DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS: A CHICANO ARTS LEGACY

MATHEW SANDOVAL

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COVER IMAGE:
Martin Moreno, *Dualities*,
2000, serigraph, 22" x 17"

Foreword

We are pleased to present this inaugural Bilingual Press | Editorial Bilingüe librito. The librito series honors the press's legacy of producing high quality art books, now in a reimagined format at an affordable price and in a convenient size. Through the librito series, we aim to provide broad, bilingual access to the complexity and beauty that pervades Latino and Chicano art.

Anita Huízar-Hernández
Publisher and Managing Editor
Bilingual Press | Editorial Bilingüe

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– For Alma, Sparrow, Raven, and Wren

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DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS & THE CHICANO ARTS MOVEMENT

Although the holiday is most commonly associated with Mexico, Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is now celebrated throughout the United States. Occurring at the end of October and beginning of November, Día de los Muertos is a cultural tradition that honors ancestors through remembrance, offerings, storytelling, ceremony, and festivity. The holiday's cultural roots are deeply complex, bringing together Indigenous American, European, and African traditions with the Catholic celebrations of All Saints' Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2).

The growth in popularity of Día de los Muertos in the United States is closely linked to the Chicano Movement, otherwise known as the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement or El Movimiento. Prior to the 1960s, the term Chicano was a racial slur used against Mexican Americans to critique their supposed lack of education and resources. A central principle of the Chicano Movement was countering this negative stereotype through creating and celebrating a unique Mexican American cultural identity.

A genuine artistic revolution unfolded alongside the Chicano Movement. Mexican American artists used visual arts, literature, theatre, dance, film, and music to advance El Movimiento's goals, principles, and ideals. This outpouring of artistic and cultural production is known as the Chicano Arts Movement. A defining feature of this Movement was its emphasis on creating and affirming a cultural identity that was specifically Chicano. This meant that artists focused on reclaiming aspects of their Mexican heritage, reintroducing Mexican artistic expressions, and revitalizing Mexican cultural traditions. For this reason, the Chicano Arts Movement was responsible for reviving popular Mexican art forms in the United States, including muralism, printmaking, street theatre, corridos, folklórico dance, Danza Azteca, as well as certain kinds of Mexican iconography. Perhaps most importantly, Chicano artists expanded the definition of art to include all creative activities that affirmed

and celebrated their Mexican cultural heritage.

One of the most profound cultural expressions to be revived during the Chicano Arts Movement was Día de los Muertos. This was especially important considering many Mexican Americans, including Chicano artists, were initially unfamiliar with the full range of the holiday's centuries-old communal celebratory traditions. As artists started introducing Día de los Muertos to their communities and audiences in the US, they reinvented the tradition in a dynamic and creative way and imbued it with new meanings (Fig. 1). While the basic tenets and iconography of the tradition remained more-or-less intact, Chicano artists altered and reconfigured Día de los Muertos to make it relevant for their communities, their audiences, and themselves. In general, Día de los Muertos manifested in the Chicano Arts Movement in two ways — (1) visual culture and (2) community fiesta.

FIG. 1 | LARRY YÁÑEZ, *CONTRA LA VENTANA*, 1992, SILKSCREEN MONOPRINT, 22" X 17"

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS & CHICANO VISUAL CULTURE

The first way that Día de los Muertos was revived was through visual culture. To find sources of inspiration, Chicano artists looked to Mexican art history, turning first to the Mexican Renaissance of the early twentieth century and the works of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, both of whom used Día de los Muertos imagery in their art. Chicanos also rediscovered an earlier artist who inspired both Kahlo and Rivera: José Guadalupe Posada.

José Guadalupe Posada, an engraver who worked in Mexico City at the turn of the 20th century, is now recognized as one of Mexico's greatest illustrators. Using lithography and wood-block relief printing, Posada created hojas volantes, or broadsides. These were inexpensive, hastily produced single sheets of paper that usually contained a splashy headline, an illustrated image, and written text. The content typically included sensational news, event announcements, ballads, and proclamations. Broadsides were sold for a centavo by vendors on the streets, in outdoor markets, and at seasonal fiestas. Posada's primary publisher, Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, had the largest printing business in the country, which allowed him to produce and distribute broadsides on a massive scale. This made Posada's illustrations widely popular throughout central Mexico.

Posada's most well-known illustrations for Arroyo's business were fanciful skull and skeleton figures known as calaveras. Sold during Día de los Muertos, these broadsides lampooned the living by pretending they were dead. Posada's calaveras weren't "dead" images, though. Instead, he portrayed skulls and skeletons that were active, expressive, and filled with personality. Posada's comic sensibility fit perfectly with the carnivalesque aspects of Día de los Muertos and his gallows humor appealed to the Mexican public. His calaveras became a new holiday tradition and successfully injected skull and skeleton imagery into Mexican popular culture and commercial mass media. Posada's calaveras satirized all Mexican society, from the rich to the poor. In Calavera Antonio Vanegas Arroyo

(Fig. 2), he parodies his own boss. Posada portrays Arroyo as an oversized, finely-dressed skeleton standing at the center of his publishing empire holding a crisp 1,000 peso bill. The scene shows smaller skeletons performing all the labor required to keep the print shop profitable while the boss does nothing—a critique that surely resonated with Mexico's working class.

In *Calavera Maderista* (Fig. 3), Posada lampoons Mexican President Francisco Madero. Although Posada had previously portrayed Madero as a folk hero of the Mexican Revolution, the calavera depicts him as a derelict drunkard. Posada's satire is all the more biting considering Madero was one of the wealthiest men in Mexico at the time.

Posada's calaveras also parodied the country's poor. *Calavera Garbancera* (Fig. 4) shows a female skeleton with a wide toothy grin wearing an oversized feathered hat. Here, Posada caricatures garbanceras, a pejorative term for Indigenous women who sold garbanzo beans on the street. Posada illustrates her in ostentatious attire to mock her as mimicking French fashion. Nearly two decades after Posada died, the calavera took on a second life when Diego Rivera and Jewish anthropologist Paca Toor renamed her *Calavera Catrina*, referring to her as a female dandy. Today, *La Catrina* is Posada's most famous creation and the most iconic image associated with Día de los Muertos.

