



# THE DAY *of the* DEAD IN ART

CURATED BY RUBEN C. CORDOVA, PHD



**THE DAY**

**OF THE DEAD**

**IN ART**

**RUBEN C. CORDOVA, PH.D.**



# ABOUT THE CURATOR

Ruben C. Cordova is an art historian and curator with a B.A. from Brown University and a Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley. He has curated or co-curated more than 30 exhibitions. Cordova has written or contributed to 18 catalogues and books, in addition to journal articles, reviews, and art criticism. Day of the Dead is one of his primary areas of scholarly specialization. As a photographer, he has exhibited nationally and internationally. His last solo exhibition was Besos de la Muerte (Kisses of Death) at Centro de Artes in 2014-15.

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# FOREWORD

Día de los Muertos is one of my favorite holidays. I didn't grow up celebrating the holiday. My ancestors are buried in Mexico and if we were to travel there, it was for more than just a quick weekend turnaround trip. However, I always had a strong calling to learn about history. It was my major in college, one of my classes asked us to create a family tree, and most recently I have been fascinated by my online DNA results. Perhaps it is because I am one of the youngest of all my 52 first-cousins and didn't have all that time with my grandparents like they did. My maternal grandfather had the best stories and I still miss him today, 30+ years after his passing.

I discovered the holiday in college where we were charged with setting up a public altar in my dorm. It was a time of tense political strife and learning one's culture was essential for our very own empowerment. To take on the label of Chicano meant you had a responsibility to gain

knowledge of your people and culture. Día de los Muertos was the perfect vehicle for this self-discovery. Therefore, it was with great joy that I read through Dr. Ruben C. Cordova's proposal for a Día de los Muertos exhibition at Centro de Artes. His decades of research across Mexico and the United States set the proper foundation for an exhibit that would educate, enlighten, and inspire our community and visitors—especially those who have never celebrated the holiday at home but want to learn.

Living in a big city with thousands of tourists and a strong Mexican identity, the arts community is challenged to display our culture for mass consumption, but also respect the community as to not appropriate our practices for commercial consumption. It is a fine line between finding the funding to organize events and festivals and not losing sight of the purpose of those public celebrations. It is my hope that public venues continue to keep the education

of the public about Día de los Muertos at the forefront of their events, otherwise we lose what made these events special.

The Centro de Artes committee feels strongly about displaying Latino culture that goes beyond the surface to create understanding of our traditions. We hope this exhibition, filled with some outstanding works of art from Jose Guadalupe Posada's first calaveras to Alex Rubio's stunning Four Hosemen piece, moving works by Vincent Valdez, and Arboles de la Vida ceramics by NEA Heritage Fellow Veronica Castillo. San Antonio has a vibrant art scene and Dr. Cordova's curation of it alongside Mexican works is beautifully done. We hope you find inspiration throughout the gallery and learn something new about this wonderful celebration of our ancestors.

Thank you for your support of Centro de Artes and the San Antonio arts community.

**Yadhira Lozano, Chair**  
District 3, Centro de Artes Committee, San  
Antonio Arts Commission

# INTRODUCTION TO DAY OF THE DEAD IN MEXICO

**D**ía de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is Mexico's most famous and widely admired festival. In 2008 UNESCO designated it part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Day of the Dead is made up of a variety of commemorations associated with the Roman Catholic All Saints' Day (November 1), All Souls' Day (November 2), and All Hallows' Eve (also known as Halloween). Traditionally, the emphasis is on private rituals, centered on remembering and honoring deceased family members. In the late sixteenth century,

substantial food tribute was paid to priests, who had up to six weeks to visit their parishes to collect it. Public celebrations are largely secular. Particularly in recent decades, they have placed a spotlight on public figures (such as deceased leaders and politicians) and cultural heroes (including artists like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, and martyred journalists and activists).

Most traditional activities that take place during Day of the Dead are standard Catholic practices. These include: attending mass, cleaning and decorating graves, candlelight

vigils, making and eating sweet breads and candies, and the fashioning of home altars. These customs originated in Southern Europe, and they were transmitted to the Americas by Spain. They are found in other Latin American countries, where they have mixed with indigenous practices and other influences in unique ways. In Mexico, Day of the Dead is constantly evolving. Consequently, it cannot be defined as a specific set of practices.

One important element survives from pre-Hispanic times. The Aztecs celebrated two

twenty-day festivals dedicated to the dead (these took place from July 23 through August 31 in 1519). The Spanish were determined to eradicate indigenous religions, which they regarded as Satanic. Consequently, remnants of these belief systems could only survive in covert form, under the cover of Spanish (Catholic) traditions, conventions, and observances. In Mexican practice, All Saints' Day is often dedicated to children; All Souls' Day is often dedicated to adults. Many, particularly in areas with substantial indigenous populations, believe that the souls of children return from the grave on November 1, and that the souls of adults return from the grave on November 2. Thus some remnant of indigenous belief has been compressed down to two days and covertly transposed to the Catholic liturgical calendar. In both Mexico and the U.S., the indigenous content of Day of the Dead is greatly overestimated. This derives from the desire to celebrate and embrace indigenous cultures, and this desire is also part of the history of Day of the Dead.

In rural areas, where homes are in close proximity to cemeteries, flower petals are strewn to guide the souls from the cemetery to the home altar and back. Altars have pronounced local character and style, and are fashioned with local materials. Villages just a few miles apart often have very different looking home altars.

Urban commemorations have a secular and public orientation: many attractions and practices have been introduced, not all of them long-lived. Sales from commercial stalls in Mexico City's Zocalo became significant in the 18th century, and even more so in the 19th. In 1829, the Zocalo's principal attraction was a large circus; three areas were also reserved for cockfighting. In the 1870s a Venetian café-restaurant replaced bars, accompanied by "good military music." By 1881, the Day of the Dead fiesta was displaced from the Zocalo to the French-styled Alameda Park, where it catered to elites who relished foreign goods. Mexican elites had long disapproved of the festival's lower class associations, but they could not successfully hijack it and transform it. In 1908-09, the Mexican Herald described Day of the Dead as a holiday for "superstitious Indians" and lower class "pelados" who drank excessively and cried all day. The Zocalo devolved to a shabby marketplace that came to an end by 1920. By that date, only a few modest shops remained at the Alameda.\*

Claudio Lomnitz says the devastating 1985 earthquake fundamentally transformed Day of the Dead, moving it from the home or graveyard into the public sphere and causing "collective memorialization" to become "mass protest."\* Day of the Dead was nationalized as "an officially promoted identitarian ritual," it spread to all areas of Mexico, and it stood in symbolic opposition to Halloween.\*

In the 2000s, altar installations in the Zocalo helped revivify the capital's historic center, which still suffered from the 1985 earthquake. Astonishingly, in 2016 the city government began sponsoring an enormous annual Day of the Dead parade based on the parade created for the James Bond film *Spectre* (2015). The Zocalo is too crowded to accommodate the altars featured in recent years, and its primary attraction is now music. Day of the Dead is a constantly evolving synthesis of cultures and practices that began with the Spanish conquest and—particularly in the last half-century—combines tourism, entertainment, and popular spectacles, either with or without solemn commemorations of the dead.

Artistically, Mexico has defined Day of the Dead since the late 19th century, with printmaker José Guadalupe Posada as the key figure. Mexican artists have continuously produced quantities of stellar art. The national government has aggressively and successfully promoted Day of the Dead since the 1970s. In the U.S., Chicano artists in particular have been deeply engaged with Day of the Dead since the 1970s. This exhibition examines Day of the Dead through over 100 art objects made by more than 50 artists, most of whom are Mexican or Chicano.

\* Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone Books, 2005): 305-39; 453-63.



# ARROYO, MANILLA, POSADA AND THE MODERN MEXICAN PRINT TRADITION

**T**hough it is often incorrectly assumed that José Guadalupe Posada (1851-1913) originated the Mexican tradition of making calavera\* images for Day of the Dead, the reality is more complex. Three people played very significant roles. While Posada was the greatest early exponent of the calavera genre, Manuel Manilla (1830-95) developed the calavera form as we recognize it today. Both Manilla and Posada worked for Antonio Vanegas Arroyo (1852-1917), who founded a print shop in Mexico City in 1880. In an ad Posada designed around 1900, the shop's diverse products included songs, magic tricks, parlor games, toasts, rhymes for clowns, patriotic exhortations,

plays, rules for fortune telling, black and white magic, etc (mostly in book form). Arroyo's firm also periodically issued single sheets with images and texts, known as broadsides or broadsheets. These were sometimes published regularly, as on Day of the Dead. More often, they were produced quickly to exploit extraordinary events, such as sensationalistic crimes, executions, and supernatural disasters. It is a mark of Posada's greatness that today we remember Arroyo best for the relatively crudely fashioned and printed broadsides that were produced on cheap, colorful paper to be pedaled on street corners, rather than for his more upscale products. But without Arroyo, it is likely that neither Manilla nor Posada would

have become famous for producing calavera images for Day of the Dead.

In their lifetimes, Posada and Manilla were semi-anonymous craftsmen who received no attention or recognition in the art world. Manilla signed some images and Posada signed a significant number of his works, including many of his late calavera images. These signatures permitted the French immigrant artist Jean Charlot to identify Posada's artistic personality in the early 1920s, though Manilla's prints were sometimes attributed to Posada. There is still confusion regarding the output of the two artists today, and the work of several contemporary anonymous artists is also

confused with them. An attempt to clarify the artistic personalities of these various artists is made in the individual texts for this exhibition. A tentative chronology for Posada's calaveras—based on stylistic evolution—is also advanced in these texts. Manilla began working for Arroyo in 1882, and he was his chief artist until 1892. Posada worked for Arroyo, starting in 1888, and he succeeded Manilla as Arroyo's chief artist. Posada made a respectable living. Initially, he is said to have regularly visited several publishers each day to see if they needed an image to be created on the spot.

The nature of Posada's work has been badly misrepresented. He is still often characterized as a politically committed artist, a revolutionary or a proto-revolutionary one. This distortion is a product of a need on the part of early modern Mexican artists to find an artistic ancestor, one who shared their political sympathies. Diego Rivera was the most influential of these distorting propagandists. Peter Wollen highlights Posada's symbolic position in Modern Mexican art: "His name and legend were constitutive in the establishment of the Mexican renaissance; they symbolized both an alternative tradition [to European academic art] and, crucially, a chain of succession."\*\* Wollen explains that Posada simultaneously fulfilled several functions: he "gave credibility to claims

to be part of an authentically Mexican artistic tradition, crossing both the class gap and the historic divide of the Revolution itself and, at the same time, guaranteed the modernity of the tradition by aligning it with the revival of popular imagery among the European avant-garde. It was a way of solving the classic dilemma of evolutionary nationalism—how to be popular, authentic, traditional and modernizing, all at the same time."\*\*

We don't know if Posada held deep political sympathies. In any case, if he did have radical sympathies, he could not have expressed them in his art without being imprisoned. Moreover, his employer Arroyo treated President Porfirio Díaz (whose perpetual presidency precipitated the Mexican Revolution) in a sycophantic manner. For his part, Posada made three flattering portraits of Díaz, which were used to glorify the dictator. Though it is a cliché to say that Posada "satirized the Porfiriato," he did not satirize the actual power holders. As Thomas Gretton notes: "There is very little in the way of overt hostility to the Mexican elite; little, indeed, of any sort of iconography of that elite."\*\*\* Instead, Posada most often treated common people and their social predicaments. Gretton argues that instead of distinguishing the classes, the "thrust" of his social iconography was to "provide a set

of images of the uprooted and the déclassé, the poor and the unruly, of the closeness of violence, poverty and desperation in the non-elite urban world."\*\*\*

Posada did not write any of the texts that accompanied his prints, so he had no control over what was said about them. Posada's works were frequently nonspecific and politically uncommitted. They were likely made this way by design, because this allowed Arroyo to create "new" product by recycling them. Arroyo gave them new lives by provided them with new texts and different subsidiary images. Several famous recycled images are discussed in the individual label texts.

\* Meanings of the word calavera include skull, skeleton, rhyming satirical verses produced for Day of the Dead (literary calaveras), and the special issue publications in which the literary calaveras were published. Calavera was also the term for treats given to children.

\*\* Peter Wollen, "Introduction," J.G. Posada: Messenger of Mortality. Ed. by Julian Rothenstein. (Mt. Kisco, N.Y.: Moyer Bell Limited, 1989): 16.

\*\*\* Thomas Gretton, "Posada and the 'Popular': Commodities and Social Constructs in Mexico before the Revolution," *Oxford Art Journal*, 17:2 (1994): 41.

# POSADA AND PHOTOMECHANICAL TECHNIQUES

**T**hough sometimes characterized as a self-taught or naïve artist, Posada received substantial training in his native city of Aguascalientes. Posada brought his lithographic press to Mexico City, but found little use for it there. Lithography is a slow process. Moreover, its finely graded half tones do not print well on the cheap paper used for broadsides. Posada's employers wanted to print words and images simultaneously, quickly, and cheaply.

In partnership with Arroyo, Posada initially made images that *resembled* type metal engravings. Manilla had mastered type metal engravings, but there is reason to believe that Posada never used this technique. Such engravings are difficult and laborious. They are made by carving a metal alloy plate with a multi-pointed burin. The areas that are not carved out by the burin print black. This medium creates dramatic contrasts of light and dark, similar to linocuts or woodcuts. Posada exploited these effects brilliantly.

After 1900, many of Posada's prints *have the appearance* of relief etching on zinc. This

quick technique creates effects very similar to ink drawings. One draws on a zinc plate with greasy ink, then submerges the plate in an acid bath that eats away all of the areas that have not been drawn. The areas that were drawn are left standing in relief, and they print black. In the last few years of his life, Posada loosened up dramatically and introduced expressive stylizations and distortions. This is evident by c. 1907 in his calavera of Arroyo as the people's publisher. Many of Posada's most memorable figures have gigantic heads and teeth that help give expression to an elevated level of emotional and psychological power.

Until 1992, when Thomas Gretton published "Posada's Prints as Photomechanical Artefacts," it was assumed that Posada had made both type metal engravings and zinc etchings. Gretton, through study of the blocks in the collection of the Library of Congress, concludes that Posada used photomechanical processes to make at least some of them.\* (He also believes it is reasonable to assume that Posada used photomechanical means to make all of them.) To achieve the appearance of an etching, Posada drew on a specially prepared

white card. To achieve the appearance of an engraving, Posada scratched his design on a scraperboard with a coating of dark ink (the scratching revealed the white chalk ground). The finished cards and scraperboards would be photographed. The resulting photographic image would then be photographed onto a gelatin-coated zinc plate. After the plate was exposed to light, acid would be used to etch it. Minor refinements to the plate would be made by hand, and it would eventually be mounted on a wooden block, to be printed simultaneously with the type and the other design elements. Diane Miliotes and Rachel Freeman also discuss aspects of Posada's photomechanical processes and their implications.\*\*

Gretton effectively shattered the myth of Posada as the humble, isolated craftsman, naïvely and defiantly pursuing his trade with simple but exacting traditional tools, in opposition to the rapidly industrializing commercial world. Posada's refusal of modern techniques had been posited as heroic, Ruskinian, and "authentic." Gretton points out that Posada's techniques were "part of the process of cultural modernization that Mexico

was undergoing during the Porfiriato, rather than as a rejection of it.”\* Many of his admirers and artistic successors would likely be appalled to learn the degree to which Posada was part of an image-producing factory. Gretton notes that the “popular” status of Posada’s prints has “largely depended on this construction of their refusal to participate in the development of a modernized, capitalist ‘mass’ image culture.”\*\*\* Gretton further argues that Posada and Arroyo produced deceptive images, designed for the downscale, urbanized mestizo audience that bought these products from street vendors: “they produced images that appeared to be crudely drawn, to be carved with evident ineptness, to have limited access to the codes of post-renaissance picture-making, and no access to the more effective of contemporary graphic technologies.”\*\*\* Additionally, Arroyo exploited “[unnecessarily visible] nail-heads, cracks, and even gaps in the blocks... as part of the appearance of the image, part of the self-devaluation of the commodity.”\*\*\* Arroyo deliberately made haphazard, poor quality prints, a practice Gretton says had the effect of “flaunting its own disreputableness.”\*

\*Thomas Gretton, “Posada’s Prints as Photomechanical Artefacts,” *Print Quarterly* 9 (December 1992): 335-356, quotes from 354.

\*\* Diane Miliotes, with technical note by Rachel Freeman, *José Guadalupe Posada and the Mexican Broadside*. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2006).

\*\*\* Thomas Gretton, “Posada and the ‘Popular’: Commodities and Social Constructs in Mexico before the Revolution,” *Oxford Art Journal*, 17:2 (1994): 32, 35.

## ARTWORKS

**Manuel Manilla** (Mexican, b. 1830 Mexico City, d. 1895, Mexico City), Eiffel Tower, restrrike c. 2005, relief engraving or photo-relief etching on pink paper, 22 x 16”, private collection

This is arguably the most brilliant calavera image associated with Manilla. Skulls and crossbones—along with a few long bones—are arranged to form the Eiffel Tower. Its “legs” include a complete skeleton on each side. The skeletons bend to shoulder the load and support each side of the tower. The tower rests on a foundation of large skulls. These skulls dwarf the top-hatted man who stands between them in the lower center, who strikes an archaic note. Prints or pictures of ossuaries, where human bones are stacked into various configurations or figural assemblages, probably served as the inspiration for this work.\* The catacombs of Paris are among the most famous of these ossuaries, though some churches feature elaborate displays, with bones formed into chandeliers, coats of arms, garlands of winged skulls, and words (as in the A La Cargada Calaveras in this exhibition). The Eiffel Tower subject matter underscores the fact that broadsides were also consistent with elite Francophile taste. An anti-reelection (anti-Porfirio Diaz) cartoon published c. 1889 featured a more conventional Eiffel Tower fashioned out of skulls.

It might have been a source for this work. Prior to the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, wealthy Mexicans spoke French, wore French clothes, ate French food, etc. Thus the Mexican print tradition has more complex roots than is generally assumed. The earliest date we can connect to this image is 1910, when it was used on a broadside called Calavera La Penitenciaría (Calavera penitentiary). The Arroyo family currently sells prints in the format of this work.

\* For ossuaries, see Meg Neal, “Bone Houses: A Definitive Guide to the World’s Ossuaries, Atlas Obscura. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/lists/definitive-guide-to-ossuaries-crypts-and-catacombs>

**Manuel Manilla** (Mexican, b. 1830 Mexico City, d. 1895 Mexico City), *Gran Juicio Universal* (The Last Judgment), published 1899, relief engraving or photo-relief etching on buff paper, 14 ½ x 11”, collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The subhead thunders: “The end of the entire world on 14 November, 1899, at 12:45 in the night.” The illustration depicts a village filled with throngs of people who are gathered to watch the end of the world. An angel sounds the final trumpet while a comet strikes land, resulting in a collapsing, devastated village.

Meanwhile, a volcano erupts in the background. Both the sun and the moon bear witness to this end of days. Buildings crumble, trees topple, and hot lava is shot into the air. The villagers face out towards the spectator, hoping for deliverance or intervention. The Book of Revelation prophecies calamitous events when the seven seals are opened: thunder, lightning, earthquakes, falling stars, mountains moved out of their places. Men were made so fearful they asked rocks to fall upon them. Finally, seven angels with trumpets poured god's wrath on the earth. Clearly, this print is drawing on Biblical imagery. Images of impending doom, including cataclysmic comets, were among the specialties of Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, who employed both Manilla and Posada to make such images. None of these prophesied disasters, of course, came to fruition. The text in this broadside jocularly enumerates several false prophets of doom. A variant broadside that uses this plate has a different title (*El Fin del Mundo*) and lists the end time as 3:09 in the afternoon. An altogether different illustration rendered in an amateuristic manner was also printed by Arroyo in 1899, which features skeletal villagers in the foreground (online example in the Andrés Blaisten collection). Clearly, these sensationalistic broadsides must have sold very well to a millennial-minded Mexican public.

Several stylistic traits permit us to identify Manilla as the maker of this print. Most crucially, the buildings are rendered with techniques common to Manilla. Manilla advertised building elevations as one of his specialties, and he was

more attentive to architectural detail. Posada, who was less interested in architecture (unless he was illustrating a particular city), emphasized human despair and created more generalized images of buildings. The rather traditionally rendered spectators, as well as their relative uniformity, are qualities found in Manilla's work, whereas they are anathema to Posada, who constantly sought variety and emotional excitement. Finally, despite a number of individual cataclysmic incidents, this work lacks the high drama and pathos that Posada gave to such subjects. Manilla rendered a landscape with people, whereas Posada rendered scenes of panic and devastation.

The plate used for this broadside has multiple cracks and extensive damage at the bottom. It was likely recycled from an earlier broadsheet. It illustrates Thomas Gretton's argument that Arroyo deliberated damaged and mishandled his plates in order to appeal to a working class clientele. A broadsheet of this type, with a similarly damaged image, is in the Phoenix Museum of Art (online image on museum Facebook page).

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *El Purgatorio Artístico* (Artistic purgatory), c. 1890s, photo-relief etching on salmon paper, 22 ½ x 13 ¾", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

*El Purgatorio Artístico* is one of Posada's most compelling works. The headline reads: "The artistic purgatory, where the calaveras of artists

and artisans are made. In this purgatory without equal, one sees the artists from the entire world." The caption addresses life's inexorable end: "Today for you, tomorrow for me." If this looks like hell, that is because purgatory (a doctrine since abandoned by the Catholic church) was posited as a place where most souls went, where their sins would be burned off in painful torment before they would be worthy and able to enter into heaven. Posada displays his skills at foreshortening figures, creating varied poses, and endowing the composition with enormous psychological power. One can feel their pain as the skeletons continue to ply their artistic vocations. Given the relatively naturalistic skulls of the artisans, their lack of exaggeratedly large teeth, their somewhat naturalistic barrel chests, and an overall meticulousness, this work is probably earlier than most of the calavera images for which Posada is most famous.

Below the main image, several inhabitants of purgatory are given the calavera treatment: a builder, a carpenter, a famous bookbinder, an intelligent engraver, a neighborhood barber, an impertinent gilder, and a blacksmith without strength.

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *Calaveras de la Cucaracha, Una Fiesta en Ultratumba* (Calaveras of the cockroach, a fiesta from beyond the grave), photo-relief etching, probably designed c. 1910, broadside perhaps c. early 1920s, on green paper, 14 ½ x 11", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The image in this broadside is Posada's most famous work, as well as the single most famous print produced in modern Mexico. The title may seem enigmatic, but reference to another broadside illustrated by Posada provides an explanatory context. As noted by the Library of Congress website, *The Corrido de la Cucaracha que no ha salido a Pasear porque no tiene Cartoncitos que Gastar* (The ballad of the cockroach that has not gone out because she has no money to spend) refers to women who accompanied their male partners in camps during the Mexican Revolution. The woman Posada provided for the ballad is dressed in practical clothes. Why is the woman in the present broadside wearing only an absurdly large and frilly hat? That is because this image has been reused: it was first published in 1913 in a broadside called *Remate de Calaveras Alegres y Sandungueras, Las que hoy son empolvadas Garbanceras pararán en deformes calaveras* (Ending of cheerful and Sandunga-dancing skulls, those that today are powdered chick pea-vendors will end in deformed calaveras) (online examples Wikipedia and Pinterest). This image was also used in another broadside titled *Han Salido por Fin, Las Calaveras* (online example Andrés Blaisten Collection).

Garbanceras were sellers of garbanzos (chick peas), which, unlike corn or beans, were imported to Mexico by the Spanish. They are mocked as lower-class women who put on airs and are untrustworthy. Posada had no part in composing the texts that accompanied

his images and he died before this image was published. But he was certainly satirizing the woman he depicted. Muralist Diego Rivera elaborated a full-figure version of this character (now known as Catrina) in the center of a mural called *A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Park*. He endowed this figure with pre-Columbian attributes, and it has become an object of national pride rather than ridicule. The ten centavos price of this broadside points to a later date than those that sold for five centavos.

\*For an extended discussion of the Catrina image, see: Ruben C. Cordova, "José Guadalupe Posada and Diego Rivera Fashion Catrina: From Sellout to National Icon (and Back Again?)," *Glasstire*, Nov. 2, 2019. <https://glasstire.com/2019/11/02/jose-guadalupe-posada-and-diego-rivera-fashion-catrina-from-sellout-to-national-icon-and-back-again/>

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), and **Manuel Manilla** (Mexican, b. 1830 Mexico City, d. 1895, Mexico City), *Esta es de Don Quijote la primera, la sin par la gigante calavera* (This is Don Quixote the first, the giant calavera without equal), top image by Posada, c. 1890s; lower image by Manilla, probably by 1892 (when he stopped working in Arroyo's shop), relief engraving or photo-relief etching on salmon paper, 22 ¼ x 15", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The large image at the top of this broadsheet is a universally admired work by Posada. The smaller image at the bottom is generally

thought to be a substantially earlier work by Manuel Manilla. The latter is the topmost image in the *Calavera Del Telele*, which is also featured in this exhibition (see that label for additional discussion). A variant Don Quixote broadsheet published by Vanegas Arroyo does not include the Manilla image (online example in the British Museum, where the Posada image is dated c. 1910-13 and the publishing date c. 1918). The present broadsheet, with its combination of images, probably postdates a version that only had the Posada image. Here a "new" product was created by combining two old ones. (Online broadsheets of the present type are in the the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago.)

Don Quixote, the protagonist of Miguel de Cervantes' satiric sixteen-century novel *Don Quixote*, lost his mind under the spell of chivalric literature and delusionally reenacted the role of a knight-errant. He famously tilted at windmills, imagining them to be giants. In Posada's illustration, the skeletal mounted knight improbably dispatches an unarmed group of skeletons, tossing several of them (along with a portion of a rib cage) into the sky. Thus he is more like a horseman of the Apocalypse than Quixote, which is fitting for a Day of the Dead image. The stiffer, more conventional draftsmanship of Manilla in the lower image contrasts with the livelier, more naturalistic work of Posada. Whereas Manilla tends to compose frontal or side views of relatively upright figures, Posada is able to

foreshorten his figures and convincingly display them in motion as they twist and turn. There could scarcely be a clearer contrast between the two artists. This print resembles a type metal engraving, a style Posada moved away from late in his career. Stylistically, it also lacks the exaggerated large heads and teeth, as well as the willful distortions and stylizations of his late work (see the *Madero*, *Monton*, and *Cucaracha* calaveras in this exhibition).

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *La Calavera del Editor Popular Antonio Vanegas Arroyo* (The calavera of the people's editor Antonio Vanegas Arroyo), 1907, photo-relief etching on salmon paper, 14 ½ x 11", signed on bottom left of image, collection of Lance Aaron and Family

Posada produced two versions of this broadside, which is one of his most famous works. This is a more pleasing composition than the other one, which has additional small images on each side of the main figure. Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, the nattily dressed "people's editor," ironically brandishes a thousand peso bill, underscoring his monetary success and business acumen rather than any clear association with the people. He towers above his shop, framed by a library of chap books, proofs, and a type box. This inventory is essentially money in the bank. Down below on the workshop floor, an army of skeletons toils like tiny elves: they create, print, and hawk Vanegas Arroyo's wares.

These worker skeletons possess no clothing save for hats, conveying the implication that Arroyo's wealth comes at the expense of his workers. Arroyo established a multi-generation publishing house that was run, successively, by his son and grandson. By contrast, Posada, the greatest worker Arroyo ever employed, was ultimately interred in a mass grave. In 1919 this caricature of Arroyo was published in a broadside with the title *Calavera de la de la [sic] Prensa* (press) (online example, Museum of Modern Art).

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *La Calavera de Cólera Morbo* (The calavera of the cholera epidemic), 1910 (dated in lower right corner), photo-relief etching (main image) and relief engraving or photo-relief etching (subsidiary images) on buff paper, 14 x 11", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The large image at the top of the broadsheet features a serpent with a cartoonish human head and spotted arms that rises from three rhythmic coils. Its protruding tongue recalls that of the figure in the center of the Aztec Stone of the Sun, which is a reference to human sacrifice (see Gonzalez painting in Mesoamerican section). Posada had earlier utilized images of a man with similar features as representations of the devil. This malevolent creature is surrounded by flies, which here represent the pestilence of cholera. The creature is surrounded by twelve skulls with professional emblems that stand for the victims

of cholera, who come from all walks of life. The twelve skulls cobbled together here are utilized in other broadsides. Whether or not this image of a human snake appeared earlier, it recalls earlier images. Posada had done images of a female-headed snake and a woman that turned herself into a snake. Cholera does not produce rashes or spotting, but in 1900 Posada's son Jaun Sabino died of typhus, which does produce a rash.

