

DAY OF THE DEAD: LOOKING TOWARDS OUR PAST AND FUTURE



Main Altar created by Io Olivera



Dia De Los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is a Mexican holiday that observes the omnipresent relationship between life and death. Each year, friends and families gather together to spiritedly celebrate the lives of those departed. These joyous days remind us of how fleeting life is, while also reminding us to care for our future generations.

The Barnsdall Junior Arts Center Gallery has a long tradition of inviting community members, families, and artists to create altars that encapsulate the spirit of the holiday. From small, personal altars that explore one's ancestry to large, abstract installations on the effect of global warming on our planet, our community of artists has created art installations that look at both our pasts and futures as a means of trying to understand who we are as individuals, our relationships with each other, and our place in the world.



This wall showcases works created by students from various classes of the Barnsdall Junior Arts Center which are also hosted on this campus.

Barnsdall Junior Arts Center (BJAC) nurtures the imaginations of children and young people in their artistic development. A fixture of the Los Angeles arts education community since 1967, BJAC continues to build on its national reputation as one of only a few distinguished institutions devoted to excellence, originality, public service, and artistic creativity. The center's small, dynamic classes support families, children, and young people in discovering their creative processes in mediums ranging from visual to performing arts. The staff and teaching artists are steadfast in their belief that arts education develops curiosity and builds confidence which leads to thriving and culturally rich communities.



Title: The Mangito Family
Class: Mixed Media by 10-12 year olds
Teaching Artist: Marie Claire Macadar

For our class ofrenda, we learned about Dia de los Muertos, what ofrendas are, and some common items included in an ofrenda. Then, students worked from reference images and added their own objects to what would be on their ofrenda if they were all one big family. The class came up with the name "the Mangito family" because the ofrenda has many mangoes on it! If you look around the painting, you will see many little details such as favorite flowers, dolls, family member names, and more.



Title: Family Portraits, Past and Present
Class: Process Art - Inspired by Stories by 3-5 years students (Adult & Child class)
Teaching Artist: Helen Maier

Inspired by the picture book *Día de los Muertos* by Hannah Eliot and Jorge Gutierrez, the artists made portraits of their families, thinking about those currently living and those who have passed away. Each child and adult pair decided if they wanted to work collaboratively on one portrait or make their own individually. Many of the artist pairs worked collaboratively, with one person drawing the face of a family member, then passing the piece of paper to their partner to finish the portrait by drawing the body. During the art making we shared stories of family members who had passed away including grandparents, dogs and goldfish.



Title: Dia de los Muertos Paintings
Class: Mixed Media by 10-12 year olds
Teaching Artist: Marie Claire Macadar

Students created mixed media paintings of popular Dia De Los Muertos motifs, such as flowers, calaveras, and spirits and put their own creative twist on each one. They created the outlines with black glue for a 3D relief effect, and colored in the paintings with chalk.



Title: Day of the Dead Sugar Skulls
Class: Intro to Ceramics Handbuilding (Ages 9-11/12-17)
Teaching Artist: Eriac Bootchk

In celebration of Dia de los Muertos, students created sugar skull mugs, a floral skull, and a cemetery ground. The ponderings of these artists:

"Halloween and Day of the Dead are my favorite holidays."

"I just like skulls."

"It's the season and dressing up."

"I like my cup because it's very colorful. Sugar skulls are very bright...they're sweet and they taste good."

"I like the colors, and I like sugar skulls because I'm 25% Mexican."

"I did the normal colors of the skull to remind myself of my mom's dad. She really liked him. My mom is making an ofrenda for him."



Artist: Dahlia López
Title: Justice for the Innocent



Artist: Mélissa Guérin-Torres
Title: Plastic Currents

This altar is an homage to Mother Nature. Observing the beauty of an ocean, a river, a waterfall... Stepping closer to discover the shiny reflections are in reality a multitude of plastic waste. The installation serves as a reminder of the magnificence of our waters and the urgent need to protect them. Through time, future generations, flora and wildlife are affected. This piece invites viewers to reflect on the impact of their choices. Time is passing by...
Plastic bottles, paper, wire, cloth.



Artist: Brian Ramirez
Title: The Two Virgins



Artist: Thomasin Franken & Avery Greenwald
Title: Weaver

Though we are not Mexican, Día de los Muertos has become beloved and familiar to my daughter Avery through her experiences in schools that celebrate multicultural traditions, especially those of our city's vibrant Mexican community.

Participating in this show provided a meaningful way to remember Weaver, our beloved dog of fourteen and a half years who passed right before the call for submissions was released. Showing this installation in the Barnsdall Junior Art Center holds special significance as members of the local community. I have taken art classes at Barnsdall, and much of the art featured in the installation was created in places where Avery has found community - the Wizard of Art on Hillhurst Ave. and The Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena.

