Information School
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Capstone

The Archives are the Story: Processing and Cataloging the Self–Help Graphics and Art Founder Archives

Danielle Galván Gomez

Master in Library and Information Science Candidate

Work conducted January – May 2024

The People
Introduction to the student and sponsor

Danielle Galván Gomez

MLIS candidate,
University of Washington

Lulu Urdiales

Associate Registrar
Self-Help Graphics and Art
MLIS, San José State
University

Danielle worked independently as an archivist conducting an item-level processing and cataloging of objects in two sub-collections of the Self-Help Graphics and Art Ephemera collection. This consisted of original artworks, such as serigraphs and other prints, created by the organization's founders before and in the early days of the organization's founding. In addition, she researched and wrote finding aids for the sub-collections. This project utilized skills developed in UW's MLIS program, such as research, knowledge organization, cataloging, data curation, metadata design, and archives care.

Lulu is the organization's archivist and registrar, and oversees objects in the permanent archival collection, prints for purchase, and artwork for exhibitions. She was responsible for overseeing the student's work, including allowing access to the collection and offering training on software and protocol data entry, as well as reviewing and approving finding aids and final deliverables.

Project Background

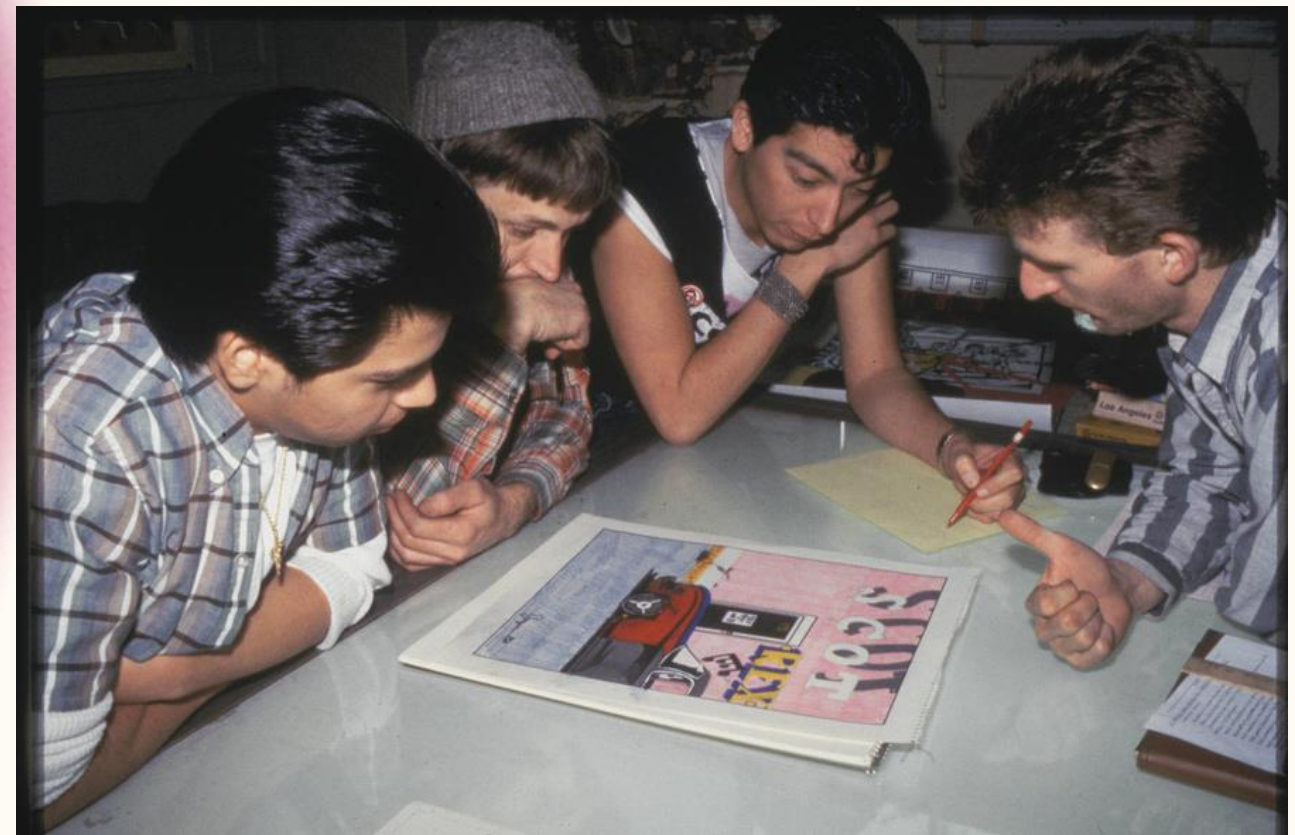## Introduction to the sponsor organization Self-Help Graphics and Art