When Chicano artists rediscovered Posada, they were inspired by his agitational, socially relevant, and highly skilled artistic style. They began incorporating versions of his Día de los Muertos imagery into their art, and skulls and skeletons eventually became the most common iconography of the Chicano Arts Movement. provides a portrait of the engraver with his son surrounded by calaveras and Posada's other creations. Rodríguez's Noche Infinita (Fig. 6) further elaborates on Posada's calaveras by showing a cross-section of society enjoying a Día de los Muertos feast against the backdrop of

FIG. 2 | JOSÉ GUADALUPE POSADA, *CALAVERA ANTONIO VANEGAS ARROYO*, 1902

FIG. 3 | JOSÉ GUADALUPE POSADA, *CALAVERA MADERISTA*, CIRCA 1910

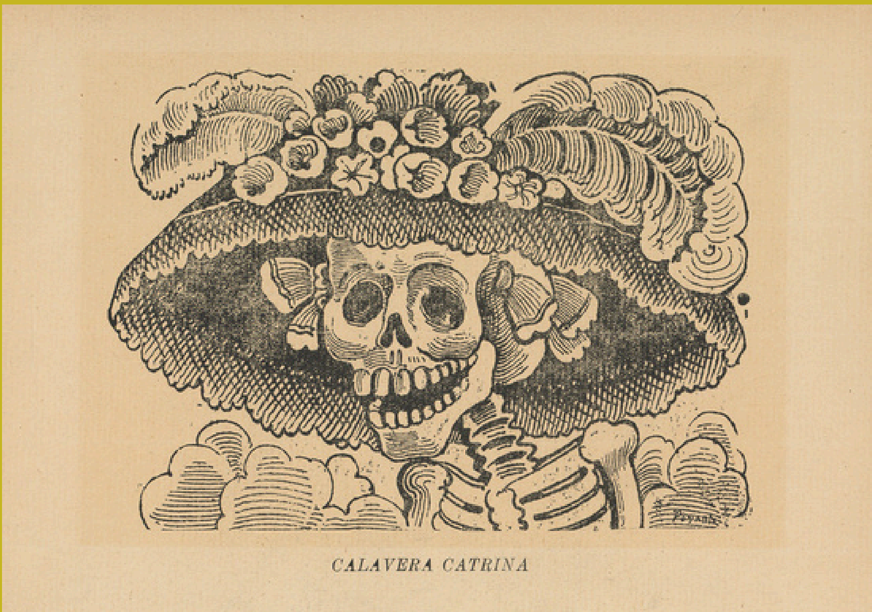


FIG. 4 | JOSÉ GUADALUPE POSADA, *CALAVERA CATRINA*, CIRCA 1912

stars and constellations. Sam Z. Coronado's complimentary screen prints *Los compadres* (Fig. 7) and *Las comadres* (Fig. 8) pay homage to Posada with pairs of male and female calavera companions amusing themselves.

Some Chicano Día de los Muertos art may not reference Posada directly, but nonetheless bears his influence. *La Pistola y El Corazón* (Fig. 9) by George Yepes is a notable example. Yepes originally painted the work in 1988, and it immediately caught the attention of Chicano rock group Los Lobos, who used it as the cover of their Grammy-winning album *La Pistola y El Corazón*. The painting also served as the inspiration for Chicano filmmaker Robert Rodríguez's "Mexico trilogy" — *El Mariachi*, *Desperado*, and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. *La Pistola y El Corazón* was purchased by then-couple Sean Penn and Madonna, but was later burned in a house fire. Yepes reproduced the painting in 1989 for several museum collections, including ASU's Hispanic Research Center. Its iconic status within Chicano culture now rivals Posada's calaveras.

Posada's influence as a biting political satirist is also evident in the work of Ester Hernández. As Hernández explains, "In terms of using the actual calaveras and all that imagery, that came from my exposure to the Chicano Arts Movement in the 1970s. Posada, in particular, had a major impact on all of us." That impact is clear in Hernández's screenprint *Sun Mad* (Fig. 10), which reimagines the Sun Maid Raisins logo by transforming the smiling Sun Maid girl into a malicious calavera who warns against the health hazards and unfair labor practices of large agribusiness. Hernández's political stance was rooted in her lived experience growing up in a Mexican/Yaqui family of farm laborers in California's San Joaquín Valley. Hernández and her family joined with the United Farm Workers (UFW) to protest the effects of insecticides and water pollution on their community, which informed her lifelong commitment to the Chicano Arts Movement. In Sun Raid, Hernández updates her image to critique corporate cooperation with US Immigration and

Customs Enforcement to detain, deport, and separate Mexican and Central American workers and communities. Hernández also utilized Frida Kahlo's Día de los Muertos imagery in her work. *Frida y Yo* (Fig. 11) portrays a young Ester Hernández wearing a skull mask and holding hands with a skeleton dressed and masked like Frida Kahlo, all while sitting inside a giant watermelon. Like her introduction to Posada, Hernández discovered Kahlo in the 1970s as part of the Chicano Arts Movement. She explains, "I was amazed by the range of Frida's work and the subject matter. Her paintings were personal and psychological, like a form of healing. It was overwhelming and magnificent." Indeed, Frida Kahlo and her imagery became common motifs in Hernández's work. *Frida y Yo* shows inspiration from three famous Frida paintings — *The Two Fridas*, *Girl with Death Mask*, and *Viva la Vida, Watermelons*. Hernández's philosophically-complex, self-referential print brilliantly pays homage to Kahlo as an artistic ancestor.

Other Chicano artists have also turned to Día de los Muertos imagery to make political statements. In the lithograph *Cristóbal Colón* (Fig. 12), Malaquías Montoya denounces the US quincentenary celebrations commemorating the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas. Montoya depicts Columbus as a half-calavera who brought widespread death and destruction to the continent, a point driven home by Montoya's inclusion of the definition for "virus." In United States of La Muerte (Fig. 13), Luis Valderas responds to the US-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, replacing the stars and stripes on the US flag with calaveras, missiles, and trails of blood.

Joe L. López's La Causa (Fig. 14) combines political critique with the remembrance of ancestors, another key feature of Día de los Muertos. The work shows an older and younger calavera together carrying a wooden cross with an etching that reads "Que Viva Cesar Chavez." The calaveras are union farmworkers, as evidenced by the red bandanas that hang from their back pockets and the jacket patch of the NFWA (National Farm

Workers Association) logo, a reference to the union's name before it became the UFW. The composition of the calaveras suggests that a younger generation of Chicanos must learn how to bear the cross of El Movimiento. One reading of *La Causa* might be that the farmworkers are the living dead, something akin to Ester Hernández's *Sun Mad*. On the other hand, López's print is also an homage to all those long-gone laborers who may not be bloodline ancestors but whose sacrifices nonetheless sustain the existence of future generations.

The cyclical nature of life and death, a central theme of Día de los Muertos, is precisely the concept explored by César A. Martínez in his lithograph *Dando Vida* (Fig. 15). Aesthetically dazzling and highly intricate, the print shows a huddled mass of buried bones becoming the roots of a prickly pear cactus in full bloom. According to Martínez, the work "was an ecological statement, but I gave it a cultural context" by utilizing Día de los Muertos iconography. The entire print is dominated by images of the natural world — mountains, desert, sun, moon, stars, and constellations — that are drawn so closely together as to suggest the deep interconnectedness of the cosmos writ large.

