

El Dia de los Muertos / Day of the Dead
A Quincentenary Ricorso: Redeeming Our Dead

Dating back to early Mesoamerican practices of worship and ritual, the autumnal celebration *El Dia de los Muertos* is a holiday of remembrance and commemoration of the dead and dearly departed, and, is observed yearly by the people of Mexico and by the Mexicano/Chicano community here in the United States.

The nature of *Day of the Dead* as it is celebrated today has been shaped diachronically and evolved from the meta-narrative of tumult which has characterized the past 500 years of colonization/occupation in the Americas. If we adhere to the notion of *resistance* as manifested in the voice of the Olmecs, in whose rituals and events celebrating the dead 3,000 years ago our current celebration is invested, we may see ourselves as practitioners of a tradition which has survived extinction despite the myriad atrocities recorded in history to which indigent Mesoamerican populations were subject during the genesis and foment of European expansionism: a period marked by massive bloodshed, death, and an accelerated campaign of progress and development culminating into a complex geo-political colonialist system of nation states.

American cultural critic Zamudio-Taylor has noted that, "In 1992, the very same who claim to speak and act for us now seem to administer, market, and auction the souls of our dead. 1992 challenges us to remember our dead and meditate on death as a social act." It is in this spirit that the present exhibition, *A Quincentenary Ricorso: Redeeming Our Dead*, was conceived. The crucial matter of the epic we now celebrate at its Quincentenary moment should be fully accorded its historical value as an exercise in mass-carnage, an early Western Holocaust.

As the last in the series *Marking Time Marking Place* at Galeria de la Raza, this exhibition includes work by contemporary Mexican and Chicano artists whose respective cultural productions draw from traditional sources as well as contemporary concerns such as identity, gender, and broader-based issues confronting the currency and state of political economy. Somehow, the sub-text of this project remains located within the various individual works which comprise the exhibition: painting, drawing, photography, wall tableaux, *altares*, and diverse media presented as a single-unifying sculptural object allow us to enter a space imbued with the veritable fact of the *Conquest's* legacy and continued deployment in the Social. Redemption of our multiple histories and localized micro-narratives from the conditioned silence of absence requires that *we too* cross the threshold of personal and collective memory in order to counter the nullifying effects of an extended *tyranny by oligarchy* predicated upon social amnesia.

Let us remember: 1,000,000 Tainos of the Antilles dead by 1498, a systematic genocide resulting in the reduction of Mesoamerican adult males to about 50% by 1531; Quauhtemoc and Tenochtitlan; P. de las Casas and Friar Sahagun; the many now extinct languages from *Guaycura* to *Zapoteco de Jalisco*; Hidalgo/Posada/Zapata/Juarez/Villa; *Los Ninos Heroes*; Sor Juana Ynes de la Cruz; Adelita; Murietta; Frida Kahlo; Ruben Salazar; hundreds of thousands dead in Central and South America; working journalists who were murdered in the line of duty; those who died in the aftermath of the King verdict in Los Angeles; and, the numerous children who continue to get caught in the cross-fire of inner city violence, from Panama City to West Oakland.

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