areas. "The freeways separate communities," she claimed, "but I would say that the biggest thing they do is separate the city from the suburb."²² Opie seems unfamiliar with East Los Angeles and its quarantine by freeways during the interstate era, but her freeway portraits are neither urban nor suburban; they depict structural fragments, eschewing signs of social and spatial context. How liberating it might have been to shift

from *Portraits to Freeways*: from her own community to no one's community, to an inhuman landscape of concrete and sky. The absence of color reinforces the identitylessness of these images, which are far from the studio portraits that scream personal flare, grit, and spirit. In this figment of postapocalypse Los Angeles, Opie's freeways are of no particular race, gender, class, or sexual orientation—they do not even belong to any particular locale, for their names and numbers are left unspecified. These social markings are absent altogether, assigning to the freeways a timeless quality that transcends the particulars of culture and identity.

It seems that we have come full circle, back to the iconography of the highway-planning profession at the height of its power during the interstate era. Like Shulman and other celebrated artists working in a visual medium, Opie canonized the image of the freeway in a series of photographs that made their way into the Whitney Museum of American Art and other prestigious exhibition spaces. In its formal attributes and its stylistic innovations, her work demonstrates a rigor and a mastery of the landscape that matches the commanding vision of highway builders and engineers during the interstate era, who deployed sketches, renderings, photographs, and other visual materials to justify the technical perfection of their endeavor. If *Freeways* carries a political message, it is one that pales in comparison to that of previous work, or, as Opie claims, "the most political thing about these photographs" is their exclusion of people and automobiles.²³

Opie credits her vision of the freeway to early photographers like Maxime Du Camp, the son of a wealthy Parisian family who indulged his desire for travel to distant and exotic lands on his father's assets. Arriving in Egypt with a panoramic camera in 1849, Du Camp photographed the ruins of antiquity, creating a visual imprint of "the Orient" on the Western imagination. This self-taught photographer and man of adventure introduced a new scope and scale of Western vision, shaping the way twentieth-century artists and photographers saw the monuments of their day.²⁴ This could include the most famous L.A. expats, David Hockney, who pronounced himself a West Coast Giovanni Piranesi before the building of the L.A. freeways, and Reyner Banham, who also came to Los Angeles in the 1960s to write his ode to the beach and the Sunset Strip. Giddy with adventure in Southern California, Hockney and Banham came to Los Angeles like the poets of Britain's Romantic age, who wandered through Greece and Turkey in a binge of aristocratic excess to poeticize the ruins of an ancient civilization.

Yet Opie takes a cooler, more distanced view of these structures, not unlike James Doolin, a landscape painter from Connecticut who came to Los Angeles by way of Philadelphia, New York, and Australia. The farther west Doolin moved, the less abstract his work

became. By the time he got to Los Angeles, Doolin had mastered a kind of hyperrealism, more in tune with mapmaking than with figurative painting. For his acclaimed painting *Shopping Mall* (1973–77), an eight-square-foot canvas portraying an aerial view of four street corners in Santa Monica, Doolin sketched and photographed the streets from every angle, climbing onto rooftops and studying blueprints, digging for maps in archives, and making watercolor and oil studies of light and color changes for all the shadows, buildings, cars, and pedestrians. The result is an omnipotent, God's-eye view of a minute fraction of the city grid, obsessively detailed down to the oil spots on the road.²⁵ Doolin went to the same extraordinary lengths to portray L.A. freeways.

For *Bridges* (1998), Doolin camped out at the site of I-5-I-110 interchange, making sketches and taking photographs to capture the expansive vista before him. He also hired someone to man his campsite while he explored every nook and crevice of this elaborate structure, where two freeways cross paths with the Los Angeles River and the city's principal railroad line. A solitary figure stands alone in the center of the canvas, almost a dot in a monstrous landscape of concrete, steel, and rushing traffic. This might be Doolin himself, wandering over tracks and under freeways to find the soul of this inhuman environment. The residue of drainage pipes on the retaining wall that supports the freeway, the graffiti, the erosion of the soil—Doolin captures the fine-grain details of this landscape, discerned through rigorous observation and careful study.²⁶

