



EXPLORING ZAPATA

Selected works exploring how Zapata's image is used in visual culture among those of Mexican descent, serving as a symbol of revolution and a bridge between Mexico's past and the their modern identity.

BY PEREZ / INDEPENDENT STUDY

PROSPECTUS

Exploring Zapata is a creative exploration in the form of an exhibition of selected artworks by Mexican and Chicano artists, exploring the dual identity of what it means to be Mexican-American. The selected works of this exhibition are focused around Emiliano Zapata, a significant Mexican revolutionary figure, and how his ideals and image act like a bridge for the Chicano culture.

This creative exploration stems from my ambition to learn more about my Hispanic heritage through visual media. Over the course of my educational career at Appalachian State University I have incorporated my graphic design skills in projects to explore my ambition. Continuing on from my graphic design senior project

titled "Printed Roots," which explores the Chicano Posters during the Chicano Movements of the 1970s. I incorporated visual elements and themes of Chicano identity, symbolism, that signifies what it means to be a first-generation Mexican-American and the end results was six original designed posters each sharing a common theme of the nopal or cactus: featured on Mexico's flag, a staple food, and used in slang.

I wanted to further explore contemporary Chicano art in a curatorial mindset, weaving a story to tell the history of Mexican-American through a shared theme while also expanding my historical knowledge of Mexico. During my research for

"Printed Roots" one of the most frequent symbol used was the image of Zapata. Dawning a sombrero and mustache, he embodies the spirit of revolution, standing against oppression, advocating for civil rights, and inspiring activism. He also acts as a symbolic connection between Mexico's historical struggles and the modern identity of individuals of Mexican descent.

The following selected works explore how Zapata's image is used in visual culture among Mexicans and Chicanos by using citations from Zapata. The first section explores the life of Zapata and how his image stood for revolutionary actions, activism and how it acted as a bridge for Mexico's past to the contemporary identity of

those with Mexican decent. The second section connects Zapata's political stands on land form and how the Manifest Destiny effected Mexican-Americans. The final section discusses the undocumented workers of Hispanic descent in America and the impact they have on production in the United States despite the negative rhetoric.

Overall the goal of this project is to curate an exhibition about Mexican-American identity that shares a common theme. By researching and analyzing the artwork I am using both my art history knowledge and my experience as a Mexican-American.



THE REVOLUTION

"IT IS BETTER TO DIE ON YOUR FEET
THAN TO LIVE ON YOUR KNEES"

THE REVOLUTION

Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919) was one of the most influential figures during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 until 1920. Zapata was born in Morelos, Mexico into rural peasant family which effected his political and moral stances years later - fighting for indigenous rights and autonomy from the wealthy elites and non-indigenous people.

Zapata emphasized his political ideology through the “Plan de Ayala” and was vocal of the oppressive regime of Porfirio Díaz and later other revolutionary Mexican leaders. Despite being assassinated in 1919, Zapata became a lasting figure of social justice resistance, as well as a symbol in the Chicano visual culture. Zapata's image has been used

throughout Mexican and Chicano visual culture. His image was used for propaganda during the revolution and after his death. In Diego Rivera's murals “Agrarian Leader Zapata” and “The History of Mexico.” Zapata is featured. Years later during the Chicano Movement his image became a significant powerful symbol because the movement sought to address civil rights, land reform, labor rights, and cultural identity for Mexican Americans.

These mirrored Zapata's ideals, emphasizing the continuity in the fight for civil rights among people with Mexican ancestry. His image acted as a sort of bridge between the History of Mexico and the Chicano community's

struggles for equality and justice in the United States.

In the visual media, Zapata is often portrayed as he appears in his 1914 portrait taken by Katherine Anne Porter. The portrait depicts Zapata in center profile, wearing his iconic large sombrero, with his intense gaze looking slightly to the side. His facial features, including his mustache and determined expression, are strongly captured, symbolizing his role as a revolutionary leader. Zapata's image has been featured in posters, murals, and graffiti as a symbol of Chicano pride, resistance, civil rights, and binging those of Mexican descent closer and unified.