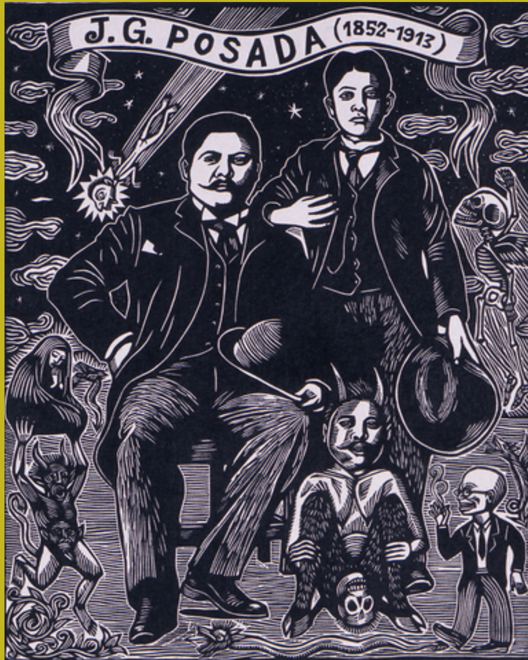


FIG. 5 | ARTEMIO RODRÍGUEZ, *POSADA Y SU HIJO*, 2002, LINOCUT, 20" X 16"

FIG. 6 | ARTEMIO RODRÍGUEZ, *INFINITE NIGHT/NOCHE INFINITA*, 2001, WOODCUT, 24" X 48"

FIG. 7 | SAM Z. CORONADO, *LOS COMPADRES*, 1998, SERIGRAPH, 17.75" X 22.5"

FIG. 8 | SAM Z. CORONADO, *LAS COMADRES*, 1998, SERIGRAPH, 17.75" X 22.5"

FIG. 9 | GEORGE YEPES, *LA PISTOLA Y EL CORAZÓN*, 1989, HAND-PAINTED PRINT, 40" X 30", GEORGEYEPES.COM

FIG. 10 | ESTER HERNÁNDEZ, *SUN MAD*, 1982, SERIGRAPH, 22" X 17"

FIG. 11 | ESTER HERNÁNDEZ, *FRIDA Y YO/FRIDA AND ME*, 1998, LITHOGRAPH, 22" X 24"

FIG. 12 | MALAQUÍAS MONTOYA, *CRISTÓBAL COLÓN*, 1992, LITHOGRAPH, 28.5" X 22.25"

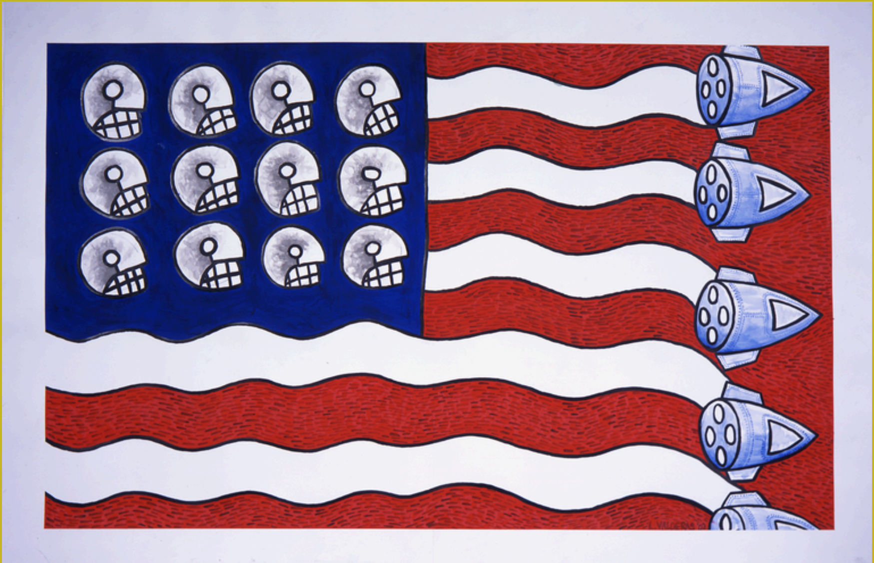


FIG. 13 | LUIS VALDERAS, *UNITED STATES DE LA MUERTE*, 2002, ACRYLIC AND INK ON PAPER, 22" X 36"

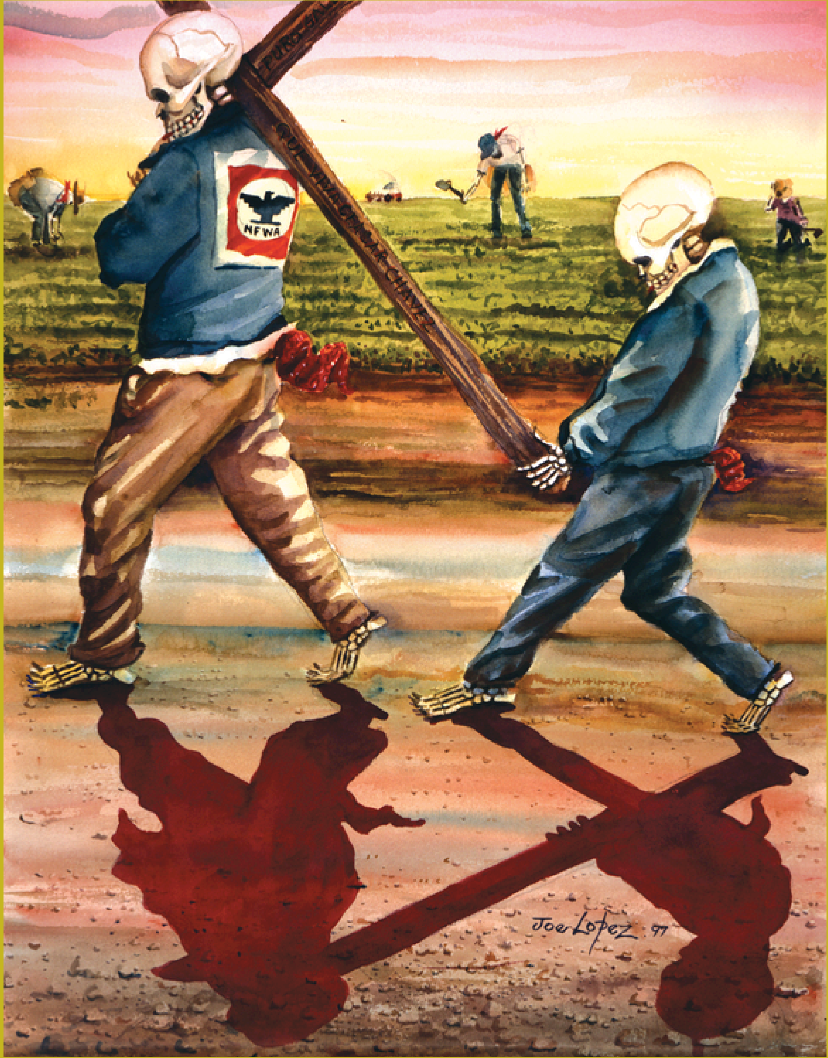


FIG. 14 | JOE L. LÓPEZ, *LA CAUSA*, 1998, WATERCOLOR, 30" X 22"

FIG. 15 | CÉSAR A. MARTÍNEZ, *DANDO VIDA*, 1999, LITHOGRAPH, 30" X 22"

Javier Hernández's *El Muerto: The Aztec Zombie* (Fig. 16) extends the visual legacy of Día de los Muertos by introducing it into a comic book. The series follows Juan Diego, a young Mexican immigrant growing up in East Los Angeles who tragically dies on his birthday — November 2, Día de los Muertos. After his encounters with Mictlantecuhtli, the Aztec God of Death, Diego comes back to the land of the living as the Chicano superhero El Muerto. Hernández's long-standing comic series pays tribute to Mexican heritage and mythology, stoking interest in Día de los Muertos for multiple generations of young fans. He also opened the door for other comic books to utilize Día de los Muertos and its related iconography in their stories. DC Comics introduced an "El Muerto" character in 2000 as part of the Superman franchise and Marvel Comics followed with an "El Muerto" character in 2006 as part of Spider-Man.

