

**AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER**  
**Oral History Center**

**Interviewee:** Roén Salinas

**Interviewer:** Cassie Smith

**Date of Interview:** September 3, 2012

**Length of Interview:** approx. 102 minutes

**Original Tape Number:**

**Duplicate Tape Number:**

**Subject Headings:** Growing up during the Civil Rights Movement in Austin; Juarez-Lincoln and the genesis of la cultura es posible; Cursos de verano and incorporating indígenas y Americanidad; Destruction of Juarez-Lincoln; The idea of the MACC post Juarez-Lincoln; El Movimiento; Addressing the divide of I-35 and divide between cultures; Introduction to the idea of the MACC; The Task Force; Time at Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center; Acquiring a site and a plan for the MACC; CMACA and fundraising; Acquiring the bond; Governmentality beating the nonprofit; Questions to be answered; Current involvement; The biggest struggle; Hopes for the future and vision

**Key Names:** Amado Peña, Santa Barraza, Raul Valdez, Juan Pablo Gutierrez, Carlos Pineda, Kathy Vasquez, Emma Barrientos, Amalia Rodriguez-Mendoza, Paul Hernandez, Diana Castañeda, Jesus Olivares, Gus Garcia, Sylvia Orozco, Delia Perez Meyer, Jorge Sanchez, Valerie Menard, Jesus Arguelles, Teodoro Gonzalez de León

SMITH: Good morning! This is Cassie Smith and Roén Salinas, and we are here on September 3, 2012 and it is 9:30 a.m. and we are at the Santa Cruz Cultural Center in Austin, Texas. Roén, do you give permission for me to record this interview on behalf of the Austin History Center?

SALINAS: I do.

SMITH: Great. Could you please state your name and spell it for us?

SALINAS: Okay. It's Roén Salinas, R-O-E-N S-A-L-I-N-A-S.

SMITH: Okay. And we're going to start with an easy question. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

SALINAS: Well, I was delivered in Waco, Texas. The reality is at the age of three months, my family – my father was with the military and so he got transferred over to Bergstrom and so at the age of three months forward, I've been here in Austin. I consider myself, I guess, technically not born, but totally raised in Austin.

SMITH: But totally raised in Austin. Can you remember growing up, when you were small, what was Austin like for a kid?

SALINAS: Oh, Austin was a very – it was a small town. It was probably about the size of San Marcos of what I remember. I ended up going to school over at St. Mary's Cathedral downtown and it was right in the – it's right in the heart of the downtown sector and I remember during those times, as a little kid, being there at the Catholic Parochial School, all the nuns constantly telling us to stay away from the fence because during this time, the Civil Rights Movement was happening. There were protests left and right. And being that we were one block off of Congress, there was a lot of activity and so I remember the nuns and the brothers and the Padre always saying, "stay away from the fence, you don't want to talk to these people because," you know, "they can be very dangerous." And so, for me, that was an awakening of like, well, what's going on outside the fence? What's on the other side? And so that was happening in tandem with what was happening within the barrio community because as youngsters, we've always been involved in dance and cultural arts and so we would end up coming over to the barrio thinking, oh, the barrio is this dangerous place. At least that's what everybody says. And so as little chavalios you've got these conflicting signals, but Austin was a small town back then. It was the capital, so there was a little bit of political charge, but it was a small community. It was very much, what I remember and what I experienced, is that I grew up in Austin during a period of change; change in a lot of different ways: socially, culturally,

politically. And it's interesting to be here in Austin my entire life to see different waves of change happen here in Austin and, of course, I'm sitting in one right now, which is gentrification of East Austin, which is a whole other conversation. But Austin, though, has always really been very beautiful as it relates to diversity, as it relates to the arts, as it relates to cultural expression, and this sense of we're all in it together.

SMITH: And where did you live in Austin during that time?

SALINAS: We've lived all over the place, but we've always done our craft of dance here in East Austin and I think a little bit down the road when you interview Mother, she'll tell you the stories of the founding of the dance company and the struggles she had, but we've always maintained our practice with the Aztlán Dance Company, which is the family dance company that we've been doing with for almost four decades. We've always worked at Pan American Recreation Center, Metz Recreation Center. We've worked over here at Zaragoza. It's always been barrio-based because it has been the logical home for the kind of cultural expression that we do. Back in the late eighties, we finally ended up securing our own space, so that the dance company could begin to nurture its own ideas of how it sees community through the expression of dance.

SMITH: Is that where we are?

SALINAS: That is where we are, and this building back in the day was a boarded up, abandoned building, graffiti, and the whole nine yards. I remember when we held our first programs here and classes, we'd get phone calls with people saying, "oh, it's in east Austin, oh, I wouldn't even go there with a police escort." And so that was the nature of the divides that were happening way back then. Things are very different now and I'm real pleased that we've

been able to turn this little space into a place that generates some, what I think, some really badass art.

SMITH: Yeah. And good energy for sure. Do you remember a time when you started in the arts, because it seems like your family has been here ever since you were born, but can you remember some of those first things that you were involved with?

SALINAS: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I remember Mother and several families from different neighborhoods came together to begin to work on – I guess the parents were interested in getting the students involved in something that was productive, positive, expressive, something that would unite families and community. I think a little further down the road, I think we're talking probably late eighties, was a moment when, all of a sudden, Juarez-Lincoln University came online and that was on Cesar Chavez and I-35. And for me, this was really, really a valuable moment because that's kind of the genesis moment when the dance company formalized. We had already had practice before we incorporated in 1974, but what was so beautiful about Juarez-Lincoln was not only was it a gorgeous space, it was kind of a maze, but it had this gorgeous auditorium with a wooden stage. It had a gallery with gorgeous wooden floors and so we were able to create our practices there and work alongside public intellectuals because it was a university. It was a Chicano university. It was really, really focused towards a lot of Chicano interests and so it was really nice to have these academics right next to the artists and the children all in one space. That created a beautiful synergy of we're sharing – we're sharing so much.

I remember very clearly when we would do our rehearsals, we'd bring our – to our practicas, whether we were bringing in maestros de danza or the folklorico or lo qué sea, I remember just looking over and this was during the time when I remember Amado Peña was

barely getting started and he had his silk screens over there off on the side and he would be looking at us rehearsing and we would be looking at him creating his artwork, studying each other within this same space of Juarez-Lincoln and so, for me, that was a magical moment where I think amongst all of us, there is this possibility where this idea of the public intellectual or the academic can interface directly and cohabitate with the creators of art. I always say that theory follows people and what I mean by that is art always happens. It's from the people, of the people, by the people, for the people, and it's usually post facto that the academics began to write about the work and so, for me, Juarez-Lincoln was a magical moment. That was during the time of the League of the United Chicano Artists (LUChA) and there was a lot of stuff happening: danza, Azteca Conchero was happening, and it was a magical moment. So that was the genesis I thought. La cultura es posible in the future and so here we are.

SMITH: Was that also how your interest in researching – academically – started as well?