Established in 1973 by artists Sister Karen Boccalero, Antonio Ibañez, Carlos Bueno, and others, Self Help Graphics and Art (SHG) is a significant and iconic cultural institution, community center, and printmaking studio in Los Angeles (specifically, the neighborhood of Boyle Heights). Its mission is to "foster the creation and advancement of new artworks by Chicana/o and Latinx artists through experimental and innovative printmaking techniques and other visual art forms." Throughout its 51-year history, SHG has nurtured and served as a cultural base for many important Chicanx and/or Latinx artists, especially through keystone community centered programs such as its Professional Printmaking Program, community artmaking workshops, Barrio Mobile Art program, and annual Día de los Muertos community altar event.

Top image is the historic location of Self-Help Graphics and Art and the bottom image is the current location. All image credit to SHG.

There are three collections within the Self-Help Graphics and Art archive that need processing and cataloging/metadata creation (culminating in a finding aid) in order to become searchable and accessible to their community, including staff and artists. In total, the unprocessed collection is approximately 170 cubic feet of two-dimensional artwork and ephemera stored in flat files off-site in Montebello, California. The project ended up processing two sub-collections consisting of 315 objects from the Institutional Ephemera Collection, which consisted of two portfolios of original artwork by the organization's founders, Sister Karen Boccalero as well as Antonio Ibañez and Carlos Bueno.

Many of the artworks in the collection are some of the few surviving early works of the founders and date back to the organization's founding, when the three artists met and began creating prints together in a garage. The artworks in the collection evidence the evolution of their own personal style and ideas, their relationships to their contemporaries, as well as the early years of the Chicano Arts Movement in Los Angeles.

Image on top is a historic photo of artists working at Self-Help Graphics and Art and lower image is a contemporary photo. All image credit to SHG.

Last year marked Self Help Graphics and Art's 50th year of operations. This project comes at a critical time in the institution's history and will process and make accessible half a century of archives and collections documenting the histories of people of color, specifically Chicanx/Latinx artists, in Boyle Heights, a historically working class and Latinx East Los Angeles neighborhood that is rapidly gentrifying. Archives and art are important tools for defying erasure, displacement, and cultural appropriation of people of color because they document cultural contributions and the collective memories of entire communities. The mere existence of archives exerts our right to exist and tell the stories of our histories in our own words. This project will help preserve and make accessible invaluable community and artist archives in a culturally significant organization and neighborhood of Los Angeles at a critical time in the organization's legacy (50 years anniversary) and in the neighborhood's history (facing rapid change due to gentrification and displacement).

Image on top is a historic photo of artists working at Self-Help Graphics and Art and lower image is a contemporary photo. All image credit to SHG.

The Problem
The project's information context

Archival processing and accessibility are vital to preserving the histories and truth, especially for records documenting or created by people of color. The mere existence of archives exerts our right to exist and tell our stories in our own words. The historic and evidentiary value of this archival collection remained hidden in a drawer while unprocessed. If objects are not discoverable, they cannot be found, and histories remain hidden. In this case, records directly related to the origins of the Chicano Arts Movement and the founders of a significant Chicano arts organization, Self Help Graphics and Art.

Methodological Challenges

- Very little research or writing exists about these collections.
- The exact provenance as well as some dates and artwork titles, and other vital information was either lost or never recorded.
- Due to these gaps, it was necessary to conduct interviews with a few key individuals who knew the collection's subjects or had studied their histories in order to create a finding aid.
- Three interviews were conducted and embedded with citations in the notes for each finding aid.