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *Calaveras del Monton numero 1* (Calaveras of the masses), 1910 (dated in lower right), photo-relief etching on blue paper, 14 ½ x 11", signed on the skirt of the woman with upraised arms on the right, collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The murderous figure with a bloody knife is one of Posada's most memorable characters, as well as the single most frightful personage he created. It derives directly from a print Posada made of a pair of real-life assassins in a broadside called *Las Bravísimas Calaveras Guatemaltecas de Mora y de Morales* in 1907 (online examples University of New Mexico and Metropolitan Museum). These two assassins murdered the ex-president of Guatemala and were tried and executed in 1907. As in the present image, both are sprinting, clad in a jacket and pants. They also have similar stylized rib cages, enormous heads (though they have larger cheekbones and smaller noses than the figure in this image). Mora and Moran hold objects in their right hands (one has a knife,



the other a bone) and each figure's left hand is made into a fist. In the present print, Posada has substituted a large embroidered sombrero for the Homburg Bollman hats worn by the assassins. By adding a row of silver buttons on the side of the left pant leg, he transforms this figure into a charro or mariachi (as in the *Zapata* broadside in this exhibition). Posada equips him with an enormous and bloody Bowie knife. He energetically strides over scores of skulls, his legs even more outstretched than those of Mora and Morales. Death rays emanate from his empty eye sockets, making him an icon of threatening violence. This berserk giant creates panic in the throngs of the small skeletal figures in the background. This is not an image that was made with a particular subject in mind. Instead, it was adapted from the images of the assassins and deployed promiscuously on a number of occasions, with different accompanying headlines and texts.

The image was reused in the *Calavera de Pascual Orozco* (online example, dated 1912, British Museum). Orozco was a northern businessman and revolutionary leader who supported Francisco I. Madero, who became president in 1911. Orozco subsequently sided with the usurper Victoriano de la Huerta, who had Madero assassinated in 1913. Since the mariachi costume is from Jalisco, in the South of Mexico, there is no reason to connect this image with Orozco or to portray him as a murderer before 1913. The present image was also used for several other broadsides: *La Calavera Oaxaqueña* (online example Library of Congress) and *Calavera*

*Revolucionaria* (online example Andrés Blaisten collection). The plate of the assassins Mora and Morales was divided into two images, which were published separately. The assassin holding the bone illustrates *Calaveras de Caudillos de Silla Presidencial* (online example Library of Congress).

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *Calavera de D. Francisco I. Madero*, 1912 (dated in lower right), photo-relief etching on salmon paper, 14 x 11", signed between sandals at bottom of image, collection of Lance Aaron and Family

After Francisco Madero somewhat inadvertently became a popular candidate for the presidential election in 1910, the dictator Porfirio Díaz had him arrested. Madero escaped and fled to Texas, where he made plans for revolution in Mexico. This caricature was first utilized in a broadside called *Calaveras del Montón Número 2* in 1910 (online example Library of Congress).

The texts that Arroyo wrote or commissioned for his broadsides often espoused reactionary or counter-revolutionary viewpoints. Arroyo often made a point of flattering Díaz, perhaps out of fear of censorship and imprisonment. In this image, Posada obliged Arroyo by creating a skeletal caricature of Madero as a drunken peasant. This was accomplished by carefully rendering Madero's characteristic drooping mustache and short, tongue-like beard that extends below it. The liquor bottle alludes to the maguay plantation and distillery owned

by Madero's father. Photo-mechanical process made it easy for Posada to make increasingly simplified, abstracted forms. He could make any kind of drawing, and have assistants transform it into a plate. Here the skull's contours are effaced by the straw hat and the moustache. The eye sockets and nasal hole do most of the work of making the skull read as a skull. The rib cage is reduced to five large, abstracted ribs, whose girth substitutes for a pot belly. The hip is tiny, and has no clear connection to the legs. The pant legs emanate from nothing (the connecting area is covered by the liquor bottle).

Posada renders a shirtless, shiftless alcoholic who is seemingly unworthy of the nation's highest office. Some have argued that this image promotes Madero as a man of the people, but the image seems more concerned with mockery than affirmation. However much muralist Diego Rivera admired and found inspiration in Posada's work, Posada was not the political radical that Rivera made him out to be.

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *El Catrín* (Dandy), c. 1910-13, restrike c. 2005, photo-relief etching on pink paper, 22 x 16", private collection

This work, which is generally referred to as *El Catrín* (which means gentleman with a strong implication of dandyism), is the culmination of Posada's stylistic development. In the last years of his life, his works became increasingly cartoonish, dynamic, and expressive, with



disproportionately enlarged heads and massive teeth. In this instance, the head is equal to the size of the body. This dandy has a topcoat with tails, a flashing diamond, and a cane. But his elegance is undercut by the fact that he lacks one shoe and he has no pants. Though he is walking towards the left, his head is swiveled to the right. He clamps down on a massive cigar with his teeth, while, at the same time, his open mouth makes it seem as if he is engaging in lively conversation. His deeply cut eye sockets and the curving lines that delineate his skull endow it with a dramatically three-dimensional character. The degree to which his head dwarfs his hat (which should be a tall top hat) provides another humorous element. The Arroyo family currently sells prints in the format of this work.

**Unknown artist here referred to as Master of the Tapatia**, *Calavera Tapatia*, 1910 (dated in lower right corner), photo-relief etching on blue paper, 15 x 11", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

This is one of the works that Jean Charlot identified as by Manuel Manilla, which is why it is commonly attributed to him. While the fussy detail found in the suit and the still life elements is very similar to Manilla's work (and unlike Posada's), the man's disproportionately large skull is a characteristic of Posada's late calaveras, though it lacks Posada's animation and psychological force. Therefore this appears to be a work by someone who is combining elements of both Manilla and Posada. The man's skull in this print appears to be based on Posada's

caricature of Madero. Therefore it is likely that it was made by someone in Arroyo's shop.

But this artist is less skilled than Posada or Manilla. Due to their complexity, hands are the most difficult anatomical element to render in art. Skeletal hands are even more difficult. The three hands in this image are undersized (perhaps to de-emphasize them) and they are so schematized that they resemble gloves. The contours of the skulls are tentative and the lines that define them have been repeatedly reinforced. Moreover, neither skull has a very three-dimensional quality. Neither the eyes nor the nose sockets convey plasticity, which is provided primarily by the shading on the left side of both skulls.

Tapatia refers colloquially to people from Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco. The first-person text that accompanies this image brags of this man's macho prowess in fighting, which is quite at odds with the skeleton's small hands, dainty cigar, and static quality. By the time Posada made oversized skulls, he conveyed remarkably character and animation, in a manner very unlike this work.

**Manuel Manilla** (Mexican, b. 1830 Mexico City, d. 1895, Mexico City), **José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), and **unknown artist**, *Calavera Telele*, Manilla image probably before 1892, Posada image probably early 1900s, lower image probably c. 1907 or later, sheet probably printed in 1910s or 1920s, relief engraving or

photo-relief etching on salmon paper, 15 x 11 inches, collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The image in the upper section of the sheet is by Manilla. Note the painstaking anatomy of the horse and rider skeletons, which are rendered in an upright manner. The building behind them has some carefully rendered architectural detail, as would be expected from an artist who listed architectural renderings as a specialty. The aforementioned skeletons have an architectonic quality. A humorous note is introduced by the skeleton on foot: it pulls on the coattails of the top-hatted man. The artist has difficulty making the relationship between these two figures plausible. The five clothed human figures on the right reveal Manilla's fundamental conservatism and his limitations in portraying emotion and human interaction in space. Relative to Posada, they are a stiff group that appears discrete from the skeletal horse and rider. The small singing figures on either side are by Posada. They are expressive, and their oversized jaws and enormous teeth are expressive devices that will culminate in the full-blown caricatures seen in his last works.

The skeleton with outstretched arms at the bottom of the sheet is rendered in a somewhat tentative manner (perhaps it is significantly enlarged). It follows Manilla's style, particularly in the rendering of the ribs, but the disproportionately large head is a hallmark of Posada's late style. Manuel Manilla quit working for Arroyo in 1892, and he died in 1895, so there is little chance he could have made this skeleton. It could have been made by another

family member, or by an unknown artist with no connection to Manilla. This skeleton doesn't perform any clear action: perhaps it is cropped. In any case, it is reused at the top of a broadsheet called *Calavera de Aquiles Serdan y Pascual Orozco* (online example Davidson Galleries). That the four largest images on this sheet were made by three different artists is a reflection of how the Arroyo shop recycled images.

**José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *San Antonio de Padua* (St. Anthony of Padua), probably early 1900s, relief engraving or photo-relief etching on tan paper, 14 ¼ x 10 ½", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

This image by Posada is included in this exhibition to give an example of the artist's more conventional work. While his calaveras became increasingly stylized and expressive, most of his work, especially his religious images, is more conservative and conforms to expectations for its subject matter. Here St. Anthony holds the Christ Child, who holds a cross in his left hand and makes a blessing gesture with his right hand. The image has a very matter-of-fact character, as if it were a statue in a church niche, flanked by flowers and burning candles on either side. Many small ex-votos (votive offerings made of tin) are affixed to St. Anthony's robe, just as they would be in a church. By comparing this work to the others in this exhibition, we can better understand how Day of the Dead gave Posada license to work in a more creative and expressive manner.

**Anonymous**, Capúla, Michoacán, Mexico, *Monja Coronada* (Crowned nun), n.d., low fire ceramic, 24 x 20 x 12", collection of Margie Shackelford, courtesy of San Angel Folk Art

Convent funerary rituals in Europe included crowns for nuns. The Spanish brought funerary rituals and portrait practices to the Americas, including the custom of making death portraits of important nuns. Elizabeth Perry notes: "Decked in flowers, wearing the crown of her mystical betrothal, and surrounded by burning candles, the body of the crowned nun is shown as she appeared at her funerary ceremonies."\* This statue follows the conventions of Monja Coronada death portraiture in Mexico. The flower be-decked nun has all her necessary regalia: a crown, a cross (symbolically, Jesus is her betrothed, and she is his spiritual bride), a burning candle, a finely detailed habit, and a rosary. This nun is already a calavera. In a knowing nod to José Guadalupe Posada's *Catrina*, she grins widely with oversized teeth—in a manner that is very uncharacteristic of a nun. (Commencing around 1727 in Mexico, nuns had their portraits painted with crowns when they completed their novitiate, which their families exhibited in their homes to honor and remember them.)

This Monja Coronada is a variant in the tradition of ceramic *Catrina* figures, made famous in Capúla by Juan Torres (a student of painter and print maker Alfredo Zalce). Torres began making *Catrina* figures in the 1970s. Each fall Capúla hosts the National Fair of the *Catrina*: hundreds of artisans in various family workshops produce a variety of ceramic statues in friendly rivalry.

\* Elizabeth Perry, "Convents, Art, and Creole Identity," in Kellen Kee McIntyre and Richard E. Phillips, eds., *Women and Art in Early Modern Latin America* (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 336.

**Master of the Worm-Eaten Skull**, *Emiliano Zapata*, c. 1913-19, probably printed soon after Arroyo's death in 1917, relief engraving or photo-relief etching on pink paper, 14 ½ x 10 ¼", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

This widely admired work is by an immediate follower of Posada, called the Master of the Worm-Eaten Skull. Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), the General of the South during the Mexican Revolution, led an army of peasants and called for the redistribution of land. Zapata has become a symbol of revolutionary righteousness in Mexico. He did not have the allegiance of urban forces during the revolution, and he was generally treated unkindly by the texts Arroyo published that accompanied images of him. Here Zapata is referred to as a *gran matón* (big killer) and as the *Atila* of the South. As Claudio Lomnitz notes, the fact that "Zapata had been routinely treated by the press as a criminal rather than as a general" made it easier for President Carranza to have him killed in 1919.\* The most obvious point of comparison with this print is Posada's *Quixote*. This work lacks the sense of motion evident in *Quixote*. While the latter rides a skeletal horse, Zapata rides a skinny nag with protruding ribs. He grasps a rope like a rodeo rider, and he is dressed in a *charro* (Mexican rodeo) outfit. While the horse's legs are splayed, as if it were in

mid-flight, Zapata's left leg ambiguously reads as if it might be planted on the ground. If we compare Zapata's skull with others by Posada in this exhibition (such as *Calaveras del Monton*), we can see that Posada endows his skulls with deeper and more highly modeled eye sockets and nasal holes, as well as enormous teeth and an expressively exaggerated lower jaw. Posada renders skillfully foreshortened arms. This artist attaches them awkwardly to the body and extends both arms and grasping hands as virtually mirrored images. The flag probably refers to one used by Padre Hidalgo's followers in the war of independence that featured a skull with cross-shaped bones behind it: this flag implies revolutionary continuity.

The name piece of this anonymous artist is the broadsheet *La gran calavera estecian o singular* (Art Institute of Chicago, online on Pinterest). As Jean Charlot noted, it is a caricature of president Francisco I. Madero's skull being eaten by maggots, and it could only have been made after the death of Madero (which was after the death of Posada). The other work that can be identified with this anonymous artist is *La Hambrienta Calavera* (the Hungry calavera), a hairy, six-legged spider with a skull that is a caricature of General Victoriano Huerta. It also features a pair of maggots and small skulls similar to the ones in *Zapata*. All three works feature dark backgrounds with scallop-shaped borders, peg-like teeth, and resemble metal engravings, whereas in his late period, Posada did increasingly free drawings that were photo-mechanically transformed into blocks. The credit line on the bottom "Test. De A. Vanegas

Arroyo" indicates that it was printed by Arroyo's estate. Therefore this was likely printed soon after Arroyo's death in 1917 and before Zapata's death in 1919.

\* Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone Books): 388.

**Unknown artists and José Guadalupe Posada** (Mexican, b. 1852 Aguascalientes, d. 1913 Mexico City), *Calaveras Revelacion de Ultra Tumba del Espiritu de Francisco Villa* (Calaveras revelation from beyond the grave of the spirit of Francisco Villa), image of Villa by 1923, images by Posada by c. 1907, photo-relief etchings on salmon paper, 15 x 11", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The *National Inquirer*-like headline points to a date of 1923 for this broadside, since the Mexican Revolutionary general Francisco Villa was assassinated in July of that year. This image of Villa is based on a photograph from the Augustín Casasola photographic agency, which provided comprehensive documentation of the Mexican Revolution. This etching of Villa exhibits a relatively high level of photographic similitude. This similitude and the work's conventional draftsmanship are qualities that are very far removed from Posada. This image of Villa was also used in a broadsheet titled *Asesinato de Francisco Villa* that is dated July 20, 1923 (online example SMU central libraries Flickr and Pinterest). The present broadside was made for Day of the Dead, which is why the word *calavera* and the skeletal imagery were added.

Villa is sandwiched between two Posada images. These two skeletons had previously appeared in a variant of the *calavera* dedicated to Arroyo (the variant not in this exhibition). The two small pork pie-hatted skulls on either side of Villa's name are by another artist, perhaps the Master of Telele. The Arroyo shop address is listed as 40 Calle de Santa Teresa, and the price is five centavos.

**Luis Arenal** (Mexican, b. Teapa 1908 or 1909, d. 1985 Mexico City), *El Machete* cover, Wednesday, 20 November 1935, 21 x 17", collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The uppermost headline reads: "Trabajadores: Impidamos Desfilen Los 'Dorados'" (Workers: prevent the Gold Shirt [a Mexican fascist paramilitary organization] parade). The headline above the illustration reads: "La revolucion mexicana aplastara callismo, la reaction clerical, y el imperialismo" (The Mexican revolution will crush callism, clerical reaction, and imperialism). Plutarco Elías Calles was president of Mexico (1924-28). He continued to exert power during the next presidential interim term and full term (1928-34), known as the Maximato because Calles was the Jefe Máximo (the maximum leader). Lázaro Cárdenas, who was elected president in 1934, allied himself with labor unions and opposed Calles' strong-armed tactics and attempts to control him. 1935 was a period of great conflict while Cárdenas consolidated power. When he succeeded in expelling Calles to the United States in April of 1936, the latter was reportedly reading Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

Arenal's print shows a worker/soldier and two armed peasants vanquishing the forces of reaction: a formally garbed representation of Calles, a Catholic bishop, and Imperialism (Uncle Sam). The latter crawls away in defeat. The worker tramples Callismo like the Archangel Michael tramples the devil. Instead of horns and a forked tail, Callismo has a swastika and a Hitleresque mustache. Revolution has broken the chains that have made workers and peasants subservient to these malignant powers, which had ruled through the use of monopolies, capital, and nuevos latifundios (new plantations). The Zapata banner heralds the triumph of the righteous forces of the Mexican Revolution. While this work has no skeletal imagery, it demonstrates how Mexican artists yoked Catholic iconography to the revolutionary cause. Remarkable and powerful political calaveras were made in Mexico by the Taller de Gráfica Popular, which Arenal cofounded in 1937. Many artists in this exhibition found inspiration in the works of the Taller.

**Taller de Gráfica Popular, *A La Cargada Calaveras*** (The loading calaveras, or, The loaded calaveras), title and masthead linoleum print; **Leopoldo Méndez** (Mexican b. 1902 Mexico City, d. 1969 Mexico City), *Arcos y Charcos* (Arches and Puddles), lower illustration of cover, 1951, page 17 x 13", linoleum print on paper, collection of Lance Aaron and Family

In the mocking masthead image, a throng of skeletal figures dashes for a "coveted" bone, which is held by a man in a tie.

In the lower image, a well-dressed man at a podium gives a speech to an attentive, working-class audience in the ruins of a rapidly flooding building. We view this speech through a collapsed wall. The building is outfitted with European fittings, such as columns and a trumpeting angel. The floodwaters have reached the chest level of the audience members, but they fail to perceive the threat, unlike the skeletal man who flees in the right foreground. One person has already drowned, apparently while in bed, and two figures in the middle distance wear diving suits.

**Taller de Gráfica Popular, *Este es el Circo del Siglo Yanqui*** (This is the circus of the Yankee century) 1951, linoleum print on paper, 18 x 26 1/2", (pages 4-5 of *A La Cargada Calaveras*), collection of Lance Aaron and Family

The setting is the Roman Colosseum, whose crumbling walls reference the declining Roman Empire, and, by implication, the declining Yankee (U.S.) Empire, which is likewise expected to fall. Almost all eminent Mexican artists were communists or socialists, cognizant that the U.S. had endeavored to control the entire Western hemisphere since the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. Mexico had profound first-hand experience with Yankee imperialism when the U.S. took half of Mexico after the Mexican-American War in 1848. In this print the artist crafts a critique of the U.S. that is as ingenious as it is caustic.

On the far left, a corpulent, cigar-smoking pig straddles a barrel atop a classical column.

It wears a crown labeled F.B.I. and it grasps a scepter in his right cloven hoof. The pig clearly represents J. Edgar Hoover, the imperious first director of the F.B.I., who persecuted communists throughout his career. Hoover ran the agency for almost half a century (1924-1972), during which time he acquired so much power through illegal surveillance, blackmail, and intimidation that the untouchable director died in office. The pork barrel and the bag he clutches with his left hoof allude to corruption. Just to Hoover's right, a vanquished worker lies on the arena sand. A sign above him reads: *Carne de Perro para Braceros* (dog meat for workers), which emphasize class disparity in the U.S.

President Harry S. Truman is rendered as a colossal calavera-emperor. The Roman Colosseum got its name from a colossal statue that stood nearby, and Truman is referred to as a little Nero. He wears a laurel crown (like those worn by victorious Roman generals and emperors), imperial robes, and his signature round glasses. He wields a torch like that held aloft by the Statue of Liberty. But the book he carries is the Smith Act (the Alien Registration Act of 1940), which marks his mission as one of oppression rather than liberty. The act was utilized against leftists, commencing with the Socialist Workers Party in 1941. It was used to convict the leaders of the Communist Party USA in 1949, a verdict that was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1951. A starving, wounded lion tethered to Truman gnaws on bones labeled Egypt and Iran, which were two Cold War hotspots. In Egypt, Lieutenant

Colonel Gamel Abdel Nasser would overthrow the British-allied monarchy of King Farouk in 1952, while in Iran covert US and UK forces (especially the C.I.A.) played a major role in overthrowing Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953. From his imperial box, Truman watches a gladiatorial spectacle: armed only with a peace sign, a worker battles a gas-masked policeman, who strikes with his club. Three additional classical columns protrude from the Colosseum stands. On the first, an axe-wielding Klu Klux Klansman presides over three lynched men. On the second column, Mighty Mouse, whose arms are clenched, is indifferent to the battle below (perhaps this is a reference to U.S. military power in the face of injustice). The last column is capped by a Coca-Cola bottle with a skull-and-cross-bone emblem: it references Day of the Dead with the skull and bones emblem of poison. Coca-Cola's aggressive international marketing gave rise to the term cocacolonization, utilized by European communists in resistance to U.S. cultural imperialism. A Coca-Cola official referred to his product as "the most American thing in America." Company president Robert Woodruff said each bottle contained "the essence of capitalism." Chairman Mao had banned Coca-Cola in China, dubbing it the "opiate of the running capitalist dogs." It was called a poison in France, where it was nearly banned in 1950-51. Historically, Coca-Cola accommodated both Nazi Germany and Joseph Stalin's best general. To counter accusations that it was a Jewish drink, swastikas were displayed at bottling conventions in Germany prior to the U.S. entry into WWII. Coca-Cola also manufactured a

clear coke with red star caps for General Georgy Zhukhov, so he could consume it in disguised form. In Mexico, per capita consumption of Coca-Cola became the highest in the world. Among traditional groups, Coca-Cola is often used in religious and healing ceremonies, where it supplanted traditional elixirs, including cacao. Many villagers are convinced it has magical powers. Coca-Cola has at times prevented Mexican villagers from having access to fresh water. Moreover, over-consumption of Coca-Cola has contributed heavily to a host of medical maladies in Mexico, including malnutrition, obesity, type-2 diabetes, and hypertension, ultimately with deadly results. The Mexican experience with Coca-Cola has far outstripped the fears of even the French communists, both in terms of cocacolonization and the degree to which over-consumption of Coca-Cola can render it a literal—if slow acting—poison.

A Ford-51 sign in the upper right of the print alludes to unrest reported by a *Daily Worker* headline on July 13: "Ford Local Head Asks UAW [to] Act on Mass Layoffs." Finally, the Roman fasces emblem (in this example, two outward-facing axes bound by 12 wooden rods) on the far right connects the U.S. with fascist Italy and marks the U.S. as a successor fascist entity. The fasces axes symbolized the power of life and death, which is why the murderous Klansman holds one. Through its association with ancient Rome, the fasces became Mussolini's favorite emblem, and he had a major role in reviving it. It is the origin of the word fascist. Mussolini had many powerful admirers in the U.S., including treasury secretary Andrew

Mellon, future Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes when he served as Warren G. Harding's secretary of state, and, initially, even President Franklin D. Roosevelt.\* U.S. architects such as Cass Gilbert also admired Mussolini. Federal Triangle buildings and furnishings were made in conscious emulation not only of ancient Rome, but of Mussolini's Rome as well. Consequently, the fasces emblem adorns the Department of Justice, the Supreme Court, and the Lincoln Memorial, along with many other prominent buildings and statues in Washington D.C. As a final note, Truman's outstretched torch might be about to light the lynched men on fire, an American practice decried by many Mexican artists. This gesture might also refer to the alleged practice of utilizing Christian martyrs as human torches in ancient Rome.

\* Eugene Kontorovich, "When Fasces Aren't Fascist: the Strange history of America's federal buildings," *City Journal*, Spring 2014.

<https://www.city-journal.org/html/when-fasces-aren%E2%80%99t-fascist-13651.html>

**José Agustín Andreu** (American, b. 1954 Mexico City, active in Chicago), *Posada en Puerto Rico*, from the portfolio *Posada 100 Year Legacy* by Arceo Press, 2013, linocut, 16 x 16", collection of Gil Cardenas

Andreu had a very international upbringing. He was born in Mexico City to Puerto Rican parents because Mexico provided refuge to independentistas when mass incarcerations were taking place in Puerto Rico. Andreu was raised in Puerto Rico, Spain, France, and

the United States. His BFA is from Virginia Commonwealth University and his MFA from the University of Wisconsin, Madison (1986). Andreu has exhibited internationally and he teaches in the Chicago area. His artistic objectives include documenting "the morphology of identity."\*

In *Posada en Puerto Rico*, Andreu appropriates a Posada print called *Revoltijo de calaveras de muchachos papeleros* (Jumble of calaveras of newspaper boys, 1903, online example Museum of Fine Arts, Houston). It features a group of skeletons in the center that hawk Day of the Dead broadsides, while vendors on either side sell miscellaneous wares. By means of a few strategic substitutions, Andreu transforms Posada's composition into a very specific and pointed political critique. This kind of explicit political criticism is antithetical to Posada's normal practice, and it demonstrates how easily Posada could have made this kind of work, had that been his objective. Andreu inserts Uncle Sam, the symbol of the U.S., into the center of the print, where he holds signs that proclaim "Liberty" and "Freedom." Andreu explains: "while Uncle Sam seduces with his offerings, the skeletal figures on either side hold signs with 'Disease' and 'Famine' to frighten and terrify the public."\*\* Just below, two other skeletons hold signs that declare what they want for Puerto Rico: "Dignity" and "Jobs." A third figure, a peasant skeleton in the center wears a hat that says "entregao", a vernacular expression indicating surrender. He is obviously a very accommodating fellow, and Andreu has positioned him to suggest that he is felling Uncle Sam.\*\*

The table cloth on the left bears the initials PPD, which stand for the Popular Democratic Part, which favors continuing as a commonwealth of the U.S. PNP, on the opposite table, stands for the New Progressive Party, which wants Puerto Rico to join the U.S. as a state. The PIP inscription on the small table on the left stands for the Puerto Rican Independence Party, which seeks complete independence from the U.S. Andreu notes: "They have been historically repressed to the point of almost disappearing, although many sympathizers tend to vote with the PDP to block the most extreme assimilationist proposals. On the side of the PNP are the initials PER of the old Partido Estadista Republicano, the Republican Statehood Party, which, after realizing after many decades that they would never achieve a majority, changed strategy and gave birth to the New Progressive Party."\*\*

Andreu concludes: "Generations later the body politic in Puerto Rico seems to have reached an impasse reflective of the same polemic in the U.S. and in many parts of the western world. I cannot but feel that Posada would have had much to say about the current state of political discourse in the world and point out the absurdities and hypocrisies of human behavior. With this print I wanted to honor my deceased parents who were both Independentistas y Socialistas. 'We did not cross the border, the border crossed us.'\*\*\*

\* José Agustín Andreu, artist website <http://www.andreu.us/index.html>

\*\* José Agustín Andreu, email to curator, July 1, 2019.

**Juan R. Fuentes** (American, b. 1950 Artesia, New Mexico, active in San Francisco), *Se Vende* (For sale) from the portfolio *Posada 100 Year Legacy* by Arceo Press, 2013, linocut, 16 x 16", collection of Gil Cardenas

Fuentes is a politically committed printmaker who was inspired by two of the earliest artists in this exhibition (Posada and Méndez) and mentored by two of the most influential Chicano artists and teachers of printmaking (Rupert Garcia and Malaquías Montoya, who are also in this exhibition). Fuentes notes: "As a cultural activist/artist/printmaker, I have dedicated my work to supporting and being part of a global movement for social change. My works have addressed issues as it relates to local communities of color, social justice, peace, and international struggles for liberation."\* Fuentes is a print maker and instructor. He served as the Director of Mission Grafica at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, in San Francisco. Fuentes also taught at the print department of the San Francisco Art Institute. He is currently retired and works out of his studio, Pajaro Editions.\*\*

*Se Vende* is a punning play on the meanings of "ice." In the first instance, it is frozen water, like the cubes that hover above the skeletal ice cream vendor's cart. More ominously, ICE is also the acronym of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. We see ICE in action as one of its agents arrests a man who wears a Mesoamerican feathered headdress. The headdress and the ears of corn allude to the indigenous people's prior claim to the Americas. The barbed wire fence alludes to the border (and



to a famous screen print by Rupert Garcia). The cart bears the words "Eye Scream," which is an oronym (a sequence of words that sounds the same as another sequence of words) for "I Scream" and "ice cream." A vigilant eye is painted on the cart, in between a waffle cone and a popsicle. The eye could be a cryptic comment on the injustice of ICE raids, or it could be a coded message that the vendor warns immigrants when ICE agents are in the vicinity.

