00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*
00:00:13	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. In 1975, this photography book came out called *Street Writers*. It had black and white photographs, mostly portraits, shot in and around the east side of Los Angeles. In *Street Writers*, you see a lot of young people—teenagers, children, young adults. They're sitting on bleachers, playing in the storm drain, jogging past the liquor store. All of this was shot by this young Italian photographer, Gusmano Cesaretti. And pretty much all of Cesaretti's photos have one thing in common: graffiti. On the walls of shops, on abandoned buildings, on the riverbank. Pretty much any blank canvas. And if when I say graffiti, you think of—you know, big, colorful bubble letters, this isn't that. It's sparse. The script is jagged and strange, but it's also neat and uniform—almost like ancient runes. Alongside the writing, you might see the occasional skull, but that's basically it. Back then, in LA, it was about writing—about telling the world these streets, this neighborhood, belongs to us. Cesaretti's photography in the book is arresting and dramatic. He's compassionate towards his subjects and honest about the circumstances in which they live. *Street Writers*, the book, has been out of print of a long time. If you're looking for an original copy, it could run you $700 online. But there's good news. *Street Writers: A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti* is again in print for the first time in decades. It's available now in a beautiful, expanded, hardcover edition. To commemorate the new book, I talked with Cesaretti, the photographer, and Chaz Bojórquez—a veteran street artist and one of the book's original subjects. Let's get into it.
00:02:15	Music	Transition	Cheerful, thumpy music.
00:02:20	Jesse	Host	Gusmano and Chaz, welcome to *Bullseye*! It's great to have you on the show. The book is totally incredible. *[They thank him.]* Chaz, I wanna start a little bit with your story. How deep does your family's roots go, in Los Angeles?
00:02:36	Chaz Bojórquez	Guest	You know, we—my mother kind of migrated here during the—during the Depression. You know, from Texas and all that, so she was like ten years old here in the '30s. But she went to local high schools. That's where she met my father, who was kind of visiting from Tijuana. So, my father's border culture. You know? So, that—we're talking about the '40s. And they kind of got married right after the war. So, I was born there in '49. So, we have a long history here. And you know, I call myself not really an Angelino, but this is my Atzlán. This is what my heart is.

			[Gusmano agrees.]
00:03:11	Jesse	Host	The ‘40s were obviously, or maybe not obviously to some of our listeners, a pretty tumultuous time for Latinos and especially Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. *[Chaz confirms.]* How did your parents think about themselves in that context?
00:03:26	Chaz	Guest	Well, my mother was at the movies downtown during the 1943 riots. She saw the sailors come in. The lights go on, the sailors came in. They got all the young Latino men and take them outside on Broadway and stripped them and burned their clothes. She experienced that—she told me that. I always knew that, as a child. And it was because they felt that the Latino culture wasn’t contributing enough, or they didn’t like their style. Because, you know, they were in zoot suits. Zoot suits was very maybe derogative at that time. It really came from Harlem. It was a Black thing, but it was also in Mexico. Famous actors down there—Tin-Tan used to wear the zoot suit. And then here in Los Angeles, the Filipinos started first, ‘cause they were the first organizers—you know, you understand, they were the first organizers out in the fields. Cesar Chavez followed them and all that. And so, my mother used to tell me, “Yeah, they used to wear zoot suits up to their armpits.” *[Jesse laughs.]* And then my uncle had a zoot suit and he said, “Yeah, we had Comer drapes.” He said, “Yeah, we paid $200 to have them tailored because they’re not off the rack.” You know, this is a time where people are making 50, $60 a week and all that. So, that was a big investment. So, my mother’s experience in all that and then my sense of roots here, I knew in some ways I was a son of Los Angeles. But also, I’m minority in Los Angeles. That’s changed since then.
00:05:00	Jesse	Host	Where in Los Angeles did you grow up?
00:05:03	Chaz	Guest	*[Chuckles.]* We just drove by. We were talking about it. I was born on *[stammers]* on Beaudry and Sunset, down in Chinatown. My—I have a twin brother. We were both raised there, in Chinatown, ‘til about five. And then we moved up the river. The Arroyo Seco River. Highland Park, Avenue 60. That’s where I made my home, since then. I’ve been there for over 60 years, 50 years—60 years. And went to local high schools and junior highs and all of that. That’s where I call my home.
00:05:33	Jesse	Host	When you were a kid, before you started writing, what did you see on walls around the neighborhood around you?
00:05:40	Chaz	Guest	*[Chuckles.]* I saw magic. I saw this stylized writing. To me, it was not only hieroglyphics in that it look like an ancient script—which I gave a lot of respect to—but also, I knew it was from my culture and I wanted to learn more about it, and I’d go, “Who are those people who are strong enough to put their identity out there with a spray can?” See, I was—I’m young enough—I know when the first spray can came into existence. And I saw letters from being paint brushed, spray canned. They got bigger, larger, the gangs started