Furthermore, reinterpretations of his portrait blend the historic significance with modern themes, such as anti-capitalism, environmental activism, and the struggle for social equity. Lastly, Zapata's image not only serves as a reminder of his historical contributions but also as a symbol that inspires ongoing movements for justice, equality, and the fight against oppression.

Overall Zapata's image signifies revolution, speaking out against those who oppress, addressing civil rights, and activism. Zapata also serves as a symbolic bridge between Mexico's past to the contemporary identity of those with Mexican



Part of a series of flyer's that ranged from saints, calaveras (skeletons), and revolutionary heroes. This one features the skeleton of Zapata, riding a horse through skulls as if it was a battlefield. These flyer's often include verses of corridos set to the familiar tunes or songs.

"The skull with teeth, telling the big tough guy: 'Hey rope, don't snap, it's the first pull!'" The line seems to be a humorous warning to take care in a difficult or dangerous situation.

José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913)
 Mexico
 "La Calavera Grande de Emiliano Zapata"
 1920s
 Metal relief print
 15 9/16 in x 11 13/16 in



Created after Zapata's assassination, Orozco places the Mexican revolutionary in the center of the doorway among Mexican laborers - bullets strung across a man's shoulder, a sword is pointed at another's eye, and figures kneeling. Yet Zapata's gaze seems ambiguous with a hint of nonchalance. José Clemente Orozco (1883 - 1949)

Mexico
 "Zapata"
 1930
 Oil on canvas
 78 1/4 in × 48 1/4 in



Featured in the 1977 *Méchanico Calender*, this Psychedelic gradient portrait of Emiliano Zapata. Beneath the portrait, the artist included the Chicano slang term "rifa," meaning "we are the best." This emphasizes Zapata as one of the greatest figures in Mexican culture and history—symbolizing his enduring legacy and the cultural pride that continues to inspire people of Hispanic descent.

Leonard Castellanos (1943 - Present)
 Los Angeles, California
 "RIFA"
 1976
 Screenprint
 28 in × 22 in



The eyes of Emiliano Zapata captivate as the rest of this face is hidden, under are the words "Zapatista ¡Todos!" The drawn in balaclava mimics the ones worn by the Neozapatista groups located mainly in Chiapas, Mexico they are continuing on the fight for the rights, dignity, and self-determination of Mexico's Indigenous communities.

Malaquías Montoya (1938–Present)
New Mexico
"Zapatista ¡Todos!"
Unknown Date
Screenprint



Celebrating 100 years since the Mexican Revolution and 200 years when Mexico breaks from Spain declaring its Independence - the fight goes on today for civil rights of those with Hispanic descent.

Melanie Cervantes (1977 - Present)
Oakland, California
"La Lucha Sigue / The Fight Goes On"
2010
Screenprint
20 in x 26



THE LAND

“TIERRA Y LIBERTAD”

THE LAND

"Tierra y Libertad" was one of the core principals of Mexican Revolutionary, Emiliano Zapata. Zapatistas hold a fundamental believe in land reform in Mexico from wealthy landlords, elites, and non-indigenous people: redistributing that land to it's workers, farmers, indigenous communities and having full autonomous community governance. The importance of land is evident in the sovereignty of indigeneity because it is important to the culture, identity, and life.

The Manifest Destiny was a concept that the U.S. was divinely destined to expand across the North American continent which resulted in genocide, the removal of indigenous populations, and overall tension and violence - specifically Mexico.

In February 2, 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed which resulted the United States acquiring a vast amount of territory from Mexico. This caused the Mexican citizens that lived in on this land (TX, NM, CO, UT, NV, CA) suddenly were under foreign rule, resulting in discrimination, displacement, and overall being treated as second-class citizens.