\* Juan R. Fuentes, "Biography," Pajaros Editions.  
<http://juanrfuentes.com/biography.html>

\*\* Juan R. Fuentes, email to curator, July 1 and 2, 2019.

**Artemio Rodriguez** (Mexican, b. 1972 Tacámbaro, Michoacán, active in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Mexico), *Somos Parte*, (We are part), 2006, 9 ½ x 8 5/8, linocut, collection of Gil Cardenas

Though this print bears the inscription "American Dream,"\* it could appropriately be called the *Fat Capitalist's Nightmare*. The corpulent capitalist sleeps apprehensively, with sweat pouring down his face. A dollar sign is inscribed on his shirt, rendering his big belly a

virtual moneybag that reveals his true concerns. Lines on his pants allude to the bones of his skeleton, and thus to his mortality and to his inner fears. The thought bubbles above his head indicate that the upper portion of the print—which is marked by a fluffy cloud-like border—is this man's American Dream/Nightmare. In the upper corners, we see a banner with the words "AMERICAN DREAM" against a backdrop that must be paper money. Most striking, however, is a completely ineffective barbed wire fence. Three skeletal Mexican peasants vault over it with ease, as if they were Olympic athletes. Two of the fence-jumpers hold their hats, a gesture that also reads like a tipping of the hat to an appreciative audience.

The first of the jumpers alights on a side cabinet. But it is evident that this is not the first wave of "invaders"—two small dogs have made themselves at home, and appear to be mating inside of it. On the left, a scull-faced figure with devil-horns emerges from under the businessman's easy chair. Yet another skeletal figure emerges from beneath his head cushion. The "invaders" are in the woodwork, they are coming out of the woodwork, *they are even*

*reproducing within the woodwork*. On the left, a weeping woman tends to a screaming child, while another is seated on the floor, holding a skull in her lap. She could be a domestic servant, or perhaps she is the fabled Llorona herself, who laments because she has drowned her own children. This dream is like a science fiction scenario in which the alarm has sounded after the point of no return: the aliens are already among us, and very soon we will be fatally overrun. The title of the print (we are part), however, contradicts the alien invasion scenario: immigrants are part of the human race, and their vital contributions to the U.S. economy in agriculture, construction, domestic work, etc. make the American Dream possible. An admirer of medieval and colonial printmakers, as well as Posada, Rodriguez here engages in the explicit social criticism that was characteristic of the Taller de Gráfica Popular.

\* Rodriguez has also painted this image on one side of a van, which he called the Grafico Movil. See: CYAN79, "Grafico Movil by Artemio Rodriguez, Lincoln Park," *L.A. Taco* (June 4, 2013). <https://www.lataco.com/grafico-movil-by-artemio-rodriguez-lincoln-park/>

# THE APOCALYPSE AND CHRISTIAN DEATH IMAGERY

**T**he Book of Revelation is the final book of the Christian Bible, written during the reign of Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), by an author who refers to himself as John. The first word of the text is "apocalypse," which means revelation or unveiling in Greek. The book envisions events that lead to a final battle at Armageddon and end of the world (also known as end of days, doomsday, and eschaton). The revelation is made episodically, as seals in a book or scroll are opened. The opening of the first four seals unleashes the Four Horsemen, usually interpreted as the agents of doom that set the stage for the great battle at the end of the world, the Final Judgment, and Christ's second coming. Images of four horsemen (or sometimes a single horseman) are among the most dominant visual symbols of death, destruction, and impending doom in the Christian tradition.\*

In common usage, Apocalypse means something other than revelation: it has come to stand for the end of the world, the end of civilization, widespread annihilation, or—at the very least—an irresistible force or a very great disaster. The Four Horsemen have also been referenced in a wide variety of ways in popular culture. In 1924, a sportswriter dubbed the unstoppable backfield of coach Knute Rockne's football team the "Four Horsemen of Notre Dame." On July 16, 2019, Republican Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana referred to four progressive Democratic congresswomen as "the Four Horsewomen of the Apocalypse." Similarly, the word Armageddon is used for the greatest of conflicts between the perceived forces of good and evil. It is also used figuratively to describe the potential devastation of nuclear war (nuclear Armageddon or nuclear Apocalypse). A passage in Revelation "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet" (12:1) provided the basis for images of the Virgin Mary standing on a crescent moon, including the Virgin of Guadalupe. Works by several artists in this exhibition drawn on artistic traditions and conventions that stem from the Book of Revelation.





# THE DANCE OF DEATH MEMENTO MORI VANITAS

**I**n treatments of the Dance of Death (also known as the Danse Macabre), a skeleton that represents death summons people from all walks of life. It first appeared at the Charnel House of Holy Innocents' Cemetery in Paris, c. 1424-25. The Dance of Death motif was a way of coping with horrific levels of death. Ole J. Benedictow estimates that the Black Death alone killed 50 million people between 1346 and 1353— 60% of Europe's population—which he calls "unparalleled in human history."\*\* Death images (usually with skulls or skeletons) made in the Christian tradition are often termed memento mori (remembrance of death) or vanitas (vanity) images. The point they make is that death is inevitable, and nothing on earth matters in comparison to the eternal life of Heaven or the eternal death of Hell. Death imagery was most pervasive from the early Renaissance through the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, and it also appears frequently in Spanish colonies. The message that death is inevitable is noted repeatedly in the texts of the broadsides Arroyo published for Day of the Dead.

\* For a selection of images of the Four Horsemen in art, see "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," *The Public Domain Review*.

<https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-four-horsemen-of-the-apocalypse/>

\*\* Ole J. Benedictow, "The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever," *History Today* 55 (#3) March 2005. <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/black-death-greatest-catastrophe-ever>

## ARTWORKS

**Alex Rubio** (American, b. 1968 San Antonio, active in San Antonio), *The Four Horsemen*, 2006, four paintings 66 x 20", and four paintings 30 x 24", acrylic on canvas, collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra

Rubio's point of departure is the *Book of Revelation*, the final book of the New Testament, where four horsemen inaugurate the Apocalypse. But Rubio brings the sky-riders down to earth: he de-horses them, decapitates them, and displays them like martyrs. But they are martyrs for evil, rather than martyrs for good. Rubio's point is that real world problems are caused not by supernatural agents, but by real world people who consciously bring about death and doom for their own benefit. Rubio transforms biblical personages into metaphors for what ails the world.

Two paintings compose each of the four figures. The lower panels contain the skeletons and primary emblems of each of the four figures. Their massive, twisted forms appear as if they are still struggling for life and for domination. They are rendered with bright, looping, twisting, yarn-like strings of color. Rubio compresses these figures into oblong painted frames, which read like crypts. The smaller panels, each of which contains a severed skull, function like reliquaries. This is fitting, because in life, these men were honored, revered, sometimes even worshipped.

The four figures represent, from left to right, Pestilence, Famine, War, and Death. Pestilence is

an archer, an ancient emblem of disease, which seemed to travel silently and mysteriously through the air. Pestilence is as twisted as his bow, and his spine juts out dramatically towards the viewer. The tip of the bent arrow suggests the devil's pointed tail. In the top panel, his upper jaw is split and several teeth have rotted out of his skull. Two sickly birds with deformed wings rest on columns at the top of the reliquary. Avian flu was a serious problem when this work was painted. Not even winged creatures can escape Pestilence. In the "crown" of each reliquary Rubio has placed an herbal remedy. With proper respect and distribution, these remedies could redress the afflictions wrought by each horseman. Pestilence's remedy is healing herbs.

Famine holds a traditional balance that symbolizes the equitable distribution of food. Tellingly, its pans are empty. The skull in the upper register lacks a lower jaw, and with it the capacity to consume food, like starvation victims who have passed beyond the point of no return. Two angry-looking vultures at the top of the reliquary face each other. Their beaks are bound, preventing them from feeding on the dead. Thus even the traditional beneficiaries of famine are denied their sustenance. They, too, will die of famine. As a remedy, Rubio has placed fruit-bearing plants in the crown.

War wields an enormous sword with a gigantic hilt. His accordion-like ribs imply that he had mighty lungs and the ability to swing the sword

with great force. But the large caliber bullet hole in his skull indicates that he was fatally outgunned. The laurel leaves above the skull point to the military decorations that victors traditionally wear. But laurels also symbolize peace. Rubio emphasizes that there is always a choice between the two. The pair of eagles at the top represents the top of the food chain in the animal kingdom. Since ancient Rome, mighty empires including the Holy Roman Empire, the Hapsburgs, the Aztecs, the U.S.S.R, Germany, and the United States have utilized the eagle as a national, imperial, or military emblem.

Death holds an enormous sickle that is as bent and twisted as he is. The gigantic blade seems to melt and encapsulate him. Could he have been decapitated by the very implement he utilized to harvest so many souls? His skull is the only one with a frontal orientation: it seems to peer out at the viewer, as if he alone is conscious of what he has wrought. The skeletal birds at the top of the reliquary recall those in the first panel, which brings the death cycle full circle. These Four Horsemen exact a cumulative, mutually reinforcing toll. Yet the calla lilies in the last reliquary symbolize a rebirth from the mass carnage. That would require respect for the earth, equitable distribution of resources, and a wholesale change in political and economic institutions, so that archaic-looking despots like these four could never again prosper and hold dominion over the earth.

**Alex Rubio** (American, b. 1968 San Antonio, active in San Antonio), *Study for Famine and War*, 2006, pencil and charcoal on paper, 21 x 13", collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra

The two figures in this study provide a reliable roadmap for the respective figures in the completed painting. In most cases, each individual element in the drawing is positioned in the same way in the painting.

The biggest single difference is in the figure of War. In the drawing, the right leg is crossed over the left leg. In the painting, however, the left leg is on top, and the right femur bone is dramatically reduced. This change creates a vastly superior composition. In the painting, War's left limbs are dominant: the shoulder in the upper right corner is linked by forms that terminate in the hand that grasps the sword. Just below the left forearm, the elongated left femur connects to the hip and extends to the knee on the right side of the painting. The left fibula and tibia connect to the foot in the bottom right corner. In the painting, the left arm and leg provide a dramatic counterpoint to the sword, which extends from the upper left to the bottom right corner. In comparison to the painting, the position of the legs in the drawing is confusing and unstable.

Though Rubio follows the general forms he created in the drawing, he accentuates every detail by making individual elements more twisted, jagged, curved, and irregular. The dramatic swirling lines in the background echo and thus emphasize these distorting accents.

**Artemio Rodriguez** (Mexican, b. 1972 Tacámbaro, Michoacán, active in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Mexico), *Super Muerto*, 2005, 27 ¼ x 14 ¾", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

Fire is raining down from the sky, but Super Muerto doesn't seem to be doing anything about it. He merely stands in his iconic pose, arms akimbo. His face and hands are skeletal, though the forms under his suit look puffy—if not chubby—and he seems to be strangely un-muscular (though not bony). At least he retains his signature cowlick in the center of his forehead.

**Artemio Rodriguez** (Mexican, b. 1972 Tacámbaro, Michoacán, active in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Mexico), *War is Money*, 2006, 38 ¼ x 50, screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

Rodriguez is a self-taught artist born in Tacámbaro, Michoacán. He began his artistic education by studying medieval and colonial Mexican woodcuts, before graduating to Posada and to the work of the Taller de Gráfica Popular. Rodriguez worked in the San Francisco Bay area and he founded La Mano press in Los Angeles, where he published one of his many books: *José Guadalupe Posada: 150 Años* (2003). He recently returned to Mexico to lead printmaking workshops. His artist statement notes his commitment to an archaic vision and to an old-fashioned craft tradition:

"I have based my style on two characteristics of medieval woodcut: the simplicity of line and the straight forwardness of its visual style. ...In these times, when technology dominates the

way we live and see the world, when even the printed word has become almost obsolete, I feel a necessity to return to the way of seeing and living through the black and white of the carved and hand-printed image. A visual artist is not only a creator of images, decorations or concepts for museums, he is also a physical worker and a creator of conscience, a[n] instigator of sensibilities, imagination and further creativity. The ancient trade of engraver-printer has allowed me to feel that I am approaching this ideal as a contemporary visual artist."\*

*War is Money* features a human skeleton astride a skeletal horse that references centuries of images of the biblical Apocalypse. But this rider wields a pistol in one hand and carries a bag with a dollar sign in the other. Human skulls and bones are strewn beneath him, and helpless humans flee in panic. Fire is raining down from the sky, and a volcano erupts in the distance (which recalls some of Manilla's and Posada's images of destruction). The fearsome horse appears to be an agent of doom: its tail and mane appear to be aflame, and it looks like it might be breathing fire. Somehow, a rocket is plunged into its neck.

On the left, a classical building that alludes to the White House flies the U.S. flag. It features an all-seeing eye on its triangular pediment. The sign above it ironically proclaims "Freedomland." Rodriguez's point is not that the end of days is near. He utilizes archaic iconography to show that war is cruel and destructive, and that it persists because it is profitable.

\* "Artemio Rodriguez," Cinco Puntos Press. [https://www.cincopuntos.com/artists\\_detail.sstg?id=3](https://www.cincopuntos.com/artists_detail.sstg?id=3)

**Artemio Rodriguez** (Mexican, b. 1972 Tacámbaro, Michoacán, active in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Mexico), *Puro Gallo Launch Party*, 23 x 11", screen print poster, collection of Gil Cardenas

Rodriguez utilized this poster to publicize five designs for skateboards. All icons get Rodriguez's calavera treatment, even Mexico's most revered religious image. He depicted the face of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a skull, and he rendered the small angel that supports her en calavera as well.

**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *Baile con la Talaca* (Dance with death), 1984, lithograph, 39 x 26 7/8", collection of Zoe Diaz

This lithograph was inspired by a remark Jiménez's father made after visiting a sick friend: "here comes *la talaca*" (skeleton/death).<sup>\*</sup> Jiménez recalls that the vividness of the remark inspired him to "grab" a blank stone and begin work. Unlike artists who work from photographic sources, Jiménez explains: "I always work out of my head. I put it down after it's done in my head."<sup>\*</sup> Jiménez was a Jungian, and believed the unconscious was the ultimate artistic wellspring.

*Baile con la Talaca*—in my view the artist's greatest print—is a "strange admixture of

macabre medieval moralizing, Posadaesque humor, and Southwestern fiesta."<sup>\*</sup> These two dancers appear to be polar opposites. The skeletal woman is in twisting, frenzied motion, while the man is stiffly upright. He's not suffering from premature rigor mortis. It is a self-portrait of the artist, who, because of his strict Methodist upbringing, *never learned how to dance*. He holds the skeletal woman with his left hand and lamely lifts his left leg. She does the rest. She grabs his head with her left hand. This creates torsion that would snap ordinary bones, causing her arm to resemble a sprung bow. Her strands of hair read like lines of force that excite the surface of the paper. Her flexed right foot is planted in the bottom right of the print, creating an anchor that permits her raised left leg to drive so powerfully that her knee almost reaches the left edge of the print. Her force seems to push Jiménez's right arm out of the left margin of the print. But above all, it is her agitated skirt that conveys the uniqueness of this dance of death. Like a trick lasso, its dancing, serpentine line encircles and captures "the damned artist, implying a final climax of frenzied motion."<sup>\*</sup> Death—as an irresistible force—has rarely been pictured so well. Jiménez's experience as a sculptor clearly helped him to define three-dimensional forms in this powerful manner. His masterful instincts for rendering black and white contrasts are equally important.

Jiménez knew the artistic traditions associated with Day of the Dead when he made this lithograph, and he admired Posada in particular. Collector Joe Diaz recalls that Jiménez considered a joint exhibition with Posada as one of the highlights of his career as an artist. Jiménez subsequently undertook a serious study of death imagery after the Black Death, which decimated fourteenth century Europe. That is why the skeletal images Jiménez produced in the 1990s have such pronounced medieval qualities.

<sup>\*</sup> Ruben C. Cordova, *Arte Caliente: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004): 28.

**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *El Borracho I, II* (The drunkard), 1992, lithograph, 37 x 24 5/8" each, collection of Zoe Diaz

*El Borracho* treats a highly unstable drunken man's imminent encounter with death. Death—in this instance—takes the form of a high-heeled, curly-haired prostitute who literally stands in the gutter. She pulls back her trench coat to flash her full skeleton. The drunkard has one foot firmly planted on the curb as he twists and totters to step into the street. The vintage car behind him illuminates the road with its headlights. *El Borracho* does not yet seem to be aware of the prostitute because he is staring intently at his

true love: his bottle of booze. The man in the car behind the prostitute is already ogling her, though from his vantage point all he can see is her head, trench coat, and lower leg bones.

We have good reason to question whether *El Borracho* will successfully take another step, much less consummate a tryst with the prostitute. But a couple of objects near her feet serve as clues that he does have a close—and fatal encounter—with Death. The phallic bottle of booze that points in her direction could be the very bottle he is holding. Its spirits are still suggestively spilling and dripping onto the street. A piece of detritus that lies nearby could be a used condom. We should, however, consider that even a glimpse of Death could prove fatal: the drunkard, upon seeing her, could have froze in his tracks, causing him to be hit by a passing car. We spectators perhaps see Death as she is (more or less), but the drunkard perhaps sees her as he wants her to appear. His habitual drinking could have been a death wish that finds its fulfillment here in the street.

*El Borracho* has been called “a spirited homage to Mexican icons” such as Posada and Orozco, as well as a “self-conscious reflection on the negative stereotypes—like the ‘drunken Mexican’—that sometimes haunt the Mexican-American community.”\* It is all that and more. Jiménez is always a gifted storyteller, a tragic and humorous narrator of life and death as he has seen it.

Jiménez had a very strict upbringing in the Mexican Methodist church, which he noted was stricter than the Methodist church in the U.S. He discovered barrio and Catholic iconography on his own. In his prints, the skeleton of death is always female, with breasts and often with kissable lips. This proclivity is rooted in the Spanish language, because death (*la muerte*) is a female gender word. Jiménez’s tendency to associate sex and sin with death led him to create a medieval-like iconography of death, which is evident even in his titles, such as *Between the Whore and Death*, *She always Triumphs*, *Sometimes at a Trot*, *Sometimes at a Gallop* (with a female skeletal rider).\*\*

\* “El Borracho,” Minneapolis Institute of Art website. <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/112647/el-borracho-i-ii-luis-jimenez>

\*\* Ruben C. Cordova, *Arte Caliente: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004): 25, note 5; 28.

**José Montoya** (American, b. 1932 Albuquerque, NM, d. 2013 Sacramento), *José Montoya’s Pachuco Art, A Historical Update, 1977, 28 x 10”*, screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

Montoya’s announcement poster for an exhibition of images of Pachucos is one of the most admired poster images of the Chicano movement, which

had its heyday in the late 1960s and the 1970s. It was even reproduced in a book chapter by Jean Charlot to illustrate Posada’s enduring influence on modern art. Pachucos were stylish Mexicans and Mexican Americans who created a defiant subculture at mid-century. They are often referenced in reverent terms as precursors of Chicano culture. Here the long lines of the high waist Pachuco Zoot Suit pants and the rakish Pachuco hat have been transformed into garb that could almost be mistaken for the clothes of a farm worker (at least one archive misidentifies these pants as overalls).

This silkscreen, which was made with the assistance of Rodolfo “Rudy” Cuellar and Luis “Louie the Foot” González, emulates a woodcut or linocut. The skull is rendered in a manner similar to one of Posada’s images of a Zapatista revolutionary, and the large hat that he wears is even a little reminiscent of the giant hat worn by Posada’s and Rivera’s Catrina. Thus Montoya is placing himself (and Chicano art in general) in a revolutionary lineage that extends from Zapata, Posada, and Rivera, through the Pachucos, and finally “updated” to the Chicano era. In 1970, Montoya was a cofounder of one of the most important and politically active Chicano art groups, initially called the Rebel Chicano Art Front (RCAF). After its name was misinterpreted, the group humorously adopted the mistaken moniker (Royal Chicano Air Force) as well as aviation regalia.







Juan R. Fuentes, *Se Vende (For Sale)* from the portfolio *Posada 100 Year Legacy* by Arceo Press, 2013, linocut, 16 x 16", Collection of Gil Cardenas, Photograph courtesy of the artist

Alex Rubio, *The Four Horsemen*, 2006, four paintings 66 x 20" and four paintings 30 x 24", acrylic on canvas, Collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra



# MESOAMERICAN CULTURE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH

The amount of indigenous content in Day of the Dead is usually greatly overestimated. It is sometimes asserted that Day of the Dead is primarily indigenous. The objects most closely associated with Day of the Dead are Spanish imports: candles, bread, sugary sweets (including sugar skulls). Even cemeteries are a Spanish imposition, so the cemetery vigil (now often viewed as one of the most indigenous practices) is actually a custom that is fundamentally at odds with indigenous belief systems. The Aztecs cremated their dead and buried them under their houses or in fields in the belief that the remains brought spiritual strength and fertility.\* The Maya also buried their dead under their houses, and they also kept bones on home altars. This proximity reflected the belief that the living and the dead are mutually interdependent. Catholic officials—who especially disapproved of bones on home altars—claimed that corpses not buried on church grounds could be possessed and revived by demons.\*

Indigenous belief systems are fundamentally different from Catholic belief systems. James Maffie says the Aztecs believed teotl (sacred

energy) pervades everything. He characterizes it as a dynamic, "eternally self-generating and self-regenerating power."\*\* Teotl exists as matched polarities, such as life-death, male-female, wet-dry, etc. that are always in tension. Maffie explains how one of these polarities functioned: "Life and death are mutually arising, interdependent, complementary, and competing aspects of one and the same process. They are inextricably bound to one another since neither can exist without the other. Life without death is impossible, just as is death without life. Life contains the seed of death; death, the fertile, energizing seed of life. Life feeds off the death of other things, and so has a negative aspect. Death feeds life, and so has a positive aspect. In short, life and death are ambiguous: both positive and negative."\*\* This system of polarities is popularly referred to as dualism. Christianity is predicated on a good-evil opposition, with the good going to heaven and the bad going to hell. Good-evil is not part of Mesoamerican systems: most people go to the underworld (Mictlán), where they just fade away. Only those who die extraordinary deaths (soldiers in battle, women in childbirth, sacrificial victims) have an afterlife in paradise. The Aztecs regarded bones as reservoirs of tremendous sacred power.

Quetzalcoatl used bones to reanimate the human race. Christianity holds that at death the spirit leaves the body. Nonetheless, the bones of saints were revered as relics that could help work miracles: they were long regarded as necessary features of churches and chapels.\*\*\* Officials went to great lengths to obtain relics for their churches, which were displayed on All Saints' Day.\*

The indigenous peoples were compelled to convert to Christianity. Charles Gibson says indigenous peoples readily embraced Christian trappings, such as the great churches and ceremonies, but they also retained antithetical values: "The community of saints was received by Indians not as an intermediary between God and man but as a pantheon of anthropomorphic deities. The symbol of the crucifixion was accepted, but with an exaggerated concern for the details of an act of sacrifice. The Christian God was admitted, but not as an exclusive or omnipotent deity. Heaven and hell were recognized, but with emphasis on concrete properties and with obtrusive pagan attributes. Christian worship was acknowledged . . . [but] Indians continued to act as if the object of worship relied upon the worshiper for its sustenance and upkeep. . . . Indians accepted



the concept of the soul, but they extended it to animals and inanimate objects.”\*\*\*\*

In the introductory text, it was noted that the Aztecs had two twenty-day feasts devoted to the dead. In two texts likely completed in the 1570s, the Dominican Friar Diego Durán describes these festivals, which he terms “the ancient idolatries and false religion with which the devil was worshiped until the Holy Gospel was brought to this land [Mexico].”\*\*\*\*\* He feared the devil had created a parody of the Catholic faith, and he studied indigenous practices in order to eradicate them more fully. Durán recognized that Aztec beliefs had survived in Day of the Dead festivities in the form of offerings made on November 1 (to children) and 2 (to adults). In his analysis of the ninth month of the Aztec calendar he called Miccailhuitontli (the Little Feast of the Dead), Durán was perturbed by the veneration of the Xocotl pole, which he thought was too close to the veneration of the Christian cross. It was “blessed and hallowed each day with splendid ceremonies, singing and dancing, incense, the letting of blood, fasting, flagellation, and many other forms of penance.” He also condemned the “thousand diabolical inventions” in the form of “hair croppings, sacrifices, anointing, baths, tarring, feathering, covering with soot, beads, and little bones.” Mothers performed these offerings/ceremonies to ensure that their children would not die in that year.\*\*\*\*\* Durán concluded that the month commemorated “innocent dead children.”\*\*\*\*\* The Franciscan Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (the other primary ethnohistorical source) called this month Tlaxochimaco, and thought it was dedicated to the Aztec patron god Huitzilopochtli. The contemporary scholar Michel Graulich believes

it was dedicated to the goddess Xochiquetzal and to women who died in childbirth, who were analogized with warriors who died in battle.

Durán notes that Miccailhuitl (The Great Feast of the Dead), the tenth month of the Aztec calendar, featured multiple human sacrifices and human stew. The Xocotl pole was raised and “an amazing amount of food and pulque [an alcoholic beverage] was placed around it.”\*\*\*\*\* Splendidly arrayed Aztec lords danced around it, holding balls and images of amaranth dough, which represented the “flesh” and “blood” of deities. Sacrificial victims were burned, then quickly retrieved from the fire so their hearts could be extracted while they were still alive. The dough was then consecrated with blood and eaten as communion. This perturbed Durán: “The people claimed that they had eaten the flesh and bones of the gods, though they were unworthy. . . Let the reader note how cleverly this diabolical rite imitates that of our Holy Church, which orders us to receive the True Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, at Eastertide.” He concluded: either (as I have stated) our Holy Christian Religion was known in this land or the devil, our cursed adversary, forced the Indians to imitate the ceremonies of the Christian Catholic religion in his own service and cult, being thus adored and served.”\*\*\*\*\* Durán was also troubled that Aztecs clamored to take a piece of the Xocotl pole, as if they were taking a relic of the True Cross. Sahagún calls the tenth month Xocotl uetzi. He says it is dedicated to the fire god Xiuhtecuitli. Graulich says this month was devoted to deified ancestor warriors symbolized by the god Otontecuhitli. He believes it was also fundamentally concerned with fertility. Any interpretation of Aztec religion

has to be pieced together from conflicting ethnohistorical accounts (like those of Durán and Sahagún) and other fragmentary evidence. The destruction of Mesoamerican civilizations was so extensive that even the most basic aspects of its religion are still a matter of debate.

\* Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone Books, 2005): 159-62; 256; 247-49.

\*\* James Maffie, “Weaving the Aztec Cosmos: The Metaphysics of the 5<sup>th</sup> Era,” *Mexicolore*, December 27, 2011. <https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/home/aztec-philosophy>

\*\*\* See: Andrew Butterfield, “What Remains,” *The New Republic*, July 27, 2011. <https://newrepublic.com/article/92804/medieval-christian-art-relics>  
Thomas Head, “The Cult of the Saints and Their Relics,” *The ORB: The On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies*, 1999. <https://the-orb.arlima.net/encyclp/religion/hagiography/cult.htm>

\*\*\*\* Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964): 100-01.

\*\*\*\*\* Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden trans. and ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971): 51; 443; 441; 445; 203-5; 95. For an extended discussion of Durán and Sahagún, see: Ruben C. Cordova, “Is Day of the Dead More Indigenous or Catholic? Friars Durán and Sahagún vs. Wikipedia,” *Glasstire*, Oct. 31, 2019. <https://glasstire.com/2019/10/31/is-day-of-the-dead-more-indigenous-or-catholic-friars-duran-and-sahagun-vs-wikipedia/>

## ARTWORKS

**Alma López** (American, b. 1966 los Michis, Mexico, active in Los Angeles), *La Llorona Desperately Searching for Coyolxauhqui*, 2003, serigraph, 28 x 21", private collection

López's *La Llorona Desperately Searching for Coyolxauhqui* is a personal response to the rape, murder, and mutilation of women working in the post-NAFTA factories of Juárez, Mexico. It was inspired in part by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa emphasized the mutilated figure of the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui as "the symbol of identity reclamation."\* López's print references notable female figures in Mexican religion, myth, and folklore in a manner consistent with Anzaldúa's project. It, too, can be viewed as a mytho-poetic recreation of Mexican history and myth whose goal is the creation of a new, feminist self.