			multiplying and all that. So, in some ways, that was the new social media.
00:06:18	Jesse	Host	I think people, when you describe graffiti—like, if they imagine anything, it might be that kind of like—those kind of neon green bubble letters that were in TV commercials in 1989. Or they might imagine the graffiti that they see around their neighborhood that might be, you know, little tags or things that are part of a kind of international graffiti aesthetic that grew out of those bubble letters. But the kind of graffiti that you're describing seeing as a kid looked very different. So, describe for the audience what it looked like.
00:06:56	Chaz	Guest	Graffiti was there, as a kid from the '40s, from—since the riots of '43. Latino communities in LA, kind of since united behind their baseball teams, became the gangs. White Fans, Clover, Avenues, those were just streets and neighborhoods. They started identifying their communities through the graffiti by marking out their territories that—those were the boundaries of their—of their—of their communities in the streets. There's a sense of like self-identity, not only to mark off their territories, but they were usually prestigious letters and doing the role calls. Everybody who was in the group had their name on the wall. Of course, one person who wrote it—the guy who had the best script—and it would be years later, working in movie advertising, I realized how the formatting was. Which I encountered when I was in Europe in Sumerian clay first writings—these little clay tablets. Basically, they were set up as headline, body, copy, logo. In advertising, I learned those terms, also how to apply them and what they're—how they're used. I saw the same thing in graffiti. So, graffiti, to me, was a public statement. Also, a place of allegiance, where you not only claimed your community—love for your community—but also love for your gang and also, "I am here to protect it. Outsiders beware." That's what was intended. So, our style was black letters. All capitals, only done in black. And it was done script style. Flush left, flush right. We had the name of the gang at the top, the roll call, and then whoever was writing it or the street or *[inaudible]*, that was kind of like the logo at the bottom. That lasted for decades. *[Gusmano agrees.]* It was—actually, that is still going on. The New York style started there in the late '60s
00:08:52	Gusmano Cesaretti	Guest	Colors.
00:08:53	Chaz	Guest	Right, in the '70s. They're the ones who are the bubble letters, the colorful just stars and that stuff.
00:08:59	Jesse	Host	Wild styles. *[Gusmano agrees.]*
00:09:00	Chaz	Guest	Yeah, wild style. And—but they—you notice, in the script, they use upper and lower case. We all used capital letters. They are impersonal. They're writing about themselves. They do not claim their culture, their street, or anything. Well, some of them claim the—they would put a number of the street. But it wasn't about being Puerto Rican or being a certain neighborhood or anything like

			that. It was about getting up on subways. And it became famous. I bow to New York style, because that's what created the doorway to the world graffiti movement. *[Gusmano agrees.]* And years down, with the advent of the computer, they started looking up history of graffiti, that's where they find us. We're a subculture, but we were there 20 years before they were.
00:09:48	Jesse	Host	So, when did you start writing and what did you start writing?
00:09:52	Chaz	Guest	*[Chuckles.]* I started writing late. I knew I was always an artist. So, I started going to Chouinard Art Institute as a ceramics major. So, we're talking in '60—1967. But I still wanted to do graffiti and I was tagging at night. I started in 1969. I finally did my first major tag of Señor Suerte—Mr. Lucky. And I started a new style. In '69, that movie came out—*The Graduate*. And there's a statement in there, an older man telling the young graduate, "You know, there's one word you should know: plastics is your future." And at that time, plastics was a future. And I go—I remember in Tijuana, there used to be all these graffiti stencils of the political parties—the PAN and the PRI. Two color or one color. I go guerrilla style. Let me make a stencil of my tag of a skull, representing Día de los Muertos—The Day of the Dead—as the skull. *Superfly*, New York pimp daddy hat, which was the big movies at that time—*Superfly* and *Shaft*, which kind of gave us our sense of identity, 'cause he was the first time minorities were—pimp daddies were superheroes.
00:11:06	Jesse	Host	So, Gusmano. *[He affirms.]* You're not from Los Angeles. *[He confirms.]* How did you end up here?
00:11:12	Gusmano	Guest	Well, I was 19 years old. I left Italy. My father gave me tickets and I came to Los Angeles—to New York in 1963 and the day that Kennedy was killed, I arrived to New York. So, they just… I go outside and they put television on the windows, and everybody was looking—Kennedy just killed. You know, it was crazy. So, I stayed in New York for ten days and then I went to Chicago. Then I have an uncle in Chicago. And I stayed there for six months—six years. And then, to Los Angeles in 1969, I came to Los Angeles. And I got a job in 1970 at the Huntington Library as a photographer. And then at night, I would go to—around to look at the city. And then I discovered east LA. And east LA was my favorite part of the city, because everything that I—it was—for me, it was amazing. There were people on the street *[stammers]*—you know, I went to—I went to—in different parts of Los Angeles, and there's nobody on the streets. You know? But anyway, east LA, it was my favorite place.
00:12:46	Jesse	Host	Do you remember when you first started recognizing the pieces that were on the wall?

