

**Paul Valadez**

***Selections from the Great Mexican-American Songbook***

**2016**

**40 unique mixed media collage on found paper**

**Dimensions variable**

**Collection: Contemporary**

**Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art, Gift of the Artist**

Using vintage sheet music of the “Great American Song Book” as his backdrop, Paul Valadez re-envisions the idea of the songbook, integrating nostalgic images with “Spanglish” text, resulting in a dichotomy of oblique visual ideas that are equal parts humor and social commentary.

Valadez was born in San Francisco and was raised in the Central Valley of California. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Art at the San Francisco Art Institute, and a Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina where, in 2003, he was awarded the Weiss Urban Livability Fellowship. Valadez uses metal, acrylics, text, and mixed media to create a concept of “old signage,” with subtle hints of race, culture and history. His current work is autobiographical with semi-satirical social commentary inspired by his childhood memories of growing up in a bi-cultural household.

Valadez is Assistant Professor in the Art Department at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, formerly the University of Texas-Pan American, in Edinburg, Texas on the U.S. / Mexico border. His work is included in the following collections: El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, Texas; Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Faulkoner Gallery, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa; Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon; Florida State University College of Fine Arts, Tallahassee, Florida; Mexic Arte Museum, Austin, Texas, and Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio. Additional information and image may be found on the artist’s website, <http://www.paris1920.com/>.

## **JoAnne Northrup Interview with Artist Paul Valadez**

Q: What is the concept behind the series?

A: **First**, this artwork has very little to do with “music” but it does have to do with images and language, “the language of images,” if you will.

Q: Why for example did you choose to do them on what appears to be sheet music?

A: **Second**, Years ago I acquired a stack of sheet music and figured I could do something with this. Several bound volumes of music in my pile were called “the great American songbook” or “American songbook” I looked up on the internet the concept of the “American songbook” and came across the Wikipedia entry “*There is no consensus on which songs are in the "Great American Songbook."* Several music publishing companies, including *Hal Leonard*,<sup>[6]</sup> *J. W. Pepper & Son*,<sup>[7]</sup> and *Alfred Music*,<sup>[8]</sup> sell music under the name “Great American Songbook.” Alfred Music lists the Songbook as its own *genre*. Music critics have attempted to develop a “canon.” For example, in *Alec Wilder's 1972 study, American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900–1950*, the songwriter and critic lists and

*ranks the artists he believes belong to the Great American Songbook canon. From some perspectives, the Songbook era ended with the advent of rock and roll; Wilder ends with 1950. So I figured that I could use this idea of an undefined list of music and create a "Mexican-American Songbook".*

Q: Are you referring to a 1940s aesthetic or is it a specific historical period?

A: Yes, I wanted to include the presence of LATINOS, MEXICANS in American history. This is in response to a paper installation on memories of my maternal (ANGLO/WHITE) grandfather who served in WWII in the navy. He worked as a machinist at shipyards in California and never went to sea. The exhibition was about loss and regret and disappointment. It dawned on me that my paternal (Mexican) grandfather also served in WWII in the Army and he possibly, more than likely, saw combat but no one ever talked about it. He could/would not attend any fireworks display because he would get distressed, **BUT NO ONE EVER TALKED ABOUT IT!**

**THIRD**, the work has to do with my childhood and language. I grew up in a bicultural family, Anglo/white on my mother's side and Mexican on my father's side and I felt that I never fit in. I was either Mexican or white depending on what side of my family I was spending time with. Language to me is the fact that, **Spanish is the language of secrets**; Spanish was spoken in front of me to keep me from knowing something. Spanish was never spoken in my home but English was rarely spoken with my father's family.

I wanted to capture the feeling I had as a child. As a child everything had the same type of meaning, something was not more important than the other. I had not developed a hierarchy of importance. For example if my parents were voting for McGovern or Nixon was the same meaning or importance to me as was playing with my G.I. Joes or wanting a bike or having to take a bath. Everything was the same when I was as a child. Compound this with having to spend time with a half of my family that I could not communicate with. Magazines were very important to me as a child; it seemed that everyone had *TV Guide*, *Time*, *Life* or *Look* magazines and I would look through these magazines wherever I went, and I would encounter a parallel world of Spanish language magazines at my father's family's home!

As a child I really was just looking at the pictures in both the Spanish and English magazines, I really did not understand what was going on in most of them until I got older. The same thing was happening with television or radio, but magazines seemed more prevalent because when visiting the TV and radio was turned off.

Q: What is the socio-political content in the work?

A: Of course there is Socio-political content to the work, this is true in all artwork but it changes from viewer to viewer. Marxists will see the work differently than right-wingers I want different people to see and feel different things when they see the same work. **FOURTH**, I really think that my artwork should function without knowing what was going on in my mind when I am making the work. **MOST IMPORTANTLY I WANT VIEWERS TO BRING THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES WHEN LOOKING AT THE WORK. WHAT YOU THINK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT I THINK. WHAT YOU THINK THE WORK IS ABOUT IS WHAT THE WORK IS ABOUT.**