

Center for Creative Photography

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Finding aid for the
Louis Carlos Bernal Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection,
1980s
AG 233

Louis Carlos Bernal Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1980s

AG 233

Creator

Center for Creative Photography

Abstract

Contains materials related to the photographer and teacher, Louis Carlos Bernal (1941-1993) and received from a variety of sources.

The collection is active.

Quantity/ Extent

Fraction of a linear foot

Language of Materials

English

Biographical Note

Louis Carlos Bernal (1941–1993) was born in Douglas, Arizona, and grew up in Phoenix. After completing his M.F.A. at Arizona State University in 1972, he joined the faculty of Pima Community College in Tucson, where he remained for the duration of his career, developing and heading its photography program. In 1979, Bernal, along with four other photographers – Morrie Camhi, Abigail Heyman, Roger Minick, and Neal Slavin – received funding from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund to photograph Chicano culture in the Southwest for an exhibition and a book project entitled ESPEJO: Reflections of the Mexican American. The commission brought him closer to his ethnic roots and fueled a passionate direction for his work that gained him international recognition for championing regional diversity while symbolizing his exploration of identity as a Mexican American.

Following a tradition of Latin American documentary street photography, Bernal photographed in the barrio – a young girl and her grandfather in a corner barber shop, a girl taking her quinceañera, or locals posing in front of colorful wall murals – images that captured the unique character of Chicano life. He wrote, “My images speak of the religious and family ties I have experienced as a Chicano. I have concerned myself with the mysticism of the Southwest and the strength of the spiritual and cultural values of the barrio.”

Bernal also centered on the family and the home, believing these two elements combined to form the most significant structure within the Mexican-American community. As he wandered streets from Texas to Los Angeles, and met people who were soon drawn to charismatic personality, he was often invited into their homes. He asked permission to photograph them surrounded by their treasured possessions, their family portraits and mementos, and their shrines decorated with saints, candles, and flowers. His subjects appear at ease and confident in front of his camera, a product of Bernal's deep respect for them. Bernal's interest in what people chose to surround themselves with led him to photograph the interiors of homes without people. These sensitive portraits of both prized and everyday items in living rooms, bedrooms and gardens were perhaps his most significant innovation.

Bernal's interest in strong compositional design and technical expertise are evident in both his skillfully printed black-and-white images and his color work that luminously captures the bright pinks, blues, and greens of interior painted adobe walls, window curtains, and religious icons. He felt a particular urgency to document the streets, people, homes, and artifacts in historic neighborhoods, as many were undergoing rapid changes or being bulldozed to make way for urban renewal. In recording the Mexican-American experience of Southwest towns and barrios, Bernal created a visual document that preserves the specific iconography and reveals many aspects of this distinct culture.

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of one group of materials given as gifts from Bernal to a former student, Helen Unruh. Included are a letter written on cardboard sent with Bernal's photograph, "La Reíña de mi Vida" in 1983; a photocopy of a Bernal carte-de-viste photograph with handwritten letter from Bernal; a 1981 announcement for *Five Photographers: Contemporary Views of Mexican and Mexican-American Culture*, an exhibition at UC San Diego, La Jolla, California.

Names and Subject Terms

Bernal, Louis Carlos, 1941-1993
Photography

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access

Access to this collection requires an appointment with the Volkerding Study Center.

Conditions Governing Use

It is the responsibility of the user to obtain permission from the copyright owner (which could be the institution, the creator of the record, the author or his/her transferees,

heirs, legates or literary executors) prior to any copyright-protected uses of the collection.

The user agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Arizona Board of Regents, the University of Arizona, Center of Creative Photography, including its officers, employees, and agents, from and against all claims made relating to copyright or other intellectual property infringement.

Provenance

This collection consists of gifts from a wide variety of different sources. Some restrictions apply.

Separated Materials

Eleven photographs and the carte-de-visite are in the fine print collection.

Related Materials

AG81 Espejo

Preferred Citation

Louis Carlos Bernal Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1980s. AG 233. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

Processing Information

Finding aid updated by Meghan Jordan in June 2016.

Container List

Box

- 1 Letter written on cardboard and sent with a photograph, "La Reina de mi Vida" to Helen Unruh by Louis Carlos Bernal, 1983.

Photocopy of carte-de-visite photograph and letter to Helen Unruh by Louis Carlos Bernal, 1984.

Exhibition announcement