00:12:53	Gusmano	Guest	In 1970, I started to photograph east LA. And I'm photographing east LA and I see graffiti on the wall, and I say, "Oh my god." You know? "That's beautiful." That photograph. And I couldn't understand what was—I wasn't able to understand it, because my English wasn't that great at that time. So, in 1973, we had a dinner and I had people and I made a little—a book, you know, that I was gonna—to publish. I had all of these people from east LA with me. I had car clubs, graffiti people, gangster people. And so, they saw me and, "Oh, great, he's got a book coming! He's got a good book coming!" So, the graffiti—it was something that I needed to learn. And I said, "I gotta figure out who's gonna be the guy that's gonna help me and take me around and look at the graffiti and tell me what the meaning of the graffiti." So, I had this good friend in Pasadena. She said, "Oh my god! I know the guy—the graffiti guy! I know the guy that is really good in graffiti." And that was him. So, we met. We spent time together. And he told me, or he took me around and showed me how the graffiti artists—what it means with the graffitis. At night, we would go out and just graffiti on the walls. We drew graffiti here, graffiti there. We smoked pot, marijuana. *[They chuckle.]* We—you know. We used to go—amazing. We used to go drink. We used to do sorts of great, crazy things together. And—but he—the man that opened the door to graffiti for me is the guy that really showed me what graffiti is and what it means. So, I start writing graffiti, too. And, you know, and he was amazing because I took photographs of him making graffitis on the wall, graffiti on the—on the—on the river. You know?
00:15:18	Jesse	Host	What did you think—*[chuckles]* Chaz, what did you think when this Italian guy showed up? *[They laugh.]*
00:15:28	Chaz	Guest	And was like—and was like, "What's the story with this graffiti?" Latino people are very protective and all that. But actually, we were just talking about it on the way over here—Gusmano… you look Latino, you know, for one. *[Gusmano agrees several times as Chaz continues.]* And then he didn't come with any attitude. He came correct. He came and he met the families. He met the parents. He met the mother and all that stuff. You know? He used to take pictures of them. You know. So, that's how we met him and that's how he was accepted. But I have to say, Gusmano was the first person that actually took us serious. He actually took pictures of cholos. He actually took a—one of the—first person who ever actually took a picture of me doing graffiti. Nobody ever did that. Not even our parents. You know?

			So, he took an outsider—took a third eye, an Italian. Hey, Italians are some of the best designers. *[Chuckles.]* You know? Took an outsider to come in and appreciate what we were doing and actually do something with it, because we couldn't. Everything that we did with our graffiti, nobody accepted because it was dressed in gangster, in blood, in bad history, in a minority's barrier of east LA and the Tortilla Curtain. It was—in those times, believe me, a lot of racism in those times. And there was no opportunity for us. But this book came out and he gave us pride and—the first time I saw the other graffiti guys, I go, "Boy, these guys are good!" Otherwise, we were just kind of having fun. We were just a bunch of kids. So, that's what Gusmano did for us.
00:17:12	Jesse	Host	So much more with Chaz Bojórquez and Gusmano Cesaretti still to come. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:17:22	Music	Transition	Cheerful, brassy music.
00:17:25	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor Green Chef. Green Chef is a USDA certified organic meal kit, offering plans for every lifestyle—including paleo, plant-powered, keto, and balanced living. With their wide variety of high quality, clean ingredients seasonally sourced for peak freshness, you can feel great about what you're eating and how it got to your table. Get $90 off your first month, including free shipping, at GreenChef.com/90bullseye and use code "90bullseye". *[Music fades out.]*
00:18:01	Music	Transition	Thumpy, relaxed music.
00:18:05	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guests are Chaz Bojórquez and Gusmano Cesaretti. Chaz is a longtime LA street artist whose been writing graffiti continuously since the 1970s. Gusmano is a photographer and the author of the book *Street Writers: A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti*. To the extent that a photography book can be a cult classic, *Street Writers* is one. It's been out of print for decades, but it was just republished this year. Let's get back into our conversation. One of the things about graffiti that I think is really interesting is that it is a form that is dominated by—I mean, there are many people who write graffiti their whole lives. Chaz, you're one of them. But it's a form that's dominated by like 15-year-olds. Mostly 15-year-old boys, although there are some pretty cool young women writers in this book. And like, that is just a very particular part of your life. You know what I mean? And one of the things that you say in the book, Chaz, is like—it's just a time in your life where like if you're into something, you just do it all the time. *[Chuckles.]* *[Chaz agrees.]* You just practice all the time. It's your whole life.
00:19:28	Chaz	Guest	That was our computer. That was our iPad. That was our phone. There was no malls. We would all hang out at the beach and throw rocks at the Z-Boys. You know. But we're a mixed culture, because we also skated on steel wheels in Highland Park. There's all these hills. And at night—well, during the day, I would go to Chouinard Art Institute and do figure drawing and painting and my ceramics. But at night, it was mine. You know, and my friends'. And we'd go out

there. Many times, I would go out by myself. I would take a little—you know, a little six pack of beer. You know? They also fit spray cans in there. So, a couple of beers, four spray cans, and my radio—big boombox. Go down there to the river at night by myself. The freeway would be going by with the headlights flickering across. It looked like a black and white ancient movie: flickering lights, like it's a diamond studded highway. So, it was romantic. *[Laughs.]*

[Gusmano agrees.]