Both of these ideas, Zapatismo and the Manifest Destiny, view land as a central part to power and identity in drastically stark contrast. While the beliefs of the Zapatistas was land reform in Mexico from the wealthy landlords, elites, and non-indigenous people and redistributing the land to workers and the indigenous communities and having full

autonomous governance. In contrast to the Manifest Destiny where Mexicans living in certain parts of the Southwest were resulted in discrimination and displacement. Overall, both Zapatistas land reform and the consequences of the Manifest Destiny reflect deep tensions between indigenous people and external powers seeking control of land, with profound effects on the social and cultural fabric of Mexican society and it's people.

During the Chicano Movement in 1970s the image of Emiliano Zapata was a symbol in the message of the movement as well as Zapata's beliefs such as land reform. The myth of Aztlán, the Aztec myth of a legendary homeland of the Mexica people, became a symbol of Chicano identity

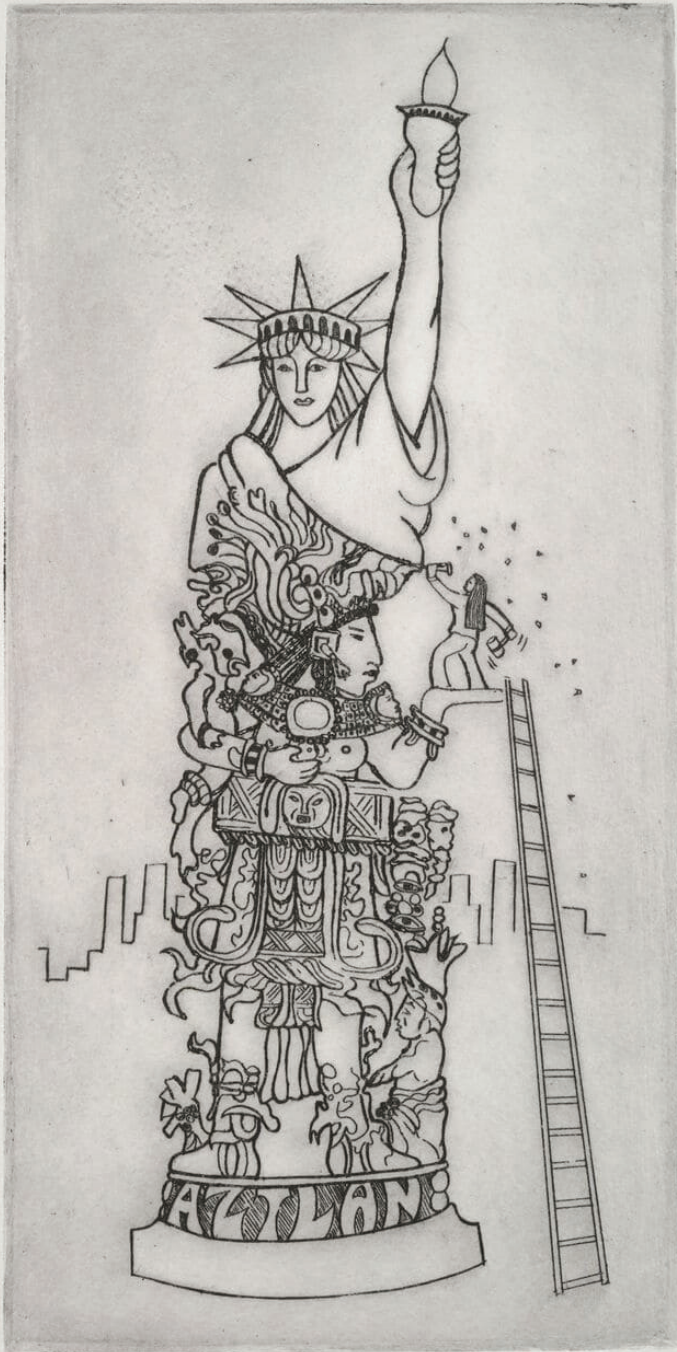
for the Mexican-Americans living in the Southwest part of the United States - the same part where the Manifest Destiny took place. What Aztlán symbolized to these Mexican-Americans was a reclaiming of indigenous heritage and resistance against colonialism, oppression, and marginalization. It also represented the fight for civil rights, autonomy, and the right of land for Mexican-Americans and the descendants of the indigenous people who had lived in the Southwest for centuries - much like the fundamental ideas of the Zapatistas.