Doolin's almost scientific approach to portraying L.A. freeways complemented his dogged quest to find the extreme perspective. For *Highway Patrol* (1986), Doolin secured permission from the Los Angeles Police Department to ride in the back seat of a patrol car to see the freeway through the eyes of law enforcement. For *Crossroads* (1999), Doolin's wife, Lauren, drove the artist on the freeway so that he could take photographs from which to craft the freeway's image. On several occasions, Doolin hired a helicopter and pilot so that he could photograph the city's freeways from the sky. For Doolin, portraying the freeway on canvas was not about going to the structure and setting up his easel. Rather, the artist employed a variety of source materials—photographs, sketches, maps, city plans, archival materials, engineering maps—to convey the physical reality of the urban landscape, but imbued with a spectral quality that conveys an underlying sense of menace, unease, or alienation. Doolin's freeways appear to be tied to reality, but his play with perspective unhinges that connection, forcing the viewer into an inhuman vantage point that could come only at great peril. Thus, *Crossroads* plunks the viewer right onto the roadway itself, in the stream of rushing traffic; *Twilight* (1999) suspends the viewer's perspective at an impossibly high angle over a congested freeway intersection.²⁷

These gestures can make the viewer feel like a God. This might explain why city officials in Los Angeles chose Doolin to adorn the expansive lobby of the lavish new headquarters of the city's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), which opened in 1995. On its opening, the \$300-million-dollar structure—garbed in Italian granite and English brick, replete with a \$300,000 aquarium—was the most expensive transit headquarters in the nation, dubbed by one critic as the Taj Mahal of public transit. Winning a national competition to paint the walls of its soaring lobby, Doolin enlisted the help of two assistants to create four murals depicting Southern California's evolving transportation infrastructure. On the ground floor, Los Angeles circa 1870 delivers a preindustrial view of open pastures stitched by a single railroad line. To its left, Los Angeles circa 1910 depicts three railroad lines and a trolley network crisscrossing orchards and a cluster of high-rise buildings in the city's historic core.²⁸

The last two murals highlight the prominence of freeways in the evolving urban landscape. Los Angeles circa 1960 shows the new four-level freeway interchange, built in 1959, adjacent to a nascent downtown. Buses have replaced streetcars and a bluish-orange haze filters the dots of light that punctuate the sprawling landscape. But taking the glass escalators to the mezzanine level reveals the pièce de résistance. Above a wall of closed-circuit TVs that monitor traffic flow on the city's sprawling freeway system, one finds Los Angeles after 2000, an expansive vista of the L.A. basin at twilight, painted on a half-circle measuring ten feet high and twenty feet across. The sun sinks beneath the curving horizon line, heightening the illusion of infinite sprawl. Trails of jet exhaust streak across the sunset sky, mimicking the intersecting lines of freeways on the urban surface. Technology, infrastructure, and transit lines highlight the circuit-board metropolis of twenty-first-century Los Angeles—the arresting image in the headquarters of the nation's largest metropolitan transit authority.

The corridors of public power in Los Angeles thus enshrine a privileged perspective of the freeway. Exact, restrained, top-down, even tense and alienating, this perspective abstains from expressive form and color. The view faces west, toward the prosperous Westside and the sun dipping into Pacific Ocean, cropping the byzantine interchanges that dominate the vast barrio that stretches east of the downtown core. Instead, we are given the soaring angle, unhinged from the landscape of daily life, divorced from the social context of homes, streets, markets, sidewalks, pedestrians, and even cars—a perspective that aggrandizes the freeway, even while inviting questions about its place in society. This is the image of power, guided by the thrill of discovery and mastery over space—an image fit for the palatial headquarters of transit authority in the freeway metropolis.

EASTSIDE STORIES

Moving east about a mile from the MTA headquarters, we come to Boyle Heights, the historic center of East Los Angeles and a community knitted in freeways. Walking south on Euclid Street from Seventh to Eighth Avenue involves crossing over and under twenty-seven lanes of four separate freeways: the Santa Monica, Hollywood, Santa Ana, and Pomona Freeways. Less than a mile northwest of that site, walking east on Fourth Street from the Aliso Pico Housing Project to Hollenbeck Park requires passing twenty-four freeway lanes: over the Hollywood Freeway, across its on-ramp and off-ramp, and under the Golden State and San Bernardino Freeways. And about one mile north from there, walking south on State Street from the University of Southern California (USC) Medical Center, one traverses twenty lanes of typically sluggish freeway traffic: past three carpool lanes of the San Bernardino Freeway, across an entrance to the Hollywood Freeway, then an exit from the Santa Monica Freeway, and over the combined width of the Golden State and San Bernardino Freeways. This scene is repeated in other East L.A. neighborhoods. The Long Beach Freeway makes a cloverleaf interchange with the San Bernardino Freeway in City Terrace, the eastern neighbor of Boyle Heights, and tangles once again with the Pomona Freeway in the adjacent community of Belvedere.²⁹ In East Los Angeles, home to the second largest concentration of Mexican-origin peoples in the world, the concrete walls and columns of seven freeways provide a ubiquitous backdrop for the local bricolage of murals, graffiti, and Spanish-language advertising (*Figure 4.4*).³⁰