SALINAS: Absolutely. I think the nature of the work that I do, which is studying culture, but also studying the human body, no doubt that was an originating space for me that ended up leading me to more inquiries, so then I started my craft in Juarez-Lincoln, this Chicano place. It was a politically active space, and to have so many diverse artists in one space, you know, working to collaborate, working to co-create, whether it be projects, festivals, works of art, you name it, was quite powerful. All of a sudden, I found myself then going into my cursos de verano in Mexico City and going into this other community, which is Mexico proper, feeling completely norteadado. You know, I remember very clearly as a youngster during those cursos, I had – the other folks that were in the classes that would call me everything from pocho, vendido, norteamericano, gringo, you name it. I got all those labels and so, all of a sudden, I'm in these different spaces, the spaces here in Juarez-Lincoln that was so richly Chicano and then

I go to Mexico and I'm disavowed for being exactly that. Of course, I spent my time – I would have to spend my time talking to my classmates in these cursos de verano letting them realize, you know, I'm the same blood you are. It's not my fault that the Mexican government somehow has either forgotten the community, abandoned a community, decided to not work with a community, whatever – whatever the failures are. The reality is I have to live in my skin and in my blood and with that I use that as a very deep resource for my cultural creativity.

SMITH: Wow, that's great. What university or what organization were classes affiliated with?

SALINAS: I went to like the La Academia de Danza Nacional en Mexico City, the Instituto de Bellas Artes. In addition, I ended up also I know participating in several independent groups, like the Izte de Tlalpan (??) Group and I even joined in with the Departamento Turismo to really kind of get a really diverse education in what is danza de Mexico. But in addition to that, one of the things that I felt very proud of was my mother, along with the energy of what is Juarez-Lincoln, started creating this alliance with danza Azteca, danza de Concheros, and so I would also go and do days of obligation amongst los indígenas de Mexico and – [sirens in the background] those are our travelling mariachis over here. Spending time with los indígenas, understanding their perspective, which is very different than the modern Mexicano and so, all of a sudden, for me, it was about understanding even deeper layers of identities that are all part of who I am and so I think that's why – and a lot of my projects, I do bring in lo indígena. I bring in this idea of Mexicanidad. I bring in this idea of modernity and Americanidad, which is Chicanismo, into my works and I really do hope that the whole idea is to create a platform where people can come in to learn about, to understand, to interact, and hopefully to collaborate and I think we've been real successful with the Aztlán Dance Company in creating a platform for really gorgeous cross-cultural programming.

SMITH: When you were spending time in Mexico and coming back to Austin, how was it received here – the things that you were learning there and were you implementing them in Austin at that time?

SALINAS: Absolutely. I'd go for the cursos de verano – and I remember back during this day, this is back in the days of J. J. Pickle and we would create these international exchanges through Arts International and so we'd go spend time. And so we'd come back and one of the things that we would do is quickly assemble a project that would reflect the work that we learned. A lot of it was tradition-based, which was fabulous. I think back then, we're talking about, we're now in the mid-seventies, late seventies. That was a period where Austin was really small, like we talked about, and this idea of oh, there's this small group of folks that are studying work in Mexico City and then coming back and they're creating work. There was this gorgeous idea that Austin – we can, in fact, exceed our city limits and bring in these cultural tones that add to the rich textures of our arts community.

SMITH: Wow. And so were you here at the time when Juarez-Lincoln dissolved?

SALINAS: Oh yeah! I remember, yeah, as a matter of fact, one of – a real deep mourning – not morning as in a.m., but mourning as in sadness – was the day that the wrecking ball came in and, we as youngsters, we would go in through the front door, go around the little staircase where Raul Valdez had a gorgeous mural with a farm worker with his hand out with real dirt on it and so we'd go by and we'd actually touch it and then we'd run up to the studio to go get our work done. So then, all of a sudden, when we were told that Juarez-Lincoln was going to be demolished, it was a really big moment of great sadness for all of us because, all of a sudden, this idea of us being able to interact with these academics, with administrators, whatever, in a large facility that's located downtown, a place that gave us a sense of hope and meaning and

purpose and future, with the swing of that iron wrecking ball in front of that gorgeous mural with the Quetzalcoatl serpent and all the beautiful imagery, the wrecking ball just knocking it down was a moment of deep breadth and we – it was a shocking moment. It was a shocking moment where right when you think you’ve found the place, the place that will provide a future of opportunity, right at that moment, it can be demolished, destroyed, taken away never to be seen again; and, for me, going back to the whole idea of archive, you know, how with the swing of the wrecking ball, erasure was part of the larger brush strokes of what was to come. And so now we have an IHOP.

SMITH: And what kinds of things came in to fill that void? You have all of these people really involved in the arts community and the academic community, what happened after that?

SALINAS: Everybody ended up really kind of going their own way. I remember, you know, LUCHA ended up moving over to the Q House on Cesar Chavez and along with LUCHA went a lot of the visual artists, the Santa Barrazas, the Raul Valdezes, the Jose Treviños – all those great artists that were – that I felt like at Juarez-Lincoln they were there. They were there to answer the questions. You could ask, “why that color?” And they would give you – and all of a sudden that – as a dance artist – that would color how you think about movement.

So after the destruction of Juarez-Lincoln, then all of a sudden, everybody goes their own way and, in a real sense, we all began to operate autonomously with little interaction with each other, except for the most notable Cinco de Mayos and Diez y Seis. There wasn’t a lot of effort to reconcile that – to reconcile the linkages that were severed and so I think – and everybody ended up going their way and I think that really did dilute, fragment, and segment our arts community. I can only imagine looking at it thirty years later or thirty-five – whatever it is – think back that had Juarez-Lincoln stayed on board and had it become something that we



all dreamed up, what it would be now; and I think something like that could've really become a national beacon for new models of bringing art and education together into frameworks of study that community and academics could really source for future knowledges.

SMITH: Some would say that the idea for the Mexican American Cultural Center came out of that space at Juarez-Lincoln that they – people had wanted to make a new space to practice. Do you remember when you first heard about the idea of a MACC?

SALINAS: I do. I do. I can say yeah, because there's this idea of memory and remembering and longing of this utopian space that we call Juarez-Lincoln. I don't know how much of it – I think we all can say, okay, that was a model. If it links directly to the MACC, I don't know. That's not for me to say. I think what brought Juarez-Lincoln such this beauty is its independence and its autonomy from governmentality. Perhaps it was the city working to respond to a grave error it created or that it committed. I would think that if there was a dire interest in filling that gap created, it would've happened a whole long time ago. There would've been some serious groundwork created to create not just a space, but to fortify our organizations and our cultural institutions that are money poor but culture rich. I didn't see any of that. I think as we all went our own way, the challenges that beset us all were all of a sudden, we had to compete in the larger economy, the arts community, and whether it be funding or space or whatever. And, you know, we lost a lot of artists. There were a lot of organizations that came together. I remember, yeah, I mean, dance companies lost – artists, you know, dissipated and disappeared. It was an incredible moment of great change.

So I think what ended up happening – if you call this linkage, I would be like, yeah – but the community was like, okay, what can we do to kind of bring us all back together? And so I think that idea – and I think there's also this thirst by the community wanting to see more

art, wanting to see art that reflects who they are rather than seeing kind of mass commercial art that from the barrio perspective is a little bit distant and removed. There's a lot of work in translation trying to figure out, okay, so, you know, what is this cinema about. I don't relate to it because it doesn't look like me. It's not my experience, so I'm having to learn to experience someone else's experience in order for it to somehow validate my experience. So, yeah, I think, you know, at that moment, all of a sudden, there were some folks that got together in the community that began to, I think, you know, question the motives of the city, question the motives of how we as a community – as a Mexican American community – could, in fact, empower ourselves to see a future.

I know that before there was the task force, there were several individuals that came forward – and this was a long time ago. And I remember very clearly that they, especially like the Q House, the Quintanilla House, there were this idea of we cannot be assaulted like this. We need to bring about change because if we don't do it, nobody is going to do it for us.