The artwork showed expresses these ideals of land reform as well as the consequences of the Manifest Destiny toward Mexican-Americans.



Depicting the historical event of the Manifest Destiny. With Quiroz's cartoon or graphic novel style, it employs a bold, exaggerated imagery to satirize the events. The title of the work is a play on "manifest destiny," the idea that U.S. territorial expansion across North America was inevitable.

Alfred J. Quiroz (1944–Present)
 Colorado
 "Muneeft Destiny"
 1996
 Mixed media on mahogany panel
 108 in x 156 in



Combining the Statue of Liberty and Indigenous statues seen in Mexican culture, addressing dual-identity and resistance to assimilation among Mexican-Americans.

At the bottom of the statue features the word Aztlán, which may signify in this piece land rights or the reclaiming of cultural and political identity.

Ester Hernandez (1944–Present)
 California
 "Libertad"
 1987
 Etching
 12 in x 6 in



The Statue of Liberty is transformed into the Virgin Mary, a religious icon that transcendent into a cultural symbol in Mexico. By combining the two they symbolize the blending of American ideals with Hispanic identity - representing the journey of immigrants or those of Hispanic descent, who seek freedom and opportunity in the United States, all while holding onto their cultural roots.

While “Libertad” signifies a resistance to assimilation, in this piece they are blending the two cultures - a celebration of the dual-identity.

“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”

Tony Ortega (1958–Present)
New Mexico
“La Marcha De Lupe Liberty”
2006
Screenprint poster
23 in x 16 in



By having the word "Indian Land" it address the fight for indigenous land rights, cultural identity, and the impact of colonization. Much like the Aztec myth of Aztlán, this piece serves as a reminder with those in the indigenous community about their identity and connection to their native land.
Jesus Barraza (1976–Present)

Texas
"Indian Land"
2019
Screenprint
12 in x 18 in



Juxtaposing the Utopian landscapes with a silhouette of a family running, this installation discusses the dystopian-like circumstances of families crossing the border into the United States. The paintings are hung onto a painted outline of the country, visualizing the treacherous journey immigrant families take.

Carlos Fresquez (1957–Present)

Colorado
 "Salon de los Ilegales"
 2005
 Altered thrift-store landscapes
 Variable dimensions



THE WORKERS

"THE LAND IS FOR THOSE WHO WORK IT"

THE WORKERS

“The land belongs to those who work it,” is another fundamental vision of the Zapatista’s. Much like the previous ideal, Zapata’s reforms aimed not only to redistribute land but also to restore dignity and economic independence to rural workers. The fight continued with the United Farm Workers founded by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta in 1962. The organization was significant in advocating for the rights of migrant farm workers in the United States, many of whom had Mexican descent were Mexican-American or Mexican immigrants.

According to the National Center for Farmworker Health, it is estimated that 2.9 million agricultural workers are in the United States as of January

2022. These farm workers migrate to the U.S. to find agricultural jobs and 70% of them are foreign born. Despite it being a trillion dollar industry, the conditions of the agricultural work are harsh: physically demanding, health risk due to the exposure of pesticides, extreme weather conditions, and so on. These farmworkers also generate income to our country as well as our produce and food.

There are other undocumented workers in different industries across the United States. These industries included but not limited to factories, construction, maid service, cleaners, and more. Since these workers are undocumented, they do not receive benefits from the government such as food stamps, or social security – a

common myth. Furthermore there has been a rhetoric of undocumented workers are “stealing American jobs.” However, when examined critically, this rhetoric reveals inconsistencies, particularly when the types of jobs taken by many undocumented workers—such as agricultural labor or physically demanding jobs—are considered.