For most of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, seven freeways gouged their way into East Los Angeles. I-5 from the south, also called the Santa Ana Freeway, reached East Los Angeles from Orange County in 1956. It met a portion of Interstate 10, running east to San Bernardino, the following year.

In 1958, the California Division of Highways finished the northward segment of I-5, the Golden State Freeway. Three years later, the western portion of I-10, the Santa Monica Freeway, finally met the San Bernardino Freeway segment. Also in 1961, Interstate 710, the Long Beach Freeway, opened at the eastern end of East Los Angeles, and the following year, U.S. Highway 101, or the Hollywood Freeway, ran through Boyle Heights. And finally, in 1965, State Highway 60, or the Pomona Freeway, linked up with the 5, 101, and 10 freeways, all converging in the East L.A. Interchange, one of three massive interchanges that dominate the East L.A. landscape.³¹



FIGURE 4.4. EAST LOS ANGELES INTERCHANGE, CIRCA 1963. UCLA DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, BENJAMIN AND GLADYS THOMAS AIR PHOTO ARCHIVES, THE SPENCE COLLECTION.

This is the turf of Frank Romero, Carlos Almaraz, and David Botello, three East L.A. artists whose work stands out in the field of Chicano art and who spent much their careers depicting scenes of daily life in the barrio. As children, they witnessed the invasion of interstate highways, as well as the explosion of the Chicano civil rights movement during the late 1960s. In unique ways, each artist embraced the politics of Chicanismo, but they maintained a shared commitment to the search for an aesthetic of social justice and community empowerment. By the 1980s, in the aftermath of the movement, these artists returned to the solitary work of studio painting, yet they continued to draw inspiration from the barrio.³²

Born in 1941 in Whittier, a community of East Los Angeles, Frank Romero recalls Los Angeles “being more rural than it obviously is now.” Such recollections inform his 1984 painting *Pink Landscape*, which situates symbols of the artist’s personal history among the more prominent features of the urban landscape. Distinguished by its ziggurat crown, the Los Angeles City Hall, which reigned as the tallest building in Los Angeles between 1928 and 1964, stands in the center of the canvas between two symbols of Romero’s youth: a church and a home that bears some resemblance to the artist’s home in East Los Angeles. The image also conjures the city’s youth, when orange groves had not yet given way to housing developments and when smog had not yet blocked the sight of not-so-distant mountains. Other elements suggest Los Angeles as well: the twin-engine airplane, maybe a reference to the local aircraft industry that employed Romero’s father, and the 1950s pickup truck, long admired by Chicano car enthusiasts.³³

This scene could be anywhere in the L.A. area, but the presence of the freeway in the foreground distinguishes an Eastsider’s perspective—post 1956. It frames the urban scene, partitioning the view of the landscape. Two freeways, actually, the Golden State Freeway (I-5), completed in 1958, and the Holly-

wood Freeway (U.S. 101), completed in 1962, follow a parallel path that divides East Los Angeles from the downtown core. As Romero himself said, “I always do paintings looking towards downtown,” and though *Pink Landscape* does not specify a particular vantage point, the view is looking west from Boyle Heights, where the horizontal line of the freeway provides a visual contrast to the verticality of the downtown core. Like the U.S.–Mexican border, the freeway attempts to distinguish one social world from another, dividing the barrio from the urban core.³⁴ A similar view of the freeway informs from the work of David Botello, another East L.A. artist who, like Romero, rendered radical changes in the local landscape. Botello emerged within the Chicana/o art scene in Los Angeles by opening the Goez Art Studio and Gallery in 1969, and he later collaborated with fellow East Angelino David Wayne Healy in the early 1970s to establish the East Los Streetscapers, a public murals program committed to neighborhood beautification. By the 1980s, however, as the thrust of a unified Chicano movement flickered, Botello returned to canvas painting, rendering scenes of everyday life in the barrio. For much of his artistic career, Botello lived within a few blocks of Hollenbeck Park, established in 1892 by John E. Hollenbeck, founder of First National Bank. In its early years, Hollenbeck Park was a tourist destination, a “city park renowned for its lush greenery and tranquil harmony,” nestled amid a few proud blocks of upstanding Victorian homes.³⁵ Postcards from the 1930s underscore the park’s role as a tourist destination, a popular setting for weekend picnics, horticultural expositions, and carriage rides. A lake in the center of the park provided a visual focal point and a tranquil respite from the grind of city life.³⁶