Coffin Comics' *La Muerta* (Fig. 17) brings an innovative, quasi-feminist take on comic renditions of Día de los Muertos. The long-running series follows María Díaz, a modern-day Chicana military veteran hellbent on revenge. After returning from Afghanistan, she witnesses the murder of her family in the cemetery on Día de los Muertos. Dressed in scantily-clad skeleton-ornamented outfits and sugar skull face paint, María takes on the powerful, death-worshipping border gang responsible for her family's massacre and the demise of her Chicano community. What she lacks in superpowers she makes up for with military training and cultural pride. Illustrated by Joel Gomez, the successful comic series infuses Día de los Muertos iconography with narco-cultura visuals, pin-up style, and chola aesthetics.

Día de los Muertos imagery has become wildly popular in the US thanks to the Chicano Arts Movement. The flip-side has been increased cultural appropriation and corporate commodification. In 2013, the Walt Disney Company famously attempted to trademark "Día de los Muertos" in the lead up to the release of the film *Coco*.

Chicano cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz responded with *Muerto Mouse* (Fig. 18), which went viral across social media alongside the vocal protests of the Latino community. His print shows a monstrous Mickey Mouse calavera with claws and fangs rampaging through the city of Los Angeles. The tagline for this faux movie poster reads “It’s coming to trademark your cultura!” Alcaraz brilliantly channels Posada-esque satire to take on the corporate behemoth, thereby reclaiming Chicano control over the symbolism that animates Día de los Muertos. Disney eventually withdrew its trademark application.

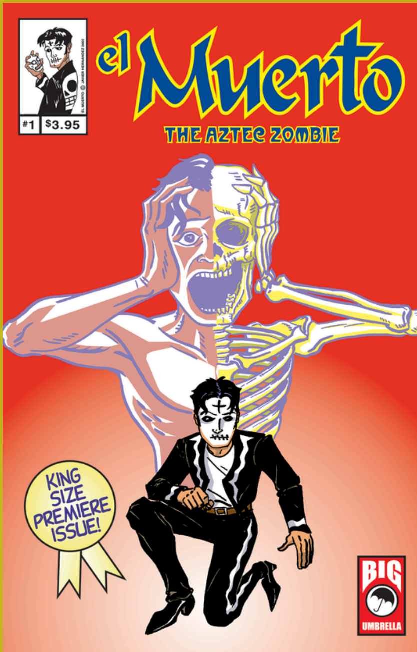


FIG. 16 | JAVIER HERNANDEZ, *EL MUERTO: THE AZTEC ZOMBIE* 1998, COMIC BOOK

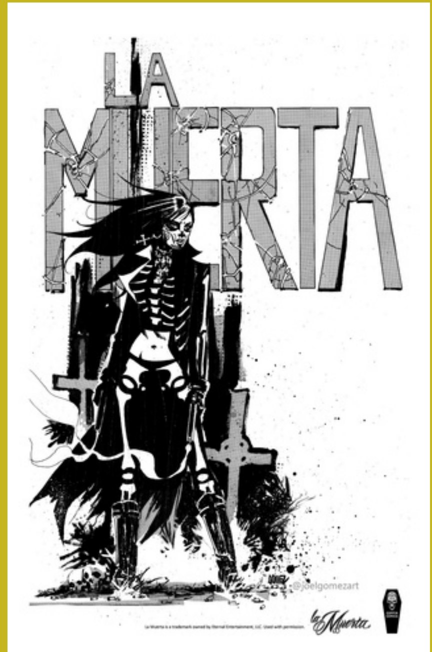


FIG. 17 | JOEL GOMEZ, *LA MUERTA*, 2016, COMIC BOOK

FIG. 18 | LALO ALCARAZ, *MUERTO MOUSE*, 2013, DIGITAL PRINT

3 DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS & CHICANO COMMUNAL FIESTAS

Prior to the 1970s, most Mexican American families and communities commemorated the dead on November 1 and 2 privately, if at all. Attending All Saints' and All Souls' masses, picnicking graveside, or lighting candles on the family shrine at home were some of the most common ways to mark the holiday. In certain regions of Mexico, however, Día de los Muertos has long included an outpouring of community-wide celebrations that are very public. These fiestas (festivals) for Día de los Muertos, especially in central and southern Mexico, are celebrated in cemeteries, plazas, parks, and other public venues. Urban and rural communities gather for carnivalesque revelry that features music, dance, theatre, parades, processions, fireworks, masquerading, and colorful pageantry. Prior to the 1970s, these kinds of Día de los Muertos fiestas didn't generally exist in the US.

That changed when Chicano arts organizations began producing public celebrations of the holiday. Instead of copying Mexican Día de los Muertos fiestas, these organizations creatively adapted them to correspond to their own artistic expressions, the needs of their communities, and the ambitions of El Movimiento. In the process, they invented a hybridized celebration that was distinctly Chicano. Things that weren't Día de los Muertos traditions in Mexico became central customs of Chicano festivities, including ballet folklórico performances, Danza Azteca ceremonies, altar installations to honor political heroes and cultural icons, calavera facepaint, and skeleton costuming. For Chicanos, Día de los Muertos went beyond simply honoring one's ancestors. Chicano fiestas honored Mexican heritage writ large, building and sustaining community, protesting social injustices, showcasing artistic excellence and innovation, and proudly performing Chicano cultural identity in public. In short, Día de los Muertos was a celebration of cultural life and resilience.

The earliest recorded Día de los Muertos fiesta in the US took place in 1972 in San Francisco's Mission District. It was

organized by Galería de la Raza (GdlR), a now-famous art collective and gallery dedicated to showcasing Latino art and culture. The co-directors René Yáñez and Ralph Maradiaga only had a passing familiarity with Día de los Muertos, but they believed a public celebration of the holiday could help GdlR establish a community built on ethnic pride and self-empowerment. In large part they relied on the knowledge of fellow Bay Area artist Yolanda Garfias Woo, a Chicana from Oaxaca, Mexico. She was steeped in Día de los Muertos tradition and took time to educate Chicano artists and the community about the holiday and its customs, including mentoring a young cadre of Chicana artists in Indigenous Mexican spirituality. Garfias Woo also taught local bakeries in the Mission District of San Francisco how to make pan de muerto, traditional Día de los Muertos bread, so that it was available for the holiday.