The upper portion of *La Llorona Desperately Searching for Coyolxauhqui* features the Virgin Mary in dark pink silhouette. She is viewed from the rear, with her hands outstretched in a gesture of receptive compassion. This is not the traditional Catholic Virgin Mary. Anzaldúa refutes the virgin/whore dichotomy and calls for seeing the indigenous in Coatlicue. López's print and Anzaldúa's book are creative works of cultural syncretism. The image that dominates this print is that of a mournful brown-haired woman with smeared mascara. This tear-streaked countenance connects her with Mexico's most popular legendary figure: La

Llorona (the Weeping Woman). In traditional folklore, La Llorona has served as a bogey-woman: having drowned her own children, she is represented as someone who might kidnap misbehaving children. Like other infamous Mexican female figures such as La Malinche, however, La Llorona has been rehabilitated and recuperated by Chicana feminists.

López has rendered a garland of human hands and hearts in white outlines; it overlaps the contemporary weeping woman. This garland is copied from the one worn by the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, who simultaneously embodies life and death. Serpentine fangs have been superimposed directly over the mournful woman's mouth.

The lower portion of the woman's body also bears the imprint of portions of the dismembered Aztec goddess Coyolxuahqui, who is generally thought to be associated with the moon. Coyolxuahqui and her brothers killed their mother Coatlicue in the mistaken belief that she had violated ritual purity (they did not realize her pregnancy was miraculous). At the moment of Coatlicue's death, she bore a son named Huitzilopochtli (the Aztec patron deity associated with the sun), who in turn slew and dismembered Coyolxuahqui, sending her body tumbling down Coataptec (snake mountain). López's modern day weeping woman partakes of the sacred emblems of the most famous Aztec goddesses. Additionally, the roses at the bottom of the print—which

serve as offerings to the murdered women of Juárez—are also attributes of the Virgin of Guadalupe. According to the Guadalupe legend, the miraculous appearance of roses convinced a skeptical bishop that the Virgin Mary had indeed appeared to Juan Diego. The background pattern (behind the weeping woman and the silhouette of the virgin) is derived from the pattern of the Virgin of Guadalupe's pink gown. The print's pink palette reflects the color of the crosses that are dedicated to the murdered women as well as Guadalupe's gown. López thus makes multiple associations between the most powerful—and in some cases infamous—female figures in Mexican culture. The multiple female images in *La Llorona Desperately Searching for Coyolxauhqui* can be related to a similar summoning and gathering of female powers in Anzaldúa's text:

"That power is my inner self, the entity that is the sum total of all my reincarnations, the godwoman in me I call *Antigua, mi Diosa*, the divine within, *Coatlicue-Cihuacoatl-Tlazolteotl-Tonantzin-Coatloapeuh-Guadalupe*—they are one. . . . Let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent. . . . I'll take over now, she tells me. . . . Suddenly, I feel like I have another set of teeth in my mouth. . . . I see the fine frenzy building. I see the heat of anger or rebellion or hope split open that rock, releasing *la Coatlicue*. . . . Something pulsates in my body. . . . my vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open. And I am not afraid."\*

Thus we can imagine that the weeping woman in the center of *La Llorona Desperately Searching for Coyolxauhqui* is a new mestiza, and therefore the most powerful of women. Her mascara runs because she weeps for the most vulnerable of her sisters: those victimized in Juárez.

\* Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999, 2nd ed.): 104-5; 72-73. This derives from a text written for the Centro Aztlán in 2004.

**Enrique Martinez**, (U.S., b. 1979), *The Triumph of Vice and Asphyxiation of the Creator*, 2015, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 52", collection of the artist.

In this painting, the Mesoamerican gods Mictlantecuhtli and Quetzalcoatl are back-to-back, as they are on page 73 of the Borgia Codex. The Borgia is a remarkable ritual and divinatory manuscript from the region of Puebla that is thought to be one of the few codices to have survived the Spanish conquest. Martinez was struck by the "duality and balance" of Mictlantecuhtli's and Quetzalcoatl's poses, which he views as a Mesoamerican yin and yang: the skull-headed Mictlantecuhtli represents "the underworld and death," while the pink-headed Quetzalcoatl represents "air, wind, and life."\* Both play critical roles in Aztec creation myth.

Martinez has compressed the two Mesoamerican gods into a single, double-headed entity. He wanted to reinvent that image by grafting modern pop culture notions of "good and evil, yin and yang, and id and

ego" onto that core Mesoamerican pair. One of his goals is to suggest the coexistence of conflicting forces within the individual psyche, wherein dark and light forces, including the id and the ego, are locked in an "internal struggle to achieve balance."\* It is Martinez's way of representing the "duality of existence through inner conflict." He sees the painting as representing—in a broad sense—the "demise of civilization and the human race, and the ascension of dark forces."\* In this painting the forces of darkness are suffocating those of light. In a contemporary parallel to Mesoamerican conceptions of time, Martinez sees "another cycle of humanity coming to an end, extinguished by its own devices."\* Here the Quetzalcoatl head is gasping for air while the Mictlantecuhtli head has dominance and control. The creature is multi-armed, like a Hindu deity. In an updating of the Seven Deadly Sins theme, each of his six hands are holding emblems of vice: a joint, money, a sugary raspa (whose aura marks it as a supernatural food), a beer, and a cell phone. The arm that holds the phone aloft is aflame, signaling the potency of that device, which, like the atom bomb, can be understood as a destroyer of worlds.

In this painting, the two-headed god inhabits a glowing, graffiti-filled universe. Outfitted in blue jeans and Converse All Star tennis shoes, he runs in a manner that recalls the knife-wielding murderer by Posada in the first gallery (though the phone is his weapon of choice). Yet, somehow, life will persevere, and the next age of humankind will be created from what the artist calls "the detritus of the current age." In

Aztec myth, Quetzalcoatl revived the human race of the present age by stealing bones from Mictlantecuhtli and sprinkling them with his own blood. Here, a beer is being poured onto the ground in a symbolic gesture to honor the dead: this action of honoring the dead might have a similarly revivifying function for the human race.

\* Enrique Martinez, email and telephone conversation with curator, May 1, 2019.

**Cesar Martinez** (American, b. 1944 Laredo, active San Antonio), *Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place*, 1990, mixed media, 24 ¾ x 20 ¾", collection of the artist

Martinez, a painter and print maker, explains his position on religion: "Perhaps a more apt title for this piece would be *Reinvented Icon Expressing My Own Lack of Religious Beliefs*, though it goes much deeper than that. No witches, devils or fairies here either, and so on. Don't get me going. Religion is so prevalent in our culture and others that, over the years, I've done a number of pieces, in my Mestizo Series, on the subject of the *mestizo* cultural fusion that is our heritage. It was only natural that I'd deal with the irksome influence of religion over so many lives. Sacrifice, torture, bloodletting, and persecution are the staples of Mesoamerican and Christian religions and they are also the tools for the manipulation of its subjects, the god-fearing masses. Suffice it to say that the awesome power of nature to create and evolve itself made it necessary for the human mind to contradict and to attribute its 'creation' to conveniently anthropomorphic deities."\*

The great, though tragically short-lived Mexican artist Saturnino Herrán (1887-1918) died before he could complete a monumental synthesis of Aztec and Spanish religion and culture that he called "Our Gods." Its centerpiece, titled *Coatlicue Transformed* (1918), survives as a crayon and watercolor sketch. It features an image of a crucified Christ that is blended into the monumental Aztec statue of the goddess Coatlicue. In *Reinvented Icon*, Martinez has likewise created a remarkable synthesis of Spanish and indigenous religions—one that he notes is proper for "this time and place." We can begin with the cruciform shape in the background. The cross, the instrument of Christ's sacrifice, is the most basic emblem of Christianity. For Mesoamericans, the cruciform shape represented the four principal directions into which the world was divided. The upper portion of the famous statue of Coatlicue (now in the Anthropology Museum in Mexico City) occupies the top of Martinez's collage.\* What appears to be a frontal fanged head is actually a pair of striking rattlesnakes depicted from the side. They are, in fact, a representation of blood, for Coatlicue was decapitated at the very moment that she gave birth to her warrior child Huitzilopochtli. (The ridge below the red tongues and the row of circles marks the line of decapitation.) Coatlicue wears a garland of hearts and human hands. Her midsection, however, is absent, for Martinez has substituted the frame of the Rose Window at Mission San José in San Antonio. This window is "one of the most iconic and widely recognized images in San Antonio, perhaps second only to the façade of the Alamo...."\*\*\* Inside this window, Martinez has placed a silhouette of the Virgin of Guadalupe (who is often regarded as a synthesis of Spanish and indigenous). She stands on a half-moon because she is identified as the Woman

of the Apocalypse, who is "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet" (12:1). Golden rays emanate from her. The skull beneath the window has been enlarged, moved, and repaired: in the Coatlicue statue, it is on her belt, just beneath the lower pair of hands on the necklace. Martinez has "Christianized" the skull by endowing it with stone wings, as is often done in churches. The winged skull stands in for the angel that bears Guadalupe beneath her image. In Mesoamerican cultures, skulls were trophies and emblems of power. In Catholicism, they are memento mori: reminders that this life is fleeting and finite, and all that matters is the afterlife. The tangle of rattlesnakes below the skull is part of Coatlicue's skirt, which is made of knitted rattlesnakes. Here it looks like a serpent mating ball. Snakes, of course, were regarded antithetically by the two religions: Mesoamericans associated them with gods, Christians with the devil. The large moon at the bottom of the work serves as a base for the entire composite icon. The red drips and splatters invoke sacrifice and death, providing reason to consider the apocalyptic source in a sanguinary manner.

Martinez concludes his analysis of religion and society: "La Coatlicue is perhaps the most terrifying piece of sculpture ever created and a wonderful analogy to the horrors of Christian religion in my 'reinvented Icon.' Central to all this is the relatively benign Virgen de Guadalupe to seal the cultural deal and it is with that transcendent icon that the great myth of racial reconciliation was perpetuated. It matters not to many Eurocentric settlers, now a majority on this continent, that many native cultures became Christianized; real racial reconciliation and human equality remains illusive and elusive."\*

\* Cesar Martinez email to the curator, July 1, 2019.

\*\* For a short video, see: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank and Steven Zucker, "Coatlicue," Smarthistory, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DR1E85xYqzE>

\*\*\* Scott Huddleston, "Legends Surround Rose Window," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 1, 2017.

<https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Legends-surround-Rose-Window-11190065.php>

**Roberto Jose Gonzalez** (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *Duality Series – Loque*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 52", collection of the artist

Mesoamericans made life/death masks that are divided down the middle: they are half flesh and half skull. James Maffie analyzes these masks: "Skulls simultaneously symbolize death and life, since life springs from the bones of the dead. Flesh simultaneously symbolizes life and death, since death arises from living flesh. The faces are thus neither-alive-nor-dead yet at the same time both-alive-and-dead."\* These life/death masks serve as a point of departure for this series of paintings.

Loque is a slang word derived from the Spanish word *Enloquece*, which means to go crazy. This painting depicts a vato loco on the left and a devil on the right. The vato loco skull face on the left wears a bandana, styled after the headdresses of ancient Mexican warriors. His left eye is the symbol for *Ometeotl*, the ancient deity of duality, symbolic of the entirety of the universe through the tension of opposites. The devil has a double eye and a cross that is inscribed on his fang-like tooth. The butterfly on the devil's shoulder is an ancient symbol of transformation.

Gonzalez says his Duality series represents a universal "ancient inner drive for transformation." Gonzalez believes the "genocide and domination of our ancestors in Mexico" is the root cause of intergenerational trauma that produces "unconscious 'craziness'" in contemporary Chicano communities. "These traumatic assaults still haunt and disturb the consciousness of our people," concludes Gonzalez.\*\*

\* James Maffie, "Weaving the Aztec Cosmos: The Metaphysics of the 5<sup>th</sup> Era," *Mexicolore*, December 27, 2011.  
<https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/home/aztec-philosophy>

\*\* Roberto Gonzalez, email to the curator, July 27, 2019.

**Roberto Gonzalez**, (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *Quinto Sol* (Fifth sun), 2019, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 78", collection of the artist

The Aztec *Stone of the Sun* was made c. 1503-1519. It has been the most visible Aztec monument since its rediscovery in 1790 under the paving stones of Mexico City's Plaza Mayor. It graced one of the Cathedral's bell towers from 1791 until 1885, when it entered the collection of the Archaeology Museum. In 1964 it was moved to the place of honor in the center of the Aztec gallery in the Anthropology Museum. Cecilia F. Klein calls the *Stone of the Sun* the "most important" extant Aztec monument, as well as "a national symbol" and a "key" to late Mesoamerican art and cosmology.\* The Aztecs conducted war, captured prisoners, and performed human sacrifice on a significant scale because they believed the sun—the symbol of life itself—needed hearts and blood in order to sustain itself in its daily struggle with the forces of darkness. Like many Chicanos, Gonzalez

is not interested in Aztec warfare, human sacrifice, or ritual bloodletting. He is, however, deeply moved by Mesoamerican art, music, culture, and spirituality. His painting, *Quinto Sol*, is a painted evocation of this imposing and intricately detailed sculpture.

The center of the image (inside the orange ring) features a head most often identified by scholars as Tonatiuh, the solar deity. Other scholars have offered learned arguments making other identifications, including Tlaltecuhli (the earth lord), Xiuhtecuhtli (the fire god), and Yohualteuctli (the night sun). In a 2016 blog post of a book in progress, David Stuart posited that the face represents the deified portrait of Montezuma II as the Aztec patron deity Huitzilopochtli (with the attributes of other gods).\*\* This figure wears ear spools, and his protruding tongue is a tecpatl (an anthropomorphized sacrificial knife). This head is in the center of the glyph for ollin (movement), which is outlined in turquoise. The four rectangles offer proof of the sun's vulnerability and inevitable cyclical death: glyphs within them represent the four preceding suns (ages), and the means by which they perished: wind, jaguar, rain (of fire), and water. Within the circular area on each side, a clawed hand clutches a human heart. All of these elements are subsumed within the ollin (movement) symbol, which simultaneously commemorates the birth of the current age, the Fifth Sun, and forecasts its future demise, which will be through movement itself (earthquake).

The orange ring around the ollin glyph features the 20 day symbols of the ritual calendar (which was distinct from the 365 day solar calendar).

The next ring, which is yellow, bounds the solar disk and holds rays that mark the four cardinal directions. The outermost ring, which is red, is formed by a pair of Xiuhcoatl (fire serpents), whose tails nearly meet at the top. Human faces with skeletal jaws emerge from the heads of these serpents at the bottom, and their tongues touch. Xiuhcoatl is associated with the solar year, and it is a bearer of the sun.\*\*\* Huitzilopochtli used fire serpents to slay and dismember the goddess Coyolxauhqui. This paradigmatic act of sacrifice served as the model for ritual human sacrifices at the Aztec Templo Mayor.

The purpose of the *Stone of the Sun* is much debated. H. B. Nicholson sees it as a cuauhxicalli (eagle vessel), a ritual receptacle for human hearts and blood. Esther Pasztor thinks it might be the temalacatl, the sacrificial stone for gladiatorial combat that was ordered by Montezuma II. David Stuart sees it as a sacrificial platform that was likely displayed outside Montezuma's palace, not far from where it was found in 1790.

The destruction of Aztec culture was so complete that the most eminent scholars cannot agree on who was represented in the center of this famed monument. Nor do they agree on what purpose it served, or where it was originally located. Gonzalez deeply mourns this wholesale destruction. He explains: "it is why I have practiced going within and cultivating a bridge to our indigenous ancestors via the collective shared unconscious. It is in 'visiting' with the ancestor artists that I may connect and learn from them. It is why I have cultivated sensation as that bridge. Sensation is of the nervous system. The nervous system is the

literal, shared core root that forms that bridge. It was, I believe now, where their creativity was cultivated, and I emulate my ancestors to cultivate my own creativity.”

\* Cecilia F. Klein, “The Identity of the Central Deity on the Aztec Calendar Stone,” *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 1.

\*\* David Stuart, “The Face of the Calendar Stone: A New Interpretation,” *Maya Decipherment*, June 13, 2016.  
<https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2016/06/13/the-face-of-the-calendar-stone-a-new-interpretation/>

\*\*\* For a short video, see: Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank and Beth Harris, *The Sun Stone* (The Calendar Stone) [video], Smart History, 2015.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zn03u3-U1fk>

**Roberto Jose Gonzalez** (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *Duality Series - Apula 3 - Escorpinche del Varrio*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 52”, collection of the artist

This painting is from the artist’s Duality Series, which he explains in a statement written for this exhibition: “I have been working with the ancient Mesoamerican concept of life and death being visually depicted as one entity, one experience. It has been a common icon reminding us of the temporality of our life and implicitly offering a way of organizing ourselves culturally and personally in preparation for our own end of life.” In *Apula 3*, Gonzalez creates a life/death figure by pairing a stylized skull with a scorpion body. The skull wears a cholo hat that is based on the grooved

hat worn by the Zapotec rain god Cocijo. The swirling form within the skull is a kind of eye that represents psychotropically elevated consciousness. The scorpion, the element that is alive, also causes death. Therefore both halves of the painting have a dual aspect. This painting explores “the idea that we are of nature and that the spirits of nature around us are manifest incarnate in many forms.” The artist notes that “loss is universal, your mate is here one moment, and gone the next. How do you make sense of this? The ancients also had to make sense of this phenomenon thousands of years ago.”

**Luis “Louie the Foot” González** (American, b. 1953 Mexico City, active in Sacramento), *Día de los Muertos* (Royal Chicano Air Force poster), n.d., 35 x 15 ¾”, screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

González created a stark poster, utilizing a famous Life-Death Figure from Mexico’s Haustec culture (c. 900-1250). This particular sculpture, the best surviving example of its kind, is in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art\* The front of the statue depicts the fully fleshed Mesoamerican wind god, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, who wears a conical hat and a broad skirt. He is associated with life forces, which is emphasized by details such as deeply embossed tattoos of corn.

González depicts the rear view of this statue, which features a much smaller skeletal-headed figure that is suspended from Quetzalcoatl. Its chest cavity is open, forming a flower-like motif (an emblem of sacrifice) and its arms and legs are suspended straight down. The skeletal figure’s feet take the shape of claws (they are

above Quetzalcoatl’s knees). González’s choice of source material for this poster demonstrates a deep interest in the Mesoamerican concept of duality, which provided an alternative to Christian notions of good and evil. The poster announces a “Caras y Mascaras” Mask Exhibit by El Zarco Guerrero, a community mask-making workshop, a procession, and a mass and indigenous ceremony.

\* For images and additional information, see “Life-Death Figure,” Brooklyn Museum of Art website  
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/118927>

**Kristel A. Orta-Puente** (American, b. 1973 San Antonio, active San Antonio), *Kan Xib Chaac Mask of Kabah: The Path to the Puente*, 2019, photograph on metal, 40 x 60”, collection of the artist

Orta-Puente journeyed to the Maya site of Kabah with an animal mask made from discarded crocheted pieces and a small traveling altar. The latter contained small pieces of pyrite, obsidian, jade, turquoise, alebrijes, and tiny skulls. Each day Orta-Puente prayed before the altar and invoked the ancestors, asking if she could “connect with the Maya.” On the fourth day, she slept in a vintage rebozo, and dreamed about “a shoot with the mask and rebozo at Kabah’s Palace of the Mask.” In her dreams, ancestors led her to Jacob David Lozano, a colleague on the group trip, and “conversations about his own blood sacrifice rituals, his two-spirit identity, and how we both were connected to the sacred spaces we were in.”\* She asked Lozano to be his model.



Orta-Puente connected the yellow mask to Kan Xib Chaac, the Yellow Chaac of the South. Chaac is the Maya god of rain and storms, the counterpart to the Aztec Tlaloc. In the sacrificial ritual to the four Chaacs (which represent the four directions), a sacrificial human heart is thrown into a burning fire. Such sacrifices assured the growth of corn, enabling the cycles of life, death and rebirth, as noted in the *Popol Vuh*, the holy book of the Maya. "Life, death, and rebirth are the cycles of life we celebrate on Day of the Dead," notes Orta-Puente.

Chaac's image is a blend of human and animal. Orta-Puente calls her crocheted mask "my bridge blending elements from our abuelas, corn, the quest to seek deep ancestral knowledge, and self- and ritual-sacrifice."\* For the artist, the mask became "a representation of my journey from San Antonio to that palace, made for an unknown, shared purpose to which only our ancestors could lead us, where we would find our true identity."\* Orta-Puente adds: "When we make the ritual of putting on a mask or painting our faces like calaveras, we are asking our ancestors to lead us to the safe paths, and scare the bad spirits. Our grandmothers, aunts and tios become god-like figures that we put on our altars and pray to everyday, asking for the strength to keep our own cycles of life rolling. We now 'sacrifice' or 'offer their favorite cafesito (coffee) or dulce (candy) to lure them to be close to us once again, to nourish them, and to give them a safe path back to the underworld."\* In her view, the family has replaced the Chaacs, and the ritual of sacrifice is "no longer blood and human hearts, but we still embrace the beauty of the cycles of life, death, love and dying."\* She quotes Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*: "The

Mexican... is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, and celebrates it."

\* Kristel A. Orta-Puente, email to curator, July 1, 2019.

**David Zamora Casas** (American, b. 1960 San Antonio, active in San Antonio), *Until Death Do Us Part*, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 24", collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra

Known as Nuclear Meltdown since 1985, Zamora Casas draws on his Chicano GLBTQ+ sensibility, Catholic and pagan ideologies, Mexican traditions, and Pop culture. At the top of *Until Death Do Us Part*, the artist has painted two pink birds personifying "homosexual couples in love, contemplating pagan same-sex union as well as far right extremist heterosexual marriage in the early stigmatizing times of HIV / AIDS."\* Beneath the birds, the Catholic image of the crucified Christ represents "the angst and contradictions that GLBTQ+ people must negotiate when openly seeking out same-sex sacred unions."\* It also represents death and resurrection. Utilizing the folk motif of two birds, Zamora Casas switches the hetero-normative gaze to an unapologetically queer worldview.

Multiple superimposed images dominate the center of the painting. The main figures are the bride and groom, which represent the artist's parents. The bride is wearing "patriarchal virginal white,"\* while the groom is garbed in "a party confetti tuxedo jacket with bow tie and Stacey Adams Pachuco shoes."\* Frida Kahlo had utilized similar imagery of a married couple in *Frieda and Diego Rivera* (1931), which is commonly referred to as a wedding painting. In *Until Death Do Us Part*, Zamora Casas presents

his biological parents as *the main focus*. The artist's mother and father are transformed in a special way: their faces are divided into half-flesh and half-skeletal images. They hold flowers and a heart in their hands. The groom's pants and the bride's gown create another life/death illusion of the artist's face, with the "eye sockets strategically placed indiscreetly at their crotches, emphasizing the natural beauty, metaphysical joy and innocence of sexuality between two consenting human beings."\*

The artist states: "My art practice—my painting, sculpture, performance work—my soul, my umbilical cord and politics are my life, are one and the same."\* He adds: "a continual multiple representation of significance, meaning and diversity springs from the questioning queer poly-amorous point of view."\* Mesoamerican peoples frequently made life/death images because they believed that life and death are intimately and indivisibly connected. Zamora Casas knowingly marries life and death in an eternal cycle of exploration of afterlife, rebirth, spirituality and magic. As Rita Urquijo-Ruiz explains, multiple representations of duality, including Life/Death, Love/Fear, Male/Female, Gender binary/Gender fluid, Past/Present spring from "the mind of a gender-bending, unapologetic, Chicano gay activist from South Texas."\*\*

In the lower middle section of the artwork, the artist paints himself wearing a jacket reflecting love and fear on each side. While the left side of Zamora Casas' jacket features winged skulls, monkeys, and other "jarring faces representative of homophobia, religious extremists and broken dreams,"\* the right

side is embellished by putti, who signify his friends, lovers, family, and a hopeful future. A ravenous snake climbs the central image necktie as if it were a phallus. The necktie is a prayer: it is a prayer in hope of finding a cure for HIV/AIDS. For Zamora Casas, "the necktie/phallus symbolizes HIV/AIDS. The snake is constricting the phallus to death, symbolic of finding a cure for HIV/AIDS."\*

This is a marriage picture that weds LGBTQ+ culture—made at the peak of the dark days of the AIDS pandemic—with Christian and Mesoamerican concepts of lie and death. Zamora Casas concludes: "Surviving the cross-generations of the AIDS pandemic with an HIV negative status, the words 'life' and 'death' have profound memories and significance for me. ¡Viva La Vida! ¡Juégala fría! ¡Hay viene la Muerte! Play it cool!"\*

\* Written communications to the curator, June, 2019.

\*\* Rita Urquijo-Ruiz, "Ancient Guardians of the Sky," (San Antonio: Bihl Haus Arts, 2010).

**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *Southwest Pieta*, 1983, 30 x 44", lithograph, collection of Zoe Diaz

Chicanos, who were extremely marginalized in mainstream society in the U.S., took special pride in their connection (or wished-for connection) to the great Mesoamerican cultures, which had monumental architecture and sculpture, as well as resplendent costumes. These cultural achievements were self-evident, even on Mexican calendar images, and the depiction of sumptuous finery was part of the appeal of such images. In *Southwest Pieta*, however,

Jiménez "dramatically stripped the royal Aztec regalia from this couple" with the intention of transforming them into tribal people from New Mexico.\* The man who holds the dead woman has no visible clothing, save for a red headband. His facial structure is Southwestern, but he is as buff as a typical calendar Aztec. The woman's body is shaped like an arch, and the skin-tight cloth that covers her recalls the similarly clinging costumes found in calendar images. Jiménez said he regarded this lithograph as "a working drawing for the sculpture" that he eventually made of this image.\* The volcanoes in the background allude to Mexico, while the features of the individuals he depicted are meant to be Southwestern. Jiménez emphasizes that the flora (maguey and cactus, which are both sources of food) and fauna (eagle and rattlesnake) are important emblems in both the U.S. and Mexico. The eagle with the rattlesnake in its beak is on the Mexican flag and official seals. It references the Aztec foundation myth. The eagle is a bald eagle, the U.S. national emblem.

\* Ruben C. Cordova, *Arte Caliente: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004): 26.

**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *Cholo and Van with Popo and Ixta*, 1997, 30 x 44", lithograph, collection of Zoe Diaz

Jiménez made many works that centered on the Mexican volcanoes Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, which were anthropomorphized into the "Legend of the Volcanoes." This myth is a Romeo and Juliet story projected back into Pre-Hispanic Aztec society. It holds that two young star-crossed lovers could not marry, died tragically because of

misunderstandings, and were transformed into two volcanoes that are among those that ring the Valley of Mexico.\* Popo, the erupting volcano, is the male; Ixta, the languorously snow-capped "sleeping woman," is the female. Jesús de la Helguera, the "Michelangelo" of Mexican calendar art, made a painting of this subject in 1941 that became a ubiquitous calendar image that is still popular today. Helguera's calendar images were sources of pride for Chicano communities, who regarded the inhabitants of the great Mesoamerican civilizations as ancestors.

Jiménez preferred rendering the couple in the form of a pieta, as he does here. In several other works, he transposed them into the U.S. Southwest and called them Southwestern Pietas (see adjacent lithograph). In this lithograph, they are still situated in Mexico: true to form, Popo is erupting in the center background (echoing the red feathers), and Ixta is visible further back on the left. The eagle behind Popo seems to lend him his wings, marking him as an eagle warrior, one of the two elite knighthoods in Aztec society. The Cholo at the wheel clearly takes pride in his Mexican ancestry, and his van is essentially a mobile billboard covered with an image of ethnic pride.

Jiménez sometimes reveled in his ability to render painterly qualities in his lithographs. He never did that more gloriously and freely than he does here, with swirling bursts of overlapping colors.

\* For a discussion of this Romantic legend in the context of Chicano art and culture, see Shifra M. Goldman, "The Iconography of Chicano Self-Determination: Race, Ethnicity, and Class," *Art Journal* vol. 49, #2 (Summer 1990): 167-173.



**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *Air, Earth, Fire, and Water*, 1991, lithograph, 30 x 40", collection of Zoe Diaz

*Air, Earth, Fire, and Water* is a variation on Jiménez's indigenous pieta theme, which derives from Jesús de la Helguera's calendar images. Here the two figures are depicted as Aztecs, rather than as inhabitants of the present-day U.S. Southwest. They personify "the four elements, as well as the mythic opposition between eagle and rattlesnake."<sup>\*</sup> The man with an eagle headdress also has a mighty beak of a nose. Born by the winds and his eagle avatar, he "sweeps down from the clouds and clasps one of the supine woman's legs."<sup>\*</sup> He represents air, and, as the bearer of rain clouds, he represents water as well.

