When the exhibition *Cyber Arte: Tradition meets Technology* opened at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe on February 25th, 2001, a tremendous amount of press had already been written in such publications as *American Art*, *Art and Antiques*, *Hispanic Magazine*, and the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. The reviews, prior to opening day praised this small exhibition of less then 600 square feet for the cutting edge show that it was meant to be-- and that it was. Few of them mentioned the now famous piece by Alma López titled *Our Lady*.

**CURATORIAL INTENT**

My original curatorial intent in putting together the Cyber Arte exhibition was to highlight the Hispanic and Latina/o arts and cultural presence on the World Wide Web. (One of the handouts being passed around is one from the exhibition with Latino arts and cultural websites as well as Spanglish terms for the Internet published with permission from the *New York Times*). I had originally titled the exhibition “¿Y tu que?” which in Spanish means “and you what?”-- a play on the Y 2 K craze. The show was meant to
open the 21st century in 2000 at MOIFA but plans were put on the back burner because the director at the time thought the Y2 K problem was just a fad.

The secondary purpose of the exhibition, as it was originally conceived, was to address stereotypes of Latinos, technology, and art especially since we are one of the “minority” groups greatly affected by the digital divide that stems from the lack of computer access in schools and homes--not only in New Mexico, but nationally. I had noticed for a number of years that many traditional and contemporary artists were looking towards the computer to either set up their own websites or to create art. I was especially intrigued by the fact that many of these artists experimenting with technology were women. Sometimes in our culture women and technology just don’t come out in the same sentence. I wondered how these women negotiate the borders of identity as it pertains to combining tradition and technology? Thus, Cyber Arte: Tradition meets Technology was born. The exhibition was one of the first in the country to highlight computer art. Little did I know it would become a metaphor for tradition meeting modernity, as well as many other issues, in Santa Fe, New Mexico and beyond.

THE EXHIBITION

For the exhibition, I chose the work of four Hispana / Latina / Chicana artists: Teresa Archuleta- Sagel, Elena Baca and Marion Martínez all from New Mexico, and Alma López from California. These strong, talented and intelligent women explore traditional elements by using technology. Whether it is digitally rendering family photos to convey family histories, or constructing saints out of computer parts, each artist grapples with how to be modern and traditional simultaneously. What I realized as the
show went up is that all four artistas were responding to high-tech modern times and at the same time, they were saving tradition. (One of the other exhibition handouts being passed around features brief artist statements by the four women).

TERESA ARCHULETA-SAGEL

Teresa Archuleta-Sagel from Española, New Mexico is an award-winning traditional Hispanic weaver represented in our permanent textile collection. A few years back Archuleta-Sagel got environmentally ill from the weaving process and as a result she had to set her weaving aside. Needing a creative outlet she turned to the computer. Her digital paintings and use of family photos and religious icons provided for cathartic healing and expression.

ELENA BACA

Elena Baca from Albuquerque also uses family stories, photos and religious components in her digital and print process. Along with these cultural elements Baca has begun a series of “fakelifes” playing upon the stilllife tradition found in both folk and fine art. In these pieces she is making commentary on tradition and modernity- natural and artificial.

MARION MARTINEZ

Marion Martínez from Glorieta creates religious images and traditional matachines masks from old circuit boards and other computer parts she finds in “the Black Hole” up in Los Alamos. For Martínez the process in which she creates is very
spiritual and devotional in the same way the traditional santeros and santeras of Northern New Mexico sculpt and paint their images in wood.

ALMA LOPEZ

I first met Alma López four years ago in Mexico City. I was drawn to her work and that of the other artists specifically because they were combining traditional folk and cultural iconography and recasting it to reflect the 20th and now 21st centuries. Among the works of Alma’s I chose for the exhibition were images of women and the border including La Linea, Santa Niña de Mochis, California Fashion Slaves and Juan Soldado.

HISTORICAL IMAGES

When I selected Alma’s Our Lady for the exhibition, it was based on my knowledge of current discourse, as well as that over the last 30 years or so, of Chicana and Latina artists and writers who have strongly felt the need to reshape and recast the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe into something they can personally identify with. As La Reina de las Americas (the Queen of the Americas) she is an image that affects all of us.