Practical Concerns

- Many of the archives date back to the 1960s and 1970s and were extremely fragile, handling them at all during processing posed a risk to their longevity and conservation.
- The short time frame of the capstone (5 months) caused the project to be re-scoped to two, rather than three, sub-collections.
- The archive were located off-site in a temporary space where construction was taking place, which limited access.

The Project
Objectives & Deliverables

Objective	• Create Item-level metadata and records for objects of unprocessed historic collections.
Deliverable	• Processed and cataloged 315 archival objects spanning two collections in a spreadsheet.
Objective	• Assess object conditions and rehouse items in conservation grade materials.
Deliverable	• Condition reported and rehoused all objects in individual sleeves for preservation.
Objective	• Prepare a finding aid for collections within the archive to optimize search & research.
Deliverable	• Researched and wrote two comprehensive finding aids on the collections processed.

The Process

Step by step how the work was done

The Self-Help Graphics and Art Ephemera Collection

Sub-Collection 1:
The Sister Karen Portfolio

170 unique objects, majority original artwork.

Overall, very good condition with some high risk items

- The archives were unorganized and unprocessed in large bags.
- Each object was assigned a unique accession number, processed with metadata such as title, date, artist, dimensions, object type, inscriptions, edition, and condition information with notes and tags.
- Each object was then rehoused in an individual archival sleeve, labeled by accession number, and carefully returned to the drawer.
- Researched and conducted three interviews for an individual finding aid per sub-collection.

Sub-Collection 2:
The Antonio Ibañez and Carlos Bueno Portfolio

145 unique objects, all original artworks.