It was nice. It was safe. And I could write on these sloped walls and walk up and down and write 40-foot-tall letters all the way down with my big paintbrush or my spray can. And one thing—we didn't ask—we didn't need permission. That was the freedom. Graffiti gave us a lot of freedom. We didn't have to prove it to anybody. Except, Gusmano showed up.

[Gusmano confirms and they chuckle.]

And put a mirror to us and said, "Listen, you guys are doing something incredible." And I go, "Really?"

00:20:56	Gusmano	Guest	Yes. It was incredible to me! Extremely incredible. Because it was something special. You know? That I'd never seen before. Graffiti in Italy, it's like this—you know, *[stammering]* but the way they did it, in black, in—with a ladder or, you know—it's special! It was special! You know? And I—you know. It's different than any graffiti in the world.
00:21:30	Jesse	Host	Los Angeles is such a particular place. Like, I live in the neighborhood where you grew up. I live down a little bit, towards Lincoln Heights and Cypress Park, but I think probably I still—my house still counts as Highland Park. And I was talking the other day to this guy, Roy, who owns the restaurant down the street from my house. And shoutout to La Abeja. And I'm talking to Roy and Roy grew up in the neighborhood. And, you know, he's 60-ish. I was like, "What kind of—what kind of stuff did you guys get up to in the neighborhood when you were a kid?" You know? 'Cause he grew up in the neighborhood.

And he goes, "Oh yeah, we all used to pile into the cars and then go surfing." *[Laughing.]*

And I was like, "For real, Roy?! You went out to go surfing?! With your homeboys from Highland Park?!"

He was like, "Yup!" *[Laughs.]*

00:22:26	Gusmano	Guest	That's amazing.
00:22:28	Chaz	Guest	That's the beauty of LA and the area. It's a mixed culture. Look, you know, take Cheech Marin. You know? Okay, he has a bandana. He has a—he's riding in his low rider, but it's a convertible with a surfboard sticking out of the back. You know? Snoop Dogg, Black rapper. He's got a low rider. I mean, we all cross cultures in Los Angeles.

[Gusmano agrees.]

00:22:50	Jesse	Host	Now, one of the things about Los Angeles graffiti that you mentioned briefly but I think is worth highlighting is that, in New York graffiti culture, the idea was always to go all city. So, you painted a train because a train left your neighborhood and went other places and made you famous there. *[They agree.]* Right? If your style was distinct enough, if your piece was big and amazing enough, it rode the train to other boroughs. What you're describing, Chaz, is mostly graffiti that is at home and for the people who are at home rather than designed to travel. That seems like a big difference.
00:23:31	Chaz	Guest	You nailed it. Yeah. Their graffiti was about—to get their imagery and to be famous. For their subways to go up and down Manhattan, for some art curator or a gallery or a photographer—as we know, famous photographers—to make them famous. That's a New York sentimentality. You know. And that's a struggle in New York. I understand that lifestyle. LA's different. We're a lot more laid back. We did graffiti only for ourselves. *[Gusmano agrees.]* Like I said, we didn't have to prove it to anybody, because there was nobody out there—there was no audience! There was no dialogue of graffiti. There was no word of bombing or tagging or—all city was all New York and stuff like that. We kept it within the boundaries of our own neighborhood, just like the gang tradition. It was graffiti by us, for us. For decades.
00:24:25	Jesse	Host	Why did you keep writing, Chaz? 'Cause this is something—you know, one of the things that you describe in the book is that a lot of teenagers in your neighborhood would basically write until they could get a car, and then they'd be into cruising. *[They chuckle.]*
00:24:38	Chaz	Guest	Or their first girlfriend or their first baby. *[Jesse affirms.]* Yeah. I loved it. I truly, truly loved it. It was magical to go out and write tags. And the friends I made were incredible and they're still friends. I was 20 years older than most of the graffiti guys there, in Los Angeles. When they became of age during hip-hop, during the early '90s, I was turning 40 and they were 18 and all that. We had a lot of conversations. They hated my work. They said, "We don't wanna do cholo gangster like our brothers who are in prison do. We wanna do hip-hop, New York style." You know, multi-color and all that. You know, fine. You know. But our tradition is this. In some ways, they—Gusmano also reinforced what I do. Plus, my bad-boy attitude was, "I'm gonna put it in your face. If you don't like it, that's what I'm gonna do more of!" *[Chuckles.]* And being an art student all my life, an artistic person—which, I wanted to be an architect, so I did a lot of architecture drawing. I had—I knew geometry, mathematics. I knew perspective. I knew all that. In some ways, graffiti brought all that together for me. To me, it was an