There have been many bills passed in order to prevent this, such as the Senate 4 Bill in Texas (2023). The bill targeted companies that hire undocumented workers, penalizing them by facing fines, suspension of their business licenses, and even temporary bans operating in Texas. While it’s still early to fully evaluate the long-term impacts of this bill, there are

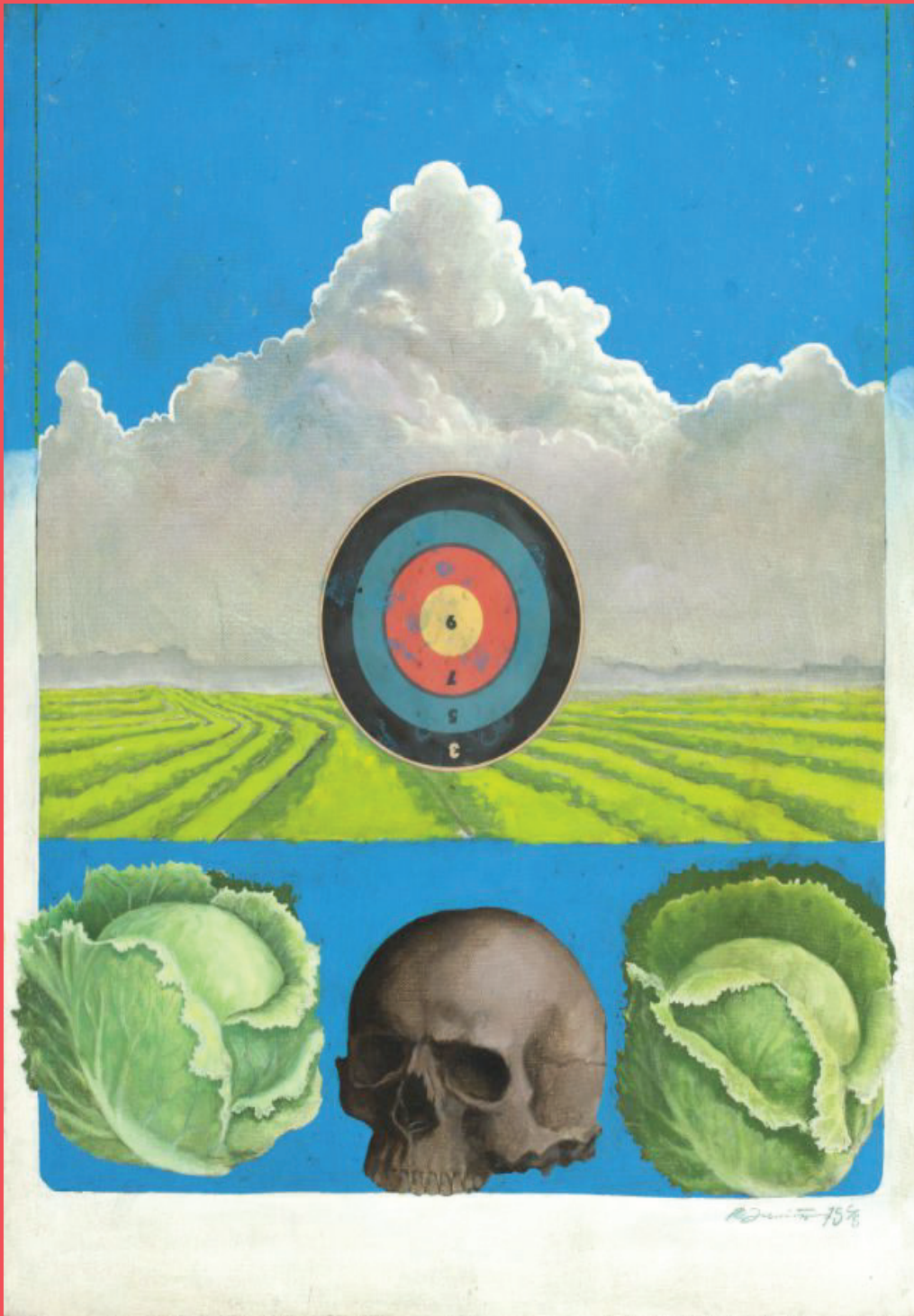
signs that the law may be backfiring, especially in the construction industry – due to many undocumented workers being in this field.