Overall, in excellent condition with very few high risk items
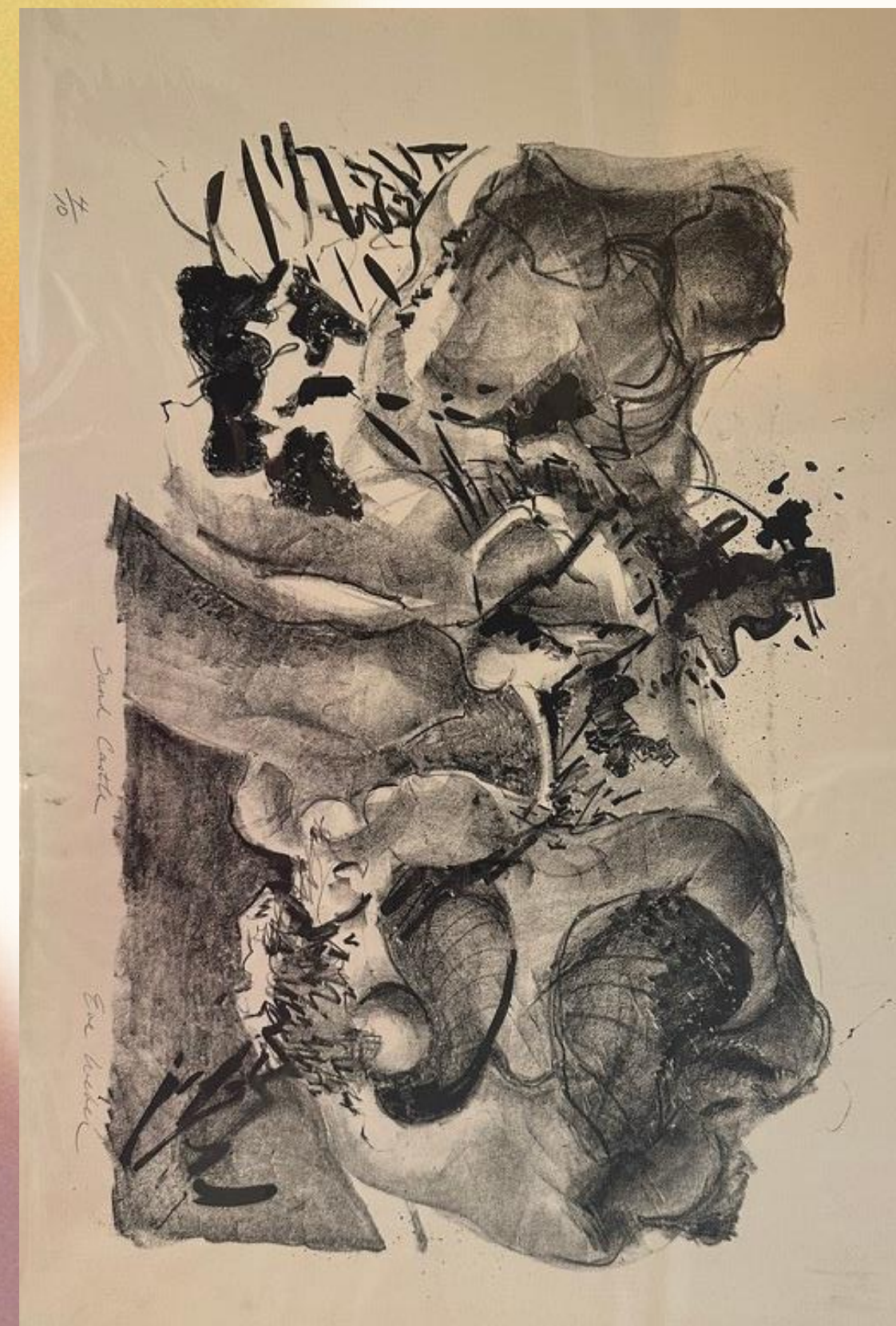
Images documenting the capstone process
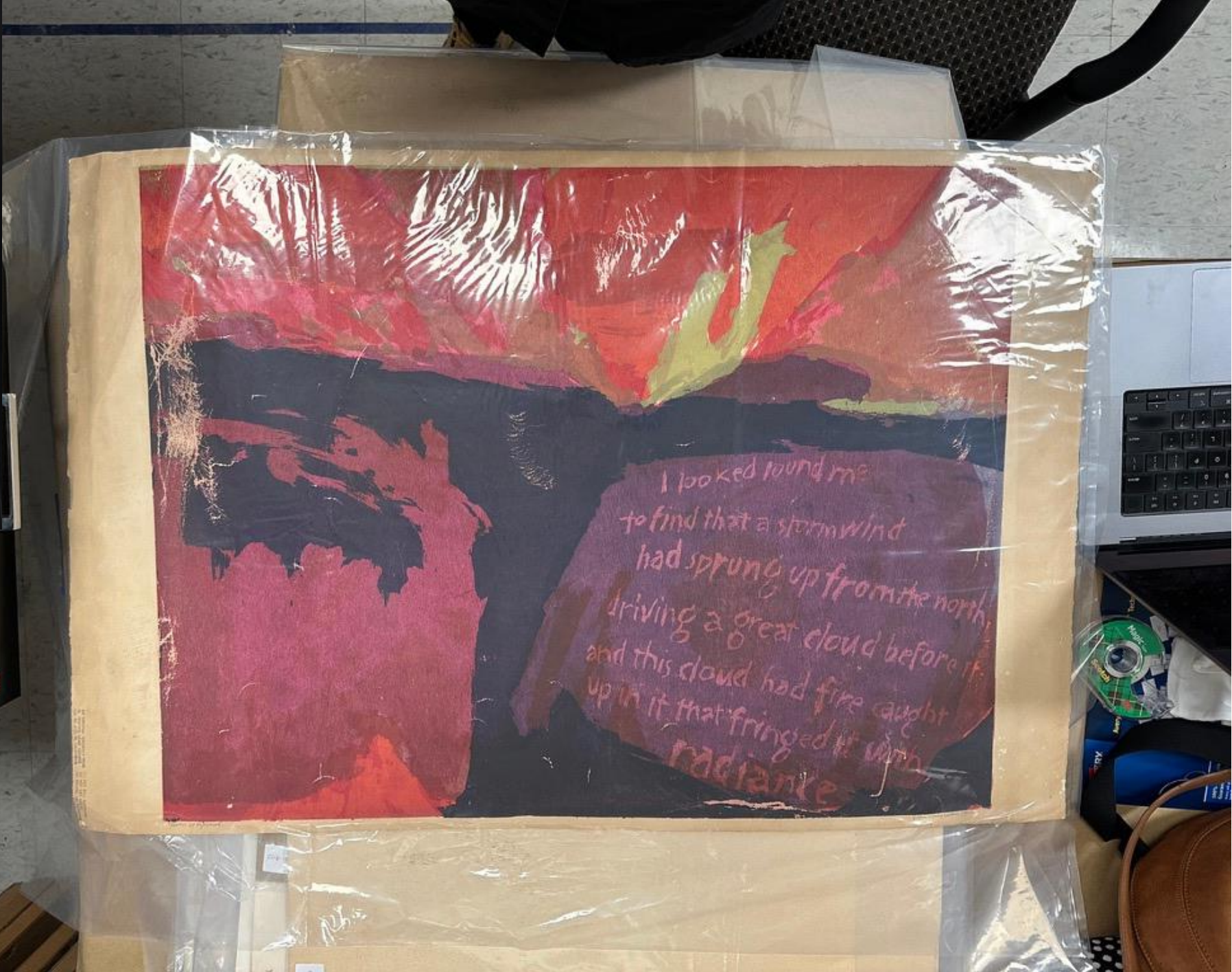
Images documenting the capstone process