			artistic movement, and I knew it. I knew it was a movement for anybody else that—so, I said, “Okay. It’s mine.” It motivated me. Could I sell a painting? No. Could I get a gallery show?
00:26:10	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	**Gusmano**: No.
			Chaz: No.
00:26:11	Chaz	Guest	Everybody was rejecting it except the homies and Gusmano.
00:26:16	Jesse	Host	So, sometimes when I see an Avenue 43 tag up on a wall where I live, if I see it crossed out it’s not crossed out—usually—by a writer who’s trying to get their name up there. It’s usually crossed out by, you know, somebody who’s writing MS-13 or another kind of like gang—
00:26:37	Chaz	Guest	It’s the other gang.
00:26:38	Jesse	Host	Yeah. And so, gangs have—you know, gangs have a variety of relationships to criminality. Right?
			[They agree.]
			[Chuckles.] There are—I think MS-13 and its tributaries and people who claim allegiance to that idea—like, look. That’s folks who got deported to Central America and started, you know, a cartel basically. Right?
			[They agree.]
			And people who wish they were like that. And there are also gangs that are, you know, what if a Lions Club was for 15-year-olds? So, what was the—what was the relationship when you were a kid with these crews that were getting written up on the wall? Like what were kids up to?
00:27:24	Chaz	Guest	Early on—I had cousins who were gangsters, and they were in prison. And they do leather work and all that stuff. And I had a choice. I could be a gangster, or I could be a nerd. A hippie nerd. I didn’t wanna be a gangster. I got thrown in jail a couple of times and all that for being at parties smoking weed and all that. And I go, “This place stinks.” These—there’s no color. It’s just—it’s this beige, green color and yellow and all that. I go, “I’m never gonna come to jail again, because this—there’s no art. There’s no feeling. I hate this place.” So, I made sure I was not going to be on the wrong side. Except nobody’s gonna catch me doing graffiti, ever. Never been caught.
			So, the graffiti then was just sort of this gangster mentality. So, CP boys—the gang down the river—
00:28:17	Jesse	Host	That’s Cypress Park.
00:28:18	Chaz	Guest	Cypress Park and all that. And then we had White Fence. Or downtown we had Dogtown, which was the dog—animal shelter down in—closer to downtown. And so, I knew the gang mentality. So, I kept it in that realm. Never assuming or ever imagining I would ever make a career out of it. I never did art for a career or for a future or anything. It was always personal, me with my friends. Yeah.
00:28:48	Jesse	Host	Chaz, you’ve been writing for 50 years. You really never got busted?
00:28:54	Chaz	Guest	No.
00:28:55	Jesse	Host	Have you had to run from the cops?

00:28:56	Chaz	Guest	Yes! *[They laugh.]* Oh yeah, a couple of times. I got busted at the parties, but for graffiti. *[Laughs.]* No, I've been in jail about five times. Something like that. Just BS stuff. You know. As a kid. Since then, I don't double-park. *[They laugh.]* I pay all of my parking tickets. I do not wanna be in that system ever again. *[Gusmano confirms.]* You don't get out of it. It's… it's something that pulls you down. It takes your art away. You know.
00:29:27	Jesse	Host	Gusmano, looking at the book, there are a lot of documentary photographs of the graph. You know, like there are pictures that are ways of documenting the way that those pieces look in the landscape, which is probably what people imagine the book is. Right? There are also a lot of incredible portraits of people, both at work and—you know, more traditional kind of portraits. People with their crews or people by themselves. *[Gusmano confirms.]* What did you do when you wanted to take a picture of somebody? That's a—you know, a person. How did you—how did you get them to show themselves to you?
00:30:11	Gusmano	Guest	Well, I introduced myself into their neighborhoods by photographing the kids on the street, taking their picture a week later to their mother. "Oh, Gusmano took a picture! Oh, he's Italian! Oh!" You know. And they were all happy because I wasn't American. I was Italian. I wasn't speaking good English. So, they were speaking to me a little bit in Spanish, a little bit—you know. It was great! So, I introduced myself into the neighborhood first, by going around taking pictures to the kids and giving the picture to them without any—you know, just free photographs. And so, they opened—slowly, they opened the door to me and said, "Well, it's perfect." You know? And so, they… they were like gangs. There are so many gangs in east LA. You know? But not necessarily bad gangs. But they were gangs. Just… every neighborhood had a gang. And they were all good to me. They opened the door to me. And then when they were doing something bad, saying, "Oh, we gotta go—you know, we gotta do—we gotta do…" And I'd say, "Okay, okay. Come back." You know? But I never saw him doing anything bad, because maybe they never did anything bad! You know?
00:31:55	Jesse	Host	The roughest picture in the book, Gusmano, is a group of cholas and they're kind of—they're kind of arrayed. Like, they've got their—