In the 1950s, however, the California Division of Highways, following the directives spelled out by the BPR in Toll Roads and Free Roads, stitched an elevated highway along the western edge of Hollenbeck Park, obliterating a one-mile stretch of Victorian houses that stood on North Cummings Street, where Julius Shulman lived before his exodus to the Westside (Figure 4.5). In protest, a handful of Boyle Heights residents staged a local version of the freeway revolt with signs that read, “save the park!” As bulldozers broke ground for construction, the editor of the Eastside Sun, Joseph Eli Kovner, condemned the Division of Highways for “destroying what little green space we have in this community.”³⁷ Only after the freeway’s completion did the Division of Highways issue its rationale: Where the Golden State Freeway passes through the Boyle Heights district of East Los Angeles, an encroachment of the freeway into Hollenbeck Park was unavoidable. In order to disturb the existing park facilities as little as possible, the freeway carried over the most westerly portion of the lake on an attractively designed box girder reinforced concrete bridge with specially designed slender columns.³⁸



FIGURE 4.5. HOLLENBECK PARK, HOLLENBECK LAKE, AND INTERSTATE 5 (UNDER CONSTRUCTION), CIRCA 1957. UCLA DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, BENJAMIN AND GLADYS THOMAS AIR PHOTO ARCHIVES, THE SPENCE COLLECTION.

As an East L.A. native, Botello witnessed the concrete encasement of Hollenbeck Park and rendered a portrait of the park's unwanted future. His 1990 painting *Wedding Photos—Hollenbeck Park* shows a pastoral scene in the postmodern city: a photographer framing his shot of a wedding party against a willow tree. The freeway in the background, carrying trucks and vans, fulfills the Division of Highway's 1958 prophecy: "This freeway is expected to carry large volumes of truck traffic whose origins and destination are the industrial area lying south of the Santa Monica and Santa Ana Freeways."³⁹ And by plainly rendering what the photographer tries to hide, Botello not only disputes photography's claim to exacting visual truth but also takes a subtle jab at the nature of nature in the barrio. In a redlined neighborhood riddled with freeways and their interchanges, short on front lawns and backyards, the working-class residents of the barrio stake their claim to a park built originally for the city's Victorian bourgeoisie. Today, Hollenbeck Park is not only for wedding parties, families, artists, and street vendors, but as mandated by the California Division of Highways, it is also for freeways and car traffic.

Like *Pink Landscape*, *Wedding Photos* orients the viewer toward the structure of the freeway. Again, the freeway delimits the boundaries of the barrio. The skyscrapers in the background seem part of another city, close in physical terms yet far in the city's socioeconomic geography. The trucks belching exhaust signal the environmental consequences of routing freeways through East Los Angeles, demonstrating a local knowledge of what researchers are just beginning to confirm. A 2007 report from USC's Department of Preventative Medicine, for example, found that children between the ages of ten and eighteen who live within five hundred yards of a freeway exhibit pronounced deficits in lung function, of-

ten leading to a lifetime of respiratory illnesses. More recent studies paint an even bleaker picture: a 2010 study sponsored by the National Institutes of Health concluded that children born to mothers living within approximately 1,000 feet of a freeway had twice the risk of autism.⁴⁰