S. Karen Boccalero '69

SHG-EPH-KB-1970-12

Self Help Graphics & Art Inc.
2111 Brooklyn Ave., Suite 3
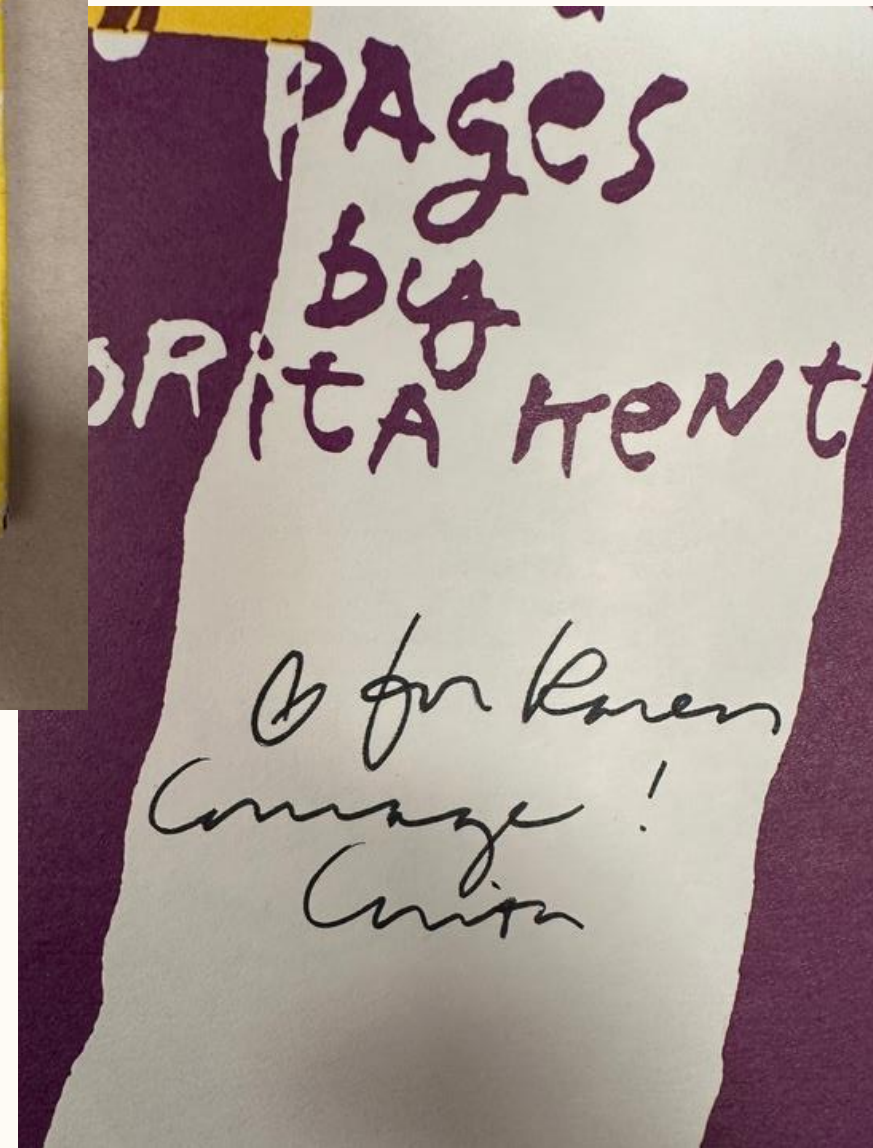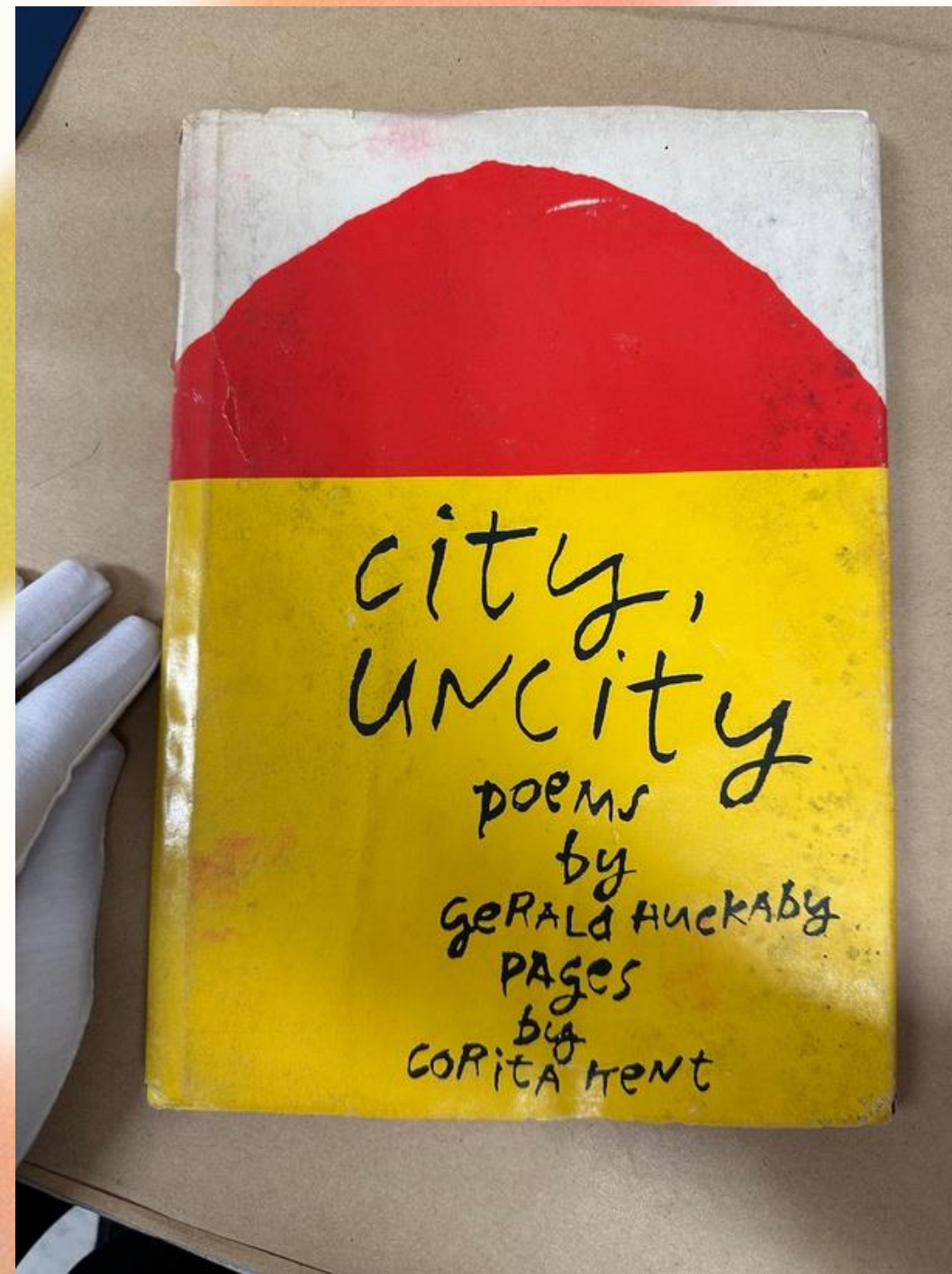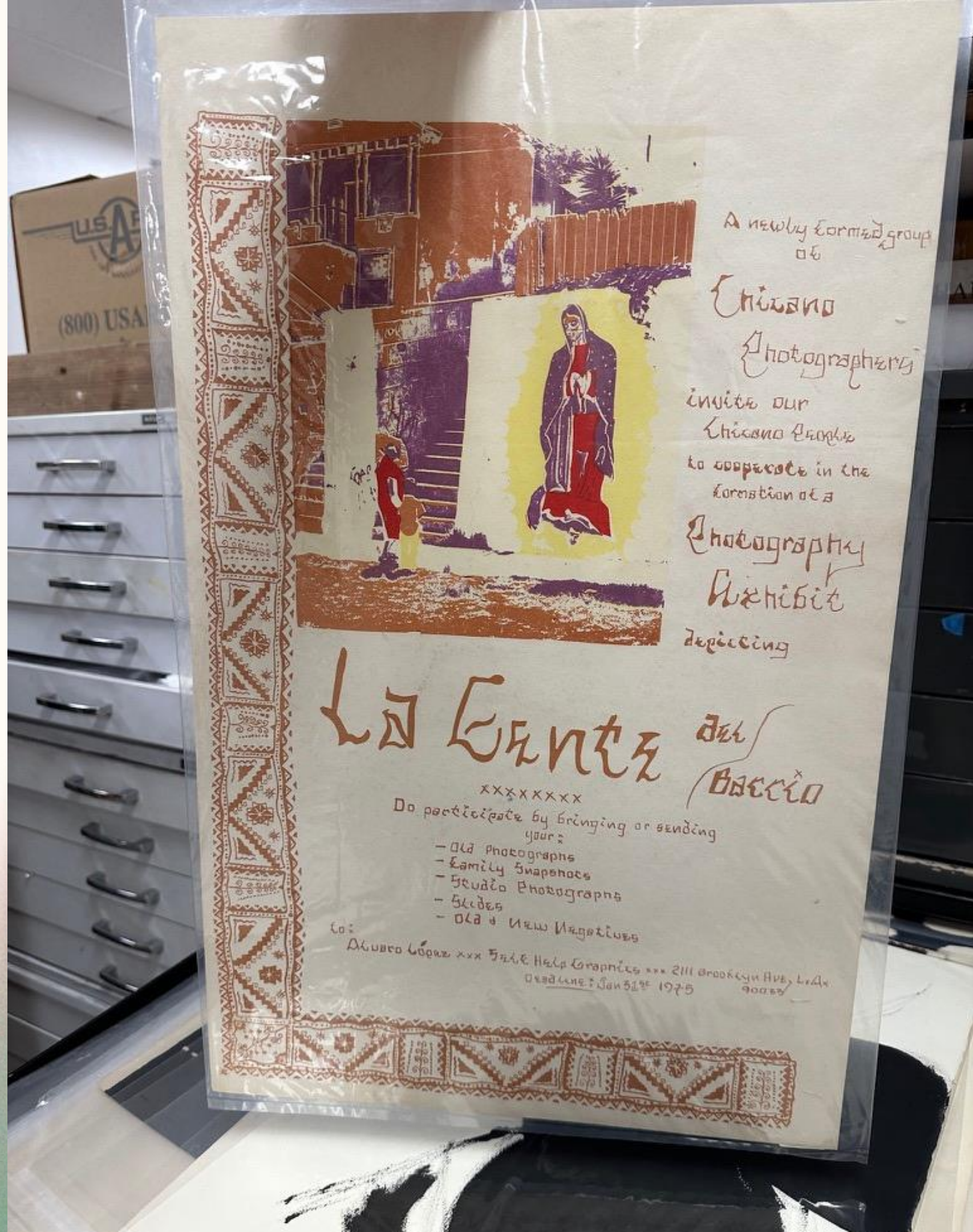