Many undocumented workers are family members, often with mixed-status: a common being their children being United States citizens. This often leads to interesting circumstances such as the fear of deportation and or law enforcement interference, limits opportunities for higher education due to language barriers and or financial aid, and overall struggle to cover basic needs such as housing and healthcare. Coming from a mixed-status family, I understand the struggle first hand.



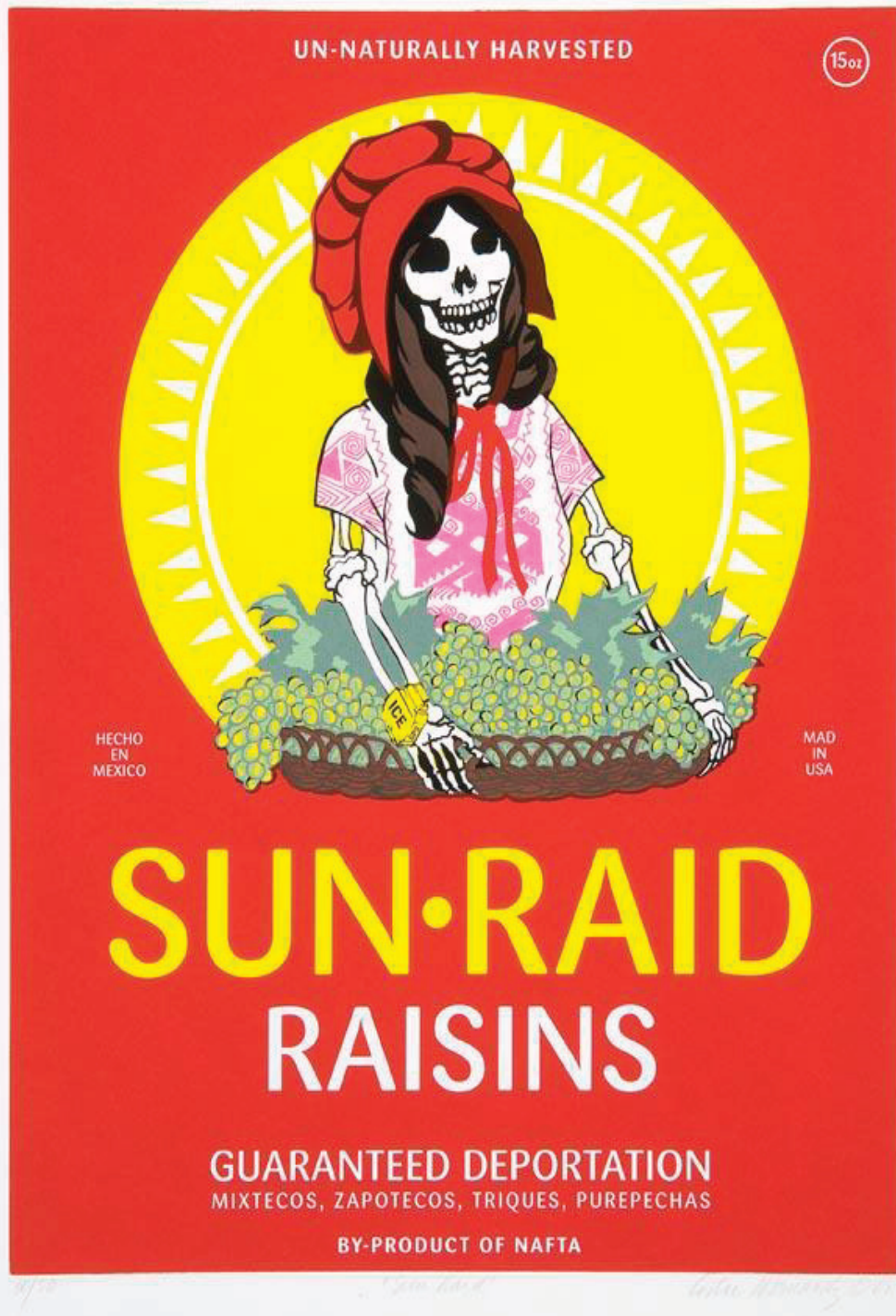
Portraying a farmworker who is also a fan of the Pumas, a popular Mexican soccer team. This piece combines themes of identity, labor, and pop culture, highlighting the personal lives and passions of undocumented farmworkers who are often overlooked in mainstream narratives in society.

