

A Jaded "Find" in Big Sur
Somos en escrito The Latino Literary Online Journal-Magazine
Follow us on Twitter @Somosenescrito
<http://www.somosenescrito.com/>

Published May 20, 2017



Painting by Chicana artist Alejandra Oseguera

Chicano Sociological Imagination: A Case Study in the Sociology of Knowledge

A Chicano friend of mine named “Memo” lives in South Sur (South of Big Sur, Califas) and is a career mineralogist, just like his father, and his grandfather just the same. I like to say that Memo is truly a “stone-cold Chicano.” He lives in a valley about 10 acres from Bill Nye “the science guy” to the south and 10 acres to the north of the only person ever to be awarded two Nobel Prizes, and where vitamin C guru Linus Pauling once lived.

Memo's father and Pauling use to drink orange juice all day and ponder whether all of humanity was a made-up simulation by a society 100 million years more advanced than we are today. You have to admit it is an interesting idea.

Memo used to say "Aztlán may in fact be a simulation, a giant experiment," and draw conclusions such as, that the appearance of La Virgen was an experiment the advanced civilization would conduct on humanity, especially Chicanos. Memo reflected a bit on the fact that it was a 100 years ago in 1917 that La Virgen made two appearances to three 3 young boys. He heard Linus Pauling once say, "The advanced civilization is most likely Chicanos!"

I got an email from Memo inviting me to view (witness) his "find." So I hopped into my VW Vanagon and drove down through Big Sur, the most picturesque coastline in the world, past the Brazil Ranch where Dr. Dre got married, past Nepenthe where the Chicana Rita Hayworth lived with Orson Wells, and past the cliff-house where the Chicana Joan Baez lives today and once lived with Bobby Dillon. Oh and I spotted half a dozen Latina looking mermaids waving to me along the way near Bixby Bridge.

When I pulled up to the house I immediately smelled patchouli incense mixed with marijuana and the smell of rocks. The smell took me way back to my rock-in-roll days, free love, rock festivals. My sense of smell is keen and patchouli oil has an aromatherapeutic effect on me, just talking about it sends me to another dimension. Patchouli grows freely next to the Buckwheat in the area between Big Sur and South Sur. Both plants are not indigenous to the region so that really pisses-off the locals, but the patchouli seeks refuge in the Buckwheat and the Buckwheat is found to hold up the cliffs and keep Aztlán from sliding into the Pacific Ocean; we did have a helluva cliff slide in the summer of 2017.

Memo's home is made of several sections of walls and ceilings of glass pane windows, including lead panes from yesteryear, much like you find in old green houses, but it is not a greenhouse at all; it is his home and a storage place for thousands, if not millions of rocks. As I searched for Memo I came across his partner, Tinko, a transplant Chicana from East Los Angeles via San Simeon, who was milling around in boxes of small rocks. Needless to say, she didn't look up, she acted preoccupied, much like when you visit your physician and he doesn't seem to be present.

She was squatting down wearing cut-off blue jeans (Daisy Duke's style), stuffing small pieces of rocks in her pockets that protruded beyond the cut of her shorts, odd, but peculiarly interesting. After several minutes she looked up and for some reason I was amused at how alive she looked, very tan and a little stoned, and smelling of patchouli oil.

She offered me a large glass of orange juice, figures. When I took a sip I tasted vodka, she noticed. "Good, isn't it?" The orange juice was homemade from orange

trees located not too far away on the grounds of Hearst Castle (San Simeon) where her father had worked as the grounds keeper for over 40 years. It was, to say the least, a welcome offer given that I had just driven several miles down the coast to meet them and besides it was very much breakfast like.

With an absolutely sobering grin, she looked up at me and said, “I guess you are here to look at the ‘find’?” and I said with great eagerness, “Yes, I want to check it out.”

Now that I think about it, I was invited by a stone-cold mineralogist to check out the great “find” and I had no idea what I was about to witness. I had to think about what it might be because the last time I visited him to see another great “find,” it was a Big Sur wild boar, the size of a Shetland pony with tusks large enough to gore you like a bull that we down-sized and turned into menudo with patitas and BBQ ribs. So I wasn’t assuming the “find” was going to have anything to do with rocks.

With my glass of orange juice and vodka in hand I followed Tinko through a maze of weathered wooden containers; they were everywhere both large and small. I observed an old picture of Che Guevara as a baby with his mother, a poster with the United Farm Worker’s symbol with the words “Chicano Batman” above it, and a painting of Cesar Chavez that looked original.

I was struck by the openness of the space, how the sun seemed more heated radiating through the glass and what appeared to be an absence of doors that locked. Fact is, in several entrances to the house there were no doors, just hanging beads, yet every door had a crucifix above it (as if that were enough security) and there were pictures of a brown-looking Jesus, everywhere. I could hear voices off in the distance; little did I know that we had just walked by the “find” on the other side of the glass wall.

It was Memo and much to my surprise his father, Memo, Sr. Hijole! I thought Memo’s father must be over one hundred years of age; he was. Memo, Sr., attributed his good health to Vitamin C and tequila not vodka. I thought I was going to be able to talk to him about his friendship with Linus Pauling, but the old guy seemed to be searching for a particular rock and didn’t want to talk.