Following Helguera, treatments of this theme invariably made the male the personification of the fiery volcano Popocatepetl; the female, frozen in death, was always the incarnation of the snow-capped mountain Ixtaccihautl. In this work, Jiménez breaks with tradition and makes the woman the embodiment of both fire and ice, for she is the earth, and she blows both hot and cold. Her knees and breasts are snow-capped peaks. At the same time, hot lava pours over her body, forming a red tunic of fire. Jiménez's joking conceit is that her vulva is the locus of the greatest heat. The fire melts the snow, creating run-off that flows into the ocean in the foreground. The rattlesnake, an emblem of the earth, "uncoils from the woman's hair and slithers towards the newly formed sea."<sup>\*</sup>

*Air, Earth, Fire, and Water* is an image of mythic proportions. It is as if we are witnessing the creation of the world out of the four elements.

It calls to mind the European paintings inspired by the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, such as those made by the Italian Renaissance artist Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1489-1534) that dealt with the Loves of the Gods. *Air, Earth, Fire, and Water* also relates very directly to a major reinterpretation of Mesoamerican religion. Richard Fraser Townsend argues that the harder one looks, the more one discovers "a rainbow like quality to these supposed gods of Mesoamerica."<sup>\*\*</sup> Thus, in his view, they are very unlike the individualized, personalized, anthropomorphic gods of the Greek pantheon with which we are so familiar. Townsend instead views them as "evanescent and immaterial . . . dissolved in mists of allusion and allegory with which Mexica [Aztec] poets and sculptors expressed their sense of the miraculous in the world about them."<sup>\*\*</sup> Instead of a theistic view of the world, Townsend argues that the Aztecs had "cults addressed to natural phenomena."<sup>\*\*</sup> Jiménez's *Air, Earth, Fire, and Water* would make a fitting illustration for Townsend's thesis.

<sup>\*</sup> Ruben C. Cordova, *Arte Caliente: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004): 26, 27.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Richard Fraser Townsend, *State and Cosmos in the Art of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979): 30, 31.

**Martín C. Rodríguez** (American, b. 1971 Fort Hood, TX, active San Antonio), *Righteous Indignation* (Installation), 2018-19, Raku fired ceramics/mixed media sculptures, approximately 12 x 5 x 8" (sizes vary), collection of the artist

Rodríguez is a New Media Interdisciplinary artist of Puerto Rican descent who specializes

in performance and installations. He has performed at the Capilla del Arte in Puebla City, the Museo Soumaya in Mexico City, and Hotel Pupik in Scheiffling, Austria. Rodríguez received his BFA (2003) and his MFA (2018) from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

*Righteous Indignation* addresses "the apparent demise of the Taino Indians, shortly after the conquest of Puerto Rico in the 15th century,"<sup>\*</sup> which was an astonishingly rapid example of genocidal depopulation. The small bumps on the surface refer to diseases brought by the Spanish, for which the indigenous people had no resistance. Rodríguez points out: "recent DNA testing and further research reveals that the Taino bloodline is still evident today and that one could speak of assimilation rather than total extinction."<sup>\*</sup> The 12 skulls shown here are adorned with horn-like plátanos (plantains, which resemble bananas). Plátanos are a staple of the Caribbean peoples' diet. These skulls "can be understood as mythological, archeological finds, representing the resilient vigilance of the Tainos, described by Christopher Columbus as 'people of excellent heart who know nothing of cupidity.'"<sup>\*\*</sup> They are mounted on metal stands, to invoke decapitated heads on pikes. The massive iron chain in the background refers to slavery and other forms of compulsion. The number 12 is a personal reference for the artist. He was 12 when his mother left the family, and he has never seen or heard from her again. It has been 36 years.

<sup>\*</sup> Martín C. Rodríguez, email to curator, July 2, 2019.

Also see: Robert M. Poole, "What became of the Taino?," *Smithsonian.com*, October, 2011.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/what-became-of-the-taino-73824867/>

**Cesar Martinez** (American, b. 1944 Laredo, active San Antonio), *Lola la Llorona* (Lola the cryer), 1991, linoleum print on paper, 12 x 14", collection of the artist

The Mexican songstress María Lucila Beltrán Ruiz (1932-1996), known as Lola Beltrán, Lola the Great, and La Riena (the queen), was an acclaimed singer of Ranchera, Mariachi, and Huapango music who had a flair for the dramatic. As the *New York Times* noted: "Song after song found her confronting suffering, loneliness, abandonment or loss with an equanimity that her millions of listeners in the Spanish-speaking world found inspiring and deeply moving."\* Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes says he spent his life with her voice "on records, over the airwaves, but above all in the soundtrack of memory," and that "passion and desire, joy and risk, tenderness and the cry for existence are the wings of this dove that is the voice of our lady Lola Beltrán."\* Linda Rondstadt compared her singing to that of Billie Holliday and Edith Piaf.

Lola emoted dramatically while singing sad songs, such as *Soy Infeliz* (I am unhappy), which accounts for the word *Llorona* in the print's title. Martinez has depicted her in mid song, with tears streaming from her eyes and Mesoamerican speech glyphs emanating from her open mouth. Her pointy nose is not a reference to the beak of a songbird, but rather a convention the artist uses when making quasi-skull portraits, such as this one. While Picasso's work was one of Martinez's many artistic influences, he did not consciously emulate his style in this work. The expression *tan tán* is sometimes used as a slangy, humorous way to end a conversation. Martinez recalls: "Way back, Sandra Cisneros had asked me if I could

come up with something that incorporated tan tán in it because she liked the way we use it. *Lola La Llorona* is what I came up with."\*\*

\* Larry Rohter, "Lola Beltrán, Singer, Dies; Mexico's Adored 'Grande,'" *New York Times*, March 26, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/26/nyregion/lola-beltran-singer-dies-mexico-s-adored-grande.html>

\*\* Cesar Martinez email to the curator, July 27, 2019.

**Nicolás de Jesús**, *The Altar* (American, b. 1960 Ameyaltepec, Mexico, active in Chicago), 1991, 15 x 11 ¼", etching and aquatint on amate paper, collection of Gil Cardenas

The four prints exhibited here are from a portfolio of ten prints treating the ancestral traditions of Day of the Dead as experienced in the artist's native community of Ameyaltepec in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. In this portfolio, de Jesús provides a narrative for each print (translated by René H. Arceo Frutos and Tamara J. Witzel). The narratives for each print are copied here.

"The first day of the offering is dedicated to children. Generally, people prepared the altar with materials found in their surroundings such as branches and tree trunks. In my community, atole and bread are prepared and offered on the first day. The deceased children are offered small plates with food and toys."

– Nicolás de Jesús, 1991

**Nicolás de Jesús**, *The Offering in the Home* (American, b. 1960 Ameyaltepec, Mexico, active in Chicago), 1991, 11 ¼ x 15", etching and aquatint on amate paper, collection of Gil Cardenas

"The second day is dedicated to adults. Food, cigarettes and liquor are offered. During the three days of offering, people pray in front of the altars. Copal incense is burned and flowers can be seen all over. Musicians are invited to play in homes and in the church."

– Nicolás de Jesús, 1991

**Margaret Garcia** (American b. 1951 Los Angeles, active Los Angeles), *El Espanto* (fright or dismay), c. 1987-88, 26 x 20", monoprint, collection of Gil Cardenas

Garcia is a painter, muralist, and printmaker who is well known for her portraits, but this image takes portraiture not just to another level, but to a whole other place. She has overlaid a self-portrait with a spectral skeleton that eerily hovers on the surface, externalizing the internal, foreseeing her own ultimate corporeal visage, and connecting life and death. Garcia explains her thought process when she gave this work its title: "It was a sort of daring myself. What am I? Who is that?""\*

Garcia was one of *L.A. Weekly's* Critic's Picks of the Year in 1986, for which Michael Anderson wrote: "Garcia's prints and paintings... seethe with 'the hot response of being.' The figures that populate her work, from her serigraph self-portrait [an earlier, non-skeletal work] to a painting of [a] Day of the Dead reveler, are formally exacting compositions and accomplished transferences of inner visuality."\*\*

In 1987 Garcia received a grant from the California Arts Council, which she used to introduce monoprint techniques to Self-Help Graphics in Los Angeles. Initially she painted

directly on plexiglass and pressed paper onto the plexi to create unique images before painting on silkscreen to make one-of-a-kind images. Garcia later taught workshops on this process in Mexico as well as in many parts of the U.S. Participants included Wayne Healy, who has a monoprint in this exhibition. Garcia used oil paint rather than acrylic because the latter dried too quickly. Nonetheless, Garcia notes, the process "made you be succinct with our brushstrokes" and it also created interesting accidental effects.\*

Garcia curated the Day of the Dead exhibitions for Self-Help Graphics in 1984, 1985, and 1986 at the L.A. Photo Center. She recalls that in 1984 Sister Karen Boccalero, who had founded Self-Help, had considered not having a Day of the Dead exhibition due to a lack of economic support for it in its East Side neighborhood. Garcia organized it at the L.A. Photo Center on the West Side of Los Angeles. Garcia's exhibitions in 1985 and 1986 were large and had diverse participants, including African American, Chinese, and Cuban artists. Garcia explains her motive for inclusion: "The point of Day of the Dead for me is that nobody gets out of here alive. It is indicative of our humanity. It is a contribution our people, our community, makes to American society so no one has to mourn alone. We have to recognize that death is a stage of life."\*\*

\* Margaret Garcia, telephone interview with curator, June 29 and 30, 2019.

\*\* Michael Anderson, "Margaret Garcia," *L.A. Weekly* (December 5-11, 1986): 3.

**Mel Casas** (American, b. 1929 El Paso, d. 2014 San Antonio), *Southwest Apple, 1990, 24" x 24,"* acrylic on canvas, collection of the Mel Casas Family Trust

*"Southwest Apple* (1990) features a fruit-tipped paddle of a nopal (prickly pear) cactus. This crimson 'pear' is the apple's North American equivalent. The rattlesnake emphasizes the contrast between Christian and indigenous American religions. In the Christian tradition, the snake is the personification of evil. The devil entered Eden in the form of a snake, and it caused the fall of man by tempting Adam and Eve to partake of the apple, the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. For the Aztecs, the nopal fruit symbolized the human heart. An eagle perched on a nopal cactus with a snake in its beak served as the sign of their covenant. When they saw this omen, they created their own paradise called Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City). One of the most important Mesoamerican gods was Quetzalcoatl, a feathered rattlesnake who was responsible for the arts, among other things. The indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica and the present-day U.S. Southwest associated snakes with water (and thus fertility), caves (sacred entrances to the underworld), and the sky. Snakes in general were primary emblems of transformation and rebirth. Thus they had numerous positive roles in indigenous mythology."\*

\* Ruben C. Cordova, "American History Does Not Begin with the White Man: Indigenous Themes in the Work of Mel Casas," San Antonio: Bihl Haus, 2018.

**Wayne Healy** (American, b. 1946 Santa Barbara, active Los Angeles), *El Ultimo Fuego* (The final fire), 1992, 26 x 20", monoprint, collection of Gil Cardenas

Healy, who founded the East Los Streetscapers in 1975 with David Botello, is one of the best-known Chicano muralists. In this monoprint, he

endows a sheet of paper with monumentality. A tall Mesoamerican pyramid is engulfed in flames. Above the burning pyramid, a gigantic skull wearing a Spanish Conquistador's helmet emerges from the smoke and flames. The overlaid white paint on the helmet conveys the implication that it is melting from the heat of the destructive fire. Symbolically, it powerfully evokes the attempt to eradicate indigenous cultures.

When the Spanish Conquistadors and their allies took the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, they destroyed it house-by-house and they leveled the ceremonial center. But after the conquest, it was often priests, like Diego de Landa (who had authority in the Yucatan),\* that took the leading role in destroying indigenous religious beliefs and material culture. This included burning codices (books), destroying statues and temples, and torturing and murdering indigenous people. The stones from destroyed temples were used to build Catholic churches and cathedrals.

\* Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Diego de Landa," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Diego-de-Landa>

**Nicolás de Jesús**, *The Arrival* (American, b. 1960 Ameyaltepec, Mexico, active in Chicago), 1991, 15 x 11 ¼", etching and aquatint on amate paper, collection of Gil Cardenas

"For all of us, the return of our deceased relatives is so real that during these days people seek meditation and tranquility. Children are asked to be quiet and to stay away from the entrance to the house to allow the souls to enter.

The family remembers and talks about their relatives and about their experiences together. Children hear about their grandparents or about other relatives they might not have known.”

– Nicolás de Jesús, 1991

**Nicolás de Jesús**, *The Joyful Dead* (American, b. 1960 Ameyaltepec, Mexico, active in Chicago), 1991, 11 ¼ x 15”, etching and aquatint on amate paper, collection of Gil Cardenas

“In the celebrations for our deceased relatives, we believe they are happy with us. They realize they have not been forgotten. We dedicate our efforts to give them the best possible and in this way preserve our tradition and culture. Our children will continue this celebration when the time comes for them to carry on.”

– Nicolás de Jesús, 1991

**Roberto Jose Gonzalez** (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *DreamStack Series - Nochipa Tiiztoyah Nican*, 96 x 40”, 2019, acrylic on canvas, collection of the artist

The painting features two calaveras in the center. A crouching calavera is falling backwards while another calavera holds his head and looks up. Both have one foot in the light, and one in the dark. The painting represents the doorway between the two worlds of the conscious and the unconscious. Both calaveras are self-portraits. In the background, one can make out dreamy, cloud-like heads and skulls and intimations of other forms. Most of them derive from Olmec, Aztec, and other pre-Columbian sculptures, because they represent pathways to the ancients and to the artist’s indigenous spirituality.

**Roberto Jose Gonzalez** (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *Coatlicue*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 68”, collection of the artist

Gonzalez has essayed this monumental Aztec sculpture for several years in a series of paintings based on its complex forms. His appreciation of the statue’s complexity has grown with each painting. Gonzalez considers it “one of the greatest three-dimensional sculptural forms in the history of art.”\* The complex interweaving of symbols makes it a very challenging object to depict. Gonzalez says the statue exerts “an almost supernatural force over my creative interpretations.”\*

At over eight feet tall, this statue is the largest extant Aztec sculpture. It is one of the centerpieces of Mexico City’s National Museum of Anthropology. Even though it has long been one of the most famous Aztec statues, its precise identity is still debated. It was initially identified as the goddess Teoyamiqui by Antonio León y Gama in 1792. Most commentators identify it as Coatlicue. Noting the existence of fragments of similar statues, Elizabeth H. Boone believes it is one of several statues of tzitzimine (celestial demons that descend to devour humans when the sun dies at the end of the world) that were once in the Templo Mayor complex.\*\* Due to its decapitated and dismembered state, Cecilia F. Klein argues that it represents Coatlicue as a “resurrected creatrix” who, along with her four sisters, had sacrificed herself to put the sun into motion.\*\*\* Unlike the Stone of the Sun, this statue was not displayed in the environment of the Cathedral after it was excavated in 1790. It was given to the Royal University, which did not want it because it stirred indigenous religious

beliefs; it no doubt also offended the taste of university professors. The statue was reburied. In 1803 it was disinterred so Baron Alexander von Humboldt could draw it and make a cast. Thereupon it was buried again. It remained in the ground until 1823, when William Bullock made a cast he displayed in London.\*\*\*\* Despite more than two centuries of study, new theories concerning the basic nature of the statue continue to proliferate.

\* Roberto Gonzalez, conversation with the curator, July 3, 2019.

\*\* Elizabeth H. Boone, “The ‘Coatlicues’ at the Templo Mayor,” *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10 (1999): 189-206. Boone first offered this interpretation in 1973 lecture.

\*\*\* Cecilia F. Klein, “A New Interpretation of the Aztec Statue Called Coatlicue, “Snakes-Her-Skirt” *Ethnohistory*, 55 (April 2008): 229-50.

\*\*\*\* For a history of Coatlicue, see Jean Franco, “The Return of Coatlicue: Mexican Nationalism and the Aztec Past,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 13:2 (August 2004): 205-219.

**Roberto Jose Gonzalez** (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *DreamStack Series - Adicto Al Peligros* (Addicted to danger), 2019, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 40”, collection of the artist

*Adicto Al Peligros* is an exploration of the unconscious of Posada via Catrina, the most famous image made by José Guadalupe Posada. A full figure image of Catrina is in the center of the painting. The inscription “Alta Souciedad” is a play on the phrase “Alta sociedad” (high society)

but with a twist of spelling, it reads as "High trash." The use of graffiti typologies depicted at the bottom represent a clash of cultures. Gonzalez summarizes his main point: "It was a clash that Posada faced during his time: a critique of society and its illusory pretensions. The *Catrina* is an image of falsity and self-delusion. It embodies a wish to dissociate from, and turn one's face away from one's own death."\*\*

\*\* Roberto Gonzalez, email to the curator, July 3, 2019.

**Juan Miguel Ramos** (American, b. 1971 San Antonio, active San Antonio), untitled drawing for a *Secret City* series print, c. 2000, pencil and sharpie marker on Bristol Board paper, 11 x 14", private collection

This is a preparatory drawing for a print in the series Ramos calls *Secret City*, which explores quirky, offbeat aspects of life in San Antonio. The print was featured in Jim Mendiola's film *Speeder Kills* (2003).

The focus of this drawing is a workmate of Ramos who was from L.A., and how his behavior departed from that of the rest of the crew, who were Tejanos. This coworker is depicted here in a Ramones T-shirt, with a Quetzalcoatll tattoo. He stood out because he ironed his jeans and T-shirts; even his suede Nikes were meticulously cleaned. But what really rankled was when he poured good beer on the ground, in memory of "dead homies." Ramos notes in the text: "it was just a tallboy of Lone Star but I still felt compelled to let him know that intentionally spilling beer wasn't looked upon very agreeably here in Texas."

**Felipe Ehrenberg** (Mexican, b. 1943 Tlacopac, d. 2017 Morelos), *Huesos* (#13), n.d., 8 ½ x 11", linocut, collection of Gil Cardenas

Ehrenberg was an artist and political activist who worked in many media (drawing, painting, printmaking, mimeography, mail art). He was also a performance and conceptual artist associated with the Fluxus movement. Ehrenberg emigrated to the U.K. after the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City, when unarmed protesting students were shot by security forces prior to the Olympics in 1968. He returned to Mexico in 1974.

This work is from a portfolio of skeletal imagery (*huesos* means bones). This image features a skeleton that looks at a temple that consists of an enormous skull. The stairs are contained by the skull's enormous jawbone. Two similar temples are in the background. The skeleton seems amazed—as if he were astonished to see a temple made in his own image.

**Xavier Garza** (b. 1968 McAllen, active San Antonio), *La Parka* (a slang word for death), 2003, gouache on paper, 28 x 23", private collection

Garza, who has a BFA from UT Pan American and an MA from the University of Texas at San Antonio (2007), is obsessed with Mexican wrestlers. He proudly recalls having dined with the famous wrestler Mil Mascaras in Reynosa, Mexico c. 1996. Mil Mascaras, whom the artist describes as "third in the trinity of Mexican wrestlers" (after Santo and Blue Demon), wore his mask the entire meal.\* Garza's artistic oeuvre features wrestlers in nearly every work. Garza is also a prolific author, who has published 15 children's and young adult's books, half of which treat wrestlers as a genre of superhero.

Garza notes that *La Parka* is "an amalgamation of several luchadores (wrestlers) who have used death images as part of their persona."\* La Parka has become a fashionable name used by the following wrestlers: La Parka, Super-Parka, La Parka Negra, La Parka II, and possibly more. *La Parka* wears a skull mask with enormous teeth. For good measure, he also has a necklace with a skull pendant. "I was playing with the concept of the wrestler as secret agent, a 007 in a mask," explains Garza. Things appear to have gotten sticky in this painting, since La Parka is staring down the barrels of several guns. "It was death facing death," adds Garza. But will La Parka get out of this jam like 007 always does? Not even Garza knows for sure.

\* Xavier Garza, telephone conversation with curator, July 13, 2019.

**Felipe Ehrenberg** (Mexican, b. 1943, Tlacopac, d. 2017 Morelos), *Huesos* (#27), n.d., 11 x 8 ½ ", linocut, collection of Gil Cardenas

In this print, a skeleton is balancing a stick and a block of wood, upon which a skeletal dog is perched. His pelvis is thrust forward and he bends backwards to maintain this precarious balance. In the distance, a multi-tiered pyramid rests on an enormous skull, echoing the skeleton's balancing act. In the distance, we can make out the skyline of a modern metropolis.

**Diógenes Ballester** (Puerto Rican, b. 1956 La Playa de Ponce, Puerto Rico, active New York City and Puerto Rico), *Pensamiento Taíno* (Taíno Thinking) from the portfolio *Posada 100 Year Legacy* by Arceo Press, 2013, woodcut, 16 x 16", collection of Gilberto Cardenas.



A visual artist, educator, and writer, Ballester received his MFA at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1986. Ballester works in many media, including painting, installation, and printmaking. As an artist and "arteologist," Ballester "focused his artwork on visual depictions and the exploration of oral history, memory, mythology, ritual, and cultural identity along a transnational spectrum."\* Ballester asserts "one function of the artist-arteologist, like that of the archaeologist, is to discover, investigate, extrapolate meaning and offer a reconfigured perspective on what has been left behind as artifacts."\*\* In his paintings, installations and prints, Ballester has depicted "appropriations of cultural objects and historical artifacts as a way of accessing the past and re-interpreting the present in a trans-Caribbean dialogue."\* *Pensamiento Taíno* was created in homage to the Taíno people. In the spring of 2012 while he was in Puerto Rico, Ballester had the privilege of holding a small Taíno sculpture carved out of bone. According to the collector, the image of amorphous twins is a Taíno representation of the spiritual and material energy from which life emerges. Ballester was very moved by this experience. He used that sculpture, as well as other Taíno artifacts and symbols, in the woodcut. Ballester discusses Taíno history: "As those of you who are of Puerto Rican or Caribbean heritage may know, but others may not, the Taíno people lived in Puerto Rico, known as Boriken, and the Islands of the Greater Antilles from about 900 BC until their demise/extinction by the mid-1500's, secondary to diseases brought to the new world for which they had no immunity, the harsh conditions under the Spanish Conquistadors, and group suicide as a stance against enslavement. The

origin of the Taíno people has been traced to the Arawakans who lived in the Orinoco and Amazon River basins in what is now Venezuela and Guyana."\* Ballester has revived this Taíno object. Rays emanating from its eyes indicate that it is communicating an immaterial vital force through the glyphs that are arranged vertically on either side of it. They, in turn, are surrounded by fields of energy, which give expression to spiritual power.

Ballester worked intermittently in the workshop of Robert Blackburn in New York City from 1981 to 2003, when Blackburn died. Ballester has been invited to lecture on challenges facing the printmaking world. In 2008 he presented "Graphic Language in The Development of Individual and Collective Latino Identity" at the "U.S. Latino Printmaking in the 21st Century" conference in Austin, Texas. Ballester was president of the San Juan Biennial, where he presented "Perspectives: On the XII San Juan Biennial of Latin American and Caribbean Printmaking at the Transition to the 21st Century." This influential paper issued a challenge to re-conceptualize printmaking biennials and assessments of their history. In 2009 Ballester was the Guest of Honor at the Second Guanlan International Print Biennial in Guanlan, China.

\* Diógenes Ballester, email to curator, July 1, 2019.  
 Also see: Diógenes Ballester, "Artist's Statement."  
<http://www.diogenes-ballester.com/pages/index.php?qpath=artists-statement>

**Enrique Martinez** (American, b. 1979, El Paso, active San Antonio), *At the Altar*, acrylic on canvas, 88 x 164", 2006, collection of the artist.

Martinez, who received his MFA from UTSA in 2006, visited Mexico for a Day of the Dead seminar taught by the curator of this exhibition in 2005. In this painting Martinez wanted to show the "overlap" of Mexican and U.S. cultures, and the manner in which they mutually influenced one another. He was surprised at the degree to which Halloween and U.S. Pop culture were "woven into traditional aspects of Día de los Muertos in Mexico."\* Martinez had noted "an effort to keep the two celebrations isolated from each other here in the U.S.," but he observed the enthusiastic hybridization of the two traditions in Mexico City.\*

The left side of the painting emphasizes the incorporation of Halloween traditions. Martinez included the U.S. horror film characters Chucky (an evil doll from *Child's Play* and its sequels) and Freddy Krueger (a mutilated murderer from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films) in the foreground because they were wildly popular children's costumes in 2005. They carry a sack and a plastic pumpkin for their treats.\*\* Other children are dressed as a witch and a ghost. Chucky's mother offers guidance, dressed as a skeleton with white face paint. A large man, perhaps their father, has a hybrid costume. His tight-fitting, generic Superman costume is capped by a Mexican wrestler's mask. The nimbus behind his head is rendered in a cartoonish pop style. A woman wearing traditional Mexican garb has her face painted like a skull. She is accompanied by an actual skeleton. On their right a young man is costumed like a vampire, but with a striped shirt and a white face that also suggest a skeleton. His saintly nimbus connects him to the skeleton. Above them all, a green skull functions as the moon. It is derived from the death god

Mictlantecuhтли, and its green color suggests jade, a substance revered by Mesoamericans for its associations with fertility. The moon's teeth are enlarged, like Posada's late caricatures, and it is somewhat reminiscent of the moon in Posada's rendering of Halley's comet. Dark clouds seem to morph into goblin or skull masks, recalling the masks worn in the U.S. horror movie *Scream* (another popular costume in Mexico), which further underscore the theme of cultural syncretism.

The center of the painting is dominated by an altar, such as one would traditionally find in a home. They are now often erected outdoors in Mexico City to exemplify Day of the Dead traditions. The altar is crowned by an arch of cempasúchil (marigold) flowers, which are universally associated with Day of the Dead. An image of the Virgin of Guadalupe holds a place of honor at the top. The U.S. and Mexican flags mark this as a syncretic, bi-national experience. The altar contains papel picado (cut paper), votive candles, cigarettes, tamales, Day of the Dead bread, sugar skulls, Coca-Cola, alcoholic beverages, and other foodstuffs. A young woman in the foreground is seated in a pose commonly found in Aztec sculptures. She turns, revealing her painted face as she lights a candle. The adult skeleton in the rear is adding some finishing touches: the dead are literally setting the table for the dead. Altars normally contain photographs of deceased loved ones, which are not yet evident here. Altars honor the departed, and they also attract their spirits, which return for one day to partake of their favorite foods before they return to the grave. Leaning against the right of the altar, a clothed skeleton takes a drink as empty bottles lie at his feet. Martinez calls him "another archetype:

el borracho" (the drunkard) and adds: "even in death the consequences of his drunkenness are not apparent to him." \*

Catrina, always identifiable by her resplendent feathered hat, is further highlighted in this painting by the red and yellow nimbus that makes her a counterpart to the Superman / Mexican wrestler on the other side of the painting. While Posada skewered Catrina as a woman with European pretensions, Rivera endowed her with indigenous significations. Thus she is a synthesis of the Spanish and the indigenous (just as the Superman / Wrestler is a synthesis of the modern Mexican and U.S. superheroes). Martinez calls Catrina a "symbol of wealth and vanity" that serves as an emblem of mortality.\* Catrina holds a skeletal dog on a leash. A devil reaches out for the dog. Martinez is uncertain whether the devil's motive is to "devour it, play with it, or use it to corrupt Catrina's soul."\*\* Winged demons fly above Catrina. They are rendered in black and white, in homage to those found in Posada's prints. On the far right, two skeletal mariachis provide musical accompaniment with European instruments. The pink notations of the sounds they produce reference Mesoamerican speech glyphs. All creatures—whether they be living, dead, or undead—are attracted to the altar, like moths to a flame.

\* Enrique Martinez, email and telephone conversation with curator, May 1, 2019.

\*\* Mexico also has a tradition of ritualized begging for treats, which were initially called calaveras. It began as funerary charity for departed souls, and the recipients (children and the poor) were proxies for the departed. See: Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone Books, 2005): 227-28.