Los Angeles, Calif. 90033
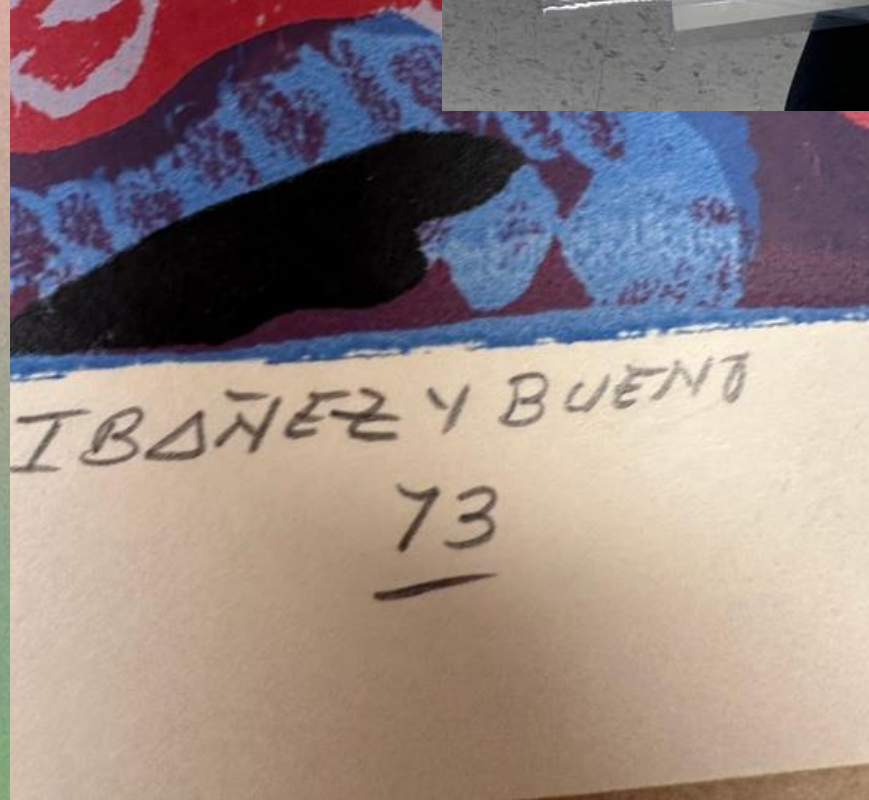Phone; 264-1259