Let me make myself clear. Memo, his father and Tinko were all preoccupied much like people on their iPhones. And as if out of nowhere, Tinko came from behind with more ice cold orange juice and vodka she retrieved from an outdoor refrigerator holding hundreds of pounds of rocks in plastic bags. I was growing content, I had an early morning buzz, I could smell the ocean, I was surrounded by rocks that seemed to exude a sort of wisdom and I could feel myself absorbing the wisdom.

Even beyond the patchouli, I could smell the rocks and some were speaking to me. “Over hear, check this out,” Memo said, as he took another hit of his joint,

squinting his eyes and pointing with the joint to a brand new impressive looking trailer with double shock absorbers and truck tires. I had never seen anything like it; quite impressive indeed.

I thought he was going to say that he was going to convert the trailer into a low-rider; instead he said, “Check it out, it’s a piece of jade the size of a Volkswagen Beetle!” And sure enough there it was, arguably the largest single piece of jade ever discovered, at least that’s what Memo told me, and of course he would know.



“The Find”

The jade rock sitting on the back bumper of my SUV in two sections, each section is about 1.5 inches thick and weighs about 250 pounds.

The green jade was strapped down with chains crisscrossed in several directions in a rather unprofessional manner. I point this out because it looked as though anyone could come by and pick it off the trailer. For some reason I thought it was a reasonable facsimile of the old-school Chicano actor Anthony Quinn when he played the Hunchback of Notre Dame (a la Victor Hugo), you know, Quasimodo and his king-sized hump.

And just like Quasimodo, Memo was somewhat of a recluse. Like Quasimodo who rarely left the Cathedral, Memo almost never left his rock cathedral. Fact is, several of the room additions his father designed were made with rocks he gathered

from across Highway 1, much like the Big Sur poet Robinson Jeffers had done when he built his stone castle in Carmel.

Years ago, one of the room additions made of stone had fallen into disrepair and Memo's father called in Tinko's father with his crew to conduct the repairs; that's how Memo and Tinko met. As descendants from the Esselen Indians of Big Sur, Tinko and Memo have a powerful spiritual connection with the region that was once their "homeland," known today as Esalen (750 square miles of the Ventana Wilderness located in Big Sur), which means "the rock" a term derived from the phrase *Xue elo xonia eune*—I come from the rock.

Both Memo and Tinko relate to their mestizo past (mixed *indios*) and to Aztlan as a massive rock connected throughout the American Southwest, home to Chicano/as. Like Tinko, many modern-day Esselens also see themselves as Chicanos/as; we've had common struggles, viewed by gabachos as dogs or animals on all fours for decades. Jeffers in his capacity as a renowned Big Sur poet often reflected on the plight of Esselen Indians, saying:

*"Look we also were human; we had hands, not paws. All hail
You people with cleverer hands, our supplanters
In the beautiful country: enjoy her a season, her beauty, and come down
And be supplanted; for you also are human."*

—Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962)

It occurred to me that if someone were to steal this giant green rock, the "Jolly Green giant," they wouldn't pick it up—they would simply attach the trailer and drive off; is that barrio thinking or what? To be sure the trailer was out of site behind a flimsy old wooden fence you could kick over with the slightest of ease. On the one hand Memo seemed to think the "Jolly Green giant" was secure, but on the other hand the reality was that much like his house, there didn't seem to be any security beyond the many crucifixes protecting the giant rock, the trailer, or anything. I became even more concerned when Memo told me that he and his father estimated the rock to be worth in excess of one million dollars, oy vey!

Again, Tinko appears without notice filling my glass but this time she stands directly in front of me, so close I could see bits of green tea leaves in her teeth and smell her breadth that hinted of cow, when Memo blurts out, "I want for you to have the first slice of this precious piece of Aztlan. It is a cultural legacy of our peoples, a natural moniker of a sort sent to me by Diosito and I plan to share it with those I know will cherish it. A much larger piece I will donate to my friend Hector to design fine jewelry and use the proceeds to fund the new *Cheech Marin Museum of Chicano Art* currently going up in Riverside.

Memo describes the rock as “*Chicano Arte de Dios.*” When Tinko first set eyes on the slice, she said it looked like a Mexican folkloric skirt, because of the colors, wavy line patterns and shapes. She also saw it as “rock art,” yet she is reminded us that Esselen Indians have no word for art.

Everything they did was art. Memo says, “To observe Mother Nature in this way sparks fire in my heart and stirs up good juju in my soul that gets me to see my own light. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. The layers and depths and colors that are formed are demonstrative of our peoples through heat, pressure, and time, brings calmness to me for this is Aztlan!”

The interconnectedness found in Memo and Tinko’s relationship is founded in our Chicanismo, that is, to live a long and happy life one must have a good relationship in both the physical and spiritual world. In this way, Memo believes that each slice of the rock will hold a piece of the truth about Aztlan.

Dr. Armando Arias, a dedicated contributor to *Somos en escrito* journal-magazine who writes under the general rubric of *historias verdaderas mentiras auténticas—true stories and authentic lies*. He has found this the most effective manner to convey his stories. Copyright © Arts and Sciences World Press, 2017.