The Mexican image of La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared in 1531. At that time, it was dramatically changed from the image of the same name in Spain. She had indigenous features and elements when she appeared to Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac. Later in the early 19th century and the Mexican War for Independence her image was utilized to help Father Miguel Hidalgo and those who fought for freedom from Spain. Around this time the colors of her dress and cloak, as well as the wings of the
Angel that appears at the bottom of her feet, changed to reflect *Mexicanidad*, or Mexican identity, with the colores nacionales (national colors) of red, white and green. Later Cesar Chávez used her image in the United Farm Workers (UFW) struggle for farm workers rights. So, even before the recasting by contemporary artists and writers, the image of la Virgen de Guadalupe was used for political and personal statements and reflected the changing times. In the 1970s Chicana artists such as Ester Hernández with her *Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los Chicanos* and Yolanda López with her triptych of her grandmother, her mother and herself rendered as Guadalupe, interpreted the icon as much less passive than the traditional image. Other images by these same artists *La Ofrenda* and *Tableau Vivant* provided very personal interpretations. Men got into the act too with Alfredo de Batuc’s *Seven Views of City Hall* and a soap package from Mexico featuring the folk saint El Niño Fidencio dressed as Guadalupe. There is even Mita Curon’s *Guadalupe Baby*. Finally, months before the *Cyber Arte* exhibition opened, an edited version of Alma López’s *Our Lady* appeared on the an award-winning cover of a book, *Puro Teatro: a Latina Anthology*, published by the University of Arizona Press. Armed with all of this information and more, *Our Lady* was selected as an important addition to Cyber Arte and a symbol of women negotiating tradition with technology.

**INSTALLATION AND OPENING**

The exhibition was installed in the Contemporary Changing Gallery a space attached to the Museum’s permanent Hispanic Heritage Wing’s *Familia y Fé* exhibition. This Changing Gallery space had been mandated by the original Hispanic community.
advisory board to showcase contemporary artists and thus tradition, continuity, and change. The adjacent larger permanent exhibition highlights two of the most important components of New Mexican Hispanic life- Familia y Fé--family and faith-- and is exemplified by extraordinary pieces of Spanish Colonial art including santos and retablos and a number of traditional images of La Virgen de Guadalupe. I’d like to add that the Contemporary Changing Gallery is the only gallery space dedicated to Contemporary Hispanic Art in the entire Museum of New Mexico system comprised of five museums.

THE PROTEST

Three weeks after Cyber Arte opened a protest started in full force-the objective to remove the image of Our Lady from the exhibition and the Museum. As the first wave of this very emotional protest –emotional from all sides-- gained energy- arguments of insider-outsider, taxpayer funded institutions, church verse state, first amendment rights, censorship and self-censorship, gender, sexuality, education and class, as well as who had the right to use the Guadalupe image, rose quickly to the surface. Even the Archbishop of Santa Fe voiced his opinion in the press and called Raquel Salinas, the model for Our Lady and a rape survivor, a “tart” and a “prostitute.”

The events of these first weeks began an extremely difficult and painful year and a half for me personally, for the artists, for my colleagues, and for the community-- a period that has not entirely gone away. One of the main protestors declared a “holy war” – his words-- on the museum. The timing of his comments last year is especially poignant today as they occurred just after the Taliban destroyed the buddahs and Mayor Guiliani was calling for a decency committee in New York City. As a sidebar, it is interesting to
note that the Museum of International Folk Art houses and cares for the Archdiocese’s collections of religious objects but this fact was rarely mentioned.

I, along with the artists, my colleagues, and supporters, received threatening phone calls, letters and personal attacks. The artwork was called blasphemous and sacrilegious. I was called insensitive and malicious. I was accused of Cyber Porn and Catholic bashing. I was told God would strike me down and I was even accused of not being Hispanic. It was declared that I was starting a new religion and promoting Satanism. Members of our own Board of Regents called me and demanded that I go immediately into the gallery and remove the piece. One Regent also told me that my decision to include the piece was one of the greatest misjudgments since that of Helen of Troy.

Although supporters always outnumbered those calling the “Bikini” Virgin blasphemous, one would have never known it from the unbalanced and polarizing media coverage (I can say that now that many members of the Press have since apologized to me). A newspaper editorial came out saying that the curator of the exhibition should have been more sensitive. Of course those who know me laughed, as I am more often than not too sensitive about everything. After reading that editorial I must have cried for two weeks. Dozens of articles and political cartoons followed. Some of the more difficult things that were said included words to the effect that because I was educated I had lost touch with my community and that I was a thinker-- and not a believer. My integrity, my scholarship, and my identity were all challenged, and for most of last year, I was vilified in the local press. Because of my unique family name the rumor also spread that
I was the head of a secret Vietnamese lesbian sisterhood. This by the way was news to my husband who in turn was told he was sleeping with the devil.