SMITH: Do you remember who some of those individuals were?

SALINAS: I know this is before the Ponciano Morales Study. I know for sure it was several of the administrators that were part of the League of United Chicano Artists. I remember folks like Juan Pablo Gutierrez was one of them and Carlos Pineda, no doubt, he had just finished coming into the city and I think he was beginning to understand what was the scenario and then, from the larger sphere, I know there were folks like Kathy Vasquez and Emma Barrientos, along with Amalia Rodriguez-Mendoza, and a lot of those folks that were the early politicians. I know they were very interested in situating their foot within the political door by asking, “hey, what about our communities?” And so I would, like I said, the time span, but those are some of the folks that I do remember, but there were a whole array of community

members. I'm talking about residents that were also very much interested in supporting this idea.

During this time, there was a lot of – during the Juarez-Lincoln moment and the moment immediately after was the time of the Chicano Movement here also, and so I know there were a lot of folks from the Brown Berets that were very much interested in having some kind of political voice that would hopefully evolve some cultural, social equity, but I think – and I say that because with the dance company, I remember Mother gathering all the youngsters together whenever there were protest marches. The organizers would always ask, “hey, we need folks, we need for Aztlán to come on board and join us in this protest march” and, of course, Mother, being the mother – the mother of all these children – being responsible would say, “hey, hold on a second, you know, we're the cultural arm of the *Movimiento*. I don't want to put these children in harm's way.”

So I remember during all the marches – there were several marches. I remember they would start at Chicano Park and go underneath I-35 and volley up through Congress Avenue. The children and women would go up front and there we were, the youngsters, and I remember always leading in the protest marches. We'd always lead and, of course, we would have – behind would be community members and always the political activists would be towards the end, and I remember very clearly, like, for example, one protest march when we were going underneath I-35, you could see the mounted police, police cars everywhere, and here we are little kids, you know – I was probably about thirteen getting ready to enter and it's like you're entering into the space of the unknown with all these people behind you, all giving *gritos*, “*La Raza Unida nunca sera vencida!*” And here we go. We enter and the mounted – you could hear the horses. I felt they were intentionally galloping, dancing, and you could hear “rrrrrrr!

Rrrrr!” And here we go and we enter, went underneath, and sure enough, as soon as we came out on the other side of I-35, it would almost seem like clockwork that the activists, the strong activists, the Paul Hernandezes, the Boscos, all those cats that were part of the activist arm of the *Movimiento*. Sure enough, they would always get stopped in the back and so the protest would – while it was trying to move forward, it would have to stop and almost derail itself because the police would descend on them. And in the eyes of us youngsters, there was – for us, there’s an incivility here, where we can’t organize and voice our opinion. Rather than allowing us to partake in a peaceful demonstration, there’s an effort to try to close it down.

And so I remember there was another protest when we were on Congress Avenue, we finally made it on another protest march going down Congress Avenue. I think it was right in front of Paramount Theater. I remember there was a kerfuffle and the police came down there. I remember Paul Hernandez with the Brown Berets. He was taken down hard and bloodied up. Here we are as kids; this is the image that we’re receiving. These are our people in the community. These are our activists that we believe in and they’re being pounded upon by the police and by the larger city and this coming off of what I just finished telling you about being at St. Mary’s and at a few years younger and being told that those people out there, “Don’t talk to them, they’re bad!” And here we are like, “No, we want rights! We’re not bad!” And so – did I answer your question?

SMITH: I think so. Two things: the first one is that divide seems to come up a lot, the 35 divide, and you seem to have had experiences on both sides of it, so just to kind of remark on that a little bit, but the second thing is this consistent duality – this conjoining of the political activists and the cultural activists is something that I’ve been really interested in and it comes up in your story and it’s the same people, the same people who end up fighting for the MACC;

the same people who were at Juarez-Lincoln are the same people who were trying to get elected, who were otherwise involved. Can you speak to that a little bit about why those two things are so closely connected?

SALINAS: You're talking about the divide and the social and cultural.

SMITH: Yes, the social and cultural.

SALINAS: I think the idea of 'other' – while Austin is a very progressive town, I think Austin still – and it still does – fear this idea of 'other.' And it's so easier to take a stand to protect a mainstream value than it is to work hard and incorporate difference as part of a structure. That's my larger overarching narrative.

And so I think this idea of – and we're talking even, you know, back in the late seventies, early eighties, this idea of difference was so – I remember Carol Keaton-Rylander, the mayor at the time, and all those folks – because we traveled to England and to Scotland, the dance company, to England and to Scotland and we even went to Hong Kong and we were doing good things. So there was part of the political system that was really wanting to support this idea of Chicanidad, that there's these opportunities to really support folks. But I think once you begin to support it, all of a sudden, there becomes a – there is a responsibility, too, because if you're going to support it, that means you're going to give an active voice, so I think there was always this idea of we can support either elements of – or we can support this idea or this notion of what we want to support, which is a theme I want to talk about a little bit later, which is who decides art.

But from the barrio perspective – and, for me, the barrio, I say that as Mexican American working class, the folks that are working to live – this idea of the divide has always been there. I think – I'm sure with the History Center all the stories about people of color get

moved to east I-35, build this highway, separate, so this idea and this notion of, well, we want to be active participants in this larger conversation about a future Austin came to the fore. Of course, it was during the Civil Rights Movement. There were social and cultural and political manifests all over, so we were just one arm of it. And it gets interesting because not only is there a divide between mainstream downtown culture, but cultures of others, because I include the African American Movement, which was quite strong back then also. But even within the Mexicano community or the Mexican American community, the Chicano community, there are divides also: divides of “oh don’t be so radical, don’t be so –” you know, “life is good, we’re doing fine, we’ll get ahead eventually.” Versus the folks that are like, “no, we need equity now, we can’t wait another day.”

Those divides have always happened and I feel like while those divides happened, eventually those barriers, those borders, those limits do end up kind of fading away. It just takes so much work and energy to translate, to explain, to create a general consensus and understanding that we’re all in it together. So whether it’s downtown culture or barrio culture, it’s like we’re in it together. The barrio lives within the city and so this idea of moving forward together has been wrought with wonderful opportunity and difficult hardships.

Has it changed today? I don’t know. I question it. I feel like, especially in light of the demographics of Austin, I feel like if one were to take a look at development, community development, the equity just is not there. Just the laws of attrition have kind of dulled the edge. Do I wish there was more activism? Yes, absolutely. Do I wish there were more people involved? Yes, and I think the opportunity is now to continue enrolling people of all makes, models, and years into this project. This project of Austin being a true intercultural society and I think Austin is on the cusp. It just needs to bite the bullet and go.

SMITH: So let's move back to the time when you first heard about this cultural center and what it meant to you at that time and how you got involved.

SALINAS: Yeah, like I say, back then, this is – we're talking again the early eighties now. I remember Carlos Pineda coming onto the scene and you had Kathy Vasquez with *La Prensa* Newspaper. You had Emma Barrientos because we were in the cultural arts and so Gonzalo and Emma were at a lot of our events supporting us and helping us and we'd talk to them and be like, you know, there's this idea. You gotta go. And so I remember as a youngster, not only everybody from Aztlán would go to speak on behalf of this idea of a cultural center. I, myself, was twelve/thirteen when I spoke in Citizens Communication to the council and to these different forums that began seeding the idea of a cultural center. I remember back then I told them I just got started in the arts. I'm a youngster. I would like a cultural center so that when I'm a little older, I can develop art and flourish as an Austin artist. My idea, just like back then as it is now, is to create dance that can be danced all over the world. I would like for Austin dancers to be able to go and see through dance. That was like almost thirty-five years ago and here we are now and we're still waiting.

