ADAN AVALOS

:: ARTIST STATEMENT

My early memories of art took place in the agricultural fields of California’s central valley. As the tenth child of a Mexican migrant family, I grew up following the harvests. I learned the power of humble materials from my mother, sisters and other migrant camp women. Women in these communities made quilts out of “throw away” materials like cotton and burlap feed sacks. The quilts were not art but an everyday necessity; while visually stunning, these objects were primarily practical.

Many of these women also crotched and knitted small carpets, or “doilies,” that could be made three-dimensional by drenching them with a solution of flour or sugar and then molding the doilies over an item such as a vase. As the solution dried, the doily took the shape of the object. These homemade crocheted pieces formed a familiar display around our temporary homes: they were both decorative and easy to transport. Before each move, the crocheted objects would be softened with water then tucked away with the rest of the belongings, only to be re-cast and displayed in a new home.

Like the vases of my childhood, my 1961 Ford Falcon Ranchero sculpture uses only burlap and sugar. I derive my practice from my female relatives but the subject matter reflects more traditionally masculine interests: car culture. I chose the Ranchero because it reflects hybridity: it is neither car nor truck, but a bit of both. The Falcon was originally marketed to suburban American families and became an icon of American affluence. Latinos were unable attain this emblem of luxury until many years after other Americans had abandoned it. The Ford, an “all American” symbol, was perceived by Latinos as an entry into a better life. Even if we could not escape the realities of “invisible existence,” Latinos could symbolically own a piece of the “American dream.” For many of us, the car became a source of pride, providing an opportunity to improve both the operation and appearance of a vehicle.

The red burlap car sculpture, modeled after a 1963 Ford Galaxy, refers to the pivotal 1976 film La banda del carro rojo (The Red Car Gang). Using my mother’s method, I pieced recycled burlap to form this work. I used “third world” Latin American coffee sacks that I dyed using beets, chili peppers and then applied the sugar solution to make it three-dimensional. This work also refers to the unseen or “invisible” labor that is responsible for the production of the products that once filled these sacks.