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EVENTS

Guided Tour
– Thu 19.11.2026, 18:30 (eng/es)
Tour of the exhibition by Los Four & Friends, with Adriana Domínguez Velasco, the exhibition's curator

Art at Noon
Lunch with the Art Center team: a short guided tour, followed by a snack from Épicerie Batavia
– Fri 27.11.2026, 12:15 (de/fr)
CHF 20.– (members CHF 18.–)
Registration until the day before: info@kbcb.ch / kbcb.ch

Kunsthaus Biel Centre d'art Bienne

Opening hours

Wed	12:00–18:00
Thurs	12:00–20:00
Fri	12:00–18:00
Sa&Sun	11:00–18:00

LOS FOUR & FRIENDS

ENG

cur.: Adriana Domínguez Velasco

20.9.–29.11.2026

Los Four (Gilbert «Magu» Luján, Frank Romero, Carlos Almaraz, Beto de la Rocha, Judithe Hernández), Álvaro Márquez, Arleene Correa Valencia, Gustavo Rimada, Jacqueline Valenzuela, Jesús Barraza, Laura Aguilar, Leo Limón, Melanie Cervantes, Narsiso Martínez, Oscar Castillo, rafa esparza, Refujio «Cuco» Rodríguez, Shizu Saldamando

For the first time in Switzerland, «Los Four & Friends» presents an exhibition of Chicanx art in a museum. It showcases the artistic production of Los Four, a Chicano art collective active in California between 1973 and 1984. Centring the history of the collective, the exhibition expands into an exploration of Chicanx art in Los Angeles, from the 1970s to the present. «Chicano», «Chicana» or «Chicanx[1]» is a self-defined identity adopted by people of Mexican descent in the United States. Reclaimed during the 1960s Chicano civil rights movement («El Movimiento»), the term became a political and cultural expression of pride in Mexican heritage and a resistance to discrimination. «El Movimiento» fought for economic justice, political representation, educational reform, and the reclamation of Mexican-American identity.

Chicanx art cannot be defined within fixed categories. It overflows. Its visual codes are neither Mexican, nor indigenous or American. They are all of them, but also something more complex than the sum of its fragments. It is, simultaneously, «un amasamiento» (the product of kneading) and «a state of being torn between ways», to borrow the words of philosopher and Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. The exhibition brings the works of Los Four into dialogue with those of «their friends», contemporary Chicanx artists based in California, in a dialogue that makes visible continuities and ruptures within Chicanx art. The narrative is not linear and does not offer a timeline. Instead, it explores a mode of time that entangles past, present, and future, reflecting a circular conception of time rooted on Indigenous thought, with which this art engages: By looking back, we will move forward.

LOS FOUR
Gilbert «Magu» Luján (1940–2011), Carlos Almaraz (1941–1989), Frank Romero (b. 1941), and Beto de la Rocha (b. 1937) formed Los Four in 1973 at Magu's invitation. The artists had all received university training, mastering formalism and geometric abstraction, before Magu convinced them to explore Chicanismo as a legitimate influence and visual language in their art practice. A recent graduate of the University of California Irvine, Magu approached Art Gallery director Hal Glicksman with a proposal for an exhibition of Chicano art. The success of the UC Irvine exhibition in 1973 led directly to «Los Four: Almaraz / de la Rocha / Luján / Romero» at LACMA in 1974, making them the first Chicano artists to exhibit at a major US art institution. The exhibitions featured collaborative murals on canvas and art by the individual artists. The artists designed a very dense installation of their works, which echoed both the history of museum display and the vernacular arrangements of

1 «Chicanx» (with an «x» at the end) is the contemporary, gender-neutral or non-binary self-identification used by people of Mexican origin who were born or raised in the USA. In the text that follows, the terms «Chicano», «Chicana» and «Chicanx» are used interchangeably, depending on the historical period and the individual's identity.

Chicano homes. The LACMA exhibition attracted more than 28'000 visitors, many of them Chicanas and Chicanos. It brought new audiences into an institution whose walls had long excluded non-white artists and communities. Unsurprisingly, reviews of the exhibition dismissed the work through elitist distinctions between «fine art» and«folk art». Judithe Hernández (b. 1948) – who joined Los Four shortly after the exhibition as its fifth official member – publicly challenged these criticisms, arguing that museums should serve as responsive institutions rather than bastions of exclusion. Her intervention affirmed Chicano art as an essential part of American art history.

