

## For more information

If you have any questions or want to find out more about the exhibition, please ask our friendly Gallery Assistants. They're here to help!

Drop in to our free Spot Tours of the exhibitions every day, Tue – Fri, led by our Gallery Assistants, or join us on Wednesdays at 1pm for a Walkthrough led by guests that offer different routes into the exhibitions.

Please ask at Reception, or visit our website for more information. [www.nottinghamcontemporary.org](http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org)



NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY

Logo by Ben Cain

## Asco No Movies

### Galleries 1 & 2

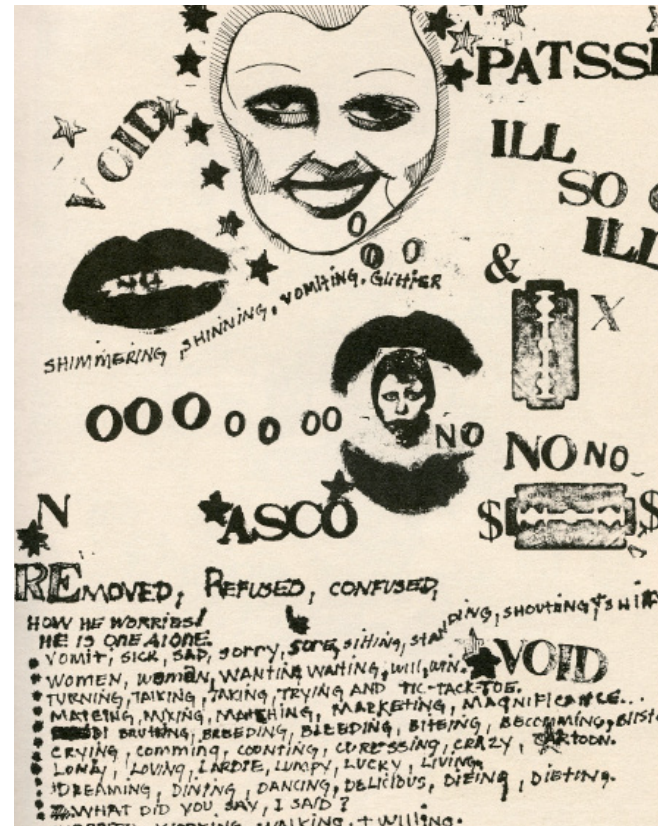
Harry Gamboa Jr. Patssi Valdez, Gronk and Willie F. Herrón III grew up in the large Mexican American, or Chicano, community of East Los Angeles. They formed their artist collective Asco in the early 70s.

At that time many of their peers were dying in the Vietnam War, or returning home seriously injured. Influenced by the counter-culture movement that sprang up in the wake of the Vietnam War, their artworks were actions staged in the streets of East LA - without warning or official permission.

Performance, film and photography drew attention to their experience as young Chicanos, excluded from the social and political mainstream. As well as political protest, they subverted the traditional Mexican Muralist movement, bringing murals to life and taking them on to the streets.

Asco had little money to make their art. They made costumes and props from cheap, readily available materials, like cardboard and paper, which required experimentation and ingenuity. They developed an “aesthetics of poverty,” as Gronk called it.

In 1971 Harry Gamboa Jr. became the editor of the second volume of *Regeneración*, a political and cultural journal for the Chicano community. Asco first worked together making artwork for the magazine. Their dark and subversive pen and ink drawings had little relation to the articles printed alongside them, suggesting instead claustrophobia, frustration and anger.



Regeneración 2, no. 4, 1974 – 75, p.31, drawing by Patssi Valdez. Courtesy of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) Library



Birds Waving Goodbye, © 1972, Harry Gamboa Jr.

In *Stations of the Cross*, 1971, performed on Christmas Eve, Asco processed down Whittier Boulevard carrying a large cardboard cross that they used to block the entrance to the US Marine Corps recruitment centre. Their macabre pilgrim outfits drew on the imagery found in traditional Chicano murals. The Vietnam War had a disproportionate impact on young, poor black and Hispanic communities, as many professions and college students were exempted from the draft. *Stations of the Cross* temporarily prevented people from Asco's own area from enlisting.



Spray Paint LACMA © 1972, Harry Gamboa Jr.

Asco were driven by alienation, both from mainstream American culture, and from the conservative Chicano community and its cultural traditions. *Spray Paint LACMA* (East Bridge), 1972 – also known as *Project Pie in De/Face* – took place after an Asco member challenged staff at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art about the lack of Chicano art there and received a dismissive reply. Asco returned at night and spray painted their names across a footbridge, transforming the building into their work of art. They photographed Patssi Valdez posing there the next morning. The museum quickly whitewashed the wall, erasing their signatures, and ending the momentary art world visibility that their action gave them and Chicano art.



Photograph taken during the filming of Agnès Varda's *Mur Murs* (1981), featuring Asco's Death of Fashion performance. Photo © Harry Gamboa Jr.

Asco's *No Movies* were made as a reaction against Hollywood's dominance, both of Los Angeles, and of mainstream culture. Chicano actors rarely featured in Hollywood films. Asco created starring roles for themselves in stills from imaginary movies, parodying big-budget glamour in their costumes and make up. They devised a spoof awards ceremony, with a spray painted gold cobra as the prize. Images were posted to individuals and organisations, stamped with *No Movie*, or *Chicano Cinema/Asco* in red ink.



Asco, *First Supper (After A Major Riot)* © 1974, Harry Gamboa Jr.

Violence and civil unrest in East LA inspired a number of Asco's street performances. *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, 1974, was staged four years after the Chicano Moratorium Committee organized an anti-Vietnam rally that ended with police brutality. Curfews were instigated and public gatherings forbidden. Patssi Valdez, Gronk, Harry Gamboa Jr. Willie F. Herrón III and Humberto Sandoval ate their meal on a traffic island, surrounded by props including a giant baby Jesus. The event took place on Whittier Boulevard, a main road through East LA, where police had opened fire on the crowd four years before. Asco recall passing cars honking their support.





Asco, Decoy Gang War Victim © 1974, Harry Gamboa Jr.



Asco, Asshole Mural © 1975 Harry Gamboa Jr.

Other artworks commented on gang violence in East LA neighbourhoods. Decoy Gang War Victim, 1975, apparently shows a crime scene with an Asco member dead in the road. The image was sent to local media with a statement proclaiming that the last gang member had been killed. Two television stations screened the report. Asco's artwork was a response to the constant, provocative reporting of gang violence in LA. In their view, this perpetuated and incited further violence, as well as providing the media with a supply of sensationalist headlines.

Asco's artworks move between fashion, rock, gangster and Hollywood imagery. Although they were only briefly staged, photographs of their actions by Harry Gamboa Jr were then posted to friends, press contacts, and art and cinema professionals. Working outside the gallery and museum system, Asco experimented with different ways of occupying public space and disseminating their work. In Asshole Mural, 1975, Asco's four core members pose next to the opening of a large concrete drainpipe on a rocky LA hillside, dressed as film stars or dandyish businessman. Asco again combine glamour and disgust, fiction and reality, in a single memorable image.



ASCO © 1975 Harry Gamboa Jr.

*Asco: No Movies is a collaboration with de Appel arts centre in Amsterdam and CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art in Bordeaux and was curated by Irene Aristizábal and Alex Farquharson. The exhibition builds on the precedent of Asco: Elite of the Obscure, which was co-organised by Rita Gonzalez and C. Ondine Chavoya on behalf of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Williams College Museum of Art.*