

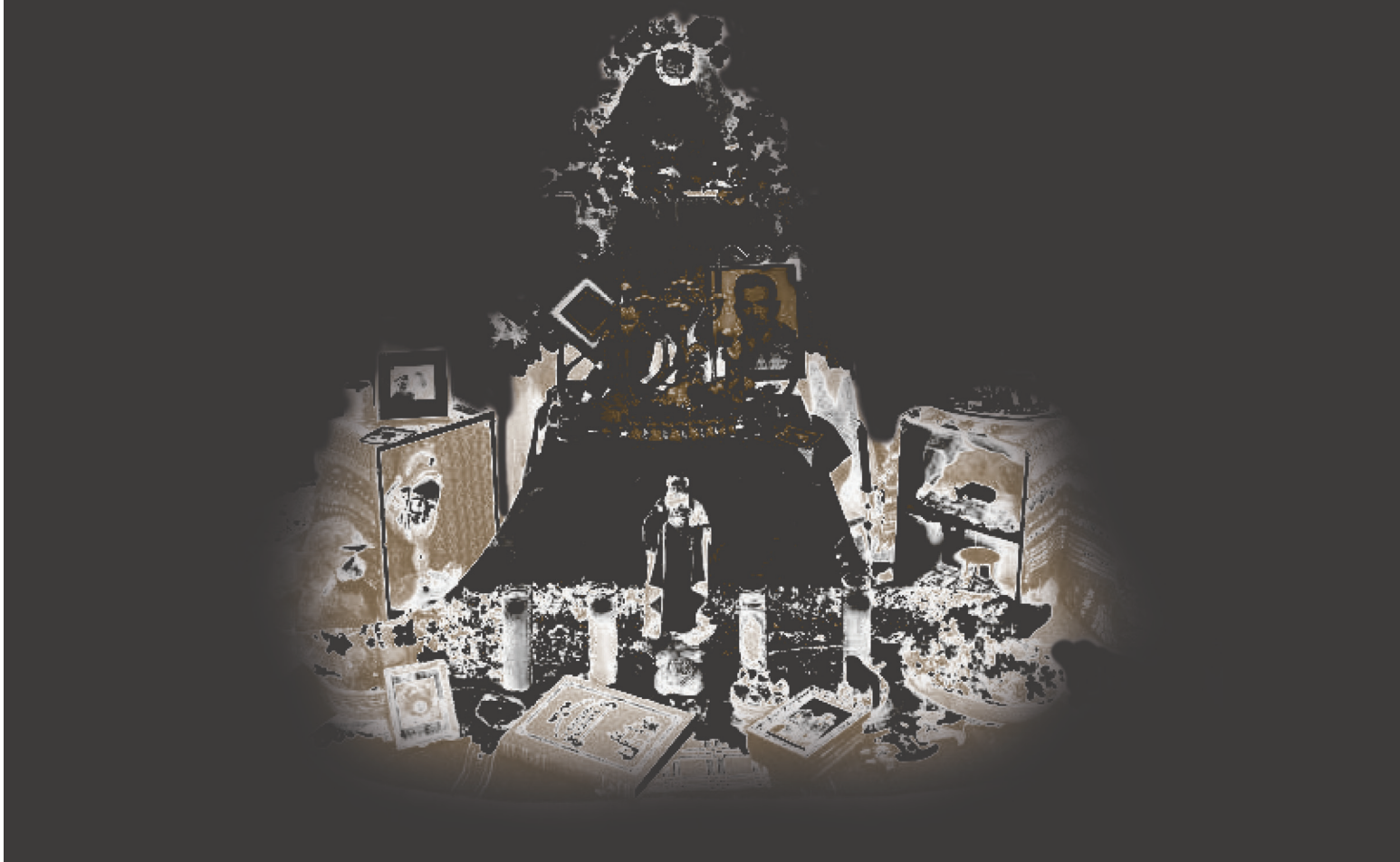


THE OFFICIAL MEXICAN  
AND MEXICAN AMERICAN  
FINE ARTS MUSEUM OF TEXAS

419 Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701  
512.480.9373  
info@mexic-artemuseum.org  
www.mexic-artemuseum.org

# Community Altars

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# DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS (DAY OF THE DEAD) ALTARS AT THE MEXIC-ARTE MUSEUM



Altar dedicated to Norma & Maria Hurtado created by ALLGO: a statewide queer people of color organization, Gabriela Herrera, Lili Rodriguez, and Ninfa Garza; 2011.