			they know what they're up to. *[Chuckling.]* Like, they're like, "Oh, you want a picture?"
			[They agree.]
			And one of these girls is up in front and she's picking her fingernail with a knife. *[Laughs.]* Like, she's got like, a real knife. Not, you know—this isn't a—
			[Gusmano echoes him in agreement.]
			This isn't a Swiss army knife. And she's just got it down there at her waist, picking her nail. It's like, oh this—these are the folks who showed you a little—a little toughness. Right?
			[Gusmano confirms.]
			A little bit of—a little bit of something. It's the cholas. It's not the dudes!
00:32:39	Gusmano	Guest	Yeah, it's true. Yeah.
00:32:42	Chaz	Guest	I give a lot of credit to Gusmano because, you know, he didn't just shoot our group, our gang, and all that. Since then, he's gone out to the White Aryans gangsters. The Black bikers. The gangsters in Panama City and all that. He's made friends with all of them. He's infiltrated people. He infiltrated those cultures and made beautiful photographs; you know?
			[Gusmano agrees several times.]
			I mean, I'm a pretty tough person. I don't take crap from anybody. But I wouldn't do what you do. *[Chuckles.]* You know?
			[Gusmano laughs.]
			So, he came proud. He came fearless into our community. That's what it took. That's why we respected him.
00:33:20	Jesse	Host	So, Chaz, one of the first things that you said in this conversation was that Los Angeles was your Aztlán. Aztlán is like a—is like a—both literal and metaphorical, a homeland for Mexican people and is—you know, it's sort of like a cross-border cultural identity. Right? And it's an idea that was—that became incredibly popular with the Chicano movement, in the late 1960s and 1970s.
			So, how did your relationship to your neighborhood and these things that people did in your neighborhood inform your relationship to being Chicano and thinking of yourself as Chicano?
00:34:07	Chaz	Guest	Being a Chicano did not come easily, in that I'm Latino but like—you know, fourth generation here. Very much American. I didn't feel an acceptance in all that. And not feeling, in both cultures—I mean, there's a famous Mexican, codices, Aztec book, which shows they all came from the central of the United States and walked. There's actually the footprints written in the—in the codices, in the long pamphlets, of them walking out of Mexico City and finding their Aztlán, their famous homeland. But since then, that little footprint has returned and there should be another codices with all the little footprints coming back to the United States. You know?

			I found my cultural, you know, heart in Los Angeles. I mean, I cruised Hollywood Boulevard. That's where I saw Jimi Hendrix. I saw all these—The Doors. Sonny and Cher and all that. That was my history. So, my heart is here in Los Angeles. This is my Aztlán. Hollywood. I claim this place. That gave me the right to write graffiti on it. You know? It gave me the right to write my name on the walls and claim it. You know. 'Cause when you write your name, it makes you famous. But if you write on the city wall, it makes you immortal. It lasts forever. That's what my focus was. You know. Since then, career bloomed. You know. I didn't expect to be here speaking to you. *[Chuckles.]* I'm glad I am. *[Gusmano chuckles and agrees.]*
00:35:47	Jesse	Host	What was it like for you, Chaz, when you were writing—you're working in creative advertising, you were being a fine artist? Right? But in street years, you were an ancient grandpa. You know, when you were like 40 or whatever. *[Laughs.]* Right? *[Chaz confirms.]*
00:36:20	Chaz	Guest	Like what was it like for you to see—to like try and relate to kids that are writing graffiti and cholo culture in 1990 or 1985 or 1997? Oh, you're bringing up a lot of anger, a lot of frustration. Because there—in like 1990, when LA blossomed with the hip-hop, with the graffiti—probably about '87, '88. But 1990, it had kind of happened. And speaking to the young people, we formed—I was—I was elected the spokesperson to go up there against the mayor, against the city hall, against all these property owners and the clergy and all that and try to defend ourselves. We had meetings up at the Getty with moderators for *[inaudible]*, General Motors, and then negotiations. And then we had the city council, we had the police and all that. And for a whole day, we couldn't get past the word—the definition of "graffiti". We argued and yelled at each other. It was difficult. And in telling the young people, "Hey, I'm fighting for you." And they're all saying, "We don't care. We're gonna go and scratch and etch and throw acid in all of these windows." I'd organized one of the first graffiti shows at the 01 on Melrose. So, what do the kids do? They started scribing—scratching the big windows all up and down Melrose. Alright. That came back to me. The owners said they were gonna sue me and all that. You know. It was my fault. It was difficult. We had meetings. I learned "talk it out" with the kids, 'cause those 15-year-olds were doing 80% of the damage. And they said, "It's not—we're not doing art. We're not doing graffiti. We're vandals." That was their intent. I go, "Alright. That's a young man's mentality." But I said, "Well, once you get—and you're 18 or so, you're gonna wanna be in this gallery. And that's gonna be closed off for you, because they're gonna close it off." And then also, later on in your life, you don't realize that you're gonna take what you have and you're gonna start doing paintings. Because a painting is a surface that you can bring