Science is beginning to tell us that freeways are toxic, but this knowledge is already made plain in the art of the barrio. This oil-on-canvas expression of critical awareness is part of what Raul Homero Villa describes as *barriologos*, a local form of knowledge grounded in the physical and cultural space of the barrio.⁴¹ Through his involvement with the Goetz Art Studio and Gallery in East Los Angeles in the early 1970s, David Botello helped establish a community-based arts organization that incorporated critical pedagogy into local art production, creating new art strategies to assist, empower, and educate Chicano artists and youth. Botello extended this emphasis on art in the service of the barrio's empowerment and education through his involvement with the East Los Streetscapers, emphasizing muralism in the local transmission of critical knowledge. Botello returned to his studio to resume canvas painting in the 1980s, but even there, as the painting *Wedding Photos* suggests, he continued his commitment to critical education through artistic expression. Botello and Romero present the Eastside point of view, grounded in individual inspiration and imagination but also in the historical coordinates of community formation, displacement and relocation, infrastructural development, and planning policy. Both artists emphasize the quotidian presence of the freeway and its prominence in the foreground or background of daily life. Through their own relationship to the East L.A. landscape and to its convulsive transformation during the 1950s and 1960s, Botello and Romero found aesthetic inspiration in the freeways that encroached on their field of vision, emphasizing freeways' prominence in the surrounding urban scene.

They might foul the air or block the sun, or they might follow the symmetry of the urban environment and its natural setting, but the freeways are always there, in the barrio but not of the barrio: monoliths built only to serve traffic and to guide it above, through, and around East Los Angeles.

If Botello and Romero rendered up-close portraits of the freeway, Carlos Almaraz took that perspective to unsettling extremes. Born in Mexico in 1941, Almaraz came to East Los Angeles at age nine, graduating from Garfield High School in 1959, just as three major freeways were carving their way around the school. Like Romero, Almaraz studied painting at the Otis College of Art and Design after high school, studying under the Italian artist and illustrator Joseph Mugnaini. In 1966, Almaraz moved to New York City, a guest in the SoHo loft of artists Richard Serra and Nancy Graves, but he returned to Los Angeles in 1969, disillusioned with the reigning emphasis on minimal-

ism and conceptual art. By the early 1970s, Almaraz had immersed himself in the Chicano movement, collaborating with Frank Romero, Gilbert Luján, and Roberto de la Rocha to establish Los Four, a Chicano art collective that emphasized art as a communal enterprise, seeking to bring further recognition to Chicano art in East Los Angeles. Almaraz read deeply in Mexican history during this time and worked with Cesar Chavez to help organize farmworkers in California's San Joaquin Valley. But by the early 1980s, Almaraz was ready for a change. As he recounted shortly before his death from AIDS-related illness in 1989, "I had had it, I needed to return to the studio to do some very personal work that was my own... that reflected my more introverted aspect, and to develop ideas that were nonpolitical, that were totally my ideas."⁴²

Almaraz thus turned to the freeway.

In 1985, Almaraz showed a series of tiny canvas paintings at San Francisco's Fuller Goldeen Gallery. These were oil paintings, on the order of five inches by seven inches, of car wrecks on freeways. These images also appeared on larger canvases, such as *Sunset Crash* (1982), *Flipover* (1983), and *Crash in Phthalo Green* (1984). There are no people in these images, only freeways, cars, and fiery destruction. It is tempting to interpret these violent scenes as the subliminal expression of a personal struggle with mental and physical health, but Almaraz credited this vision to a matter of physical proximity. After living in the Boyle Heights home of Frank Romero during the years of Los Four, Almaraz moved to a studio apartment in nearby Echo Park, a dilapidated barrio community on the northwestern edge of the downtown core. His studio sat on Echo Park Lake, whose southerly rim was grazed by the construction of the Hollywood Freeway in the late 1950s. There Almaraz developed a sense of "the limits of my life," finding inspiration from the unique predicament of living between a "very serene lake" and "the Hollywood Freeway, which literally has crashes going on every few hours... I used to wake up to the sound of metal crunching."⁴³

Almaraz lavished paint on the canvas to convey the tension between beauty and violence, delivering spectacular scenes of color, light, motion, and death. And while the serial repetition of the image of a car crash on small canvases might trivialize such dreadful events, the larger portraits invite sublime awe. Writ large or small, this morbid spectacle takes place on the freeway, which stands impervious to the deadly combustion of fuel. Though highway engineers could take a furtive delight in this portrait of sturdy freeways, it is hard to imagine these paintings hanging in the public corridors of highway administration. These images subvert the earnest ambitions of highway planners and engineers to implement rigorous standards of safety and efficiency. The length of on-ramps and off-ramps, the curvature of freeway connectors, the design of center dividers,

the demarcation of lane boundaries, the regulation of speed, even the orchestration of signage and the composition of asphalt—these rudimentary aspects of highway construction follow a standardized set of precise measurements, calibrated across three generations of freeway builders, all in the name of moving traffic through the city, safely and efficiently. And yet *Crash in Phthalo Green* invites viewers to forego their expectations of safe infrastructure to bask in the dreadful glow of a most modern nightmare.⁴⁴

