

CSUN exhibits go to roots of farm labor movement

By Lori Moody
Daily News Staff Writer

Artistic expression often has been used to inspire action, and the posters and photographs of the farm labor movement in California are a prime example.

They're the subject of two public exhibits at California State University, Northridge.

The exhibits in the Art Dome are part of "La Lucha Continua (The Struggle Continues)," a symposium sponsored by the Provoists' Committee on Chicano Labor History.

"Viva la Huelga!" is a collection of strike and boycott posters of the United Farm Workers, and "Dream What We Can Become and Rejoice" is a collection of photographs by George Elfie Ballis documenting the early years of the union. The exhibit kicked off with a reunion Tuesday of the original organizers of the National Farm Workers Association, forerunner of the UFW.

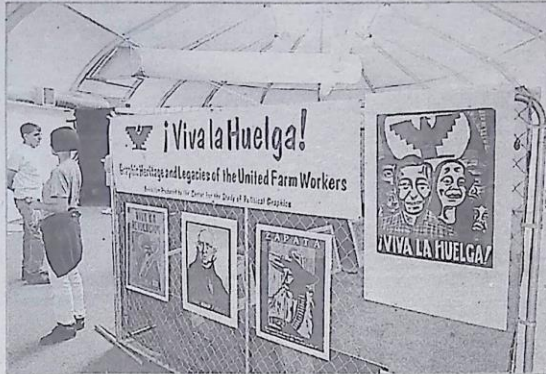
A public forum, "Lessons From the UFW: Organizing for the Future," is scheduled for 3 p.m. Friday in the auditorium of the Business Education complex. A reception and opening of farm labor movement historical documents will follow at 5 p.m. in the Oviatt Library.

A rally is scheduled for 3 p.m. Saturday, beginning west of the football field on the North Campus, followed by a symbolic march on the university's art gallery, where a reception is planned.

"I would guess the visual history of the farm workers movement is not that well-known," said R. Kent Kirkton, director of CSUN's Center for Photojournalism and Visual History.

"I think most viewers will be surprised by the number of pieces in the poster exhibit that were out there."

The idea came about when Kirkton and Jorge Garcia, CSUN dean of humanities, were



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returning from the funeral of Cesar Chavez, the migrant workers' champion who died in 1993.

"I think particularly young people may not know how harsh conditions were or are for farm workers, or how dangerous," Kirkton said. "I think yes, some people will be surprised. I think some people will learn a lot."

The poster exhibit ranges from before the farm labor movement, showing the "roots of resistance," to the 1990s and such subjects as the death of Chavez and Proposition 187. The exhibit also shows how other groups, including the Black Panthers, lent their support.

The posters offer a diversity of styles, from funky comic-booklike images to political satire to the lively, colorful tradition of Mexican folk art. Red is a prominent color, as is the eye-catching combination of red on black. Poster makers take advantage of the power of the hand, arm and eyes, said Louise Lewis, director of CSUN's Art Galleries.

"The whole intent in posters is the immediacy of the visual cue," she said.

Some of the posters are signed, but many weren't because the artists wanted to remain anonymous, letting the message speak for

THE FACTS

- **What:** "Viva la Huelga!" and "Dream What We Can Become and Rejoice."
- **Where:** CSUN, 18111 Nordhoff St., Art Dome, Music Lawn 236.
- **When:** Noon to 4 p.m. Monday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; through April 7.
- **How much:** Admission is free.
- **What else:** Parking is \$1.75 in student lots. Obtain permit from the information booths at Lindley Avenue and Nordhoff Street or Prairie and Darby streets.
- **Telephone:** (818) 885-2226.

itself, said Carol Wells, founder and director of the Los Angeles-based Center for the Study of Political Graphics, a nonprofit organization that provided the posters.

The center, which has 15,000 posters in its collection, began gathering the farm labor movement posters about 1 1/2 years ago, mostly by word of mouth. The signature piece of the show is a linoleum cut made by Carlos Cortez, a political artist in Chicago. It is being reproduced for sale at the exhibit.



Michael Owen Baker/Daily News

Carol Wells and George Elfie Ballis provided posters and photos, respectively, for a CSUN symposium on the farm labor movement.

The photographs on display were taken by Balli between 1959 and 1975, while he was editor of the Valley Labor Citizen, a weekly union newspaper in Fresno, and as a free-lance photographer. Most are images from the San Joaquin Valley.

"Clearly (they are) the work of someone who understood the movements of the period, the people in it, that people struggled for human rights and dignity," Kirkton said. "That shows through in his ability to focus attention on individuals. I think he had a good deal of respect for people and treated them as individuals, rather than icons."

Ballis' work is journalistic in nature, but "I think he was not obliged to produce images that

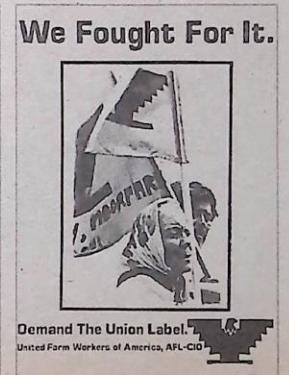
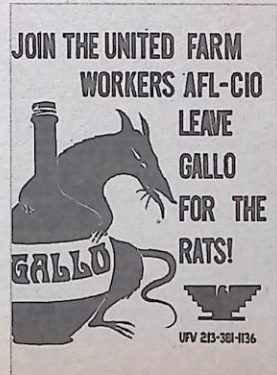
were not so dramatic; he could deal with aspects that were more subtle," Kirkton said.

Ballis, who appears to be a '60s throwback, and Maia, his wife of 23 years, are caretakers of Sun Mountain Medicine Ways, a nonprofit and research organization in Tollhouse, about 60 miles east of Fresno.

Ballis, 69, who as a photographer-organizer with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi and California, said his photographs were aimed at energizing the people to improve their lives.

"The great thing about the farm workers' movement was people found their dignity," he said.

"I knew these people. I worked with these people. I didn't just come in to take photographs."



"Viva la Huelga!" includes United Farm Workers posters, and "Dream What We Can Become and Rejoice" depicts the union's early years.