So those were my initial introductions to the MACC or this idea of the MACC. At that time, it was just loose talk. There wasn't anything formalized and I want to say the city ended up doing their first study, the Morales Study, that began to explore the idea of – it's a feasibility study – a cultural center, what would it take. How can we conceivably convert one of our recreation centers into a cultural center? If we wanted to build a new one, what needs to be – so they began to consider a lot of the logistics. So, yeah, that was my introduction to the MACC. And back then, we had no idea what the MACC would be, how it would look, what it would feel like, what would be included in it – we really didn't even have an idea of what a

cultural center is because the only cultural venues that existed were the Paramount Theater, the Zachary Scott, the stalwarts, the mainstreamers, I should say. And so, the League of United Chicano Artists then did provide a model conceptually in our minds or in our spirit, but how do you translate that to a city? And so I think everybody was trying to struggle with “we need something new” and nobody knew how to do that and that’s why these feasibility studies ended up happening. I know there were two or three of them that ended up happening.

SMITH: And that parlayed into the Task Force?

SALINAS: Yeah. Yeah, I want to say it was back in ’86, somewhere around there, mid-eighties, that the Task Force was developed and I remember Diana Castañeda was a very integral component of the Task Force. She was my interface because not only did she used to live right down the block and she used to say, “Hey, we need to go do this, we need Aztlán there, go,” and so we were there. And a lot of it was word of mouth back then because we couldn’t even get the media to help us gather information and so that’s where Kathy Vasquez and her newspaper became important because it was one of the voices for our interests, for our news.

SMITH: And that’s *La Prensa*?

SALINAS: *La Prensa*, yeah. And back then, I think *El Mundo* was barely getting started so, we were working and back then it was neighborhood politics and the politicos would come by and they’d come in, “Hey, you know, we’re going to have a meeting on this day, we need folks here, get the word out.” And that’s the way we did things back then. A beautiful moment.

So the Task Force formed and so, all of a sudden, everybody’s like, okay, so there is at least an effort, some type of officiation of this idea of a cultural center. So we supported it. I mean, we’ve got to support it. Did anybody know what it’s going to look like? What it’s going



to feel like? No. But we did know that it had to happen. By this time, in California and even in Chicago and in San Antonio, Pedro Rodriguez, he was working with the City of Cultural Arts Program here. By this time, he had just finished – he moved to San Antonio and they had just finished launching the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and he was part of the *Movimiento* here – kind of tranquilo because he was City, but he was part of it. And so he goes to San Antonio and immediately – over there, the city granted them a theater, administrative building – they worked next to the plaza, worked in collaboration with Guadalupe Church and it's like *go!* And Guadalupe became this magnificent center and the city had an investment in them and believed in the work that they were doing and they were doing great work! Very off-mainstream circuit; fabulous Tejano Chicano work! So all of a sudden we're seeing the models in California and San Antonio; all of these are coming up in their communities and here we're thinking, okay, we've got a Task Force now, we're going to have one next year. And so, we all came to the rally to support the idea or the cause of a cultural center.

SMITH: And I understand that you worked at the Guadalupe back then.

SALINAS: I did! I did. Many, many – probably about ten years later. Yeah, I ended up doing a two-year contract over there with Guadalupe because I wanted to understand, you know, what are the internal mechanics of a cultural center. No doubt Pedro – and I think because he was part of the *Movimiento* – he had this laser beam tenacity to get things done and with a *conocimiento* – he was an artist, too. He was a visual artist with a *conocimiento del arte*. And this *poder* of bringing people together and creating a democratic structure where music, dance, theater, visual arts, media, everything would come together and it's like, go, create, create. I am here with this cultural center, so that you can create, go create the best you can. And so, I spent two years there and it was like, ah, this is it. This is a model. This is the Tejano model

because I know California has their ways of doing things. Chicago *igual*, each community is unique.

So when I was at Guadalupe – and we’re talking now ’90; yeah, I was there from late ’89 to like ’92. I went there and a couple of things became very clear for me. As an artist at Guadalupe, I was housed at the Instituto Cultural Mexicano in Hemisfair Park and that’s interesting because that’s like Secretaria General de Mexico sanctioning this place, “*Esto es Mexico.*” We had the Frida Kahlos, the Diego Riveras, the Rufino Tamayos and just a whole fleet of them in the museum. And to get to my studio, I had to walk right through all these great Mexican masters every day.

So I was physically located over at the Instituto, but Guadalupe was in the west San Antonio barrio, so I would go check in over there, then I’d scoot on over to the Instituto and do my work, I’d finish out my day, I’d go back to Guadalupe; so it was very interesting because, all of a sudden, I was walking through doors of a Tejano Chicano barrio perspective – we got to create our art that means something to us because if we don’t do it, no one else is going to do it, and so that’s where folks like Jorge Piña and Juan Tejada and Kathy Vargas, all those fabulous programmers and artists were creating great work and I was really glad to be amongst their program team.

But then I come over here to the Instituto and, all of a sudden, this is Mexico: Mexico de lo Grande. I remember specifically one time speaking with one of the directors and here I’m a Tejano – I’m a Chicano Tejano and my Spanish is not government Mexico. And so I remember one time she said, “Do you want to speak in English or do you want to speak in Spanish?” And all of a sudden, that was a really strong pivotal moment because, all of a sudden, every time I walked through the halls to see these great Mexican masters, I realized

they all spoke Spanish, perfect Spanish de Mexico. Here I am: will my Spanish ever be as good as theirs, first? Second of all, being in that space of *Mexico Mexico*, where do I situate myself? Will I always be seen as – just like I mentioned about ten/twelve years earlier in that dance studio in Mexico City – will I always be viewed as the *pocho*, *la vendido*, the *gringo*, the *vendido* within this space?

And I remember going back to Guadalupe, crossing the highway again and going back to Guadalupe and saying, “Hey, man, I need space over here in the barrio” and they were raising funds to expand, but they didn’t have it at that moment. And so I ended up going back and forth and, all of a sudden, I ended up in this really conflicting space, the Coatlicue state, like Gloria Anzaldúa would say, where I was neither here or there, somewhere, but nowhere, but definitely present. And that’s when after a couple of years, I had done a great program in building a program with the Guadalupe Center that really was inspired by *folklorico*. Every time I would embark on something that was Chicano, it was kind of met with a little bit of resistance from the Instituto side and, of course, Guadalupe kept saying, do more of that! And so it was like, okay, I’ve got to go home now.

