

ENGLISH

OFRENDAS

CELEBRATING EL DÍA DE MUERTOS



DETROIT
INSTITUTE
OF ARTS



September 26–November 8, 2020

Special Exhibition Galleries Central

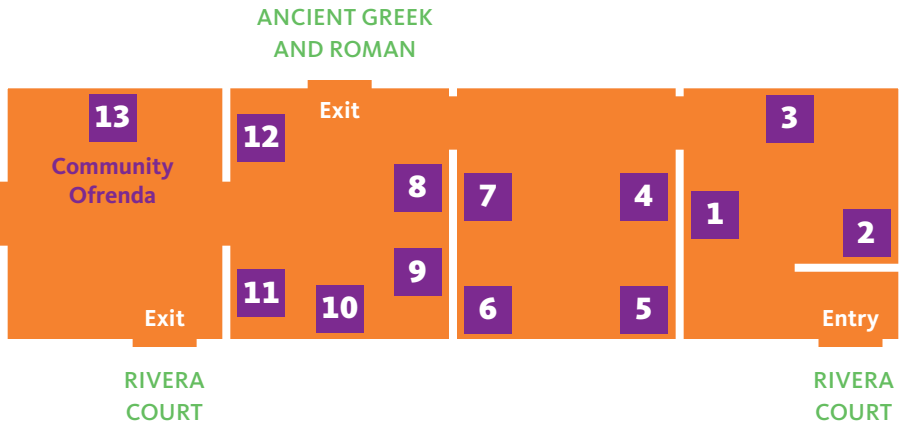
OFRENDAS

Día de Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is celebrated from October 31 to November 2 in Mexico and other Latin American countries, as well as in some regions of the United States. As part of this tradition, many people create *ofrendas* (offerings)—altars to honor those who have passed away, as the dead are believed to return to visit their living relatives at this time of the year.

The DIA put out a call to artists for proposals for *ofrendas*. Submissions were judged by a committee of representatives from the DIA, the Consulate of Mexico in Detroit, and the local community. Committee members were Andrea Montiel de Shuman, Cecilia Fragoso Miranda, Denene De Quintal, Gloria Rosas, Irma Torres, Lisa Lopez, María Elena Rodríguez, and Rubén Millán Mayorga. The wide-ranging group of artists chosen for the exhibition includes seasoned artists, teachers, art enthusiasts and entrepreneurs. Many have designed *ofrendas* for other museums, galleries, and community centers.

Discover how local artists and community members, inspired by this Mexican tradition, use their *ofrendas* to commemorate their lost loved ones.

**If you were to honor someone, who would that be?
How would you celebrate that person's life?**



PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

1. Belinda Covell and Jennifer Nance
2. Higo Gabarron, Lorraine Ranchod, and Rachel Martinez-Finn
3. Leonardo Hernandez
4. Maria Saldaña
5. Sara Nasser
6. Franchesca Rivera-Ortiz
7. Pilar Côté
8. Shanta Ambady
9. Consulate of Mexico in Detroit
10. Brenda Joan Drayer
11. KT Lowe and Jef Reynolds
12. Mario Alberto Martínez Méndez
13. Community Ofrenda

Ofrenda Coemas

Belinda Covell and Jennifer Nance ♦ *West Bloomfield, Michigan*

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On June 1, 2020, our most beloved aunt departed for her next celestial journey. This vibrant *ofrenda* celebrates her spirit, humor, and bravery, while offering up our respect for her colorful life. Christine A. Victor was a rainbow-hearted rock star with laughter made of sunshine and an unwavering commitment to acceptance and equality. An advocate for music and mirth, Chrissie began her career in graphic design at Detroit's own CREEM magazine, and eventually established an impressive career in publications. Her pets, people, and garden all flourished exponentially simply by knowing her.

Belinda Covell and Jennifer Nance are second-generation Hispanic sisters who grew up in the Metro Detroit area. Both deeply admire traditional Mexican folk art, recognizing its importance to their cultural connection and heritage. Upon losing their beautiful aunt to breast cancer, they began to work cooperatively to create this meaningful tribute in the form of a tiered *ofrenda*. They hope this altar with its bright colors, earthly elements, and icons provides comfort to those who have also experienced loss, while respectfully and joyfully welcoming their aunt's spirit back home.

The Healing Art of Resilience

Higo Gabarron, Lorraine Ranchod and

Rachel Martinez-Finn ♦ *Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights, Ohio*

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This *ofrenda* pays homage to our capacity to mend the cracked pieces of our broken hearts after we've lost loved ones, and the ability to find strength in our healing and resilience. In the Japanese art of *kintsugi*, broken pottery is repaired with gold, giving the object both new life and beauty. Just like shattered pottery, our heartbroken souls can be transformed into something even more precious with time, friendship, and prayer. Our "golden" scars make each person unique and treasured.