GdlR's initial Día de los Muertos celebration in 1972 resonated with the community, which led to it becoming an annual festival (Fig. 19). Their event focused primarily on activities within the gallery. They staged annual exhibitions that allowed Chicano artists to showcase work thematically related to Día de los Muertos. Throughout the 1970s, they also featured exhibitions dedicated to the work of José Guadalupe Posada and homages to Frida Kahlo. Their fiesta was supplemented with educational activities, film screenings, workshops for making sugar skulls and papel picado, and a large procession through the neighborhood. By the 1980s, GdlR was attracting thousands of participants for their Día de los Muertos, making it one of the most anticipated cultural events in San Francisco.

The ofrendas were arguably GdlR's greatest contribution to US Día de los Muertos festivals and Chicano art history more generally. These dynamic altars with elaborate offerings for the dead are a ritual medium by which the living commune with and honor the deceased. Erected by families and friends of the dead, ofrendas are usually placed on graves and/or within the

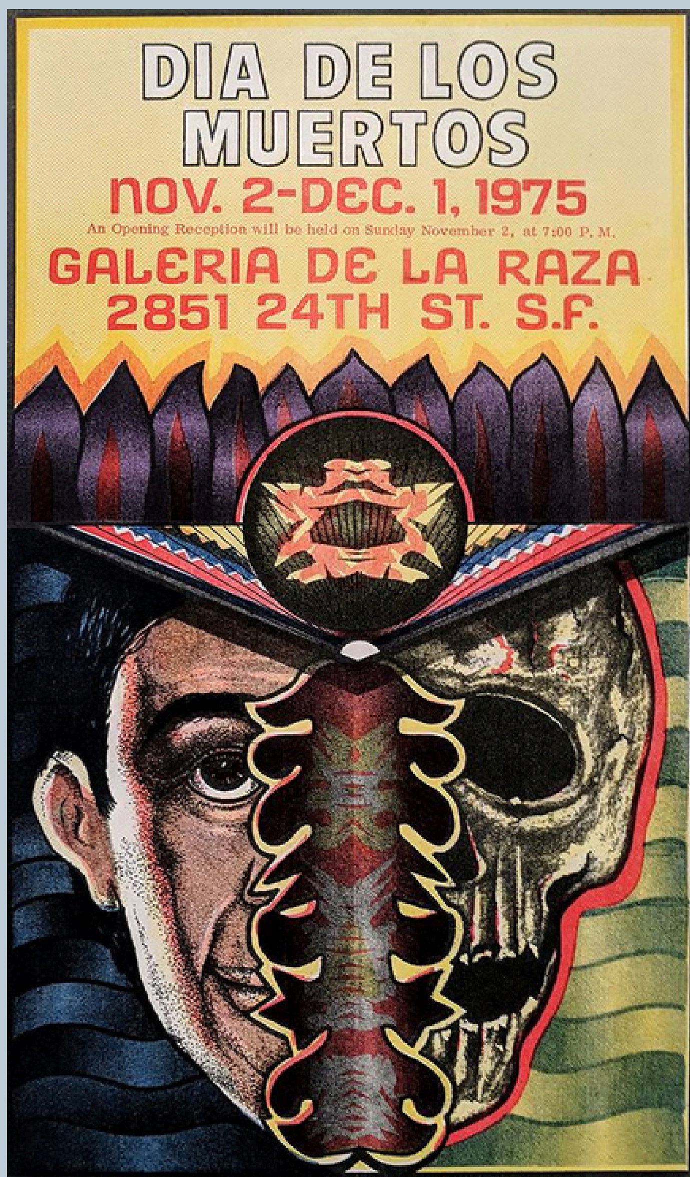


FIG. 19 | GALERÍA DE LA RAZA, DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS POSTER, 1975, SERIGRAPH

home, or sometimes in temples, churches, or community plazas. They typically include elements like food, candles, flowers, incense, skull and skeleton objects, photographs of the deceased, items the deceased enjoyed while they were alive, and other things considered sacred or significant. Although ofrendas are the primary component of Día de los Muertos observances in central and southern Mexico, they weren't common among Mexicans in other parts of the country or among Chicanos in the US. However, GdlR included ofrendas in their fiesta and introduced them as a viable cultural form for Chicano artists.

In the early years, Yolanda Garfias Woo constructed more traditional ofrendas in the gallery that featured objects and imagery that were customary of her Oaxacan heritage. But GdlR Director René Yáñez, who'd learned the tradition from Garfias Woo, began making innovative ofrendas that pushed the work into the realm of contemporary art. This was hardly surprising, though, given that in the 1960s and 70s many modern art pioneers were moving away from traditional painting and sculpture and were moving toward large-scale, site-specific, mixed-media constructions that would become known as Installation Art. Yáñez's experimentation with altar-making led to GdlR's Día de los Muertos becoming a prime venue and opportunity for Chicano artists to create their own aesthetic reinterpretations of the traditional ofrenda. Modern masters of the altar installation like Chicana artists Amalia Mesa-Bains, Carmen Lomas Garza, and Ester Hernández (all of whom started at GdlR) now have their work featured in prominent museums. Altar installations are now a regular fixture of Día de los Muertos celebrations all over the US.

Self Help Graphics (SHG), a Chicano arts organization in the heart of East LA, produced their first Día de los Muertos fiesta in the early 1970s. As a community arts center, SHG served the local Chicano/Latino population via arts education, cultural programming, gallery exhibitions, and a professional

printmaking program. This was vital for an East LA community that had spent decades experiencing police brutality, gang violence, substandard housing, a discriminatory education system, and environmental injustice. SHG's founders and a group of local artists initiated their Día de los Muertos festival primarily for its potential to instill cultural and community pride and reframe the barrio as a vibrant place. It was also an opportunity for the young arts collective to put its name on the map as the first in LA to host a Día de los Muertos celebration. The first festival's success convinced SHG to institute it as their yearly signature event (Fig. 20).

Their Día de los Muertos festival started with a community procession through the streets of East LA to nearby Evergreen Cemetery. Over the years, the procession grew into a boisterous parade with music, dancing, street theatre, floats, festive costumes, and masquerading a la calavera (Fig. 21). Once the community arrived at the cemetery, there was a short Catholic mass followed by blessings and ceremonial performances by a local Aztec dance troupe. Eventually, the mass disappeared as their Día de los Muertos became more secular, leaving only the Aztec dancers to fulfill the spiritual element. The procession then made its way from the cemetery to Self Help Graphics. There, the festival activities included a Día de los Muertos art exhibition, a community ofrenda, altar installations, educational activities, musical performances, theatre performances, film screenings, stand-up comedy, drinking, eating, socializing, and occasionally community and political organizing. SHG's Día de los Muertos gained national recognition thanks to LA's position as a media capital. The festival regularly appeared on television news segments and in LA newspapers and was also featured in documentaries and Hollywood films, such as the Chicano classic *Blood In Blood Out* (1993). Its notoriety helped influence other Chicano arts organizations across California and the US Southwest to produce their own Día De Los Muertos fiestas.