And so I spent a couple of years. That’s when I came back and started my studies and started coming and creating my own work. So when I got to Austin, all of a sudden, it was like, I had this *vamanós!* We got to build some art here! I need to – I’ve got my frames now in my mind, I was dancing next to Frida Kahlo and the Diego Riveras, I saw the *cobre*, the copper and the gold and the silver exhibits, wealth of magnanimity, now I got to go home. I got to go to my barrio and we need to create our own gold, our own silver, and our own bronze. So I came back and I was really fueled with an excitement to want to create my dance, but I also, by going to San Antonio and spending that two-year engagement, I also learned a lot about structure,

about nonprofit structure, about how to manage art in light of great challenges. Because Guadalupe did have its challenges, but I got to see a great leader through Pedro, to see how he mounts them or how he takes them on and how he challenges artists to make a difference and his artists did make a difference. For me, that was the zenith of the Guadalupe Cultural Center and, of course, where the splendors of Mexico were happening. So I came back and that's when I ended up coming back into the MACC project and it was like, okay, folks, we need to throttle this forward because I'm not going to be alive forever, you're not going to be alive forever, we need to leave something for our kiddos. And we need to mold it and put our own impressions on it. And so when I got back in '92, it was gorgeous timing because I think in '92 was when we were going before the first city bond campaign and, of course, all of a sudden, the big question was, well, what's going on here? We're set aside in the loan, so you had all the bond items and there was one item that was called the Mexican American Cultural Center. I think we, in the community, knew, well, if it's going to hang out there by itself, it's going to be a hard sell. And sure enough, it went before the voters, it didn't pass, so that was like a moment – a wake-up call. So during that time also I remember very clearly there was this – there was a lot of conversation about – because by this time, I think the site of 600 River Street had already been eyeballed. It wasn't designated, yet, but it was eyeballed. And I think we were going before the bond election and one of the things – one of the items – and another reason why I think it was so difficult to sell the bond package was because it wasn't designated for a Mexican American Cultural Center. The city had inventory, let's see if we can raise some money, sell a bond, and then we can apply it there and I think that caused a lot of disconnect also because it wasn't designated and so coming out of the failed bond election, we quickly in the community said, okay, let's organize. Let's start getting our shop in order. And by this

time, the Task Force had already been working to do – they did a feasibility study. I want to say they ended up – yeah, by this time Kathy Vasquez from the planning commission had already gotten like 200,000 dollars for an intensive study of what’s needed for the Mexican American Cultural Center. So we were beginning to put the building blocks in place.

And so one of the things that needed to happen was the artists needed to organize and we needed to establish a formal structure, so that we could begin to own our future. And so the LACA, the Latino Arts Consortium of Austin, was developed in an attempt to bring all the collective voice of artists from the community together. I think it was kind of like in the spirit of LUCa, but it was a loose association. It wasn’t anything formal, but we did all come together on numerous occasions. And the Task Force was beginning to identify what needed to happen administratively, so that we could move a project forward with some certainty. And as we got together, I remember very clearly the City – because by this time we were already looking at 600 River Street – and I remember the City on several occasions, Jesus Olivares was, I think, the acting board director. I remember him saying, “You know, 600 River Street is going to be a tough sell, again.” He’s like, “Why don’t we move it over to Fiesta Gardens? There we could tuck it under PARD. We can see if we can make it happen on a fast track.”

So it was interesting within the arts community, there was several – I’ll tell you, it was probably split. Half of us were like, yeah, let’s take it to Fiesta Gardens. It’s in the barrio, we can do it. And then there was another half of us that were like, so, if we want to have a Mexican American Cultural Center, we got to be on the other side of I-35? There’s a pattern that we didn’t – that’s a pattern that that half did not want to follow. So one of the first things that we moved for was we want Fiesta Gardens, yes, we want that, you know, it’s ours, it’s in

the barrio, but we also want 600 River Street. Why should it be one or the other? Why can we not have both?

And so I remember we all collectively came together and we asked Council Member Gus Garcia to designate the site for us. So that was an important building block. And so he passed the City and got it approved by City Council; a resolution for the designation of 600 River Street for the Mexican American Cultural Center. That was a tremendous banner for us because, all of a sudden, with a certainty we can imagine this space. We have the land. We could imagine it. And it was designated in perpetuity, which was – doesn't that just sound beautiful?

SMITH: In my mind, I'm saying, it's so interesting that it's so close to where Juarez-Lincoln was –

SALINAS: Yup! Exactly!

SMITH: Across the other side of I-35 and that divide keeps coming up and I think Kathy Vasquez said in her interview that's a huge moment in deciding that it's going to be there and not *en el barrio*.

SALINAS: Right. Right. And I remember clearly, you know, all of a sudden, when the idea of it's either one or the other and when we all collectively said "no, both," it was a moment of like, we've got a voice again. We, artists, have come together and we're now determining where we – how we want to create our art, where we want to create our art, and who we're going to work with. We're going to work with each other to create this art.

The Task Force had been working hard in always continuing to evolve the surveys, deciphering its information, presenting its reports, making itself constantly visible in all the bureaucracy that is the City of Austin. And I remember also Council Member Garcia said,

okay, so we've got the site designated, the artists are coming together, now we need a vehicle. We need to evolve the Task Force – he didn't quite say it like this – he was like, now we need a nonprofit then that the city can contract with to get the site built. And that's where CMACA, the Center for Mexican American Cultural Arts, came on board.

We established us as a nonprofit and immediately we started putting all the pieces of – our goal was to put all the pieces of the puzzle together. We got the site designation. We need to start doing some fundraising. We need to bring together the artists. We need to get ready for the next bond election, which happens every six years. And so we're putting all the elements into place. I remember specifically with CMACA, we ended up meeting with, I think, every neighborhood association in Austin. It was through CMACA that we ended up funding the *Pastorela* at the MACC. As a matter of fact, the big, silver, tin barn that was there that was part of Public Works, it was CMACA that was able to secure funds for the development of that project and we also made sure – we worked hard to make sure that we were supplying information to the media. So we were doing – it was the – kind of like the nonprofit administrative machine, the vehicle, to make sure that the project moves forward and prepares itself for the next bond election.

SMITH: Could you tell us who was in CMACA? Was it just a parlay of the Task Force into this nonprofit or were they different people?

SALINAS: No, the Task Force did evolve into CMACA and so at the very beginning, I know like the first layer of CMACA formants, the forming members. I know Sylvia Orozco was part of it. Kathy Vasquez was part of it. Tomás was part of it. I was part of it. I kind of remember Delia Perez-Meyer. I think she might've been part of it. Whoever was on the Task Force at that moment, we perfectly slid into the role as a nonprofit. And within the nonprofit, we even

brought more members on board, so I want to say when we got started, it was nine members. We enjoyed expanding the board to include everything from an attorney to an accountant to more media and everything; and so that's where more members ended up coming in, folks like Melvin Ren, Jorge Sanchez, folks like Valerie Menard, folks like Angél – what's Angél's last name? – Angél, we just call him Angél. And so we had a lot of folks that came on board in CMACA also and the whole purpose was to get this project rolling. And the year we're talking about is '92/'93. I'd just come back. I was fired up, and for me, what was my interest? I want a space where I can dance and where my kids can dance.

So as we were preparing for the 1998 bond election campaign, we sat in with the City to begin to do the feasibility studies of how much is this facility going to cost. And I remember specifically sitting down with the City managers and Paul Saldaña with Gus Garcia's office. I was sitting down there and, okay, so what do we need in this space? And I remember there was this very fueled passion for theater space. Because I think if anything is missing in Austin, it's theater space for Latino arts, Latino Mexican American Chicano art. And so we ended up evolving this idea of space. And so as we were moving forward, I remember the City being – am I narrating alright?

SMITH: This is great.

SALINAS: And as we were – and feel free to ask questions at any point because who knows, tomorrow I might not be able to remember anything. I might be hit by a bus.