Frank Romero also recognized the ironic interchange of freeways and violence in his 1995 painting *Freeway Wars*, which depicts an exchange of gunfire from the windows of cars speeding on the freeway. This style of murder has become commonplace on L.A. freeways, either as isolated incidents of violence or as the serial rampages of murderous psychopaths, who prey on unwitting drivers in the anonymous and fluid space of the freeway. This is a portrait of how freeways are not supposed to work. Like Almaraz's crash series, the painting *Freeway Wars* depicts death at high-speed extremes, illustrating a lethal discrepancy between the civil intent of the technocrats who built freeways and their felonious use by savvy criminals.

As Chicano artists steeped in the politics and culture of East Los Angeles during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Romero, Almaraz, and Botello committed themselves to the search for a Chicano aesthetic. They looked within their own community to find that aesthetic, which took shape not only through the excitement of a thriving Chicano art scene in the 1970s but also through the built environment of East Los Angeles. Their work takes up its streets, sidewalks, markets, parks, houses, and automobiles, showing a uniquely Chicano understanding of place, identity, and representation. The freeway is there as well, present on canvas as it is in the barrio. Romero, for his part, once described his work as "stories about where I grew up—where we all grew up—which was on the Eastside. So they were Eastside stories."⁴⁵

Similarly, Almaraz, who left New York fed up with white people ogling white canvases floating on white walls, realized, "It was okay to paint the world around you" and to explore "the landscape of your past and present."⁴⁶ Coming back to Los Angeles, Almaraz set up his studio in Echo Park, alongside the Hollywood Freeway, then barely eight years old.

In other words, these East L.A. artists embraced context in their pursuit of a Chicano aesthetic—not just the physical context of the barrio landscape, but also the cultural context of Chicanismo, which emphasized affinity with the aesthetic traditions of Mexico and its indigenous people. Their use of intense color, for example, echoes the traditional palette of Mexican art and culture, generating new interpretations of a structure built without color. Romero, for example, says that even though "it confused and angered the establishment," he realized, "It was okay to do emotionalism in your work, to use bright, vibrant

color." And for someone who defines Chicano art as "not cold, not about hard edges," Romero's insertion of a sinuous freeway into a pink landscape dismisses, perhaps defies, the gray surfaces, hard edges, and straight lines of the freeway structure.⁴⁷ So do Almaraz's freeways, which are green, yellow, and purple. Botello's freeways are dark, by contrast, but they heighten the intense color of Hollenbeck Park and the surrounding barrio landscape.

To acquire a sense of how color distinguishes a Chicano perspective of the freeway, compare Romero's *East on the 10* (1993) with Thiebaud's *Heavy Traffic* (1988), painted some five years apart. The two California artists adopt similar vantage points from which to see the freeway. Yet Romero, steeped in the palette of Mexican and Chicano culture, delivers a scene awash in riotous color, whereas Thiebaud abstains from bright color to depict an almost wintry scene of freeway traffic. The imposition of hot color by Romero and other East L.A. artists brings a working-class aesthetic of Mexican origin to the freeway, what the Chicano art historian Tomás Ybarra Frausto calls *rasquachismo*, which bears some likeness to kitsch in Western culture. Like kitsch, the *rasquache* style is resourceful, ironic, playful, and metaphoric, aestheticizing, or at times sanctifying, otherwise utilitarian objects. It prefers "bright colors to somber, high intensity to low,"⁴⁸ and according to art historian Amalia Mesa Bains, it "has a stance that is both defiant and inventive."⁴⁹

Born of the Chicano arts movement in the 1970s, these images defy the aesthetic conventions of their time and question the freeway's presence in the local scene. Romero and Almaraz alike expressed their conscious departure from the movements that defined American art during the postwar period, looking within their own communities to generate a new aesthetic that ignored the expectations of the art establishment in New York and Los Angeles. The freeway insinuated itself into their canvases, just as it broke into the precincts of the barrio. Viewed from the sidelines of pedestrian life, from the streets, sidewalks, and parks of the neighborhoods that bore the brunt of interstate highway construction, the freeway assumes an overbearing posture, diminishing local quality of life. We might call this way of seeing the freeway the grounded perspective—grounded in the intertwined histories of community formation and highway construction in East Los Angeles, grounded in the built environment of the neighborhood, and grounded in the political culture of Chicanoism, which developed its own aesthetic rooted in the interstices of Mexican and U.S. American cultural traditions.