One of the major innovations to come from SHG's Día de los

Muertos fiestas was an emphasis on costuming, which was not a tradition in Mexico. In certain areas of the country, people would sometimes wear papier-mâché or plaster skull masks as part of festivities, but it wasn't a common custom. Furthermore, Mexicans didn't dress in skeletal attire or paint their faces like calaveras for Día de los Muertos. All of these are Chicano inventions that originated at Self Help Graphics (Fig. 22). Early on, the make-up and costuming were simple and amateurish, but they quickly became more elaborate, elegant, and professional (Fig. 23). Given the long-standing tradition of skeleton costuming and face painting for Halloween, it's easy to see how it crossed over into US Día de los Muertos fiestas. Owing to the city's fashion and entertainment industries, LA is now the epicenter for Día de los Muertos costuming and fashion trends (Fig. 24).

The Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF), a Chicano art collective in Sacramento, also organized Día de los Muertos fiestas. Established in 1970, RCAF was a multidisciplinary artistic group. The group's name was a tongue-in-cheek reference to their Chicano militancy, as well as an homage to the fact that several members were war veterans. In addition to being one of the most significant Chicano art collectives, RCAF also excelled at community organizing. They ran a free breakfast program, operated La Raza Bookstore, and engaged in political and labor activism. RCAF made direct contributions to the UFW. Because RCAF was located in California's capital, they also made all the posters and banners for the UFW whenever they came to protest state government (which was often). RCAF also served as the official security for César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, an important service considering the era's rampant political assassinations.

In 1975, RCAF organized Sacramento's first community Día de los Muertos celebration (Fig. 25). Even though members hadn't grown up celebrating or even knowing about Día de los Muertos,they were familiar with GdlR's annual festival. The

group's founding members, José Montoya and Esteban Villa, had been featured artists in GdlR's first festival in 1972, and in 1974 several members traveled from Sacramento to San Francisco to participate in their event.

Unlike GdlR or SHG, RCAF's celebration was grounded in ceremony much more than visual art production. The artists and community gathered at a nearby high school and then performed a procession through the streets to St. Mary's Catholic cemetery (Fig. 26). The procession was led by a Catholic Priest, Aztec dancers, and a group of Guadalupanas, a society of Catholic women devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The crowd of hundreds played music, danced, and sang alabanzas (praise songs) during the procession (Fig. 27). RCAF printed out lyric sheets so that the entire community could sing along. Participants carried flowers, candles, crosses, and photographs of their departed. Some wore calaca masks, especially the youth, but most dressed in either traditional attire or their Sunday best. When they arrived at the cemetery, the priest gave a traditional All Souls' Day mass in Spanish and English, which was followed by a ceremonial dance performed by a local Danza Azteca troupe (Fig. 28). A large community ofrenda was constructed by Lupe Portillo so that the community could add items to honor their loved ones. Notably, many of the community's loved ones were buried in St. Mary's cemetery, including those of the RCAF. In that regard, RCAF's November 2nd celebration was much closer to a traditional Día de los Muertos that one might find in Mexico. It was ultra-community-centric, tied to the community's Catholic and Indigenous spiritualities, and centered in the cemetery where the community could gather graveside to honor their dead.

FIG. 20 | ALFREDO DE BATUC, *FOUR SEASONS*, 1979, SERIGRAPH, 19" X 25"

FIG. 21 | SELF HELP GRAPHICS DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS COSTUMES, LATE 1970S, COURTESY CALIFORNIA ETHNIC & MULTICULTURAL ARCHIVES AT UCSB LIBRARY

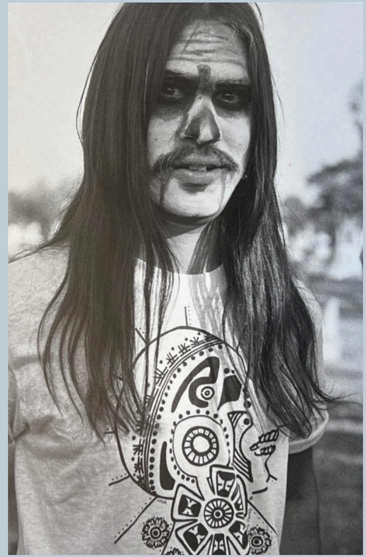


FIG. 22 | SELF HELP GRAPHICS DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS FACEPAINT, LATE 1970S, COURTESY CALIFORNIA ETHNIC & MULTICULTURAL ARCHIVES AT UCSB LIBRARY

FIG. 23 | SELF HELP GRAPHICS DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS PROCESSION, LATE 1970S, COURTESY CALIFORNIA ETHNIC & MULTICULTURAL ARCHIVES AT UCSB LIBRARY

FIG. 24 | CATRINA CHRISTINA IN COSTUME AND FACEPAINT, 2022, PHOTO BY MARS SANDOVAL

FIG. 25 | RICARDO FAVELA, DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS POSTER, 1975, SERIGRAPH, 25" X 19"

FIG. 26 | RICARDO FAVELA, DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS POSTER 1977, SERIGRAPH, 25" X 19"

FIG. 27 | ROYAL CHICANO AIR FORCE DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS PROCESSION WITH SINGING, 1977, PHOTO BY JUAN CARRILLO

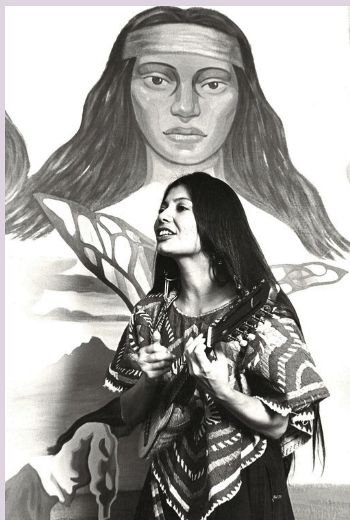
FIG. 28 | ROYAL CHICANO AIR FORCE DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS INDIGENOUS CEREMONY, 1977, PHOTO BY JUAN CARRILLO

4

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS IN THE VALLEY OF THE SUN

One of the most profound Día de los Muertos celebrations to come out of the Chicano Arts Movement was the annual fiesta produced in Arizona by Xicanindio (pronounced shee-can-in-dee-oh). The multidisciplinary arts organization was founded in Mesa in 1975 by Zarco Guerrero and Carmen de Novais Guerrero in collaboration with local Chicano and Native American performing artists, visual artists, and community organizers (Fig. 29-30). Zarco was inspired to start the organization on the advice of César Chávez during the leader's 24-day hunger strike in Phoenix to protest anti-unionization laws in Arizona, Chávez's home state. From its inception, Xicanindio's mission was to promote Chicano and Native American arts and culture. This concentration on both Chicano AND Native American culture was reflected in the organization's name, which was meant to conceptually link Chicanos (*xicanos*) with Indigenous people (*indios*). The name acknowledged two of the organization's core beliefs: (1) Chicanos have a rich Indigenous heritage rooted in the native history of the Americas, and (2) Chicanos living in the US Southwest share forms of cultural and political solidarity with Native Americans on account of shared experiences of marginalization. Another focus of Xicanindio's mission was using the arts to preserve Chicano and Native American cultural traditions. They did this through grass-roots educational programs, arts workshops, and public art projects that were often created with and for their community. For Xicanindio, community usually meant the youth and working-class people of color living in the barrios and reservations of the greater Phoenix area. In this regard, Xicanindio's mission to preserve cultural traditions also served as a mechanism for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Xicanindio was unique among national Chicano arts organizations in that they pursued their mission through various artistic forms. They created community murals in Phoenix's inner-city housing projects and on Native American reservations (Fig. 32-33). They fostered coalitions with ethnic artists across