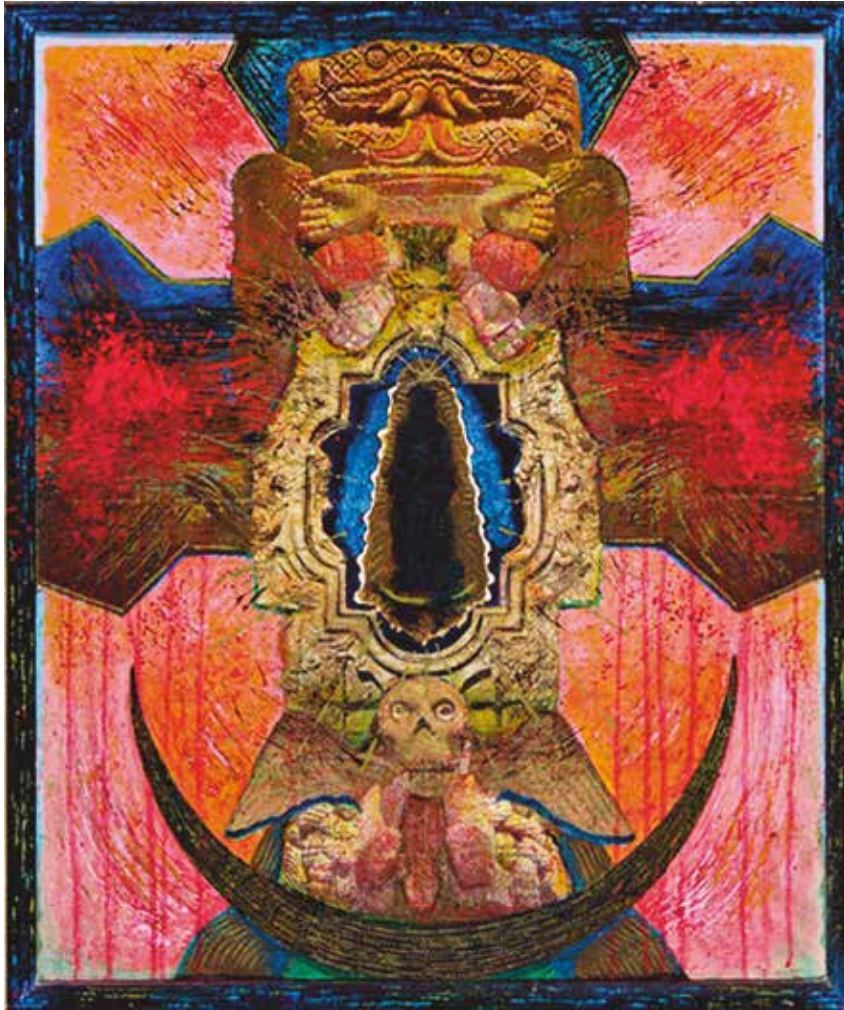
Luis Valderas (American, b. 1966 McAllen, active San Antonio), *Watermelon Skulls* (2), 2004, acrylic on ceramic and Styrofoam, 14 x 19 x 8" each, collection of the artist

The pair of *Watermelon Skulls* exhibited here as independent sculptures were originally created as part of a Day of the Dead altar devoted to the artist's father, Horacio Sanchez Valderas, in 2004. They were created to commemorate one of his favorite foods. Valderas recalls: "Every summer during our school breaks my father would drive us to San Antonio to visit our tios y tias (uncles and aunts). On the way back, we would always stop along the side of the highway in Falfurrias, Texas to buy the largest watermelon we could find. He would place it in an ice chest and it would cool down to be ready for us when we got home. To this day I still look for the biggest watermelon I can find."\*

These works marry two iconic symbols: the dry, fleshless skulls, and the fruit's juicy red flesh, on which the skulls gorge. It is an ironic, bittersweet symbol of mortality. Valderas recalls that the vendors and fruit stands on Highway 281 in the Rio Grande Valley made a mark on generations of regional travelers. These pop-up and makeshift stands sold all manner of citrus fruits, vegetables, flower pots, pop ceramic curios, and Mexican souvenir clothing. Valderas' *Watermelon Skulls* recall the ceramic figurines and the watermelons he witnessed on passages from North to South, and he combined them to commemorate his father's passage from life to death.

\* Luis Valderas email to curator, June 21, 2019.



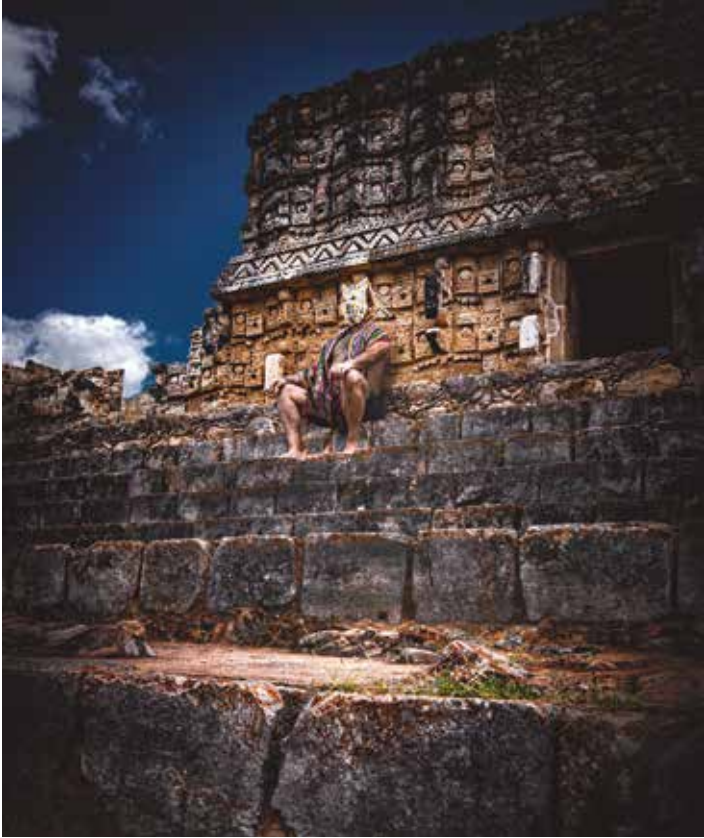


Cesar Martinez, *Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place*, 1990, mixed media,  
24  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{3}{4}$ ", Collection of the Artist, Photograph courtesy of the artist



Roberto Gonzalez, *Quinto Sol (Fifth sun)*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 78",  
Collection of the artist





Kristel A. Orta-Puente, *Kan Xib Chaac Mask of Kabah: The Path to the Puente*, 2019, photograph on metal, 40 x 60", Collection of the artist, Photograph Courtesy of the Artist

Martin C. Rodríguez, *Righteous Indignation (Detail)*, 2018-19, Raku fired ceramics/mixed media sculptures, approximately 12 x 5 x 8", Collection of the artist



# DAY OF THE DEAD IN THE U.S.

**T**he standard narrative is that Chicanos initiated Day of the Dead celebrations in the U.S., which gradually became more ethnically diverse.\* The earliest documented public festival, however, was already pan-Latino: “Día de las Animas” (Day of the spirits) at Casa Hispana de Bellas Artes in 1971 in San Francisco. Casa was a multi-disciplinary group primarily made up of Latinos with non-Mexican ancestry. Howard McHale made the syncretic announcement poster through the S.F. Neighborhood Arts free brochure program. It featured a crowned, winged skull (both European features) with three inlaid eyes (the third in the forehead, like a Hindu deity) overlaid with mosaics (like turquoise on a Mexican skull). Events included poetry (by Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, and local Latino poets), film, experimental theater, and a lecture “Concept of Death in the Indigenous Societies.”\*\*

In 1972 Day of the Dead festivities were held by two organizations that had key roles in

disseminating these traditions in the U.S.: Self Help Graphics in Los Angeles and the Galería de la Raza in San Francisco. Rene Yañez (1942-2018), like Francisco X. Camplis, who was one of the Galería’s primary founders, was a former Casa Hispana member. Yañez became the most visible curator of Day of the Dead celebrations in the U.S. Beginning in 1972, he was co-director of the Galería for 16 years, along with Ralph Maradiaga (see his *Calacas Huesudas* label). Though not conventionally religious, Yañez valued spirituality, and sought alternative forms of ritual, ceremony, and recognition for the deceased. Sal Garcia, Galería assistant curator from 1982-88, recalls that he and Yañez initiated the popular Day of the Dead procession in San Francisco in 1984 (this first procession has previously been dated 1981\*, and late 1970s\*\*). Garcia arranged for Xipe Totec, an Aztec dance troupe from Mexico City, to lead the procession, and he made bamboo staffs for them. Yañez’s exhibitions garnered substantial attention, even from Northern Mexico, where Halloween eclipsed Day of the Dead. He advised organizers

of Day of the Dead commemorations in Tijuana. In 1980, Yañez made a comparative exhibition, which featured Chinese, African, Chechnian, Jewish, and Muslim commemorations. Yañez moved to the larger SOMArts Cultural Center where he commissioned topical altars. Following 9/11, he installed “City of Miracles.” Other altars opposed the Iraq War, treated hurricane Katrina, and honored notable individuals such as Basquait, César Chávez, Cantinflas, and Selena.\*\*\*

Self Help Graphics was founded in 1971, primarily by sister Karen Bocalero (1933-1997), who was of Italian descent. Carlos Bueno and Antonio Ibañez, cofounders from Mexico, came up with the idea of a Day of the Dead exhibition as a signature event, though they did not remain affiliated with Self Help very long because they did not want it to be a community organization. The Day of the Dead exhibitions sponsored by Self Help had enormous visibility and influence. Self Help has provided print making facilities for numerous artists in Los Angeles, and it has also

been the model for the development of print shops and community galleries in other parts of the country. Many individual artists affiliated with Self Help made important contributions, including altar maker Ofelia Esparza. Margaret Garcia developed and taught monoprint techniques, and also brought ethnic diversity to the Day of the Dead exhibitions she curated for Self Help Graphics on the West Side of L.A. (see label for Garcia's *El Espanto*). \*\*\*\*

In 1977, Ramon Vasquez y Sanchez initiated Day of the Dead exhibitions at the Centro Aztlán, a San Antonio-based Chicano organization founded with the encouragement of the Raza Unida Party. A Coahuiltecan who also identifies as a Chicano, Vasquez y Sanchez is also a devout Catholic. Vasquez y Sanchez notes that Coahuiltecan called the holiday "Día de los Recuerdos" (Day of remembrance). After Catholic mass, the native people go to the Campo Santo dressed in ribbons, where they pray and place flowers and food. The spirits return with them to their homes. Vasquez y Sanchez consulted his tribal elders, and each of 19 families made individual altars in 1977 at the Centro Aztlán. Conchero dancers participated, and great amounts of incense were burned. He notes that a review in a paper called the exhibition "occult." Some accused him of commercializing Day of the Dead. Vasquez y Sanchez curated exhibitions with 19 altars for many years, before appointing a lead artist each year. He also advised representatives from Northern Mexico on how to make Day of the Dead exhibitions. \*\*\*\*\*

Most of the Chicanos who initiated Day of the Dead commemorations in the U.S. had little or no contact with those traditions in Mexico, and they reinvented the festival to fit their own needs, circumstances, and resources. Mexicans have generally not been very impressed with commemorations in the U.S. Claudio Lomnitz says many Mexicans consider Chicano celebrations "as inauthentic as they claim to be rooted."\*\*\*\*\* He adds: "Grade-school Aztecs tromping about in front of thrice-removed 1980s imitations of Mexico's art of the 1930s" can be compared to Thanksgiving or Memorial Day. But because death is so sanitized and so hidden in the U.S., Day of the Dead has served vital social and psychological needs. The art, the altars, and the activities associated with it are striking and unique. These are among the reasons that Day of the Dead has become increasingly multicultural, far beyond a Chicano or pan-Latino audience. It has become an important holiday in many U.S. cities and communities, one that is increasingly recognized as an important American holiday.\*

\* Regina M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009): 2, 3, 47; 48, 106; 97-114.

\*\* For the first published account of Casa Hispana's Day of the Dead exhibition, see: Cary Cordova, *The Heart of the Mission* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2017): 213-14; 216. Don Santina, field director for the San Francisco Neighborhood Arts Alliance in 1971, kindly provided information and documents and identified McHale as the

designer of the 1971 poster.

\*\*\* René Yañez, interviews with the curator, primarily phone interview May 22, 2007. Phone conversations with Sal Garcia, August 2019. Garcia says the Galería staff often fudged dates for funding purposes or to claim priority (a practice he opposed), but he is certain the first procession was in 1984. Phone conversation with Francisco X. Camplis, the Casa art director (1968-70), August 24, 2019. While Camplis was unaware of Casa's 1971 Day of the Dead exhibition, Santina notes that Yañez always acknowledged its priority. Camplis participated in the modern dance component of the 1972 Galería exhibition, which was partially based on a scene in Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Que Viva Mexico!*

\*\*\*\* Jeremy Rosenberg, "Culture Power: The Importance of Sister Karen Bocalero & Self Help Graphics & Art in Los Angeles History," *The L.A. History Archive*.  
<http://lahistoryarchive.socialstudio.org/resources/Bocalero/essay.html>  
Ana Velasco, "Self Help Graphics and Art's Día de los Muertos Legacy Told Through Prints," *KCET Artbound* (May 30, 2019). This article also has a linked film that treats Day of the Dead at Self Help Graphics. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/self-help-graphics-arts-dia-de-los-muertos-legacy-told-through-prints>

\*\*\*\*\* Ramon Vasquez y Sanchez, interview with the curator, August 27, 2004, and email to curator, September 19, 2006.

\*\*\*\*\* Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone Books, 2005): 478.

## ARTWORKS

**Ester Hernandez** (American, b. 1944 Dinuba, CA, active San Francisco), *Sun Mad Raisins*, 1982, 25 x 18 ½", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

Hernandez transformed the red Sun Maid raisin box—one of the most iconic advertising images of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—into one of the most iconic protest posters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her motivation for this remarkable makeover came in 1979, when she discovered that pesticides had contaminated the ground water in Dinuba, an agricultural center where her family lived in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Hernandez's grandparents had emigrated from Mexico during the Depression to work the fields. Hernandez had been a farm worker and she had also been active in the United Farm Workers Union (UFW). The UFW's calls for boycotts of grapes and lettuce had served to spark the Chicano movement. After high school, Hernandez moved to the Bay Area and eventually attended the University of California at Berkeley, where she became a visual artist.

The power of Hernandez's image is directly related to the degree to which it mimics its original visual source, while, at the same time, it effectively—even shockingly—inverts that image's message. Typographically, Hernandez only had to omit the letter "i" in order to make "Sun Maid" into "Sun Mad." The Sun Maid image is meant to connote the essence of healthful living, as well as everything associated with the California sun. The happily bonneted maiden still proffers a basket of freshly picked grapes, but by reducing her into "a Posada-like grinning

skeleton," Hernandez subverts the happy, healthful message.\* The skeletal iconography of Day of the Dead provided a ready means to make this substitution. Hernandez's caption highlights the grisly, dangerous properties of the product: "unnaturally grown with insecticides, miticides, herbicides, fungicides." All this, of course, is true. And, appropriately enough, the grapes harvested in the Dinuba area were sold to Sun Maid's packagers. Hernandez explains that her aim was to "unmask the truth behind the wholesome figures of agribusiness."\*\* She explains: "*Sun Mad* evolved out of my anger and my fear of what would happen to my family, my community, and to myself."\*\* Hernandez's first edition of *Sun Mad* was made in 1981 and it mimics the Sun Maid package first marketed in 1970. This print is from Hernandez's second edition.

\* Ruben C. Cordova, "Mestizaje, mexicanidad, y arte neomexicanist y chicano," in Luis Miguel Leon and Josefa Ortega, eds., *¿Neomexicanismos? Ficciones identitarias del México de los ochenta* (Mexico City: Museo Moderno, 2011): 49.  
Also see: Rowan Bain, "Ester Hernandez: *Sun Mad*," *Art in Print*, vol. 3, #6 (March-April 2014).  
<https://artinprint.org/article/ester-hernandez-sun-mad/>

\*\* Quotes from Therese Thau Heyman's *Posters American Style* (New York and Washington, D.C.: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the National Museum of American Art, 1998), cited in "*Sun Mad*, Ester Hernandez," *¡Del Corazón!*, Smithsonian American Art Museum:  
[https://2.americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria\\_06.cfm](https://2.americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria_06.cfm)

**John Sierra** (active Southern California), *El Teatro Campesino de Aztlán* (poster), 1970, 28 x 21", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

This poster was made for El Teatro Campesino, which had its origin in 1965 in California's central valley, where it was allied with the United Farm Workers Union. Luis Valdez began performances by and for farm workers right in the fields where they labored. These performances satirized the growers and other powerful people, so it is quite appropriate that the artist draws on Posada's satiric images. El Teatro sought to educate farm workers and to help them break free from patterns of subordination. Short acts dramatized injustices and were designed to make workers imagine solutions to their problems. The Teatro was a critical tool in the farm workers' struggles for human rights, better living and working conditions, and better pay. By the time this poster was made in 1970, the Teatro had achieved success as both an organizing tool and as a performing troupe. It inspired the formation of many other Chicano theater troupes, and it achieved national and international renown.

Sierra's main image features two skulls. One is engaged in a full, open-mouth laugh. The other skull is clearly not happy at all: its eyebrows are upraised in the center, its eye sockets are pointed at the top, its teeth are gritted, and its moustache droops. Thus Sierra economically suggests the potential range of theatrical emotion with two skulls. These skulls closely follow an image of a Zapatista

by Posada. Sierra thereby created an artistic and revolutionary link to Mexican traditions. Aztlán is the legendary homeland of the Aztecs, which Chicanos claimed as the present-day U.S. Southwest that was taken from Mexico after the Mexican-American War. The small images in the four corners of the poster also derive from other prints by Posada. Sierra's other work for the Teatro includes the program called *La Carpa de los Rasquachis* October 24-November 18, 1974.

**Malaquias Montoya** (American, b. 1938 Albuquerque, NM, active in Oakland, CA), *Un Besito Para Siempre* (A little kiss for forever), 2000, 25 x 19 ¾", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

A calavera couple are about to kiss. The man's skull is held by his beloved. He presents her with a single red rose, which accentuates her red lips. Montoya describes the scenario, which also explains the title: "This print is of two farm workers, husband and wife, coming to the end of their lives. They ask each other for a kiss that will last forever."\* The man's moustache links him generically with the Zapatistas and the Mexican Revolution. The United Farm Workers flag (a black eagle on a red field) in the foreground associates them with the struggles of the Chicano movement. Thus, even in an image depicting romance, Montoya references political struggles (past and present) and the tradition of Day of the Dead.

Montoya is a painter, muralist, and poster artist, and his work has been particularly influential in the San Francisco Bay area. Montoya learned the technique of silkscreen before attending

the University of California at Berkeley, where he made political posters for many causes. He taught at U.C. Berkeley, the California College of Arts and Crafts, U.C. Davis (where he is Professor Emeritus), Stanford, Notre Dame, and the University of Texas, San Antonio. He also played an important part in several graphic workshops.

Montoya explains his artistic motivation in an artist's statement:

"My images of empowerment are intended to confront the multitude of images of disempowerment given to us by our daily media. Images that disguise reality, manipulate consciousness, and lull the creative imagination to sleep.... I pay homage to the workers and I aggrandize their efforts. I celebrate small and large victories of the human spirit. I depict people in control of their lives working together to change and transform their reality. As Bertolt Brecht said: 'Art should not be a mirror of reality but a hammer with which to shape a new reality.'\*\*"

\* Malaquias Montoya email to curator, June 24, 2019.

\*\* "Objectives," Malaquias Montoya website.  
<http://malaquiasmontoya.com/malaquias-montoya-about.html>

**Vincent Valdez** (American, b. 1977 San Antonio, active Houston), *A Dance with Death*, 2000, 32 x 18", oil on canvas, collection of Zoe Diaz

The Devil at the Dance folk tale was one of the most resonant themes in the early work of Valdez. This legend is Catholic at its core. The Spanish introduced it to the Americas. Mark

Glazer defines its traditional moralizing essence: the devil, incarnated as a handsome, well-dressed dancer, selects and punishes "a young woman who is often vain, flirtatious, disobedient and sacrilegious."\* As the tale is told in San Antonio, the setting is most often El Camaroncito Night Club, on Old Highway 90, on Halloween. After his identity is discovered, the devil escapes, leaving behind the odor of sulfur, but no dead victims, though all witnesses learn a vital moral lesson that is shared with the community.

Valdez made his first iterations of this theme in 2000: a drawing and later a screen print called *I Lost Her to El Diablo: He Can Have Her, I Don't Want Her Anymore*. (The subtitle was taken from the lyrics of *Ella Pertenece al Diabo* by the Texas Tornados.) These works and an oil version made in 2004 focus on a spurned male lover.\*\*

The cold beauty of *A Dance with Death* was inspired by John Singer Sargent's (1856-1925) notorious *Madame X* (1883-4). It is a variation on the Dance with the Devil theme. But here the consequences of the dance are more momentous. The setting is Day of the Dead, as we can see by the papel picada and the skeletal musicians that are hung on the rear wall. It is as if representations of death are providing a serenade for death itself. An ominous black bird wearing an orange mask bears a banner with the title of the painting. Perhaps the devil has morphed into a character more appropriate for Day of the Dead. Instead of hooves or chicken's feet, he has two-tone Stacy Adams shoes that mirror the tile floor. An orange accent on the shoes even picks up the color of the bird's mask and feet, and perhaps serves as a clue that this man has chicken's feet inside of his shoes.



This sharply dressed man exhibits a cold, blue-green shade of white (save for his ear and the tip of his nose), giving him a ghastly, menacing pallor. (*Madame X's* similarly unnatural color was caused by lavender powder—which she did not apply to her ears).\*\*\* The devil's dancing partner is also turning white, and with good reason: her vital life forces are slipping away. Her left arm hangs straight down, and her right arm hangs limp in the man's clutches. Her right foot has lost its shoe and is twisted backwards. Even her head appears ready to tumble down. Valdez explains that she is "either already dead or breathing her last breath."\*\* He also notes that some of the painting's vivid details were inflected by "vibrant dreams of my own death and meeting with the devil."\*\*\* Skeletal graffiti and ghostly images of skeletal dances echo the primary scene.

\* Mark Glazer, "'El Diablo en el baile:' cultural change, tradition and continuity in a Chicano legend," *Contemporary Legend* 4 (1994): 31-44.

\*\* Ruben C. Cordova, *Arte Caliente: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004), quotes: 41; for treatments of the three *I Lost Her to El Diablo* works, see: 40-41, 43.

\*\*\* "Madame X," Metropolitan Museum of Art website. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/12127?&searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=sargeant%2c+madame+x&offset=0&rp-p=20&pos=1>

**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *El Buen Pastor* (The Good Shepherd), 1999, hand colored lithograph, 42 x 29", collection of Zoe Diaz

*El Buen Pastor* commemorates Esequiel Hernández, a high school student who was tending his family's goats when he was fatally shot by a U.S. Marine about a mile from the Mexico-Texas border on May 20, 1997.\* Four marines from Fort Pendleton, CA were camouflaged in bush-covered ghillie suits while they were completing a three-day drug-surveillance mission that had not been announced to local residents. They claimed Hernández had fired two shots in their direction with an old .22-caliber rifle that he carried to protect his family's 40 goats from predators. The marines also claimed that Hernández raised his rifle to shoot again, and that he was shot him in self-defense, an argument contradicted by the autopsy. Since he was shot in his right rib cage, Hernández could not have been aiming at the marines.\*\* Moreover, the Marines failed to render aid as Hernández bled to death. They also lied that his injuries were from a fall, which further eroded their credibility.

Rev. Mel LaFollette, a retired Episcopal priest, says the soldiers were clearly in the wrong: "The marines left their observation post, they stalked him, they came onto private property.... and then they killed him."\* Hernández, who had a marine recruiting poster on his bedroom wall, was shot in sight of his home and in sight of the local cemetery. At least his death served to change protocols for the deployment of troops in civilian areas, and it likely played a role in the abandonment of President Trump's short-lived plan to station 100,000 troops on the border.\*\* Jiménez's explanatory text at the top of this print is a direct reference to those found on tin retablos (popular Catholic paintings that depict miraculous interventions). But this text details a death rather than an act of salvation: "A tragic

consequence of this country's insane and racist border policy was the murder of Esequiel of Redford, Tex. while he tended his goats. The assassins were absolved since they were only following orders and he fit the profile of a drug smuggler, so they said."

The title has numerous Biblical associations. Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). John (10:4) declares: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Biblical iconography is also reflected in this print. Esequiel with his kid is easy to associate with Jesus and his lamb (and with Jesus as the lamb of God). Hernández's outstretched hand gesture was inspired by a stained glass window in the artist's childhood church. Jiménez considers it an archetypal gesture, rather than one with specific significance (it appears in many images of Christ, in Buddhist and Hindu art, and in the Mexican and Puerto Rican *Mano Poderoso*).\*\*\*

Esequiel's orange halo contrasts with the red sky background. But the "halo" is actually a view through a telescopic rifle sight trained on the good shepherd, who was shot with an M-16 at a distance of about 230 yards.\* Jiménez situates the viewer in the precise position of Esequiel's assassin. Ironically, the instrument of Esequiel's martyrdom simultaneously confers the halo of sainthood. To give a friend of Hernández the last word, archaeologist Enrique R. Madrid declares: "the only way they could have botched this up more was if they shot Mother Teresa. If there was one truly innocent man on the border, it was this young man. And he's the one who got killed."\* *The Ballad of Esequiel Hernández* (2007),

a documentary film by Kieran Fitzgerald narrated by Tommy Lee Jones, won several best documentary awards at film festivals.

\* Sam Howe Verhovek, "After a Marine on Patrol Kills a Teen-Ager, a Texas Border Village Wonders Why," *New York Times*, June 29, 1997.

\*\* John MacCormack, "Border killing 20 years ago changed military tactics," *San Antonio Express-News*, May 13, 2017.

<https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Border-killing-20-years-ago-changed-military-11142713.php>

Samantha Schmidt, "How the tragic killing of an American teenager halted the military border presence in 1997," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2018.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/04/06/how-the-tragic-killing-of-an-american-teenager-halted-the-military-border-presence-in-1997/?utm\\_term=.f8a7e28ea8e4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/04/06/how-the-tragic-killing-of-an-american-teenager-halted-the-military-border-presence-in-1997/?utm_term=.f8a7e28ea8e4)

\*\*\* Ruben C. Cordova, *Arte Caliente: Selections from the Joe A. Diaz Collection* (Corpus Christi: South Texas Institute for the Arts, 2004): 27, note 11.

**Adriana Garcia** (American, b. 1977 San Antonio, active in San Antonio), *La Mano* (The hand), 2009, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 20", collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra

Garcia draws on a Mexican folk religious image known as La Mano Poderoso (The powerful hand, or The hand of wonder).\* This religious image features a human hand with tiny figures of the Holy Family or saints on the tip of each finger. Such images were commonly painted

on tin on a very small scale. Though Garcia's painting is also small in scale, it has more of a political focus than a religious one: it is primarily concerned with immigration from Mexico to the United States. The skull that floats above the thumb is an emblem of death, and, in particular, the potentially fatal hazards of crossing the border. The plant represents the necessity of vegetation for life, as well as the fact that many immigrants are employed in agriculture: they grow and harvest much of the food that citizens of the U.S. eat. The hammer stands for construction and other kinds of physical work that draws immigrants. The hummingbird, though diminutive in scale, is a hard worker with a big heart. Hummingbirds regularly emigrate great distances. The rosary stands for articles of faith, which provide immigrants with the strength and fortitude to make their arduous journeys. The electrified force field around the hand represents the cosmic forces that unite all things.

\* For examples, see: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mano\\_Poderosa\\_\(The\\_All-Powerful\\_Hand\),\\_or\\_Las\\_Cinco\\_Personas\\_\(The\\_Five\\_Persons\)\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mano_Poderosa_(The_All-Powerful_Hand),_or_Las_Cinco_Personas_(The_Five_Persons)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Hand\\_of\\_God\\_by\\_Donanciano\\_Aguilar,\\_El\\_Paso\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Hand_of_God_by_Donanciano_Aguilar,_El_Paso_Museum_of_Art.jpg)

**Vincent Valdez** (American, b. 1977 San Antonio, active Houston), *El Diablo at the Dance*, c. 2002, 82 x 48", oil on wood, collection of Zoe Diaz

This early masterpiece by Valdez is exhibited and published here for the first time. It continues the theme of the Devil at the Dance. But the devil is done dancing—for the time being at least.