			home and spend more time with your vision. You know. What's in your mind. A painting is not something to sell; it's actually your iPad. *[Chuckles.]* You know. It was your computer screen and all that stuff. So, I said—I had to wait 'til they got older. Now, if you don't do your paintings, your prints, your fashion, your skateboard, your t-shirts, your video, your jewelry line, your shoe designs and all that—and then working for the companies, you know, you're not a graffiti artist. *[Chuckles.]* You know? That's what it's turned into.
00:38:52	Jesse	Host	Lots more to get into with Chaz Bojórquez and Gusmano Cesaretti. After the break, we'll talk about how the LA neighborhoods Gusmano photographed have changed and how Chaz feels about it. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:39:07	Music	Transition	Futuristic electronic music.
00:39:11	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor Discover. Discover matches all the cashback you earn on your credit card at the end of your first year, automatically. With no limit on how much you can earn. It's amazing because of all the places where Discover is accepted. 99% of places in the US that take credit cards. So, when it comes to Discover, get used to hearing "yes" more often. Learn more at Discover.com/match. 2021 Neilson Report. Limitations apply.
			[Music fades out.]
00:39:45	Promo	Clip	**Music**: Cheerful, brassy music.
			[The chatter of a wedding party, quieted by the insistent clinking of a glass.]
			Kyle: *[Clears throat.]* Hey, excuse me everybody. I just wanted to say a few words about the beautiful couple. I've known you two for a long time. And you get along like peanut butter and chocolate! Or, you know, *[chuckling]* like—like, uh, comedy and culture! Like, uh, Maximum Fun podcasts.
			[Polite chuckles from the crowd.]
			Kyle: Actually, they're having a block party from October 11th to October 22nd. And that's kind of like your party. Right? You have a community of friends and family, and Max Fun has a community of shows and audiences that support them!
			[Curious sounds from the crowd.]
			Kyle: You're having a new start with your life together and Max Fun will be putting out new episodes that are especially welcoming to new audiences! So, it's a great time to introduce your friends to your favorite show or jump into one you haven't tried before.
			Speaker 1: *[Quietly.]* Is he still talking about podcasts?
			Kyle: AND they're setting up a volunteer event where we can help out our local communities, plus Maximum Fun is gonna have games, prizes, episode recs, so much other fun stuff!
			Speaker 2: What's wrong with Kyle? Is he okay?

			Kyle: Oh! *[Chuckles.]* Anyways, anyways. Sorry for getting carried away there. If it's alright with everybody here, let's all raise our glasses for a toast. To the Max Fun Block Party! *[The audience groans.]* **Kyle**: Which you can learn more about at MaximumFun.org/blockparty and don't forget to join in on October 11th! **Speaker 3**: Actually, that sounds pretty cool.
00:41:22	Music	Transition	Thumpy music with light vocalizations.
00:41:27	Jesse	Host	It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Los Angeles street artist Chaz Bojórquez and photographer Gusmano Cesaretti. Cesaretti is the author of the 1975 photography book *Street Writers: A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti*. Let's get back into our conversation. Chaz, I have to ask you this. I mentioned I live in one of the neighborhoods that's in this book. Right? There's a certain amount of relating to my neighbors and listening to them talk about the neighborhood, talking about where I'm from, and I've been welcomed very kindly by my neighbors. But I also understand that I am an upper middle class White dude. You know, I'm—just because I didn't grow up upper middle class doesn't mean I'm not, now. An upper middle class White dude moving into this neighborhood that is not my neighborhood. And that's true even though I've lived there for 12 years. Still not my neighborhood. And that is a neighborhood that has—that has changed so much in a way that takes away the power of people that live there. Right? And I wonder what that has been like for you, as you have seen this neighborhood change over… we're talking about 60 years' time, to see the last 15 years as Highland Park has turned into hipster central.
00:43:03	Chaz	Guest	You know, I saw—as a child, Highland Park had beautiful department stores, See's Candy, soda fountain shops, you know, beautiful theaters and all that kind of stuff.
00:43:15	Jesse	Host	Home of the original Forever 21. *[Chuckles.]*
00:43:17	Chaz	Guest	Yes, well, that came much later. But you know, it was very downtownish. And it was very White. You know. Truly. And then later on, in around the '80s, drugs came in and all that. And in the '90s, Highland Park went down. And, you know, and all that. And then now, with the advent of the hipster movement, it raised the property values astronomically. I think we're number three in the nation or something like that. You know, it's—I saw it all. And after, I knew that I had—that I was never gonna leave my community, that I had invested interest. I mean, my roots were here. So, I'm constantly being asked about gentrification. What I think about it and all that. Especially from Latino culture, they want me to get in the bandwagon and wave the flag. And, you know. I said, "You really want it to be the way it used to be and all that?" I go, "If you're renting, you're not invested. You get all your roads clean. Your lights. You get the free police, fire department, and all that and schools are all paid for if you rent. If