We chose a black and white color scheme to reflect Weaver's features, while incorporating colorful paper marigolds crafted with my daughter's friends from art class. These flowers, traditionally placed on ofrendas, symbolize the brevity and beauty of life.

We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in this show and thank our community for their support.



Artist: Jose Trejo-Maya
Title: Untitled



Artist: Veronica Hunt
Title: Amo Shoma

Creating this ofrenda has helped me with the grieving of my mom, Maria. She passed quickly and unexpectedly June 2023. She was very loving, caring and always there for us. I learned to cook by watching and helping her. Active, helpful, proud, stubborn and very Catholic are just a few words to describe her. After my dad passed, she travelled the world, one cruise at a time. I've had so many of her belongings in my home since then, the ofrenda had already been presenting itself. I had to keep in mind this is for her, so rosaries, Virgin Mary statues and art, family photos and so on...Dia de Los Muertos has always been a favorite celebration of mine. I love skellies, especially whimsical ones! My mom was not a fan. She loved plants and had a beautiful yard and garden. The picture in the center is the last one I took of her in her garden with her 'favorite' shears (hence the BIG smile)! This was a few weeks before she was gone.

RIP in your new gorgeous garden, Mom. I love you and miss you so...

Thanks to Dan Bigelow, my husband, who was very helpful in the creative process and assembly. Sadly, he participated with his dad passing in August 2024, so his memories and photos now join the other loved ones lost.

As an adult, Chopper was my first rescue dog. The, we (he) found and chose Harley, who came home with us forever that day before Christmas. The house was too quiet after those 2 were gone, so we put it out to the universe that we were looking to rescue 2 more doggies. No hurry, I believe we will find each other when the time is right. Well, we found puppies, a brother and sister, Magoo and Rascal at the local animal shelter. What an adventure! I miss them all so much everyday, each one was so special in their own way. Now, we have another girl and boy, who keep us on our toes every day!

*Amo Shoma means I love you in Keres, the Acoma Tribe language. My dad, Blue Sky Eagle, was from Acoma Pueblo (Sky City)



Artist: Allie Ancel
Title: Sunflower

This altar is dedicated to a very special client of mine who died from suicide.

At the time, I was working as an art therapist and the loss of this person suddenly shifted my world. I had experienced grief and loss related to suicide in my personal life, but never professionally. Due to the confidentiality involved with being a therapist, the grieving process was restricted in a lot of ways. I was unable to say their name, show photos of them, or speak about how much they meant to me. I was grieving in isolation, but at the same time honored to hold them in my heart.

In art therapy, we use visual arts to depict difficult feelings and emotions rather than talk therapy. Building this altar allowed me a way to celebrate this person using metaphorical imagery rather than direct representation. The shells, dried flowers, crystals and hand dyed silk show their love for art and nature. This altar represents their spirit and all their beauty, like a blossoming sunflower opening up to the sun's bright rays. They were creative, resilient, kind and had so much love in their heart.

Please take a moment to honor those who have died from suicide and people working in professions bound by confidentiality who have to navigate losses of clients within ethical standards.

As you look at this altar, I welcome you to give yourself a hug to honor the light and love inside of you.



Artist: Madelaine Lorenzana
Title: To Charlyn with Love

Dedicated to Charlyn Marquez "peejay." She was 37.

Gone too soon. A sharp, beautiful soul, kind, true, loving, and always a friend, she is forever missed.



Artist: Stephanie Pinto

Title: Faith Ringgold: Flying Among the Stars

Faith Ringgold was an artist, educator and activist. She explored painting, mixed media sculpting, and fiber arts, telling stories of injustice and hope through her work. She may be best remembered for her series of illustrated quilts with hand written narrative framing the images. Most recognizable is "Tar Beach", which was first a story quilt before she developed it into a Caldecott winning children's book (1991).

My non-traditional ofrenda depicts the "Tar Beach" quilt and book cover, redesigning the picnicking party on the rooftop as calacas. I have placed a sewing machine and typewriter at the base to honor Ringgold's talents in sewing as well as storytelling. The silhouettes in the Harlem highrise are traced from all the characters in her illustrations. The bridge behind is a nod to the George Washington Bridge, which Ringgold's father helped build and was the view from her childhood window. Above is a painting of Ringgold as she appeared in the author's bio of her first book with hand written information of her life in columns of text across the top, as she would do with her storyquilts. All colors and fabric patterns are as closely matched to her original as possible.

Students of mine will recognize Ringgold's scene immediately. I introduce them to her work to bring in diversity and historic perspective. The semi-autobiographic characters in "Tar Beach" offer an age-appropriate introduction to systemic racism. As students grow, we dive deeper into her paintings which depict racial violence and address sexism and unrest in America. Ringgold didn't shy away from the facts. Dedicated to her students and devoted to social justice, she told her stories as a means to give voice to the underrepresented.