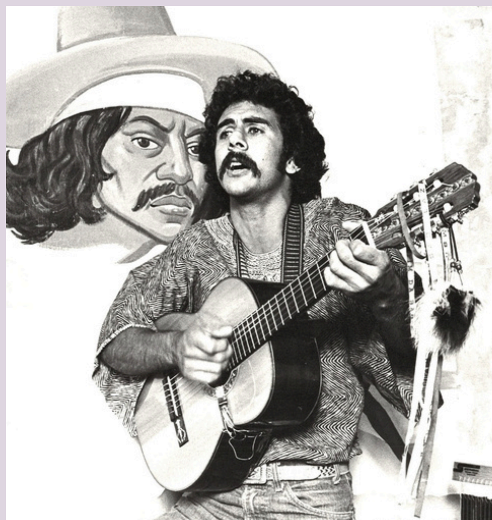


FIG. 29 & 30 | CARMEN DE NOVIAS & ZARCO GUERRERO, CIRCA 1980, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 31 | XICANINDIO MUSICIANS, CIRCA 1980, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 32 | XICANINDIO MURAL PHOENIX BARRIO, 1977, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 33 | XICANINDIO MURAL PHOENIX BARRIO, 1977, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 34 | XICANINDIO COMMUNITY THEATRE, 1979, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 35 | XICANINDIO ART WORKSHOP, 1979, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

the Southwest to present theatre shows, and cultural festivals. Xicanindio was also the first arts collective to organize traveling exhibitions of Chicano visual art, which circulated throughout the Southwest (Fig. 34). They ran city programs to provide arts education and job training for Latino, Indigenous, and Black youth (Fig. 35). They engaged in local and statewide activism, performing at rallies or staging concerts to raise funds for certain grassroots movements. At one point, some members formed a band known as "Xicanindio Musicians," later renamed "Zum Zum Zum," that played multiple genres of Latin American music for a wide range of audiences (Fig. 31). The band performed in schools to teach students about Indigenous Latin American history, culture, geography, and musical traditions. They toured to reservations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah where they performed in tribal schools, community centers, and pow wows. They also held lengthy residencies at popular Phoenix nightclubs. The band released albums and music videos and created a musical show that educated youth about drugs, alcohol, teen pregnancy, and suicide. They were even invited to perform for the White House Hispanic Heritage Awards. In total, Xicanindio's work was both prolific and wide-ranging.

In 1980, Xicanindio organized the first Día de los Muertos fiesta in the Phoenix metro area. As with other Chicano arts organizations, most of the participating artists weren't initially familiar with the holiday. Carmen and Zarco Guerrero learned about the holiday in the mid-1970s when they lived in California and became friends and collaborators with the artists of Galería de la Raza, Royal Chicano Air Force, and, to a lesser extent, Self Help Graphics. In the first several years of Xicanindio's existence, Carmen and Zarco also brought artists from these organizations to Arizona as part of their artist-exchange program. To educate the community, Xicanindio's first Día de los Muertos festival was preceded by a three-day symposium that featured lectures and presentations about the meaning of the holiday and its various traditions. The symposium culminated

with a large fiesta at Mesa's Pioneer Park (Fig. 36). The significance of Día de los Muertos immediately resonated with the community, and the festival became an annual event (Fig. 37-40).

Like other fiestas held by Chicano arts organizations of that era, Xicanindio's Día de los Muertos was essentially an arts festival with a format that stayed more or less the same. Staged annually at Mesa's Pioneer Park, the event featured a variety of local music, dance, and theatre acts who performed on a large stage constructed specifically for the event. While the line-up was typically dominated by local artists, Xicanindio also brought performers from New Mexico, California, Texas, Mexico, and Puerto Rico from year to year. Sometimes, the festival was accompanied by Día de los Muertos-themed art exhibitions. Latino and Native American vendors also set up in the park to sell arts, crafts, and ethnic foods. Xicanindio's Día de los Muertos routinely began at noon with an opening ceremony performed by local Danza Azteca troupes, and the festival concluded at sunset with a candlelight procession through the park. A community ofrenda was constructed by altar-maker and spiritual leader, Father Jorge Eagar, so that participants could contribute items in remembrance of their ancestors and loved ones. A special ofrenda was constructed for César Chávez upon his death in 1993, which also drew festival participation from Chicano Movement leader Dolores Huerta and UFW's rank-and-file (Fig. 47-48).

Xicanindio's Día de los Muertos grew in size and scope nearly every year. After beginning with an audience of only a few hundred participants in 1980, they started attracting several thousand people to the festival by the end of the 1980s. Xicanindio's increased visibility and legitimacy as one of Arizona's most important arts organizations helped aid the festival's popularity, as did the organization's marketing and promotion. They created and distributed event posters that became eye-catching works of art in their own right. They also

created English and Spanish language advertisements for local television and radio. At one point they invited RCAF from Sacramento to help them paint billboards to publicize the event. Eventually Xicanindio's Día de los Muertos became their signature event and arguably their greatest cultural contribution to the Valley of the Sun.

In significant ways, Xicanindio's Día de los Muertos was unlike fiestas produced by other Chicano arts organizations. Carmen and Zarco Guerrero were deeply committed to diversity and inclusivity, and their Día de los Muertos became a deeply multicultural and intercultural event. They gathered audiences from diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds from around the Valley to participate. Even more, the artists and groups hired to perform in the festival were drawn from equally diverse backgrounds. The fiesta regularly featured artists and groups from nearby Indigenous tribal nations. Although there wasn't an exact equivalent to Día de los Muertos in these particular cultures, the artists and groups nonetheless performed dances and traditional music that were meant to honor their ancestors.

For instance, a troupe known as the Apache Spirit Dancers from nearby Gila River Indian Reservation performed the ceremonial Gaan Dance (Fig. 44). Outfitted in large geometric headdresses and regalia meant to personify sacred Mountain spirits, masked dancers performed a ritual designed to reinvigorate the community by connecting them with their ancestors.