LOS FOUR & FRIENDS

The works in this room show the collaborations among Los Four and their immediate cultural environment. They highlight how their respective styles and interests informed each other, while interacting with the broad ecosystem of Chicana/o cultural production. Throughout their history as a collective, Los Four produced relatively few works together, focusing on ephemeral collective murals and installations. For the most part, they exhibited individual works in group shows that presented other artists with whom they regularly collaborated. Many of the collaborations among collectives, art initiatives and spaces happened around printed media. Drawing from the Mexican tradition of political printmaking, and preferred for its accessibility, printmaking has become a defining element of Chicanx aesthetics. In the wake of «El Movimiento», Los Angeles saw the emergence of numerous initiatives that sustained Chicana/o artistic production through arts education, exhibitions, and community-based projects. Among the most important were «Self Help Graphics (SHG)», a non-profit community based printmaking studio; «Mechicano», one of the city's earliest multidisciplinary Chicana/o arts organizations, and magazines such as «Con Safos» and «Chismearte», with which Los Four engaged closely.

EAST LOS ANGELES

The importance of Los Angeles as a centre of Chicana/o artistic production is rooted in the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), when Mexico was forced to cede nearly half its territory to the US, leaving around 100'000 Mexicans on the US side of the new border. Many remained, forming barrios, defined by shared language, family, religion, and customs. Discriminatory housing policies concentrated these communities around Los Angeles's old Plaza, before anti-Mexican prejudice in the 1920s pushed them toward East Los Angeles, which remains home to a large Chicana/o community and an important centre of its cultural production. After World War I, new waves of migration surged, as the US relied heavily on Mexican labour to fuel California's economic growth, yet Mexican immigrants and Chicanx continue to face political and social exclusion. The works in this room portray (East) Los Angeles from different perspectives. Some focus on its geography and architecture, while others make specific social and political critiques. Graffiti is particularly significant within the context of Los Angeles: writing and painting on the city becomes a way of claiming visibility, territory, and cultural presence. Drawings by Los Four show the influence of graffiti and calligraphy; while photographs by Oscar Castillo document Chicano murals throughout Los Angeles, including works by Judithe Hernández and Magu (both members of Los Four). Cars and lowriders also appear in works by Carlos Almaraz and Magu. Cruising through the streets of LA, lowrider cars transform materials of mainstream American culture (discarded cars) into distinctly Chicano objects, fulfilling their function as «cultural vehicles», as Magu used to refer to them.

POLITICAL TERRITORIES

The struggles faced by Chicanx and migrant populations in the US, have changed little over the past fifty years, but the reflections on their experiences have shifted the meaning of territory, which now includes their own bodies. This shift has been driven by a re-examination of the trope of Aztlán in Chicanx aesthetics. Aztlán is the place of origin of the Mexica (Aztec) people, believed to have been located in territory that once belonged to Mexico and is now part of the US. It became one of the ideological foundations of the early Chicano Movement by establishing Chicanos and Chicanas as the original inhabitants of the land and providing a legitimate claim to it. Queer and feminist thinkers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, together with Chicanx artists since the 1980s, have pushed for a change of this narrative, given the nationalist and patriarchal undertones of «the legitimate claim to land». Thanks to their work, bodies that were marginalised during the early period of the Chicano Movement, women and queer people, have become a strong force in contemporary Chicanx art. Aztlán remains a powerful framework for understanding territorial dispossession and cultural reclamation, but contemporary interpretations approach it more critically, emphasising complex, liminal identities that exist «in between». Occupying a liminal space in this chapter of the exhibition are the works of rafa esparza and Laura Aguilar. Identifying as queer, brown, and Chicanx artists, both of them position their bodies in the public space as a way to «queer» (disrupt, change, or non-conform with) the normative perception of that space.

The other works in the room also engage with the notion of body as territory: showing female bodies occupying spaces that previously belonged only to men (lowrider culture) or addressing the risks and sacrifices of migration and the importance of family and community in Chicanx life. Further works deal with the state violence and repression that Chicanx, black, native American and other migrant bodies in the US experience on a daily basis, making commentaries on the longer history of discriminatory domestic and foreign policies, war, and US intervention abroad. With their works, Chicanx artists hold a vision of the world for each other: one that doesn't ignore their struggles, and that has enough space for their stories and identities. They also hold a vision of the world for us, hopefully one of a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatistas say (a libertarian socialist and indigenous political-militant movement based in Chiapas, Mexico).

SUPRANATIONAL BODIES: NO FLY ZONE

The last (or first) piece of the exhibition is *Supranational Bodies: No fly Zone* (2026) by rafa esparza, located in the foyer and created on-site. Occupying a space in-between, it depicts migrant bodies flying over a border, accompanied by images of prehispanic objects held in Swiss collections. The adobe-bricks installation brings «brown architecture» into the museum as a way to challenge the hegemony of the structures that have enabled white racial dominance to claim authority over knowledge production. The same achievement that Los Four accomplished with their historical LACMA exhibition.