Maceo Montoya
California
"Campesino y tambien fan de los Pumas"
2007
Acrylic on canvas
16 in x 24 in



In this powerful piece by Treviño, it is addressing the labor exploitation, the difficulty of organizing for workers' rights, and the broader socio-economic struggles within the agricultural industry. Featured is a lettuce field with an upside-down target and a human skull among heads of lettuce, symbolizing the physical labor by these workers.

Rudy Treviño
 Texas
 "Lettuce Field with Target and Skull"
 1975
 Acrylic on canvas
 30 in x 24 in



Using the Sun Maid brand, Hernandez uses it to bring to light the conditions of undocumented agricultural workers, the fears of deportation, and the NAFTA agreement. Hernandez uses the brand to her advantage: using the typeset to explain these topics.

Ester Hernandez (1944–Present)
California
"Sun Raid"
2008
Screenprint
29 in × 22.25 in



Bringing to light the undocumented farmworkers front and center in this Whole Foods bag, Martinez reminds consumers where their food comes from. Despite enduring harsh working conditions to provide food for every American's dinner table, these workers are left with only scraps from the American government.

Narsiso Martinez (1977–Present)
 Mexico
 "Whole Foods y Nostros"
 2023
 Acrylic on Whole Foods Paper Bag
 14 in x 12 in x 7 in



Featured in this painting is Vasquez parents who are both immigrants. Vasquez father is seen in a stern yet prideful position while holding a gardening tool. While Vasquez mother is gazing to the side, her face with soft expressions is contrasted by her arm that is holding a bucket full of cleaning supplies.

From Vasquez: "In the long tradition of immigrants that come to the United States, they have made homes here and they are just trying to live a simple life with a bit of security and hopefulness for their children."

Criselda Vasquez
Mexican-American
"The New American Gothic"
2017
Oil on canvas
72 in x 48 in

ENDING REMARKS

This exhibition explores Zapata's legacy as a symbol of revolutionary activism and a bridge between Mexico's past and the contemporary identity of Mexican Americans. It also examines his political views on land reform, the impact of Manifest Destiny on Mexican-Americans, and the important contributions of undocumented Hispanic workers to the U.S. economy despite negative rhetoric. The art chosen for the sections allows the audience to critically think and discuss about the complex social, historical, and political issues of Mexican-Americans. Additionally, these artworks are created by Mexican-Americans and/or of Mexican descent, amplifying their voices on these issues as well as

inspiring others to create artwork about their experience as a Mexican-American. In the future, I would like to design graphics for this conceptual exhibition in the future. These graphics include but not limited to promotional materials, exhibition signage, banners, and so on. These visuals will aim to encapsulate the exhibition's theme while engaging the audience and enhancing the overall experience. This will prepare me for my future career endeavors in the art museum world as a graphic designer because I will be using my art historian knowledge with my graphic design skills.