Romero, Almaraz, and Botello earned national and international acclaim for their work. Romero's paintings, for example, have earned inclusion in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art in

Washington, D.C. Success brings great recognition, but also a second home in the south of France, where Romero has turned his canvas toward the rustic countryside. Yet as a native of East Los Angeles, his imagination retains the visual imprint of the freeway.

Throughout the 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century, Romero continued his focus on the freeway's iconography, delving into a more abstract vision of looping interchanges, rendered in pink and green, yellow and purple, or other bold pairings of intense color. After his early portraits of the freeway's indomitable presence in the barrio, Romero ultimately moved toward the abstraction mastered by Kuntz and Opie, yet these images still retain the palette of Mexican aesthetic traditions and the wry outlook of an Eastsider who seems to have made peace with the freeways in his face.

In the sprawling art scene of contemporary Los Angeles, a younger generation of Mexican American artists continues to focus on the freeway.

Ruben Ochoa, for example, a native Southern Californian and the son of Mexican immigrants, explores the freeway's place in the urban landscape, making art that unsettles its relationship to the city's diverse communities.⁵⁰ In 2006, for example, Ochoa built *Freeway Wall Next to a...*, a scale model of a concrete freeway wall in a gallery space, a massive installation that forced on viewers the kind of intimacy with freeways familiar to many urban people of color. For *Extracted* (2006), Ochoa secured permission from the California Department of Transportation for a site-specific work in which a specialized wallpaper was applied to a section of a freeway retaining wall, simulating the partial extraction of the wall, as if to reveal layers of rock sediment and natural growth. After the Chicano generation of artists visualized the freeway's domination of the barrio, the "post-Chicano" generation makes it disappear altogether.⁵¹

It is hard to think of any part of any American city as hard hit by highway construction as East Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s. Although a handful of residents expressed early opposition to highway construction, their protests fizzled, leaving East Los Angeles to emerge, simultaneously, as the nation's largest Spanish-speaking barrio and the heart of Southern California's sprawling freeway system. By the 1970s, the Chicano movement had exploded beneath and between the ubiquitous freeways of East Los Angeles, inspiring a new aesthetic in the service of social justice and community empowerment. Helping invent a new Chicano style, Romero, Almaraz, and Botello turned their eyes on the barrio and its scenes of beauty and injustice. The freeway, did not—could not—escape their aesthetic vision. By portraying the freeway's infraction on the local landscape, as well as its unsightliness, violence, shadows, toxicity, and even rare beauty, East L.A. artists of the Chicano generation visualized a Chicano critique of

the freeway, emphasizing its unwanted imposition on the barrio and its people.

The grounded view from the barrio found its antithesis in the detached perspective of European American artists like Kuntz, Thiebaud, Shulman, Opie, and Doolin. These artists saw the freeway through the racial prerogatives of whiteness, claiming the right to see this structure from whatever vantage point suited their aesthetic inclinations. If this meant daring to stand on the roadway itself, or hovering above it in a helicopter, or procuring maps and photos from an archive, then it included a privileged access to public space that distinguished a privileged point of view. These images create a sense of discovery and wonder, akin to the awe of previous generations toward the monuments of the past, but they also lack the sense of intimacy and familiarity that characterizes a barrio point of view.

These disparate perspectives took shape not only through the human gifts of creativity and inspiration but also through racially biased policies that brought freeways to the barrio in the first place. These were the paths of least resistance, where property values were low, opposition was weak, and “blight” prevailed, at least in civic discourse. As the interstate era entailed different consequences for different communities in the city, it also structured different ways of seeing the freeway, different means for their expression, and different access to the public’s attention. Race, essentially a hierarchy of human difference, underpins all these differences, especially as it shaped public discourse in powerful ways during the 1960s and 1970s. White and nonwhite artists racialized the image of the freeway, some from the sky, and some from the shadows. Chapter 5 delves back into those shadows to discover how some communities have racialized the structure of the freeway itself.

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