And so we were putting everything into place on the eve of the '98 election campaign and I remember we were all so nervous and I remember Gus Garcia along with other Council Members bundled the MACC, not by itself, but under – I think the heading was Libraries, Museums, and Cultural centers. And of which we were able to secure a 10.9 million dollar



bond award for the Mexican American Cultural Center, which was so exciting for us. It's like we did it! We organized people. We see the MACC on the horizon. It's going to happen. Artists were anxious! Anxious! I cannot tell you. I was anxious! We're going to have this Mexican American Cultural Center. That was '98.

After the bond was made, then quickly, all of a sudden, a lot of things go into play, and all of a sudden, the element of politics that we were not prepared for kicked in. With CMACA, we had hoped that we could own our own future. What I mean by that is just like the Zachary Scott Theater, now the Long Center for the Performing Arts, Paramount Theater, State Theater, Laguna Gloria, and I can keep on rattling off a few more. If you notice, they're all mainstream art organizations: code for white. All of a sudden, we're entering that class where we're a nonprofit, we can have public land like these other organizations have, and we can manage it as a community through a board just like Zachary Scott and Paramount Theater. But it was right at that juncture that, all of a sudden, the political winds came right at us and we were not prepared for this, partly because we don't have a history of being in that level of development. I remember specifically – I don't remember the name of the developers, but developer after developer ended up coming up because, all of a sudden, the site was designated, we've got funds to build a place. Developers were coming up to us saying that land is too valuable for Mexican Americans. We had developers wanting to say, hey, we'll buy half of that from you. And so, all of a sudden, the whole board was getting swamped with these inquiries. This was new for us, but we had done our homework in putting all the blocks in place and so we knew we were standing firm and we were totally interested in resisting any of that stuff, any of that static. Why? Because we wanted to create a nonprofit that manages the Mexican American Cultural Center on a City site just like any of the majors do here in Austin.

The deep pockets of Austin started speaking and it became challenging for us, challenging in such that we had council members that were beginning to question our motives. From day one, my only selfish interest was to have a theater space that I can create dance and my children can dance on in the future, creating world class space for my community. I think everybody that sat on the board had that same desire. But when all of a sudden you've got the machine of the City of Austin starting to question where this project's going, when you've got developers that are whispering in their ears and approaching us, it becomes a major challenge because you've got to stand very firm. And at that moment, that's when we asked the CMACA board – we said, we have an arts community. Our arts community stands behind this project because we are going to own our future. We are going to create our income generation machines on the site. We're going to develop this MACC project. We're going to have store fronts on Waller Creek. We are going to be the Waller Creek prime developers because we have to create a way where we're not asking for money; rather we're creating the money for our space. But we didn't know that the deep pockets and the political interests in town were going to go through the top down and from the bottom up, and it ended up fragmenting this place that we thought was very solid and principled.

As we were moving forward, we still had the site designation, we still had the bond package, we had the nonprofit. And like any bond package, it's got to move forward, so at this time, the City put out a request for proposals for architectural renderings for the space. Should we take a break here?

[Pause in Recording] ...became a bridge to cross and it's one of those that if I were to look in at things in hindsight, could things have been different? And my thought is yes. I think the principles that I hold onto and that I held onto when I was leading CMACA, along with all

the folks that were working with me on CMACA, I think we wholeheartedly felt like we were standing firm in maintaining the site, maintaining ownership of the site in the hands of community members. For us, that was the most important element of this whole project. The last thing we wanted was for this to be a project of governmentality.

All of a sudden, we were beginning to move forward. We ended up getting the contract with the City for the planning and development of the site. We were beginning to move all of the elements into place as it relates to beginning to bring large funders to the table, to begin to do the project. We had Jesus Arguelles develop a management and operations master plan. We ended up producing some forecasts as it relates to what this project should look like or feel like.

But we had these political winds now that we were having to confront and to deal with, of which, at the end of the day, there is no nonprofit that can weather the degree of pressure that a governmentality offers. I mean, it would be unlimited resources of legal staff and political office will really encumber the work of a nonprofit, and it did us.

We moved forward. I personally sat on the architectural design committee with four other City of Austin planners where we sat to look at at least a dozen proposals that were presented to the City. And I, one voice, the CMACA voice, on this panel of five, I think we unanimously – virtually unanimously – selected the architectural designs of Teodoro González de León and so we moved forward. In my hindsight and recalculating everything, I think that was another critical moment because I think we were looking to do the best job that we could. I think even the City was – the administrators were looking to do the best job that we could. And I think there was a politic involved that we didn't foresee or we didn't calculate or incorporate. I think, to an extent, there might've been this idea that this should be an Austin

Legacy Project and that's a local context. I think we were looking in a national-international context where Austin, the capital of Texas, could create a world-class cultural center that becomes the stop to the Americas, where we could present work that reflects Austin, that reflects the Mexican American community for folks passing through on their way through the corridors. And in turn, we could ship our work out to other quadrants of our communities in America and through Latin America. We were very much interested in using the whole concept of centrifugal force – build it and then it gets stronger towards the center. Bringing the idea or the models of what I call the “three in’s,” – inspiration, infrastructure, and innovation – together in one model that only leads to great work.

So clearly we were operating on one constitution; one constitution that has deep roots in the community with the arts vision, with the administrative structure that could manifest those needs, and with the idea that we could see ourselves creating the work there. That's the art that goes inside the building. I think the building itself, some serious honest political conversations needed to be held prior to us, as the managing board at the time, moving forward with the vision for a space for the artists. And I think had we sat down and heard those political conversations, those political dreams, there would've been more information on the table then that could've been a little bit more decisive.

Things proceeded the way they proceeded and then, all of a sudden, there was a lot of tension. Tension from the top-down and bottom-up that had to be dealt with by the CMACA board and it became very challenging. We were able to identify and locate the architect. We were able to secure the contract, from the community to the Task Force to CMACA to now the City: that is the bloodline of the MACC project.

So here we are in CMACA, all of a sudden, the political winds came to us and the contract for management of the site was rescinded. The City ended up assuming control of the project. The one thing that I think I know I personally never wanted was the City to be deciding my art. Now, here we are, what, six years with the facility open and I'm still waiting. This is exactly what I did not want and I don't think what any of us from CMACA or anybody in the community really wanted – for the artist to still be somehow operating as a second consideration or an afterthought. We were always wanting the model that I worked in in San Antonio. We wanted the artists to be central to the design of the project, where the artists are the programmers, the program directors, the program instructors, the drivers of program, and where CMACA, the administration, would be the facility and the funders. We entertained an idea when we were doing the Arguelles report – how could this MACC project build within the model some revenue generators? I mentioned that we were wanting to do some work, tried to incorporate the land on Waller Creek. Waller Creek is still one of those projects that I think the MACC needs to jump on right now because that River Walk is going to happen, and how great is it if we could be the first – if we could be the anchors? So we always wanted to really build in this idea of partnerships. Partnerships, whether it's public, whether it's private, whether it's municipal, whether it's incorporative, we wanted to build these partnerships so that it could continually provide funding, so that the artists can do their work.

Like I mentioned, the MACC project's bloodline now has – now it evolves into the City of Austin and here I've kind of been – I moved into graduate studies and I've been kind of spending my time focusing on some personal development. In reflection and in hindsight, I can't help but to ask some larger questions and, here, I'm kind of bringing my conversation to a full circle. I can't help but to ask some questions. They're quite profound questions.