			you buy and all that, and pay for all these services and all that, you are invested in Highland Park." I bought a cheap little house up in the hills there. Something that I could fix up. Then, a few years later, I bought another little house. I took that money. I eventually had four homes up in Mount Washington. The purpose was I became a landlord. Assuming, I said, "You know, I'm in my mid-30s right now. I'm gonna work hard right now, because in my 60s, I'm gonna be painting graffiti and I'm gonna be unsuccessful. I'm gonna be in my—stuck in my garage doing what I love in my life, and nobody can bother me and leave me alone." I planned on being a loser. *[Laughs.]* You know? So, I was gonna sit on property. The other vision I had is, down in Tijuana, I had cousins and relatives and all that, that lived in the hills. And traveling around the world, I know what poverty is. Lack of any—you are stuck in there for life. You know. I did not want to be poor when I got old. So, I said, "I'm gonna have some property and all that. And I'm gonna paint whatever I want." It became—I became my own warrior. In doing that, I invested in Highland Park and stuff. Now, my properties have bought my $2,000,000 home, right now. It's paid off. Everything's—I have—I'm very well-off. Beautiful wife. You know. Very happy. It's the best time in my life, right now. You know. Because in planning that I was not gonna move, I supported Highland Park. You know. That's what it takes. You—the hipster movement and everything else is what we needed. You are the new Highland Park. You are the face—should be on a billboard. *[Laughs.]* Because it's gonna take all of us. It was White culture, then Latino culture, then gangster culture, and all this. Now it's a mixed culture. It's gonna be all of our culture. And Highland Park is a beautiful place. You know. Glad to have been here. If I hadn't grown in east LA, I would've been a different person. You know? If people accepted my graffiti there in the '90s, I would not have been so self-reliant or self—you know, determinate as I am now. You know? So, in some ways—all that struggle created who I am now.
00:46:49	Jesse	Host	There's a sadness to it, though. I mean, there was for me, in the neighborhood that I grew up in. When I was a teenager and it changed, and today when I go there. You know. Despite *[chuckles]*—despite, I guess, being able to buy in because of my White privilege—right?—like, I can go—I can walk around my neighborhood in my cool outfit and nobody's gonna look twice at me the way that, you know, a kid I went to high school with, they might look twice at. But there is a real sadness about the exercise of power. Right? Like, people who weren't in a position to buy a house or—
00:47:27	Chaz	Guest	I—*[stammering]* there is gonna be—Los Angeles is not like San Francisco. San Francisco is a museum. They preserve their houses. It still looks the same as when I was up there in the summer of love, in '69. Still looks the same. Except more houses are more painted and more gingerbread. Highland—Los Angeles is a place of change. My high school is not there anymore. Everything of my history and all that and my memories are different and changed. That's what it is. You—LA is about progressing and movement and if you don't get on that track and plan for the

			future—and the future's gonna be more of somebody like you—you're gonna be left behind. I learned that from graffiti. *[Gusmano agrees.]* If I didn't engage the youth—at 40 years old, my ex-wife said, "What are you doing with these kids? You're gonna get in trouble. We're going to get sued and they're gonna take away our houses and we're gonna lose everything. And then *[stammering]* your career is already in a gallery. What are you doing with 18-year-olds?" I said, "Because they're the ones who are doing the real work. Their graffiti is real. In some ways, I need to give up everything that I'm doing and go back and hang out with these 18-year-olds at 40 years old and organize graffiti shows and dialogue and create the movement." I told myself, "Is this a job or a career move?" Anytime somebody approached me, I go, "Well, is this a job? I'm gonna charge you money and it's just the work." Do a title for a magazine or something. "Or is this getting a show for all these young graffiti men?" Or something—support—show up at a meeting, buy cases of paints for them, because they can't—it's against the law at 18 years old and all that. Be there on site if the police show up and take the rap? "Yeah, all this equipment is mine." Did that a lot of times in defense of the movement. That's what I did in the '90s. I said, "If the movement is healthy, I will be healthy." So, I went back to the youth. And that's—and since then, Retna, Saber, Revok, you know. Shepard Fairey. All of these guys, they're all part of the world. Mr. Cartoon, Estevan Oriol, and all those. They're all famous because we all believed in each other at the time that we needed to. You know. It—maybe it took somebody older, like me, to be at that time and all that. But then all the graffiti movement busted out. It all went to the news. It was all about New York. You want a big prize painting? You buy a New York painting, not an LA painting. And all that. It's still going on. So, since then I've organized other shows. You know. And all that. Supporting and validating who we are on our terms. Screw New York, Europe, Miami, Basil, everybody. You know? We do it ourselves. *[Chuckles.]* You know? That's what graffiti taught me: self-reliance.
00:50:22	Jesse	Host	Well, Chaz, Gusmano, thank you for taking all this time to be on *Bullseye*. *[Music fades in.]* It was so great to get to talk to you and the book a special achievement.
00:50:27	Gusmano	Guest	It was great.
00:50:29	Chaz	Guest	It was our privilege.
00:50:30	Music	Transition	Bright, chiming music.
00:50:34	Jesse	Host	Chaz Bojórquez and Gusmano Cesaretti. Gusmano's book, *Street Writers: A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti*, is back in print. We'll have a link for you to buy it on the *Bullseye* page at MaximumFun.org. In it, you can see work from Chaz and dozens of other artists from the mid-1970s. It's really something. And the portraits are gorgeous as well.

			[Music fades out.]
00:50:59	Music	Transition	Thumpy, percussive music.
00:51:01	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I celebrated getting my COVID vaccine booster shot by hanging a hammock chair on my porch, just in the last moments of my strength, today. *[Chuckles.]* Just in time to collapse into it, spend some time with Susan Orlean's new book. Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producer is Jesus Ambrosio. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation". It's by the group The Go! Team. Thanks very much to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. Just got an enthusiastic endorsement for that theme music from my friend, Brian Huskey, when I was on his show, *Bald Talk*. It's a bald people talk show. He loves The Go! Team. You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all our interviews there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:52:20	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*