Images documenting the capstone process

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The Product
Key Project Insights and Lessons Learned

315 item-level archival records

- The descriptive metadata for this project will be used to create object records in organization's database.

- This will facilitate findability and user access for the collection, which will enable future research and writing.

- The collection processing led to archival discoveries such as evidentiary proof that Sister Karen and Sister Corita were friends and artistic colleagues, as well as the origins of the Chicano Art Movement and Self-Help Graphics and Art.

2 finding aids

- The project culminated in two researched finding aids that incorporated community memories and insights about the collection's subjects.

- Including community voices as sources reflects the spirit and work of an organization that is "for us, by us" and validates communal practices of storytelling and recording history.

Item condition

- Condition reporting and rehousing objects can put fragile and irreplaceable archives at risk, especially due to handling.

- In this case, condition reporting allows the archive to treat damaged objects and craft conservation policies for their use.

- Over time, this effort will better care for and ensure the longevity of the archives.

Next Steps

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Documenting and digitizing the collection

- Since each object has been cataloged, given a unique accession number, and labeled, future photography can easily identify and document the artworks and connect easily to the object's digital record.

Batch uploading the record metadata

- The organization can use the spreadsheet with item level metadata to batch upload and create archival records for each object in their CMS, Salesforce.

Make the finding aids accessible

- The organization may consider uploading the finding aids to Archives Space, the Online Archive of California, or their website for findability by researchers and the public.

Keep the momentum going

- Following the capstone's methods and templates, the organization can process the next sub-collection, focused on Day of the Dead.
- The organization can create a finding aid when finished.

Q&A

Thank you!

Special thank you to my friends, family, and capstone team for your help and support; Ishita Chordia for your immense assistance and encouragement as my TA; Lulu Uridales for your guidance and mentorship; the team at Self-Help Graphics and Art for welcoming me into your space; and to Tomás Benitez, Pat Gomez, and JV Decemvirale for sharing your insights, time, and memories with me as I researched this project.

If you have any questions or comments, you can contact me at **dgalvang@uw.edu** or **dgalvangomez@gmail.com**

To learn more about the organization, visit: **https://www.selfhelpgraphics.com/**