Questions that need to be examined and explored and, for me, one of them is: is there a notion that started way back when, with the beginning of the destruction of Juarez-Lincoln, going back then even before? Has there or is there or – and I'm sure it's not written, but there is an etiology, a neo-liberalist ideology that somehow always fractions communities? This project – and I see this trend all across the nation, we can look, you know, just a little bit north to the – what's it called, the Latino Theater in Dallas. Is the city better positioned and can it better serve in the development and production of art? And, if so, what does that say about a city where it has to define how a city and what a city ops to project to its larger community within its region? That becomes a very problematic question that, in reflection and hindsight, has to be answered. Was this project and is this project designed in such a way that its community was required to go through all of this work, but has it always – has the city maintained a position where if there is a designation of public land, it will decide in whatever form or fashion and in whatever scale or scope, what gets produced there? And, if so, that becomes even more problematic because then there's a double standard because of the other facilities with site designations on public land that are able to define their own futures, to define their art. That's one.

Another question that I have is does this project then become a focal point for diffusing the possibility of other developments with nonprofits? Because they'll always have – there will always be a standard city response that, well, we have the MACC. How does that action actually impact a future for a larger diversity of cultural arts organizations? Another aspect is, and going back to the first question, who decides? Is Mexican American and Chicano art a working class art? It's an art of a people. It's art about struggle. It's art about dreams. It's art about a long-distanced Native American root and in Español, arrival. It's art that expresses our

new place and time, the struggles that I mentioned about when I go travel and study, this fitting in but not fitting in. Where within this project is the voice for that? Or will this cultural center, being that it's a city program, a city project, a city facility, will it always aspire to limit, silence, suppress, or erase? And I would hope not because I'd never dream the MACC to be that.

Rather, for me, it was about creating a space that is completely open for new ideas of the future. Going back to artists and what I mentioned at the very beginning, you know, artists are the beacons of society. They're the canaries in the coal mine. They are the ones that produce works that lift the spirits of communities. They're the ones that reflect the struggles and the hardships. They're the ones that design beauty and inspire a community. You know, kind of bringing my conversation to full circle, artists working hand in hand with community is where I feel like this project should be, should have always been, and now the big question then comes, we've got this MACC facility, how are we going to pay for it? How is it going to short-circuit other futurities or other futures of artists? How will this project overshadow, almost make live in the shadow, the experiences and expressions of artists that are community-based and that don't have access or bureaucratic savvy to work within systems? So, you know, those are big questions that need to be answered.

SMITH: And what is your involvement now in the center? Have you performed there? Used the space?

SALINAS: I've gone to a lot of meetings there. That place is great for meetings. It seems like that's what they do a lot of. No, you know, I haven't performed there. You know, I'll be point blank honest, it's ill-equipped for my needs. In dance – and I know I've mentioned this to some of the MACC folks – for dance, you need to create an environment that becomes a sacred space for the passing of embodied culture. In dance, you have to have that sacred space that's

called the studio. It's not a space where you move this and then you can put a table there and then let's set up some chairs, oh, let's just move this out of the way and let the dancers dance. That is doing such a disservice to the legacy and to the histories of our embodied traditions that live in the body. Dance is about creating a space that is uninterrupted where if there is one body in that space, it interacts with another body; where in that space, what gets sculpted is designed to capture the spirit of the viewer and of the community; where in that space, development happens; where in that space, one body speaks to all the bodies within the community. That space needs to be very well-equipped to facilitate the artist's needs. That doesn't exist and that's just – that's on the process side and on the performance side, of course, there is no stage that adequately handles dance at the MACC site; even at the large ballroom, it just doesn't work. I'm taking it a step further. The Latino culture loves to stomp our feet on the ground and so everybody was worried about the floors and it's like, artists don't worry about that.

SMITH: And are you still involved with CMACA?

SALINAS: I am still with CMACA. Right now, what we're working to do, which is part of continuing to build the building blocks, is we embarked on a project that was called La Sarape Weaving Project that we embarked on a couple years ago and the whole idea was we were going to – we began to build some conversation with Saltillo, our sister city, and we literally focused it on serapes. So we had weavers come into Austin to do weaving workshops. We would send some of our artists over there to collaborate with them in learning about weaving. Conceptually that was phase one. Phase two now is, okay, so you've got your loom, the *telar*, you begin to weave the fabrics to make the serapes. What if we replaced the thread with people, with organizations, with community, and, all of a sudden, you make a beautiful serape,



a *tela* of community? So our next phase right now is – what we’re looking to do is right now, if somebody comes to Austin and they want to know about like anything Latino arts, you know, where do you go? There is no place. So what we want to do is begin to assemble all the art groups and begin to create a resource and information center and the whole idea is there is one logo and that one logo goes everywhere. It goes in the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau. It gets up on a billboard on I-35. It gets implanted as a logo in the front of all of our working studios. It gets into all of our program brochures so that we begin to show audiences that we’re a weaved community. Click on that and boom, all of us come up. It’ll hopefully have a calendar of events, classes, organizational histories, links to each other’s websites, and it becomes a resource center. So that’s the weaving project that CMACA is really focused on. So we want to do not just a website, but also a very interactive component where people can actually also submit their information. If they want information regarding dance, the moment they hit it, boom, they get something right back. And so the idea is to let audiences and artists and the whole community in general know that, yeah, there’s working artists – hungry, hard-working artists and CMACA is here to continue doing what we’ve done since day one, continue to support the arts.

SMITH: That sounds great. So just to kind of finish our time here, I’d like to know some of the most difficult challenges that you faced in this timeline of MACC from idea to what it is now and then we’ll also talk about the rewards, but let’s do the challenges first.

SALINAS: I really do feel like the challenges that faced me personally and that I ended up having to confront without knowing much about is the political framework that the Mexican American Latino Community operates in and from within the City of Austin. I think we – I know we’ve chatted in the past and there’s this idea that we have to be one thing and if

conformity doesn't follow that one framework, then you're already operating outside of it. You know, just the logistical reality, we have one Council Member. Any item comes to City Council that affects or is about the Mexican American community, you know, all heads just turn one way. That's problematic. I confronted this idea that there is only one way and because we worked outside of the box and we were approaching things multifold, I think we were spanked hard. But looking back, would've I elected to operate one way? And I can honestly say, while it was a huge challenge, I couldn't see myself electing pacificity. For me, it's about challenging systems, unveiling new possibilities, and undergoing serious change and hopefully in the future, part of that change can be the political way we operate here in Austin, which is, to an extent, provincial, a little bit static and not very responsive. But I love Austin! I think it's the people that I love. I think all bureaucracies have their mechanisms.

SMITH: Earlier you mentioned some political discussions that were happening at the time after the bond was passed, but they weren't incorporated into your final decision. How do you think that that can be changed? What was the challenge then - to listen to them or to have them come to the table, and how going forward can you make sure to incorporate those voices as well?

SALINAS: Yeah, I think the first part of the question is interesting because artists never conform. And I think the nature of this project is a political project at the end of the day because of the land, the value of the land. Can you imagine what 6.2 acres of downtown prime real estate on Town Lake is valued at? Politics, lock, stock, barrel, part of the project. I think we, as artists, with the passion that we have, with the drive that is part of our DNA, and with the motivation to build a future, yeah, I question whether we could have conformed.