Higo Gabarron is a professional mixed-media artist, graphic designer, gallery owner/operator, college art professor, and award-winning editorial designer who has been in more than twenty collective and individual exhibitions in Mexico and the United States. Lorraine Ranchod teaches English to immigrants and refugees in Cleveland. Rachel Martinez-Finn grew up in a bilingual home and has been a multicultural educator for more than twenty-five years. Together they create illustrated bilingual stories for children on topics ranging from health to art.

Two-spirited artists

3

Leonardo Hernandez ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

“Don’t ask, don’t tell” is the policy in Mexico when it comes to those in the spotlight who are not straight nor cisgender. Juan “Juanga” Gabriel and Chavela Vargas are known for opening the door to greater expression of gender and sexuality in the music industry. Juanga became one of the biggest idols in a country of macho men. Chavela became the most macha of all the machos, singing to women in her songs. In Central America we celebrate and accept death as part of life. If only we could accept and celebrate all people as part of life.

Leonardo Hernandez was born in Central Mexico and brought to the United States at the age of eight to be raised in Detroit. Leonardo’s goal as an artist is to teach young people about Mexican culture and reconnect Mexican Americans to their roots through art.

Abuelitos Márquez, Ortega y Saldaña (Grandparents Márquez, Ortega and Saldaña)

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Maria Saldaña ♦ *Livonia, Michigan*

I was inspired to create this piece in honor of my grandparents who have passed away. At the top of the piece is my maternal grandfather, Guadalupe Ortega, with his favorite sombrero. He passed in February 2020. In the second row are my paternal grandparents, Santiago Márquez and María Guadalupe Rodríguez de Márquez. At the bottom are my husband’s maternal grandparents, Lino and Berta Ceballos, and his paternal grandfather, Carlos Saldaña.

Maria Saldaña was born in Lagos de Moreno Jalisco, Mexico and emigrated to the United States with her parents at three months old. She now resides in Livonia. She is the eldest of five children. A self-proclaimed foodie who enjoys making food videos on YouTube in her spare time, when she is not eating she can be found burning the calories off on her bicycle. She has worked in dental administration for the past ten years.

All of Us or None

Sara Nasser ♦ *Dearborn, Michigan*

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Honoring the Black and Brown individuals who have been killed due to systemic and institutional racism, police brutality, and white supremacy in America, this *ofrenda* combines Middle Eastern and Mexican cultures. In the center is the evil eye, a symbol of protection in Middle Eastern culture, extending its protection to communities of color. *All of Us or None* symbolizes the importance of solidarity between communities of color and that none of us will be free until all of us are free. We must stand together as a collective to face injustices, as we are all fighting the same systems that work to oppress us.

Sara Nasser is a Lebanese immigrant who is currently a graduate student studying clinical mental health counseling and art therapy. She is passionate about ending the stigma surrounding mental health and illness in her community, as well as the many social justice issues we face. She is dedicated to using her voice to highlight and bring awareness to these issues, in hopes that people will join together as a collective to face them.

We didn't pray for rose gardens, we prayed for intestinal fortitude

Franchesca Rivera-Ortiz ♦ *Madison Heights, Michigan*

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This altar is created to represent three very different men from very different places and backgrounds. Being Puerto Rican and raised in Detroit, I've learned how similar different cultures can be. The *Día de Muertos* tradition is by far the most beautiful in my eyes. I think many people can find healing in a tradition like this. I hope people look at my altar and find things they relate to and that tie back to someone they love, to keep those memories alive.

Franchesca Rivera-Ortiz is an artist, graphic and product designer, and Marine Corps veteran who was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Detroit. As an artist she specializes in bright, colorful, imaginative work inspired by magic, world cultures, interesting settings, and folklore. As a graphic designer she loves creating and expanding brand identities.

Sisterhood of Resistance

Pilar Côté ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

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Across the country, solidarity is dismantling the highly organized system of group privilege based on skin color (racism) that operates at every level of society. This *ofrenda* honors the First Nations, Latinx, and African American women ancestors that have been the key leaders in the struggle to end oppression. We also remember all the women and girls of color who have been murdered in every state (and are still targets of harrowing violence and terror). In Mexico, women and girls pray to the Virgin Mary for protection and offer flowers of devotion.