On April 4, 2001, during the first of two museum-sponsored public meetings on the issue, both Alma López and I were effectively silenced by the protestors and kept from ever giving our statements or telling our points of view to the public.

I’d like to read to you two brief excerpts from the prepared statement I wrote for that meeting.

I am one of a handful of Hispanic / Latina / o curators working in mainstream institutions in the United States--in my case, the Museum of International Folk Art. And, I am the only one in the Museum of New Mexico system. As such I have a tremendous responsibility. I am charged with the challenging task of interpreting and representing our diverse and wonderfully multi-layered culture and community. I have worked very hard to get this position in order to provide Hispanic and Latino leadership and interpretation within the Museum of New Mexico. In this position of course I must be sensitive to Catholic Hispanics of Northern New Mexico, but I must be equally sensitive to the large number of Presbyterian Hispanics, the Sephardim, recently-arrived immigrant populations, the Mexican and Central American populations, Newyoricans, Cubanos, Puertoíqueños, Latinos and non-Latinos, gays and lesbians, artists and non-artists, Nuevomexicanos and yes—even people from California.

My statement continued:

I do empathize with the parishioners of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and others who feel the piece “blasphemous” and I commend them on their tireless crusade against “Our Lady,” but I never would have selected the piece for Cyber Arte if I did not strongly feel that it had an important and timely message about Hispanic culture and especially about Hispanics and Latinas. It certainly has created an important dialog within our community and state.

These words were never publicly spoken until November 2001, when I testified in front of the State Legislative Finance Committee who was threatening to pull the Museum’s funding. This occurred seven months later than I had hoped and one month
after museum administration closed the *Cyber Arte* exhibition early in the spirit of reconciliation.

As mentioned, my statement was originally written for that first April 4th public meeting. Alma and I were both scheduled to speak at that meeting but were prevented from doing so. Law enforcement authorities because of the extremely intimidating, emotionally charged and possibly violent atmosphere canceled it. Upon news of the cancellation, Alma and I were immediately surrounded by people shouting “burn her, burn them.” We were escorted away by security staff and U.S. Marshals who helped us get back to the museum in a get-a-way car and motorcade.

Things got worse before they got better. Death and bomb threats continued--so much so that the FBI was enlisted to bug and monitor our phone system. Museum administration wrote a letter of apology to the archbishop. The Committee on Sensitive Materials, which previously only dealt with NAGPRA, issues met and considered whether “Our Lady” was a ritual object. The Archbishop and many priests sermonized from the pulpit against the museum and the artists. The ACLU threatened to bring forth a lawsuit against the museum. My “Danger Educated Chicana t-shirt” purchased at NACCS (National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies) made the six o’clock news. Tradition, Family and Property (TFP), the same group that is trying to rid Brazil of the Samba held a national rosary rally and prayer vigil on museum grounds. The exhibition closed early against the wishes of the four artists and the curator. Nevertheless public hearings continued and lawsuits were filed. The New Mexico State Legislature threatened to pull our funding citing no separation of church and state in New Mexico. A couple of state senators and representatives also sponsored a memorial to investigate my
qualifications and to issue a censure of my behavior. Things did not begin to quiet down until almost a year to the day of the exhibition opening when a state district court judge issued a ruling stating that the curator was not liable for not holding a public hearing about including Our Lady before the exhibition went up. The ruling went out on the national Associated Press wire service.

Addendum:
On October 30, 2002, almost a year to the day that Our Lady was removed and the Cuber Arte Exhibition came down, a televised gubernatorial debate was held. New Mexico’s three candidates for governor, John Sanchez (Republican), David Bacon (Green Party) and Bill Richardson (Democrat) were asked to respond to the following question: “How would you have handled the Our Lady controversy last year, when many Catholics protested an artwork on display at the state Museum of International Folk Art that depicted the Virgin clad only in flowers?” The candidates responded in the following manor: Sanchez “I would have worked hard to bring the two sides together but this is also a first amendment rights issue. Bacon: “It is a 1st amendments rights issue and I would have asked the museum to open an exhibition showing the history and importance of Guadalupe in Hispanic and Native American culture.” Richardson, former Secretary of Energy and UN Ambassador, replied: ”I was personally offended by the “statue” and I support the archbishop for intervening in this situation.”