So then the next question then becomes well, okay, then we had the political winds that became whirlwinds that dusted up. Could they have somehow supported the direction that we were moving in? I would offer yes, but because we were not sitting at the table at the same time, the differences became very clear. And we're talking futures here. We're talking about political futures. We're talking about definitions. We're talking about how the community sees itself. We're talking about serious issues here. We're not talking about anything small. No, this is like the project moves on into the future long beyond we're here. And so that's why I say this project, to an extent, I think is a legacy project and I'm just wondering – I think I mentioned to you a little bit earlier that we, the Mexican American community, especially here in Texas, you know, Austin a little bit less so, but we are a culture of poverty that for centuries have not been part of the mix and the paradigm and, all of a sudden, here we are at the apex of opportunity with the site designation, the center of Austin, and I think the politics of greed because the land is so valuable, because the land is centrally situated, because the land is political in nature, people salivate in deciding its fate, its future, whatever it be. I think the fact that we as a team of artists and community individuals decided its fate before that machine could put its hands into it, you know, it was very powerful for us to say, hey, it's here. We're not going anywhere, but we had to deal with consequences. So that's one of the real serious moments that it was a wake-up call for all of us and we had to deal with it on our feet. And I dance a little bit, so I could kind of move with it and keep it sweet. But that was a story I did not know and I couldn't have even predicted its writing.

Of course, now we're at this stage of the game and I'm hoping for a bright future still. I hope artists can somehow reassume vision of the project. And I'm talking about artists owning our future, owning the vision, not waiting for budgets to be approved, for this to happen, to

wait until the next bond election, wait for a council resolution. I'm not talking about that. I want artists to come in and make a difference. I want us to figure out how we don't have to do all that stuff, how we can turn the facility into a place where we bring kids in for classes, they're inspired to tell their parents about it, projects are built with the skills in town that they learned where communities can come together and create change and where the artists can be leading the charge. And I do feel like it can happen. I think.

SMITH: And some of the most rewarding times that you've had?

SALINAS: The most rewarding time was no doubt the passing of the bond election. Because all of a sudden, it was – by this time, I think what, fifteen, twenty years had already passed – and it was like, we didn't think, you know, we didn't know if it was going to pass when we were all sitting around looking at the television. That was a very pivotal moment because, all of a sudden, we got the site designation, we have a nonprofit, and now we've got the bond monies. You can't turn that around. And so, for me, that was a really beautiful moment.

I can say the opening of the MACC, the grand opening, was also a very beautiful moment for me. The breaking ground and then a few months later, seeing the trucks begin to break the serious ground. Not the pretty shovel; I'm talking about getting those trucks in there, beginning to move everything off. Seeing those white wall structures coming up, that's when it's like after all is said and done, who cares about the politics? I could care less because I see the wall coming up and that's something I, along with numerous others along the whole thirty/forty-year history of this project, we did that and it's there and so, you know, whenever I go to the MACC site, I look at it and I'm like, we built it. We're not finished. We got a lot of work to do.

SMITH: And so, ten years from now, what would it look like with the artists there in control?

SALINAS: With the artists in control. And, yeah, there's some great models. I look at like, for example, Jump Start in San Antonio and they're fantastic programmers and they're all artists. And their whole principle, their whole ethic, even within their mission statement, the way they write the sweetness of what they outline their work is – it's to bring artists in and let them decide what's the future of their programming. So in ten years, what do I see? What I would love to see is the Waller Creek site develop little cafes, little restaurants, little tienditas that sell the artists' work that gets created in the MACC site. As part of the larger MACC structure, I imagine right now we just have the auditorium pyramid, but the other two pyramids fully charged with the excitement of locally produced badass projects, performances. In one space could be theater. In the other space could be a dance show while there's the visual arts event happening in the galleries along with class students, and whoever's not attending that could go down to the little cafes and, of course, all those stores, the revenue income generating support for the artwork, while in the plaza there's a mercado, you know. And I see this happening every weekend. That would be the dream. That would be where I would want to be. I know it would be where my youngsters would want to be. It's where the Aztlán – if anywhere the Aztlán dance technique ought to live, should be at the Mexican American Cultural Center because I am a product of this community. I've danced this dirt and the MACC should house what I give. And youngsters should continue within that sacred studio space. I could be there and some of the dancers that have already imprinted their body form with can continue moving forward this idea and this notion of creating new cutting edge, innovative thought-provoking dance work that narrates the story of a people.

SMITH: Great.

SALINAS: So whether it's Planet X or whether it's a mercado en Laredo, it's got to happen!

SMITH: Throughout our discussion, you've talked a lot about community involvement, whether it's the artists or the politicians, the activists, what is the best way to do that outreach? You did it through the bond election. You talked a little bit about that, but now we're kind of at a new age, how do you reach the community? How do you get them involved again?

SALINAS: I think there's different strata. I think what CMACA is doing right now with trying to create the serape of arts is definitely one step, one layer of the three-layered – seven-layered cake. So that's one layer. The other layer is – I think like the MACC and whether it's through the advisory committee or whether it needs to develop a separate – I think it needs to create a little marketing team that their sole job is to not be at the MACC, but to be everywhere else where their role is to be going to the schools, going to the neighborhood associations, going to events, going to everywhere and really, you know, continuing the dialogue of, you know, only phase one. We still need phase two and phase three and we need you. I think that's another side. I think another phase is opening the space up for community proper and something as subtle as having little outdoor speakers playing, you know, música – música del barrio, the multiple musical sounds of a people; to have that out there where people can find a place to begin to identify with. I think that the MACC is a gorgeous space, but we don't identify with it because it's still not offering an identity and I think that would be quite helpful. Let's just start doing some badass programming. You know, I think at the end of the day, you get the artists in there and start doing some badass programming, we'll discover each other and I'm talking about little kids discovering each other, you know, talking to each other, parents discovering each other, artists discovering, and then going lateral and horizontal, just having all those intersections happen, I think that's the future. But no doubt that that question of revenue has to be addressed; I don't want our community constantly waiting for funding. I think we

need to take a little bit of ownership and direction and begin to define our future financially, also.

SMITH: Thank you. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you would like to add?

SALINAS: No. I mean, well, yes, I guess I would like to just kind of take this moment to reflect back on all the people where there have been differences, especially in the arts community. It's like my mother's father used to always say, "*hay que estar juntos pero no revueltos.*" My mother always would tell me that as I was growing up and I think they're very valuable words. This idea that we're all in it together, but we don't have to necessarily get to the point where our differences end up becoming points of contention. For all the people that have worked on the project, for some it's been labors of love, for others it's been moments for discord. I just want to say to everybody that's worked on the project – and I know from the days of like Diana Castañeda and Carlos Pineda – that I remember, all the way forward, it needed to have happened in order to get us where we are now and I think those now need to serve as memories. We need to remember and take the cues and the lessons so that we can begin thinking forward in new ways and I don't want us to – and this is just me speaking now, this is my personal agenda – I don't want us to be at the mercy and at the hands of governmentality. I want the artists and I want the supporters whether it be some kind of a funding structure, some kind of a nonprofit, whatever, that supports the artists and lets the artists be who they want to be and be the greatest that they can be because if we can't have the MACC doing that, who? And so I would ask for – I just want to thank everybody that's supported the project no doubt, but I also want folks to be like, okay let's turn the channel. We've got phase two and phase three now. Those are even bigger challenges, so, you know,

my closing thoughts would be those two frames of reference: one, okay folks, turn the page, we've got to move forward, and then the other one is don't lose sight of the artists.

SMITH: Well, I'll see you out there.

SALINAS: Yeah!

SMITH: Thank you so much. It was a very informative and passionate interview and I think that passion is what you see time in time again in every interview and every person that worked on it and thank you for so eloquently illuminating that for us.

SALINAS: Well, thank you, it was a pleasure.

*(Interview Ends)*