Pilar Côté blends surrealism, traditional portraiture, folk art, and comic illustration to explore ideas of feminism, culture, protest, and empowerment. She understands the world through visual art, movement, and sound, and loves to fuse these into time-sensitive pieces. Her recent works have unexpectedly vibrant colors and bold lines. Interested in intertwining beauty with darker themes, she has been experimenting with abstraction, blurred lines, boundaries, and discovery within her various mediums. She is a Mexican-born, Canadian-educated artist based in Detroit.

Cuida a tus muertos (Take Care of your Dead)

Shanta Ambady ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

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The *ofrenda* is the bridge that connects me to my loved ones. Though they have passed on from this world, they continue to bring me wisdom, and in turn, I make sure they are honored and tended to with offerings and prayers. The different sizes of porcelain skulls represent three generations that have passed—my father, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents. Terracotta offering plates and jars signify the importance red clay has in Spanish and Indian pottery. Palm leaves framing the *ofrenda* symbolize a link between Spain and south India—creating a feeling of “home.”

Shanta Ambady is a ceramic sculptress, mystic, diviner, and proud immigrant of Spanish and desi origin. Her work explores themes of death, transformation, magick, ritual, and myth, seeking to connect viewers to ancestral wisdom, to nature, to Spirit. Dancing between hope and despair in rooms filled with candles and heady incense, she whispers her stories into the clay. She is a bundle of bones looking for her missing pieces everywhere she goes. She currently lives and works in Detroit with her dog, a fish, and many spirits.

Anonymous Heroes

Consulate of Mexico in Detroit ♦ *Madison Heights, Michigan*

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In a time when food scarcity is a widespread concern, the Mexican Consulate in Detroit honors agricultural workers, whose hands give us the food on our tables. These anonymous heroes, predominantly Latinos, are an essential yet unrecognized people. Also honored is César Chávez, a Mexican-American labor leader who fought for the rights of agricultural workers. Chávez is recognized for his efforts in achieving social transformation without violence, his immense political achievements, his legacy of justice for all, and his fight to defend the rights of farm workers as well as the wider Hispanic community.

Una celebración de mamá (A Celebration of Mom)

Brenda Joan Drayer ♦ *Fort Wayne, Indiana*

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When I lost my mother in September 2019, I was left with a great deal of jewelry and memories of her always in the kitchen feeding everyone and anyone. My mother loved colorful necklaces and earrings. She often dressed as La Catrina, a feminine icon of the Day of the Dead, on Halloween. I wanted to use my training in art and my love for my mother to create a very special piece to honor both her and the traditions of Mexico, and to include the traditional elements of an *ofrenda*—water, earth, wind, and fire.

Brenda Drayer is an artist of message. Her work revolves around thoughts of life and how events in our lives form us. She connects processed metals with forms from nature to show the connectivity we have with the earth, while highlighting the emotional relationship we have with nature, and, at times, the irony of our values and beliefs. Brenda has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Purdue University with a concentration in sculpture.

The Loss of Trust and Fact

KT Lowe and Jef Reynolds ♦ *St. Clair Shores, Michigan*

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The emergence of modern fake news has eroded trust in most forms of media-driven information, such as newspapers, television news, and radio. As academics, our job is to teach college students how to sort fact from fiction, yet this task becomes increasingly difficult as people shut themselves off from most forms of information. This *ofrenda* is dedicated to the values of truth and honesty, while providing information on spotting fake news.

KT Lowe is a librarian specializing in information literacy at Indiana University East. She has delivered presentations on fake news for the American Library Association and the Indiana State Library. Jef Reynolds is an engineering instructor at Macomb Community College with thirty years of experience in the automotive industry. Their work in academic environments has led them to consider creative solutions for confronting basic problems affecting their students and community.

When Home Was Not an Option

Mario Alberto Martínez Méndez ♦ *Royal Oak, Michigan*

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Informal economy workers like street vendors and market traders are a crucial link to food security and basic necessities in some developing countries. These workers typically lack social protection and access to health care; most COVID relief efforts are not reaching them. For them, the choice was to stay at home and die from starvation, or to go out and work, hoping not to get sick. I dedicate this *ofrenda* to all the informal workers who died trying to survive.

Mario Alberto Martínez Méndez, born in Mexico City, is a plastic artist. He expanded his engineering studies with a certificate in visual arts from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, merging two worlds often believed to be opposites. His structured thinking combined with his risk-taking, artistic personality generates rich pieces that reflect both disciplines. In *Alebrijes by MAMM*, his most recent project, he shares part of the Mexican culture by populating the world with magical papier-mâché creatures found only in dreams.