This version of the myth has a twin genesis. When the artist was working towards his BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design, he found a news article from the Dallas area from the 1990s that described crimes in Mexican-American communities in North Texas. Valdez recalls: "The victims of these unsolved crimes exhibited strange, claw like scratches over their bodies. Crime scene witnesses from local nightclubs and even from a state fair described similar details about a suspect—a finely dressed man who stuck out, looked like he was from another time. Others described a strange, dark and uncomfortable feeling being in his presence and others offered their tales of El Diablito."\* Valdez also recalled a "strikingly similar" story his grandmother often recounted about "a mysterious man who frequented the Westside night clubs of San Antonio in her youth."\* Valdez recalls: "She claimed the memory of seeing him still made the hairs on the back of her neck stand. He sported the best suits. The women flocked to him. The men cursed him. He would select the finest partners for the dance floor. Until a foul odor began choking the air. Shrieks of terror occurred at the sudden sight of his feet. People fainted. The jukebox went dead. Some hid in the bathroom and others sprinted for the front door. And there he stood, glowing in the pale moonlight before quietly vanishing into the night."\* Valdez reflects on the purpose of his grandmother's stories: "I understood then, as I do now, that her tale was as much mythic as true. My grandmother was teaching me—'Cuidado (careful). There are devils that walk among us.'"\*

Valdez fused a sensational news article, family oral traditions, folklore, fine art, and film to create this monster. He is captured in a frontal position,

with his left hand down at his side. The devil—and there can be no doubt about his identity now because he is perched on chicken feet—smokes a cigarette. Meanwhile, photographic images of his female dance partners/victims are strewn around him. Each of them is violated by claw-like scratch marks. The photos burst into flames, emblematic of the fate of these victims in the fires of hell. Such is the cruel price they paid for succumbing to temptation.

The devil's face is differentiated: his left eye is unnaturally green, while his right is a sunken, skull-like socket. The right side reveals his true nature, for he represents the eternal death of damnation. As in *A Dance With Death*, his ears and nose are flesh-colored, while his face bears a cold pallor, again echoing Sargent's *Madame X*. This satanic vision was also influenced by the gaunt, pale, archaically dressed devil in the film *Poltergeist II* (1986), who "really spooked" the artist and caused nightmares.\* Valdez's devil sports a bright red vest and a rose on his lapel (one of his victims has a similar rose tattoo above a scratch mark that looks as if it were made by a claw). His black tie is accented by red X's that ironically recall crosses. While, in the Christian tradition, the cross represents salvation and eternal life, an X often stands for death. Perhaps the X's are a tally of his victims. Given the multicolored lights in the upper right and the green and red accents, the setting appears to be Christmas. But that is an inside joke on the part of the artist: "It was my spoof on San Antonio. It's always Christmas in SA. No one ever takes down their Christmas lights!"\* Christmas or not, the only cheer the devil is spreading is death, symbolized by the X-marked bottle on the shelf. On the far left, a

votive candle with an image of Christ burns on the windowsill. As Valdez's grandmother would have desired, it provides a small beacon of hope against the devil's predations of female flesh and female souls. In this painting, fire is an agent of salvation as well as damnation.

\* Vincent Valdez, email to curator, July 11, 2019.

**Carlos Cortéz "Koyokuikatl"** (American, b. 1923 Milwaukee, d. 2005 Chicago), untitled [Nadie...], 1984, linocut on butcher paper, 25 x 30 ½", collection of Gil Cardenas

Cortéz was a muralist, cartoonist, and print maker, as well as a political activist. He was deeply inspired by the work of Posada, whom he regarded as an exemplary revolutionary artist. Cortéz edited a book with commentary on the Mexican artist called *Viva Posada!*, which was published on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Posada's birth in 2002. Like nearly all of Posada's admirers, Cortéz overstates Posada's revolutionary character and influence in the introduction to this book: "He has long been recognized as one of the personifications of the ensuing Mexican Revolution, which he did not live to see completed."

Posada's work was enormously influential on Cortéz, and that influence is evident in this monumental print. A man—one who has at least a passing resemblance to Emiliano Zapata—is seated at a round table, drinking tequila from a shot glass. He wears a dress shirt and has no weapons or military emblems (though the big hat could be associated with Zapatistas). The man is being serenaded by a group of skeletons in big hats. Their song is about love, but perhaps

they could also be anticipating his death in the Mexican Revolution. The lyrics written at the top of the print are from "La Huasanga," a ballad that originated in Veracruz, which proclaims: "Nadie debe lamentarse por muerte de sus amores, más bien debe conformarse, sabiendo que hasta las flores nacen para marchitarse" ("No one should lament the death of their loves, rather they should comfort themselves with the knowledge that even flowers are born to wither).\*

Pre-Hispanic speech glyphs emanate from the skeletal musicians' mouths and/or instruments (two guitars and a trumpet). The skeleton on the left side of the print has her hand on the man's shoulder. She is Posada's Catrina, complete with hair ribbons, but without the gigantic European hat that Posada and Rivera depicted her in, which would be out of place in this context. Her dress is also more appropriate for a singer in a bar than the one that Rivera provided to his Catrina in his Alameda Park fresco.

\* For a complete version of the lyrics, see: "¡Que Florezca! (Let it Bloom), Lyrics," *Sones de Mexico*. [http://sonesdemexico.com/florezca\\_lyrics.html](http://sonesdemexico.com/florezca_lyrics.html)

**Carlos Cortéz "Koyokuikatl"** (American, b. 1923 Milwaukee, d. 2005 Chicago), *Greetings IWW*, n.d., offset, 20 x 17", collection of Gil Cardenas

Cortéz was the son of an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, popularly known as Wobblies). He was active in the group Movimiento Artístico Chicano (MARCH). A fervent anti-war activist, Cortéz was

imprisoned during World War II because he was a conscientious objector. After the war, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and he regularly wrote and drew cartoons for its paper, *The Industrial Worker*. This print has an anti-war theme and it bears the logo of the IWW. The man in the foreground is depicted in a normal fashion. The figures behind him are increasingly skeletal, culminating in the naked skeleton in the rear. The second figure wears a uniform and an army helmet. His face is sunken and his sockets have no eyeballs. The figure behind him wears the hat of a Vietnamese soldier. His nose is indicated by two small holes and his face appears to be drying up. Ribs are evident beneath his shirt. War will cause both men to become skeletons. This differs from Posada's Day of the Dead prints (and the tradition from which they stem), where the point is that everyone will become a skeleton. The point here is that war is deadly.

Cortéz bequeathed his wood and linoleum blocks to the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, with instructions that they should be used to drive down the price of his prints, should they ever rise a considerable amount.

**Carlos Cortéz "Koyokuikatl"** (American, b. 1923 Milwaukee, d. 2005 Chicago), *Tlazolteotl*, 1982, linocut, 28 ½ x 22 ½", collection of Gil Cardenas

Tlazolteotl was the Mesoamerican god of purification and curing, associated with sexual sin, lust, fertility, and confession, among other things. Cortéz's image is based on a world-famous, unique statue of a woman giving childbirth in the Bliss Collection, Dumbarton

Oaks, in Washington D.C.\* That statue influenced Frida Kahlo's painting called *My Birth* (1932). It was enormously admired by artists such as Diego Rivera, as well as by most Pre-Columbian specialists. A gold version of it was the first statue looted by Harrison Ford in the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Though widely admired, published, and exhibited in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that statue is now regarded as 19<sup>th</sup> century forgery.\*\*

Tlazolteotl both caused sin and expiated it. This dual role connects the gender-neutral god with dualism (as opposed to the good/evil dichotomy of Christianity). Cortéz has emphasized this aspect by rendering the woman half flesh and half skeleton. Moreover, the child to whom she gives birth is also half flesh and half skeleton (though the sides are reversed). Even the god's name is reversed and spelled backwards to emphasize the concept of dualism. Lyrics from the song *Fallaste Corazón* are written at the top of the print: "La vida es una ruleta en que apostamos todos" (Life is a roulette on which we bet all).

\* For comprehensive references, see: "Birthing Figure," Pre-Columbian Collection, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, record 33. <http://museum.doaks.org/Obj23088?sid=1479&x=4965&sort=76>

\*\* For the most thorough scholarly study, see: Jane MacLaren Walsh, "The Dumbarton Oaks Tlazolteotl, looking beneath the surface," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* (2008): 7-43. <https://journals.openedition.org/jsa/8623>

**Mel Casas** (American, b. 1929 El Paso, d. 2014 San Antonio), *Humanscape 145* (SW Cliché), 1987, 72 x 96", acrylic on canvas, collection of the Mel Casas Family Trust

An enormous goat skull inhabits a rectangular field that suggests rough, western terrain. This bleached skull references the skulls that were favored subjects of the U.S. painter Georgia O'Keefe. For many art lovers, knowledge of Southwestern art is limited to O'Keefe's paintings, rendering her widely imitated motifs the reigning clichés of Southwestern art.

A grave marker lies directly beneath the big paint-splattered skull. The subtitle "SW Cliché" is emblazoned on it. The grave marker is surmounted by a garlanded cross, which is dramatically outlined in red. The marker is framed on each side by two semi-abstract forms that represent the "sleeping Mexican," which is one of the most pervasive stereotypes. Though it is also customary for families to hold graveside vigils during Day of the Dead, the artist's objective here is to create a compendium of clichés. As he told the curator in an interview: "A skull, a cross, sleeping Mexicans—you have all the major clichés here." The sleeping Mexican motif usually features a male Mexican asleep, with his back resting against a large cactus. Casas has further universalized the cliché by depicting a female (on the right) as well as a male (on the left). They are outlined in green—almost as if grass were growing on them. The cactus has been dispersed rather than eliminated: the grave marker is cloaked with prickly pear cacti and red fruits. The red blobs on the blue field also represent these fruits. The Aztes regarded cactus

fruits as a symbol of the human heart, adding another layer of symbolism to this painting.

**Mel Casas** (American, b. 1929 El Paso, d. 2014 San Antonio), *Humanscape 140 (Day of the Muertos)*, 1987, 72 x 96", acrylic on canvas, collection of the Mel Casas Family Trust

This painting and *Humanscape 145 (SW Cliché)* are late examples of Southwestern Clichés (1982-1989), the last series in a cycle of over 150 large-scale paintings that Mel Casas called *Humanscapes*. The *Humanscapes* were inspired by a glimpse of a drive-in movie screen in 1965, which is when Casas began painting them. The Southwestern Clichés reflect a sense of place, as well as Casas' belief that artists shouldn't merely imitate styles or subjects from Europe or New York. Casas wanted to distill the Southwest into a pictorial essence, stripped to "the bare essentials." In these paintings, he increasingly employed dripped and poured paint. When this series came to an end, Casas dripped and poured exclusively, as in *Southwest Apple*.

*"Humanscape 140 (Day of the Muertos, 1987)* features a large skull that should symbolize death and the potent life forces that skulls were thought to possess. But this effect is undercut by whimsical details: the large, rectangular eye sockets suggest sunglasses, and the cheap veneer of the sole gold tooth has been eroded away. The geometric field behind the skull simultaneously references indigenous textiles and abstract painting. The confetti, streamers, dancing skeletons, and the mixed language subtitle refer to the manner in which contemporary Day of the Dead commemorations in the U.S. have

been largely emptied of cultural and religious content and transformed into just another fiesta to attract tourists and commerce."\*

\* Ruben C. Cordova, "American History Does Not Begin with the White Man: Indigenous Themes in the Work of Mel Casas," San Antonio: Bihl Haus, 2018.

**Luis Valderas** (American, b. 1966 McAllen, active San Antonio), *United States of La Muerte*, 2004, serigraph, 16" x 21", collection of the artist

Valderas is a noted creator of flag imagery, and like many artists who regularly create art for Day of the Dead exhibitions, his works engage in social criticism. On the one hand, *United States of La Muerte* is concerned with "the sacrifices that immigrants make on the path crossing the river into the dreamland."\* After immigrants settle in the U.S. and build their lives here, "they continue to sacrifice," and that sacrifice is often wrapped in the flag of patriotism, specifically in the "death that America spreads with its rockets and munitions."\* Valderas inscribes death and sacrifice into the structure of the flag itself: the waving white stripes are fashioned by the contrails of projectiles, and calaveras are "ghosted" onto the stripes. The artist also alludes to his Mexican heritage: "the skulls in the field of blue reference the Aztec Great Skull Rack (Hueyi Tzompantli)." The dark marks within the red stripes represent drops of blood that have been shed for freedom. Valderas concludes: "Attempts to minimize and ignore the consequences of our struggles take for granted the value of our humanity."\*

\* Luis Valderas email to the curator, February 7, 2019.

**Rupert Garcia** (American, b. 1941 French Camp, CA, active Oakland, CA), *Calavera Crystal Ball* (from the portfolio *Beyond 1992*), 1992, screen print, 30 x 22 ¼", collection of Gil Cardenas

Garcia is a highly accomplished painter and graphic artist who creates commanding effects with elemental means. He also has a profound interest in history and art history. In addition to an M.A. degree in studio art (San Francisco State University, 1970), Garcia earned an M.A. degree in art history (University of California, Berkeley, 1981). His thesis treated Chicano murals in California, and he subsequently published on both Mexican and Chicano murals. Garcia also authored the pioneering study *Frida Kahlo: A Bibliography and Biographical Introduction* (Berkeley: Chicano Studies Library Publications Unit, 1983). He was active in the San Francisco State student strike, to which he contributed his skills as a poster artist, and he became one of the first instructors in La Raza Studies in 1969. Garcia treats many historical and political subjects, and he is one of the co-founders of the Galería de la Raza in San Francisco. In 1992 he was honored with the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement from the College Art Association and in 1993 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute.

In *Calavera Crystal Ball*, Garcia forms an enormous skull on adjoining fields of black and grey with three black spots and an irregular gray form. Above this stark skull he places a simplified head and shoulders portrait of Christopher Columbus. Columbus' features, however, are effaced by a brown hand. In this fashion, Garcia fingers Columbus for his extreme cruelty and greed,

which contributed immensely to the genocide of the indigenous populations he came into contact with in the Caribbean. The punning title plays on the explorer's name in Spanish: Cristobal Colón. This work was a stark rejoinder to the celebratory commemorations of Columbus's "discovery" of the "New World" on its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Garcia explains his motivation for making this work: "I wanted to make a beautiful picture about a menacing historical event that changed the world for the Mexicans for the worst and the Spaniards for the better."\*

\* Rupert Garcia email to curator, June 23, 2019.

**Ruben Trejo** (American, b. 1937 St. Paul, MN, d. 2009 Spokane, WA), untitled (flag with Catrina stripes), 2003, 34 x 42", mixed media, collection of Gil Cardenas

The son of a railroad worker, Trejo was born in a boxcar that housed railroad workers in St. Paul, Minnesota. As a sculptor, his anthropomorphic works forged from railroad spikes are among his most notable.

Trejo also created unusual mixed media works that fuse Mexican elements with those of mainstream modernism. This fascinating flag can be related to Jasper Johns's flags, and specifically to *Flag, 1969*, the lithograph created as a poster for the National Vietnam Moratorium.\* In this work, Johns replaces the seven red stripes with green stripes whose painterly qualities evoke camouflage patterns. Instead of six white stripes that traditionally symbolize purity, Johns inverted that tradition by making six black stripes. Instead of a blue field with white stars, Johns made an orange

field with black stars. The sole white spot on the flag can be interpreted as a bullet hole.

While John's *Flag, 1969* is an obvious point of departure, Trejo has Mexicanized the U.S. flag. Red, green, and white are Mexico's national colors (though Trejo has given his red stripes a peculiar orange cast—perhaps as a cryptic reference to Johns). Instead of stars on a blue field, Trejo has placed an elemental skull on a green field. This skull—which Trejo has used in other works—is as simple as Mrs. Potato Head. He outfits her with collaged lips that are a truer red than his stripes. Instead of white stripes (like the U.S. flag) or black stripes (like John's protest flag), Trejo creates stripes that are both black and white. Moreover, he fashions them out of multiple views of Posada's *Catrina*. For unknown reasons, he utilizes eight red and eight black-and-white stripes. (These cannot stand for the present-day states that were taken from Mexico, since Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Nevada, and parts of Wyoming, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Kansas were taken from Mexico). The U.S. flag has seven red stripes and six white stripes, which stand for the original thirteen colonies. Trejo has created a death flag, but one that does not correspond precisely to the U.S. flag either in its proportions or in the number of stripes it possesses.

\* Jasper Johns, *Flag 1969*, [masterworksfineart.com](https://www.masterworksfineart.com/artists/jasper-johns/artwork/flag-1969/id/w-3272)  
<https://www.masterworksfineart.com/artists/jasper-johns/artwork/flag-1969/id/w-3272>

**Enrique Chagoya** (American, b. 1953 Mexico City, active in San Francisco), *4-U-2-C*, 1986, 30 x 22", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

Born and raised in Mexico City, Chagoya received his BFA at the San Francisco Art Institute (1984) and his MA (1986) and MFA (1987) at the University of California at Berkeley. He served as the artistic director of the *Galería de la Raza* in San Francisco from 1987-89, where he co-curated *Day of the Dead* exhibitions with assistant curator Sal Garcia. Chagoya and Garcia also co-curated a *Day of the Dead* exhibition at the *Alternative Museum* in New York in 1988, in conjunction with director Geno Rodriguez. In 2003, Chagoya organized an exhibition of funerary ceremonies from cultures from all around the world at the *Oakland Museum*. Chagoya is currently a full professor at *Stanford University*. He frequently fuses Pre-Columbian iconography and images from U.S. Pop culture in works that engage in social criticism. Chagoya finds that familiar pop icons "create deceptively friendly points of entry for the discussion of complex issues."\* In *4-U-2-C*, a large man in a business suit holds a small man in a business suit, as if the latter were his puppet. They both have stylized skulls for heads, and their mouths and noses suggest a corporal's stripes. Both men have Mickey Mouse hats flying off of their heads. The big man's eye sockets have red arrows that point inwards, and the small man has similar arrows, one of which points up and one of which points down. The implication is that both men are part of the military industrial complex, and neither one is particularly competent. Moreover, they are profiteers, and their skull heads proclaim their ultimate product, which is death. Chagoya explains that the two men "are possibly witnessing a nuclear explosion," which could have caused their eyes to short-circuit.\*\*



\* Ruben C. Cordova, "Enrique Chagoya's Superheroes and Super Villains," *Glasstire*, August 19, 2019.

<https://glasstire.com/2019/08/19/enrique-chagoyas-superheroes-and-super-villains/>

\*\* Enrique Chagoya, email to curator, June 22, 2019.

**Luis Jiménez** (American, b. 1940 El Paso, d. 2006 Hondo, NM), *Coscolina con Muerto* (Flirt with death), 1986, lithograph, 26 ¾ x 21", collection of Zoe Diaz

Jiménez's *Coscolina con Muerto* features a woman outfitted in a flag patterned dress modeled on Jiménez's *The Barfly/Statue of Liberty* (1969), a work that addresses the corruption/dissipation of liberty and American values. The woman flirtatiously approaches a Nicaraguan Contra, a member of a right wing paramilitary militia. The Contras were supplied and covertly funded by the Reagan administration. The Contra pays her no attention. Instead, he nonchalantly lights his cigarette as he leans against a wall topped with jagged shards of glass surmounted by barbed wire. Graffiti scratched onto the wall (Chile, El Pueblo [the people], Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Los Mojados, C/S) indicates that the wall is the U.S.-Mexico border, the barricaded gateway to and from Latin America.

By representing the soldier as a calavera (skeleton), Jiménez underscores the deadly effects that U.S. policies have had in Latin America, as well as the militarization of the border. The countries listed are among those in which the U.S. has intervened to overthrow popular governments (hence the "El Pueblo" inscription) and to support or orchestrate repressive measures and massacres of civilians.

Los Mojados (often translated as Wetbacks) references the U.S.'s inhospitable reception of immigrants from those Latin American countries where brutal U.S. interventions have caused great suffering, humanitarian crises, and flight. The C/S graffito means "the same to you" in Chicano slang. C/S is used to protect murals and placas from defacement. In this work, it could be construed as serving two functions: preserving the indictment of U.S. foreign policy that is inscribed on the wall, and warning that these unjust interventions will result in negative consequences.\*

\* Adapted from a text written for the Centro Aztlán in 2004.

**Enrique Martinez** (American, b. 1979 El Paso, active San Antonio), *Volver, Volver, Volver* (Return, return, return), pencil on paper, 16 x 20", 2005, private collection.

Martinez has created a Day of the Dead Mexican melodrama. It can be viewed as a Mexican counterpart to the European theme of the Abduction of Europa. Catrina (a character created by printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and elaborated by muralist Diego Rivera) is being carried away by El Diablo, a horned bull-devil. Using a strand of El Diablo's hair for a rein, Catrina waves goodbye to her dead lover with his last gift, a bouquet of flowers. The dazed, sorrowful mariachi entreats her with outstretched arms. El Catrin, the well-dressed figure in the left background, is Catrina's long-standing mate. He seems to have orchestrated this caper to get revenge on El Mariachi. According to the artist, "this love triangle had always been beset by chaos."\* But now, under the full moon, El Catrin's

invocation has been successful. His candles, incense, and incantations successfully summoned El Diablo, whose demon and skeleton minions have been "unleashed to wreak havoc."\* One worm-filled casket in the foreground has already been disinterred. There can be no turning back.

\* Enrique Martinez, telephone conversations with curator, July 2019.

**Ralph Maradiaga** (American, b. 1934 San Francisco, d. 1985 San Francisco), *Calacas Huesudas* (bony skeletons), poster for Galería de la Raza/Studio 24, 1980, 17 ½ x 23", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

Maradiaga was an artist and a co-founder of the Galería de la Raza in 1970, a community arts organization in San Francisco's Latino Mission District. The Galería was an early and important venue for exhibitions of Chicano art, which was long excluded from mainstream art institutions. It also embraced other marginalized communities. The Galería pioneered annual Day of the Dead exhibitions in the Bay Area. René Yañez recalls that the first altar was "very simple. But when people saw it it was like they were looking at the Mona Lisa. It hit a chord."\* Many consider the Galería to be the most influential of all the early Chicano arts organizations. The Galería's billboard on Bryant Street was also a vital means of disseminating art and political messages.

In addition to his work as a printmaker and documentary filmmaker, Maradiaga served as an administrator of the Galería, and as a teacher, consultant, and curator. This poster for the Galería's Day of the Dead exhibition in 1980 features an example of traditional

Mexican papel picado (cut paper). After the Galeria was forced to move from its home of 46 years in late 2018 (its first two years were spent in another location), Carolina Morales stated on behalf of San Francisco Supervisor Hillary Ronen: "it's been a space for gathering, for fighting for civil rights, and a true beacon for 24th street Mission-Latino community."\*\*

\* Ryan Kost, "Galería de la Raza, a birthplace of Chicano art, finds respite from exile," *San Francisco Chronicle* (Dec. 20, 2018).

<https://datebook.sfchronicle.com/art-exhibits/galeria-de-la-raza-a-birthplace-of-chicano-art-embraces-its-exile>

\*\* Julian Mark, "Galería de la Raza has moved, but its former home may be landmarked anyway," *Mission Local* (Jan. 17, 2019).

<https://missionlocal.org/2019/01/former-galeria-de-la-raza-building-up-for-sf-landmark-status/>

**Rodolfo "Rudy" Cuellar** (American, b. 1950 Auburn, CA active in Sacramento) and **Louis "Louie the Foot" González** (b. 1953 Mexico City, active in Sacramento), *A Tribute to José Guadalupe Posada*, 1980, 23 x 17 ½", screen print, collection of Gil Cardenas

This poster for a tribute exhibition devoted to Posada is another mark of the printmaker's enormous influence on Chicano art. The text at the bottom of the poster reads: "A tribute to José Guadalupe Posada. He continues to serve as an inspiration to Mexican and Chicano Artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." Only two photographs of Posada are known to survive. Cuellar and González utilize the photograph in which Posada is seated, with his son Juan Sabino Posada (1883-1900) standing

next to him. To balance the composition, the artists added the Catrina figure by Diego Rivera on the right. They accentuated Catrina's pre-Hispanic elements: the Ollin pattern (signifying movement) on the belt buckle is gold on red; the Quetzalcoatl feather boa is green, emphasizing its qualities as a serpent and as an emblem of fertility; the red in Catrina's mouth area emphasizes the blood on her fanged face. The poster is signed by both artists on the bottom and is dated 1980 in pencil. Cuellar and Gonzalez were both founding members of the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF), one of the most important Chicano groups, which was based in Sacramento.

**Martín C. Rodríguez** (American, b. 1971 Fort Hood, TX, active San Antonio), *White-Washed Warrior* (Installation), 2018-2019, mixed media, approximately 60 x 96 x 36", collection of the artist

According to Rodríguez, "the White-Washed Warrior metaphorically represents the period in time when the United States acquired Puerto Rico [through the Spanish American War] and the simultaneous rise of the United Fruit Company."\* The United Fruit Company often had more power than sovereign nations, and Peter Chapman credits it with inventing both "the concept and reality of the banana republic," as well as the modern banana.\*\* United Fruit controlled up to 90% of the world market of bananas, and left a legacy of political coups, violence, repression, and poverty in Latin America.

Rodríguez also notes that the sculpture's mask references "the vejigante mask, exclusive to Puerto Rico and worn during folkloric

festivals to this day."\* This masked tradition had Spanish origins: it originally celebrated Saint James' victory over the Moors. In time, Taino and African elements came to dominate, and its significance was transformed. The figures that had begun as demonized Moors became celebrated folklore heroes, and today some believe that the vejigante is a figure of resistance to colonialism and imperialism.\*\*

\* Martín C. Rodríguez, email to curator, July 2, 2019.

\*\* Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, "Big Fruit" (review of Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*), *New York Times*, March 2, 2008.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/books/review/Kurtz-Phelan-t.html>

\*\*\* Zaine Dean, "The Story Behind the Vejigante Mask of Puerto Rico," *tripsavy*, August 29, 2018.

<https://www.tripsavy.com/story-behind-the-vejigante-mask-of-puerto-rico-1622305>

"Arts and Crafts," *Welcome to Puerto Rico*. <https://welcome.topuertorico.org/culture/artsc.shtml>

**L.A. VATOCOSMICO c/s.** (American, b. San Antonio, active San Antonio), *El Kool Muerto Takin' His Cosmica Muerta For A Cool Ride*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 36", collection of Gary Garza

L.A. provides a special narration for this exhibition:

It was on a cool breezy summer night, the sky was full of estrellas (stars). La Luna (the moon) was in a kool round circle and a bright fluorescent object performed zig-zags in the Sky. Then, after driving awhile low and slow the Muertos went atop a hill called Muertos Lane. He checked around to see if any other Muertos were parked with their Caruchas.

She asked her Chavalo Muerto: "It has been over a week since you brought me to Muertos Lane. Have you been with another Muerta Chic?" His cell phone starts ringing and El Muerto answers: "Chale! This is not Takos on Wheels," he tells his other Muerta.

"Sorry Honey, they got the Wrong Number," he tells his Muerta in the Carucha. GOT YOU!!!!

**Artemio Rodriguez** (Mexican, b. 1972 Tacámbaro, Michoacán, active in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Mexico), *Melodía de la Lucha Cruelísima del Buen Elefante* (Melody of the cruel struggle of the good elephant), 1994, 22 ¼ x 19", linocut, collection of Gil Cardenas

A man and a woman share a kiss as they stand on top of the globe, while a bizarre cupid figure prepares to put an arrow in his bow. On the other side of the couple, a guitar-playing monkey raises a cautionary finger. All manner of creatures float, fly, or fall through the air. A motley assortment of people, animals, and objects likewise inhabit the earth and its oceans, including the artist (on the right), who dutifully records them.

At the bottom of the print, an elephant—no doubt the good one from the title—seems to be bearing the weight of the world. This job is made harder by the fact that he is being attacked by a variety of creatures. Death feeds life on the margins: flowers grow through virtual totem poles of skulls.

**Roberto Jose Gonzalez** (American, b. 1955, Laredo, active San Antonio), *El Paso 8/3/19 – Frieze panel #1* and *No Hate, No Fear – Frieze panel 2*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 96" each, Collection of the Artist

Gonzalez had intended to make a diptych in honor of Posada, but he was so moved by the massacre of 23 people (and the wounding of many more) in an El Paso Walmart on August 23, 2019 that he made this diptych. The left panel addresses the shooting. The shooter wrote that he traveled to El Paso specifically to hunt Mexicans. The artist cannot explain his pain and sorrow in words. He identifies with the families of the victims, and with the citizens of El Paso and of the nation that have been traumatized by this racially motivated massacre. In the panel on the right, *No Hate, No Fear*, he depicts the shock and sorrow of those who are trying to make sense of this horrific event. "Speak truth to hate," he urges. "Hate is wrong. Violence is wrong. Hate is a lie. I choose the truth of love."