Xicanindio's Día de los Muertos also typically began with a blessing ceremony performed by a local Aztec Dance troupe, Yolloincuauhtli (Fig. 45, 49, 50). However, unlike other troupes in the US that were typically made up of Chicanos looking to connect with their Indigenous ancestral identity, Yolloincuauhtli was comprised of Tohono O'odham, Akimel O'odham, and Pascua Yaqui peoples living at the Salt River Pima-Maricopa

Reservation. While promoting and preserving Chicano and Native American art and culture was Xicanindio's mission, Carmen and Zarco also made space in their Día de los Muertos for African and African-American performers to participate. The local troupe Kawambe African Drum & Dance was also a regular feature of the festival (Fig. 51-53). They performed traditional dances and music drawn from sub-Saharan African cultures.

In general, Xicanindio's festival was also unique for its utilization of masks (Fig. 41-43). This owed to the influence of Zarco Guerrero, a renowned and award-winning mask maker with numerous residencies throughout Latin America and Asia. His calaca (skull) masks were worn on stage by artists who performed at Día de los Muertos. For instance, Zarco worked with the Ballet Folklórico Primavera dance company to create masked dance dramas (Fig. 46). Primavera also created performances using his Nagual masks. These were masks made to represent the mythological creatures of Mexican folklore who can shapeshift between human, animal, and other beings. Audiences at the festival also had the opportunity to purchase Zarco's Día de los Muertos masks so they could participate in the holiday revelry. Whereas most Chicano Día de los Muertos fiestas went the route of calavera facepaint, Xicanindio remained committed to masks.

Xicanindio continued hosting Día de los Muertos at Pioneer Park throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In 2005, they partnered with the newly created Mesa Arts Center (MAC) for a Día de los Muertos celebration that featured an art exhibition and a theatrical performance in MAC's new state of the art venues. In 2007, Xicanindio restructured their organization, changed their name to Xico (shee-co), and moved from Mesa to Chandler. There, they began co-producing a Día de los Muertos fiesta with Vision Gallery that focused on altar installations. In 2013, Xico moved to Downtown Phoenix, where they began co-presenting a Día de los Muertos festival with St. Mary's Catholic Church. The void that the organization left in Mesa was quickly filled by

MAC, who in 2007 started organizing a massive two-day Día de los Muertos celebration that featured dozens of performance groups and a two-story tall community ofrenda. With sponsorship from the City of Mesa and the Mexican Consulate, MAC's festival became one of the largest and most successful Día de los Muertos celebrations in the US, regularly attracting more than 30,000 people and winning the prestigious "Cultural Diversity Award" from the National League of Cities.

Beginning in the 1990s, Carmen and Zarco Guerrero and Xicanindio began to go their separate creative ways. Although the couple continued performing and contributing to the organization's annual Día de los Muertos festival, they also started organizing annual Día de los Muertos fiestas for multiple local cultural institutions, including large celebrations at the Heard Museum and the Desert Botanical Garden. Their efforts helped disseminate Día de los Muertos throughout the Valley, eventually making the Phoenix metro area a hotbed for Día de los Muertos events.

Carmen and Zarco also started their own arts organization, Cultural Coalition, which produces an annual Día de los Muertos fiesta. For the past decade, it has taken place at Phoenix's Indian School Park, which was once home to a federal Indian boarding school. Cultural Coalition renamed their fiesta Mikiztli (pronounced meeh-keesh-tleeh), which in Mexico's Indigenous Nahuatl language means transition. The name change was a response to the over-commercialization and appropriation of Día de los Muertos. Their event is still deeply multicultural and multigenerational, attracting a large and diverse audience (Fig. 54-58). Carmen and Zarco Guerrero's efforts represent 45 years of creating communal space for the Valley of the Sun's diverse communities to gather and honor a broad collective of ancestors and departed souls.

FIG. 36 | XICANINDIO DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS PROCESSION, MID-1980S, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

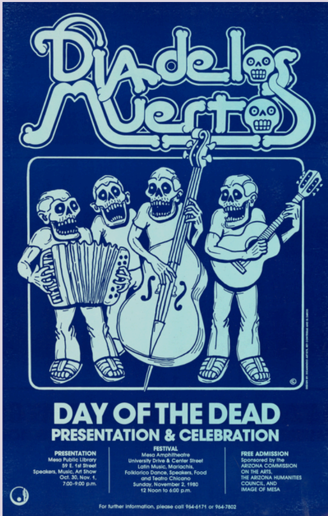


FIG. 37 | ZARCO GUERRERO, XICANINDIO DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS POSTER, 1980, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

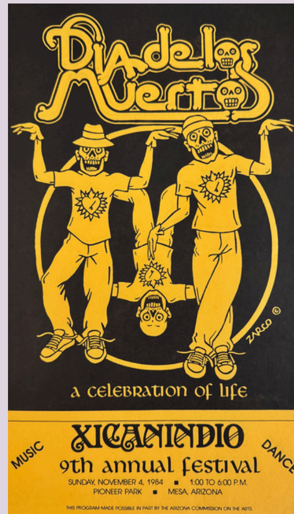


FIG. 38 | ZARCO GUERRERO, XICANINDIO DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS POSTER, 1984, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 39 | JOE RAY, XICANINDIO DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS POSTER, 1990, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 40 | MARTIN MORENO, DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS, 1989 POSTER, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 41 | NAGUAL MASKS BY ZARCO GUERRERO, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 42 | CALACA MASKS BY ZARCO GUERRERO, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 43 | PAPIER-MÂCHÉ CALACA MASKS BY ZARCO GUERRERO, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 44 | APACHE SPIRIT DANCERS, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 45 | YOLLOINCUAUHTLI DANZA AZTECA TROUPE, COURTESY CHUVAK MONTIEL

FIG. 46 | BALLET FOLKLÓRICO PRIMAVERA PERFORMING "LA VISITA," COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 47 | CARMEN GUERRERO, DINA LÓPEZ, AND DOLORES HUERTA, DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS PROCESSION IN HONOR OF CÉSAR CHÁVEZ, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 48 | JORGE EAGAR OFRENDA FOR CÉSAR CHÁVEZ, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 49 | DANZA AZTECA PERFORMANCE, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 50 | DANZANTE, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 51 | KAWAMBE DRUM & DANCE ENSEMBLE, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 52 | KAWAMBE PERFORMING TRADITIONAL WEST AFRICAN DANCES, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 53 | KAWAMBE PERFORMING TRADITIONAL WEST AFRICAN DANCES, COURTESY ASU LIBRARY CHICANO/A RESEARCH COLLECTION

FIG. 54 | CULTURAL COALITION'S MIKIZTLI FESTIVAL, 2024, PHOTO BY KELLY FOX

FIG. 55 | CULTURAL COALITION'S MIKIZTLI FESTIVAL, 2024, PHOTO BY KELLY FOX

FIG. 56 | CULTURAL COALITION'S MIKIZTLI FESTIVAL, 2024, PHOTO BY KELLY FOX

FIG. 57 | INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISE AT CULTURAL COALITION'S MIKIZTLI FESTIVAL, 2024, PHOTO BY KELLY FOX

FIG. 58 | INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISE AT CULTURAL COALITION'S MIKIZTLI FESTIVAL, 2024, PHOTO BY KELLY FOX

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