

Images of the Fields

■ CSUN exhibits of photos and posters chronicle the farm workers' movement.

By NANCY KAPITANOFF
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

NORTHRIDGE—On a bus returning from the funeral of United Farm Workers leader Cesar Chavez in April, 1993, R. Kent Kirkton and Jorge Garcia heard a lot of discussion suggesting that Chavez's death was the end of an era, an end to the farm workers' movement.

For it was Chavez, a field worker in the 1940s who began participating in workers' strikes then, who had served as the guiding force behind farm workers' struggles in the 1960s to organize and obtain decent wages and living and working conditions.

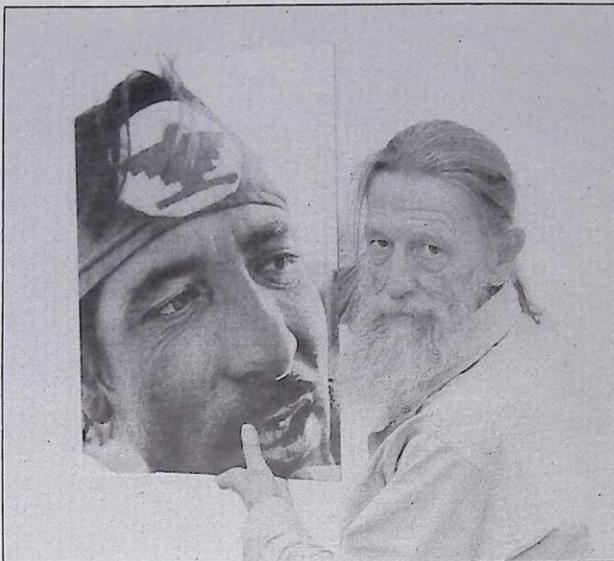
"But we were thinking, maybe it's a transition rather than an end," said Kirkton, a Cal State Northridge journalism professor associated with the campus' Center for Photojournalism and Visual History.

He and Garcia, dean of CSUN's School of Humanities, decided then to do what they could to keep things going. They contacted Carol Wells, director of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, to find out if the center held any pertinent graphics.

An educational and research archive in Los Angeles, it collects, preserves, documents and circulates domestic and international political poster art. As it happened, the center had a somewhat meager collection but was able to locate many more images around the country. Soon after, Kirkton and Garcia got together with others on campus to plan several exhibitions.

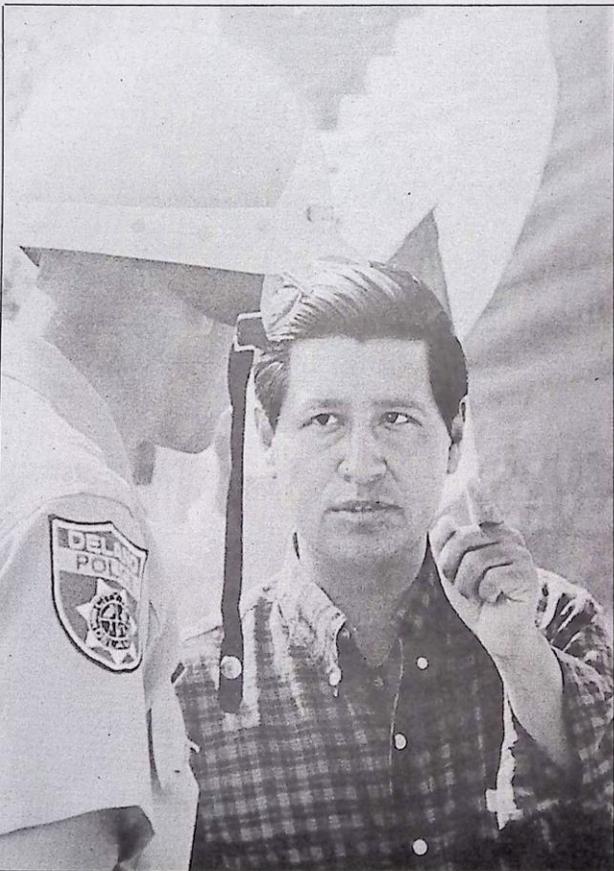
The result of their two-year effort is "La Lucha Continual" (The Struggle Continues), three exhibits on view at CSUN. "Farm Workers of the American Labor Movement: An Exhibition of Historical Documents and Photographs" is displayed in the Oviatt Library. In the campus' new temporary art gallery, the Art Dome, located on the Music Lawn, "¡Viva la Huelga!" (Long Live the Strike) celebrates the graphic heritage and legacies of the United Farm Workers movement with more than 100 posters from the graphics center's collection.

Also in the dome is "Dream What We Can Become and Rejoice," a show of photographs by George Elfie Ballis documenting the farm workers' struggles to form the UFW AFL-CIO union. The imag-



BORIS YARO / Los Angeles Times

Photographer George Elfie Ballis holds photo of farm worker Jorge Zaragosa taken in 1966. A Ballis photo shows a young Cesar Chavez talking to a Delano police officer.



Where and When

What: "¡Viva la Huelga!" and "Dream What We Can Become and Rejoice."

Location: CSUN Art Dome, Music Lawn 236, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge.

Hours: Noon to 4 p.m. Monday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday to Friday. Guided tours of "Dream" will be led by photographer George Elfie Ballis at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m. March 28 and 29. Shows end April 7.
Call: (818) 885-2226.

What: "Farm Workers of the American Labor Movement: An Exhibition of Historical Documents and Photographs."

Location: Oviatt Library lobby, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge.

Hours: 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday.
Call: (818) 717-4199.

es span the years 1959 to 1975. In the 1960s, Ballis was a photographer and organizer with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi and California.

Ballis captured high points of the movement, including a 1966 march from Delano to Sacramento led by Chavez, and other strike efforts and confrontations with growers and police. He also made portraits of prideful individuals who took part in efforts to form the union as well as depicted the workers' squalid living conditions.

"Dorothea Lange took those same pictures in the 1930s," Ballis said. "A couple of years ago the Fresno Bee took the same pictures. The compositions are the same. The only difference is the cars."

"We have a right and a duty to throw off oppression. Cesar used to say (to workers), 'It's your fault because you let them do that to you,'" Ballis recalled. He then pointed to a farm worker's picket sign in a photo that reads, "Let us improve ourselves."

"That's the issue," he said. "My message is, 'We're all the same. We're going to create a society that has some justice and meaning.'"

And that has been the goal of the graphic artists who designed the posters included in "¡Viva la Huelga!" Posters concerning the farm workers movement date back to the 1969 "Don't Eat Grapes." One of the most current graphics addresses Proposition 187 in last year's election, which would deny public services such as education and health care to undocumented workers.

When Kirkton and Garcia first discussed the idea of a political graphics show with Wells, and she found that the center had only a handful of farm worker posters in its archives, she networked until material began coming in from California and from as far off as North Carolina.

"People had literally kept these posters under their beds for 20 years," Wells said. "They knew they were important and wanted to do something with them, but they didn't know what. We gave them the opportunity."

Nancy Kapitanoff writes regularly about art for *The Times*.