**L.A. VATOCOSMICO c/s.** (American, b. San Antonio, active San Antonio), *El Coxmico LowRider Muerto*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36", collection of Olga Brown and Gene Marck

L.A.VATOCOSMICO c/s., also known as L.A. DAVID, is one of San Antonio's most colorful characters. This includes his dress, his comportment, his language and manner of speaking, and certainly his art. His paintings are usually filled with burros and flying saucers. L.A. explains this other-worldly painting as no one else can:

"El Harmonious Coxmico Muerto had been washing his flashing Carucha (car) inside and out, then finishing it off with a good wax—in other words 'Make It Shine Like El Sol (the sun).' El Sol is no longer in sight. El Coxmico Lowrider Muerto rolls his Carucha to the nearest telephone box. There he calls his beautiful Muerta Ruca (dead girlfriend) to get ready because they were going

for a long Coxmico (cosmic) journey throughout Aztlán. 'Orale with an attitude, El Coxmico Muerto gets back into his flashing fluorescent neon Carucha, and begins driving slow and low and listening to his favorite oldie: '96 Tears.' His Fashionista style includes a Fedora hat, a silk black shirt embroidered with skulls, pyramids, cactus, and Con Safos. His Plead pants are shining neon purple while his shoe ware is designed with diamonds and small tiny L.E.D. lights, Avant-Garde Style. While he cruises the desert he looks into his rear-view mirror, where there appeared bright fluorescent colors. Orale, you guess what was flashing: the Carucha was beamed up into the Jefa Mothership. Wow! What a psychedelic experience! FIN."

**Deborah Keller-Rihn** (American, b. 1956 San Antonio, active San Antonio), *Kali-Ma*, mixed media photograph, 17 x 12", collection of the artist

Keller-Rihn is a photographer and installation artist who has participated in Day of the Dead exhibitions in San Antonio as an artist, teacher and curator. Keller-Rihn is interested in beliefs that cross cultures. She has an active interest in Eastern belief systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. The artist notes: "This photograph pays homage to the Indian goddess, Kali who is the fierce attribute of the Mother archetype. She is not bound by traditional notions of good and evil. Her passions are intense, her maternal love fierce and uncompromising."\*

Many Mexican artists and intellectuals, including Frida Kahlo, had a deep interest in Eastern religion, which has many parallels with dualistic Mesoamerican beliefs (which is why Rivera represented her holding a yin-yang symbol in

his Alameda Park mural). Kali is the irresistible destroyer: she is usually depicted with a garland of skulls around her neck, often holding a bloody sword in one of her multiple hands and a severed head in another.\* Kali is often viewed as the Hindu counterpart to the Aztec goddess Coatlicue (who has a necklace of hearts and hands). Public Day of the Dead commemorations in the United States have increasingly embraced other world cultures.

\* Deborah, Keller-Rihn, email to the curator, June 29, 2019.

\*\* Kali has multiple origin myths. See: Mark Cartwright, "Kali," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, June 21, 2013. <https://www.ancient.eu/Kali/>

**Albert Alvarez** (American, b. 1983 San Antonio, active San Antonio), *Something to be Proud Of*, 2019, acrylic on wood, 20 x 16", collection of the Emily Ramos.

In our atomic age, Four Horsemen are no longer necessary to presage the end of the world. An atomic explosion in the center of *Something to be Proud Of* signals the Nuclear Apocalypse (or Nuclear Armageddon). The English language controls at the top of the painting implicate the U.S. in this end-of-the-world scenario. The eager young man in the upper right is derived from the Vault Boy mascot of the *Fallout* games, which explore post-nuclear holocaust scenarios. He gives a big thumbs-up gesture to this Big Bang. The quote at the bottom of the painting, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds" was spoken by Shiva, the Hindu god, in an ancient holy text called the *Bhagavad Gita*. As the personification of destruction, Alvarez illustrates the goddess Kali, who is usually understood as the incarnation of Parvati, Shiva's consort.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been associated with the A-Bomb since the dawn of the atomic era. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb" thought of these words after he witnessed the successful test of the first atomic device on July 16, 1945 at a site called Trinity in New Mexico. Oppenheimer recalls that those who observed the explosion "knew the world would not be the same."\* Reflecting on the above quote from the *Bhagavad Gita* (which is Oppenheimer's own translation from Sanskrit), Oppenheimer concludes: "I suppose we all thought that, one way or another."\*\* In August of 1945, the U.S. dropped atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The figures in the lower corners of the painting are based on survivors of the Hiroshima bomb. The other three figures are imagined genetic mutants, inhabitants of a post-Apocalypse world. Scientists quickly became concerned that a nuclear war would end civilization, and possibly the human race. In 1947, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists inaugurated the Doomsday Clock, which assessed the imminent risk of nuclear war in terms of minutes before midnight. That clock is still ticking....

\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb13ynu3lac>

**Albert Alvarez** (American, b. 1983 San Antonio, active San Antonio), *The Second Seal*, 2018-19, mixed media collage, acrylic, ink on paper mounted on wood panels, 34 x 30", collection of the artist

According to the *Book of Revelation*, John of Patmos had an apocalyptic vision of a book or scroll secured by seven wax seals. Only the Lamb [of god] / the Lion of Judah could open (break) the seals. The breaking of the first four seals would release the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. According to the King James edition of the Bible, this is what happens when the second seal is

broken: "And there went out another horse red: and [power] was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword." (Revelation 6:4)

In Alvarez's painting, General Robert E. Lee is part of a Confederate monument seemingly brought to life. He is astride a red horse, which wears ornaments that resemble devil's horns. His flaming sword lights the fires of war that engulf the world, including a burning cross (a reference to the KKK) and a meteor shower of flaming skulls! The first Horseman (an archer on a white horse) is on the far left of the painting; the third (a rider with balances on a black horse) and fourth (Death followed by Hell, represented by the skeletal rider) are on the right. Somehow, the Alt Right demonstrators in the lower wings of the painting have successfully raised the red-eyed, green-fleshed Confederate Dead, who lurch and stumble towards the burning cross like moths to a flame. For the first time ever, Biblical Apocalypse meets Zombie Confederate Apocalypse. At the base of the cross, an angry white supremacist crashes into counter-demonstrators with his car. A group of people in the lower center feature Alt Right figures and a generic Barbie Doll. Enslaved people and other victims of racial injustice are also represented in the painting. At the very top, Lee seems to have an inverse halo, with a black core. It is the eclipsed sun, prophesied to follow the opening of the sixth seal: "the sun became black as sack cloth of hair, and the moon became as blood" (Revelation 6:12). The opening of the sixth seal also causes the shower of flaming skulls: "And the stars of the heavens fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind" (Revelation 6:13).



Vincent Valdez, *A Dance with Death*, 2000, 32 x 18", oil on canvas, collection of Zoe Diaz

Ramiro Rodriguez, *La Luna Mariposa*, 2010, lithograph, 20 x 15", Collection of Gil Cardenas, Photograph courtesy of the artist



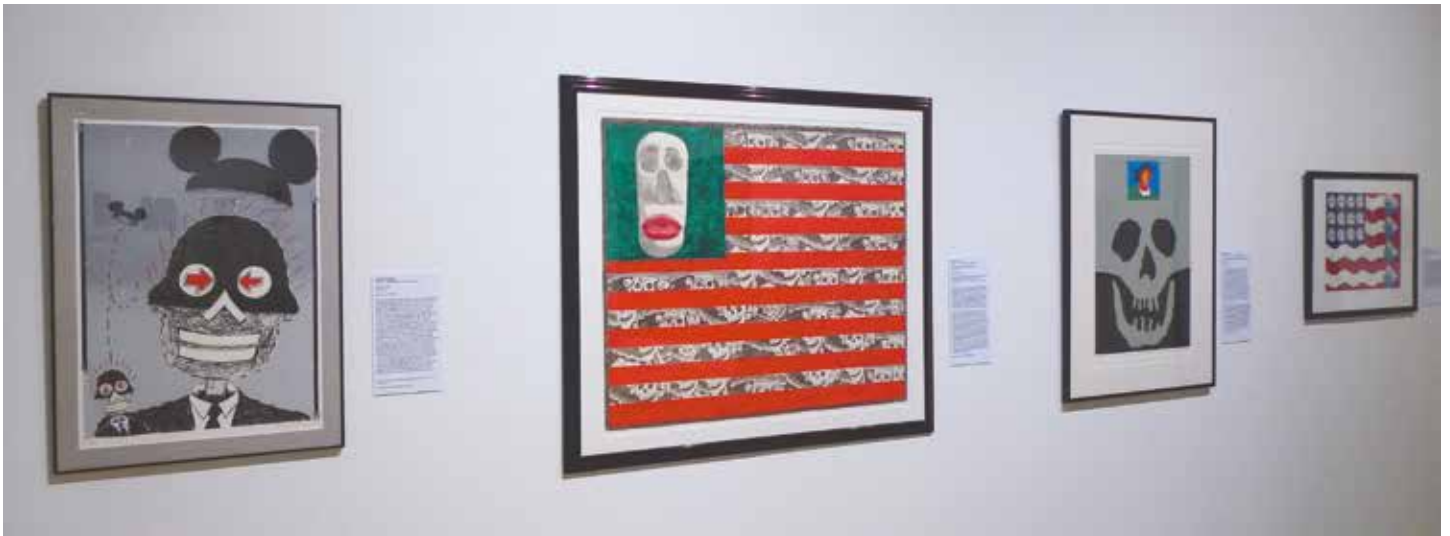




*The Day of the Dead in Art*, foreground (left to right)  
 Mel Casas, *Humanscape 140 (Day of the Muertos)*,  
 and *Humanscape 145 (SW Cliché)*, background (left  
 to right) Luis Valderas, *Watermelon Skulls*, (center)  
 Enrique Martinez, *At the Altar*



*The Day of the Dead in Art, (from left to right) Enrique Chagoya, 4-U-2-C, Ruben Trejo, Untitled (Flag with Catrina Stripes), Rupert Garcia, Calavera Crystal Ball, Luis Valderas, United States of La Muerte*



# FOLK ART

## ARTWORKS

Verónica Castillo Hernández (American, b. 1967 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, Mexico; active San Antonio) *Sobrevivencia o La Lucha de vivir* (Survival, or the struggle to live), 2019, low fire ceramic, 31 x 25 x 15", collection of the artist

This work centers on global warming, and its threat to Mother Earth. According to Castillo Hernández, "Mother Earth is in the abyss and we are not paying any attention."\* This work reveals the consequences of not taking care of Mother Earth. While her father Alfonso Castillo Orta introduced new artistic themes and helped to break down the boundaries between craft and art, Castillo Hernández has moved another step forward by making politically engaged work, as in this example. In 2003, Castillo Hernández made *El Arbol de la Muerte: Maquilando Mujeres* (The tree of death: factory women), a "visual elegy" for the hundreds of female factory workers who have been murdered in the vicinity of Juárez, Mexico. *El Arbol de la Muerte: Maquilando Mujeres* is in the collection of UCLA's Fowler Museum.\*\*

*Sobrevivencia o La Lucha de vivir* is an installation of separate pieces that is an artistic rendering of Climate Apocalypse. We can connect it to the Biblical-themed art in the first gallery, and to Alvarez's image of nuclear Apocalypse in the hallway. This is a Tree of Life/Death in which the earth itself is a battleground between the forces of life and death. On this shattered, devastated earth, humans, along with other creatures, have to fight for food and water to survive. They might have to devour everything in their path, like the locusts of Biblical plagues. They will also have to fight devils, which makes their lives even more difficult. A flaming base symbolizes global warming, and the beginning of the transformation of mother earth into a living hell. The coins on the black skulls symbolize the greed that has imperiled the earth and the survival of its creatures. Meanwhile, the earth itself resists, and she, too, struggles to survive.

\* Verónica Castillo Hernández, email to curator, July 31, 2019.

\*\* See: <https://www.fowler.ucla.edu/product/x2004-20-1-el-arbol-de-la-muerte-maquilando-mujeres-the-tree-of-death-factory-women/>

Carmen Caballero Sevilla (Mexican, b. Ceyela, Guanajuato, d. in the 1970s in Mexico City at the age of 58\*), *Death Figure*, n.d., papier-mâché, cane frame, wire, and fiber, 46 x 14 x 11", collection of Margie Shackelford, courtesy of San Angel Folk Art

Born in the state of Guanajuato to an officer in the Mexican Revolution, Caballero learned how to make cartonería (papier-mâché) figures when she was 18. After moving to Mexico City, she sold fruit and cartonería objects at the Abelardo Rodríguez market. The demand for cartonería, which was seasonal, was especially high on Sábado de Gloria (the Saturday before Easter), when Judas figures were exploded on the streets.\*\* Diego Rivera encountered her work at this market in 1951.\* (Though this initial meeting is sometimes placed in 1955, as stated in the Creative Hands of Mexico article, this cannot be correct because Frida Kahlo, who died in 1954, was photographed with a Caballero Judas.) Rivera was so moved by her work that he commissioned Caballero to make numerous works for him. He gave her space in his San Angel studio, and some of the works she

produced there are extremely large. These works are still exhibited at Rivera's San Angel studio, Frida Kahlo's Blue House, Anahuacalli (Rivera's enormous studio-museum and his intended mausoleum), and the Dolores Olmedo Museum. Rivera included a number of Caballero's pieces in his paintings. He also compared her work to that of Picasso, saying that her Judas figures each had a unique form and content, like each of Picasso's guitars.\* Rivera brought Caballero's work to the admiring attention of sculptor Henry Moore and photographer Nacho Lopez, who documented her work with numerous photographs (see links below for examples). Rivera died in 1957. Though he had a very limited opportunity to promote her work, its placement in the museums associated with Rivera give it high visibility. Most of the 170 papier-mâché figures he collected are by Caballero, including Judases, devils, calaveras, and other miscellaneous subjects. In 2009 the National Museum of Popular Arts in Mexico City mounted an exhibition called *Carmen Caballero: fabricante de judas* that analyzed Caballero's work in a cultural and aesthetic context.\* In addition to Caballero's cartonería, the exhibit featured 126 photographs taken by Nacho Lopez in 1955, 1963, and 1968. Caballero never dated her work and given her continuous innovation, it is not possible to determine when this Death Figure was made. In addition to its stark visual power, one should appreciate that it is a rare example of Caballero's work outside of the museums of Mexico City.

\* Fabiola Palapa Quijas, "Llama a revalorar la cartonería de Carmen Caballero," *La Jornada*, April 7, 2009.  
<https://www.jornada.com.mx/2009/04/07/cultura/a04n1cul>

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, "Exponen fotos de 'Judas,'" April 14, 2009.  
<https://www.inah.gob.mx/boletines/3832-exponen-fotos-de-judas>  
 Creative Hands of Mexico, "For a brief shining moment...." Nov. 7, 2016.  
<https://creativehandsofmexicodotorg.wordpress.com/2016/11/07/for-a-brief-shining-moment/>  
 \*\* "Judas Burning in Mexico," Copal Folk Art Guide.  
<https://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/judas-burning.html#.XSO-eyMrlgo>

Jorge Pedro Uribe Llamas, "The Papier-Mâché Wizards of Mexico," *Roads and Kingdoms*, March 29, 2018.  
<https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2018/la-quema-dejudas-mexico-city/>

**Verónica Castillo Hernández** (American, b. 1967 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, Mexico; active San Antonio) and **Patricia Castillo Hernández Jolet** (American, b. 1973 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, Mexico; active Bulverde, TX) *Pieta*, 2009, low fire ceramic, 7 ½ x 5 ¼ x 6", collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete

Verónica Castillo Hernández and Patricia Castillo Hernández Jolet are the daughters of Alfonso Castillo Orta. When he died in 2009, they made this moving pieta as a tribute to him. A crying woman with her dead child in her lap holds her own disembodied heart as an externalization of her grief. Verónica Castillo has worked with clay since she was a child. In 2013, she received the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities for her work as a clay artist.

**Alfonso Castillo Orta** (Mexican, b. 1944 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, d. 2009, Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla), *Tree of Popular Arts*, low fire ceramic, 18 x 17 x 6", c. 2003, collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete

Alfonso Castillo Orta was part of a long tradition of ceramic artists in Izúcar de Matamoros, which is one of the two primary centers for the production of trees of life in Mexico. The other center is Metepec (represented in this exhibition by a large skull). As a fourth generation ceramic artist, Castillo worked producing traditional objects in his family's workshop since he was a young man. A highly original and creative artist, Alfonso Castillo transformed traditional objects by endowing them with new subject matter. Trees of Life traditionally featured Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and were made primarily as wedding gifts. Alfonso Castillo introduced Trees of Death. This is variation on the Tree of Death theme. Accompanied by a drummer and a trumpeter, masked skeletons in this sculpture celebrate Mexican popular arts.

Alfonso Castillo also created entirely new types of objects, which broke down distinctions between art and craft, and won him national and international awards and fame.\* He also brought significant attention to Izúcar de Matamoros as a center for ceramic art. Castillo's awards include: first place in the Secretaría de Educación Pública's Concurso Diciembre en la Tradición Popular (1985); first place at the Gran Premio de Arte Popular (1992 and 1994); FONART's Premio Nacional de Artesanías "Las Manos de México" (1993); honorable mention in UNESCO's Candelero Traditional competition (Havana 1995); Premio

Nacional de Ciencias y Artes (1996); the title Grand Master bestowed by the Fomento Cultural Banamex (2001).

\* Yadira Llaven, "Alfonso Castillo Abrió brecha a los artesanos de Izúcar en el extranjero: Martha Hernández," *La Jornada de Oriente*, Sept. 10, 2019. <http://www.lajornadadeoriente.com.mx/2009/09/10/puebla/cul119.php>

For a selection of images, see: "Alfonso Castillo Hernández," *Feria del Maestros del Arte*, n.d. <http://www.feriamaestros.com/spanish-castillo.html>

**Alfonso Castillo Orta** (Mexican, b. 1944 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, d. 2009, Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla), *Skull with Caterpillars and Butterflies*, low fire ceramic, 7 x 6 x 6", n.d., collection of Zoe Diaz

Not content to merely create a skull, Alfonso Castillo rendered various creatures emerging from it—in this case, caterpillars and butterflies. Butterflies—since they emerge from caterpillars—are associated with metamorphosis. In Aztec myth, they are the souls of Aztec warriors. Butterflies are often referenced in Mexican and Chicano art because of their long migrations, from Canada to Mexico. For a discussion of butterflies as symbols of migration, see the label for Ramiro Rodriguez's *La Luna Mariposa* Ramiro Rodriguez's *La Luna Mariposa*

**Alfonso Castillo Orta** (Mexican, b. 1944 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, d. 2009, Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla), *Skull with Cactii and Figures*, low fire ceramic, 7 x 5 x 3 ½", 2003, collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete

This skull is inhabited by several skeletal figures. Some of them are eating, including a man seated in the skull's left eye socket, who is enjoying a slice of watermelon.

**Alfonso Castillo Orta** (Mexican, b. 1944 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, d. 2009, Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla), *Skull with Sea Creatures*, low fire ceramic, 6 x 4 ½ x 3", 2003, collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete

In addition to several species of fish, an abundance of sea creatures populate this skull, as if it were a coral reef. These include a seahorse, an octopus, a starfish, and a small whale.

**Alfonso Castillo Orta workshop** (Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, Mexico) *Musician*, c. 2003, low fire ceramic, 8 ½ x 4 x 4", collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete

A Mariachi sings and plays the guitar.

**Unknown artist**, Metepec, Mexico, *Calavera*, c. 1940, low-fire ceramic, 15 x 16 ¼ x 14", collection of Lance Aaron and family

This large calavera is from Metepec, a suburb of Toluca, which is West of Mexico City. Metepec is one of Mexico's major ceramic centers, and is best known for its brightly painted Trees of Life. This soberly painted skull references Posada by its enormous, jutting cheekbones and its big grin. The flower patterns are characteristic of Metepec decorative motifs. The skull is wearing eyeglasses, which implies that it belonged to a scholar, perhaps a cleric.

The latter identification is reinforced by the cross that is painted on the forehead. The pattern on the top of the skull might refer to a skullcap (aka zucchetto or berrettino) worn by Catholic clerics. All ordained priests are entitled to wear black skullcaps; only bishops and a few other prelates are entitled to wear white caps. So it is perhaps intended to represent a very high-ranking prelate, a likelihood that is reinforced by the golden eye sockets/lenses, which satirically suggest gold coins. These factors reinforce the omnipresent Christian theme of Day of the Dead: that death comes for all—even the highest, the mightiest, and the holiest. In time, all will be reduced to a grinning skull.

**Soledad Martha Hernández de Castillo** (Mexican, b. 1949 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, Mexico; active Puebla) *Catrina*, c. 2003, low fire ceramic, 8 ½ x 3 x 3", collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete

José Guadalupe Posada created a graphic image of a skull wearing a big hat (see print in the first gallery). Muralist Diego Rivera took Posada's head-and-shoulders image and transformed it into a full figure now known as Catrina (a female dandy). This sculpture, following the figure in Rivera's mural, includes a serpent boa that references the god Quetzalcoatl. Rivera deployed the boa as one of the elements he used to Mexicanize his Catrina. Soledad Martha Hernández de Castillo was married to Alfonso Castillo Orta. She is the mother of Verónica Castillo Hernández. This work, like others she produced, is unsigned because she worked as an anonymous member of the shop.

**Alfonso Castillo Orta** (Mexican, b. 1944 Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, d. 2009, Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla), *Frida Kahlo Candelabra*, low fire ceramic, 21 x 9 x 7", n.d., collection of Zoe Diaz

Through his ever-inventive creative imagination and formidable technical skills, Alfonso Castillo Orta helped to break down the boundaries between folk art and fine art. This work is an homage to the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). Though in her lifetime she was primarily known as the wife of muralist Diego Rivera, she has become an internationally acclaimed artist and cultural celebrity. Today she is more famous and recognizable than any of her artist contemporaries. Kahlo painted numerous self-portraits, often in the company of her beloved pet monkeys and parrots, and this image recognizes her love of flowers as well as animals. Kahlo sometimes painted symbolic emblems on her forehead, and here Castillo has rendered a detail from Kahlo's painting titled *Self-Portrait on the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States* (1932). It features the sun

and moon (on clear and stormy backgrounds) between a bolt of lightning. It can stand for the turbulent circumstances of Kahlo's life. Here one Mexican master pays tribute to another master.

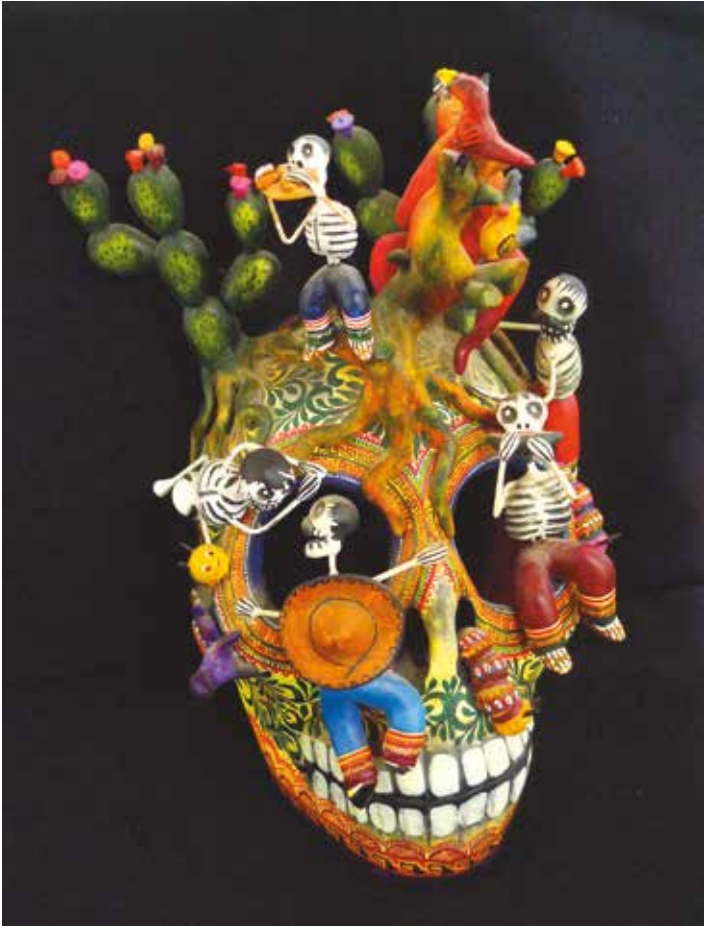
**Ramiro Rodriguez** (American, b. 1965 Douglas, MI, active South Bend), *La Luna Mariposa*, 2010, lithograph, 20 x 15", collection of Gil Cardenas

This image had its origin as a wood cut that was part of a Dia de los Muertos installation at the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame in 2007. A 16 feet long suite of wood cut prints referenced dualistic aspects of the Rodriguez family's migration history: "trabajo/fiesta, male/female, sun/moon, life and death."\* He assembled the wood cut blocks into a coffin that referenced the Olmec earth dragon sarcophagus from La Venta, Mexico. The blocks for *La Luna Mariposa* and its companion, *Sol Emergente*, comprised the "head of the dragon."\*

This lithograph, made three years later, treats "the feminine portion of a migration

story: the night, the moon, the mother."\* The woman's braids are emblematic of the strong women in the artist's family who tied their hair for emigration and labor. The monarch butterfly travels from Mexico through the U.S. to Canada and back (sometimes in the course of three generations). It symbolizes "the migratory nature of the Mexican people" through centuries.\* The woman's clothing mimics the wings of the butterfly. Rodriguez gives prominence to the milkweed plant, the essential food of the monarch that makes it unpalatable to predators. The suns on the heads of the two figures symbolize life's physical and spiritual potential. Rodriguez rendered the figures as skeletons "because we are all skeletons: the memento mori (remembrance of death) reminds us of what we all will be, but the journey is where the sweetness is."\* This image is situated by the exit as a reminder that all of us in the Americas are immigrants (or the descendants of immigrants), whether the journey was by land, sea, or air.

\* Ramiro Rodriguez, emails to curator, June 2019.



Alfonso Castillo Orta, *Skull with Cactii and Figures*, low fire ceramic, 7 x 5 x 3 ½", 2003, Collection of Drs. George Negrete and Josie Mendez-Negrete



Alfonso Castillo Orta, *Frida Kahlo Candelabra*, Low fire ceramic, 21 x 9 x 7", n.d., Collection of Zoe Diaz





**Carmen Caballero Sevilla,**  
*Death Figure*, n.d., papiermâché,  
cane frame, wire, and fiber, 46  
x 14 x 11", Collection of Margie  
Shackleford, Courtesy of San  
Angel Folk Art



**Verónica Castillo Hernández and  
Patricia Castillo Hernández Jolet,**  
*Pieta*, 2009, low fire ceramic,  
7 ½ x 5 ¼ x 6", Collection of  
Drs. George Negrete and Josie  
Mendez-Negrete

# ABOUT CENTRO DE ARTES

Centro de Artes gallery is dedicated to showcasing San Antonio and South Texas Latino/a artists. Found in the heart of the Zona Cultural, an officially designated and state-recognized cultural district, Centro de Artes is dedicated to telling the story of the Latino experience with a focus on South Texas through local and regional art, history, and culture. As a space that is free and open to the public, and located in Historic Market Square - one of the most visited cultural venues in Texas - Centro de Artes is at the center of a cultural and historical crossroads, accessible to residents and visitors, alike.

Since October 2016, the Department of Arts & Culture has managed Centro de Artes and showcased the works of more than 160 San Antonio artists. The City of San Antonio continues to support local artists and provide opportunities for them to show their works.

Through a robust community-engaged process to develop the Centro de Artes Strategic Plan, the City of San Antonio set a framework, overseen by the Centro de Artes Committee so this mission of celebrating and honoring Latino arts and culture, with a priority on showcasing San Antonio and regional artists, continues.

In 2018, the City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture hosted a national open call for exhibitions and related programming for Centro de Artes as part of the strategic plan developed for the gallery in collaboration with the community in 2017. The Centro de Artes committee, a subcommittee of the San Antonio Arts Commission comprised of local community members, reviewed and scored the submitted qualified proposals. *The Day of the Dead in Art* was one of the ten exhibitions selected by the Centro de Artes Committee through the inaugural open call.

## CENTRO DE ARTES COMMITTEE

2019 – 2021

**Yadhira Lozano, Chair**  
(San Antonio Arts Commission  
Member, District 3)

**Susana Segura**  
(San Antonio Arts Commission  
Member, District 4)

**Sarah Gould, Ph.D.**

**Ellen Riojas Clark, Ph.D.**

**Kathy Vargas**

**Paloma Cortez**

**Monica Sosa**

2017-2019

**Cristina Ballí**

**Adriana Gallego**

**Harvey Mireles**

**Nick Peña**





CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
**DEPARTMENT OF  
ARTS & CULTURE**

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CULTURAL EVENTS & EXHIBITS



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CITY OF SAN ANTONIO DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & CULTURE

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