As part of the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) holiday and celebration (November 1–2), Mexic–Arte Museum invites practitioners to create ornate altars that typically consist of *cepasuchitl* (marigolds), foodstuffs, and memorabilia commemorating a deceased individual. The annual Community Altars exhibitions represents the fluidity of this practice and unveils dedicatory altars to not only past friends and family but also community leaders, cultural influencers, unknown international casualties, and personal role models.

## HISTORY OF EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS (DAY OF THE DEAD)



Lacey Richter, *Life Rings: a dedicatory altar to Daryl Colburn*, mixed media installation, 2012.

The *Día de los Muertos* stems from ancient Mesoamerican beliefs that life and death are intertwined. Mesoamerican traditions aimed to honor ancestors by making offerings at burial sites. Later these pre–Columbian traditions merged European rituals of Catholicism. This convergence created a cultural blend of celebrations on November 1 and 2. The *Día de los Muertos* is a national holiday in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Celebrations come from an array of indigenous cultures and contemporary influences, and mark the return of the dead to Earth. Participants prepare for the return of their ancestors by decorating graves and creating altars with offerings in their honor.

# FIND THE COMMON OFFERINGS ON A *DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS* (DAY OF THE DEAD) ALTAR



Emmily Arenas , *The Last Home* (altered detail), altar installation, 2011.

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# *DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS* (DAY OF THE DEAD)

## ALTAR GLOSSARY

### 1. *CALACA* (SKELETON)

TYPICALLY USED AS A REPRESENTATION OF DEATH AND OFTEN REFERENCES THE MEXICAN CARTOONS OF POLITICAL SATIRIST JOSE GUADALUPE POSADA.

### 2. *PAPEL PICADO* (PERFORATED PAPER)

DESIGNS ARE CUTOUT ON A BRIGHTLY COLORED TISSUE PAPER TO ADORN ALTARS, HOMES, AND ARE USED THROUGHOUT DAY OF THE DEAD FESTIVITIES, AND INCREASINGLY IN MOST LATINO/LATIN AMERICAN CELEBRATIONS.

### 3. *ANGELITOS* (LITTLE ANGELS)

STATUES AND IMAGES ARE PLACED ON ALTARS AS A REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN WHOSE SPIRITS RETURN.

### 4. *PAN DE MUERTO* (BREAD OF THE DEAD)

A SWEET BREAD, SOMETIMES MADE IN THE SHAPE OF A FIGURE, IS LEFT AS A FOOD OFFERING FOR THE DEAD.

### 5. WATER

A BOWL OR A GLASS OF WATER IS PUT ON ALTAR FOR THE DEAD TO DRINK UPON THE END OF THEIR JOURNEY AND RETURN TO EARTH.

### 6. *CEMPASUCHITL* (MARIGOLDS)

SINCE THE PRE-HISPANIC ERA THE MARIGOLD HAS BEEN USED TO HONOR THE DEAD DUE TO ITS PUNGENT AROMA. PETALS ARE PLACED AROUND THE ALTAR AND ACT AS A PATH FOR THE DEAD TO RETURN.

### 7. SUGAR SKULLS

SKULLS MADE OF SUGAR ARE PLACED AS A SWEET OFFERING, THE NAME OF THE DECEASED IS USUALLY ICED ON THE FOREHEAD.

### 8. CANDLES

LIT WAX CANDLES PROVIDE LIGHT FOR THE DEAD TO RETURN.