Faith is flying among the stars now, leaving behind her characters and her art to memorialize her lifetime commitment to making the world a more just place.



Artist: Gia Lugo

Title: Untitled



Artist: Andrea Acuna
Title: Eres tú / It's you



Artist: Citlalli Pacheco, on behalf of the group Amigis
Title: Mujeres De Mi Alma



Artist: Charlotte, Jessica & Alina Cortez
Title: Foxy & Friends

Charlotte (age 10) had her first experience with loss this year when her dog, Foxy, passed away. As she moved with the ebbs and flows of grief, Charlotte had the support of both family and friends to assure her that it was okay to feel. At school, her best friends offered comfort through hugs and stories of pets they had lost. Charlotte soon understood that although these emotions were new to her, her loved ones had all felt the same or similar before. She wasn't alone in her grief and knew Foxy wouldn't be alone in the afterlife either.

This altar was co-created by Charlotte, Jessica (mom), and Alina (aunt). It features a watercolor portrait of Foxy painted by Charlotte, along with photo dedications to the pets of Charlotte's friends who are now Foxy's afterlife friends. It also includes a miniature mixed media piece by Alina titled "Celebration," depicting dogs in a celebration of life. All other decorations were handmade and/or arranged by Jessica.



Artist: Lana Dandan
Title: Hoda means Guidance

Featured in altar:
Tapestry 3, 2014
Archival inkjet print on cotton rag paper
Digital textile created using a photograph of my grandmother's living room

Hoda Hilal
Untitled, c.1970s
Embroidery
Hoda Tabbal Hilal

Hoda Tabbal Hilal (1943 - 2024) was my maternal grandmother - my teta, my Hadhoudi. She passed away in Beirut this year. Allah yerhama. She was the light of our lives and treated everyone like family. She survived civil war, invasion, economic instability, and raised her four children through all of it. She helped raise me, my siblings, and my cousins.

She taught us to love each other, our culture, and our community. She was kind, gentle, and affectionate. She was stylish, she was beautiful, and she was silly. She was one of the funniest people I have ever known. She had an open-door policy at her home. There was always a visitor there with a cup of Arabic coffee and some gossip to share. She was an incredible cook, truly creative, a magician in the kitchen. She taught us to hold each other tightly and be proud of where we come from, even as the world crumbles around us.

This installation is inspired by her living room in Beirut, where family and friends gathered countless times for over fifty years. It is a tribute to her unique aesthetic and unparalleled ability to make a home. It is a promise to carry forward all that I have been fortunate to learn from her.

Thank you, habibti Hadhoudi. I take you with me everywhere I go.

And to my motherland, my heart, my Lebanon - you are resilient and beautiful, and you are the only place that feels like home.



Artist: Kira Vizcaino
Title: Goodnight, Little Sister

My sister, Lexa Vonn, lived a million lifetimes within this one. The intention of my altar was to showcase her colorful personality, creative influences and talents as a writer, artist and musician. She was the lead singer of local L.A. band, Ophelia Rising and devoted her life to the arts. She supported and promoted many bands as well as befriended, partied, toured with and dated more than just a few. Lexa lived her life as if she was the writer, director and star of a movie.

Every little detail on the altar has so much significance and story behind it. For example, the sparkling white vintage sweater was one of her favorites. She wore it as a teenager to a Hole concert. After the show, she met lead singer Courtney Love who complimented her on this sweater. It was the sweetest sentiment as Hole was one of her musical influences. The vintage dolls incorporated in this altar are a nod to the song "Doll Parts" by Hole.

A chapter was written about my sister in Pamela Desbarres' book "Let's Spend the Night Together." My sister also appeared on the Tyra Banks show, in the 2011 indie film "Road Dogs", as well as other documentaries and stage performances over the years.

My sister is the one who introduced me to my future husband which is why I now have a large extended Mexican family as well as our daughter who is my everything! Lexa passed last year on bad terms with me as our relationship was very close yet also complicated. So this altar is my love letter to her, celebrating the happy moments and acknowledging just some of her many accomplishments. As the banner reads, my prayer is that she took with her the good memories and left behind the rest.

Love, Kira



Artist: Roxy Maronyan
Title: Continuum



Artist: Janet Ginsburg
Title: The Endlings' Carnival

Many, many animals have naturally gone extinct throughout time. My piece is for the animals who've disappeared at the hand of man - whether due to the overhunting, environmental pollution, or habitat loss.

An endling is the last living individual of a species, and the word carnival basically means "flesh, farewell" in Latin. So this altar is for those very last individuals as they leave Earth and depart for the spirit realm.

Many of the endlings from the last hundred years died in zoos, so we know exactly when they died. The date you see on the animal portraits is the date that particular individual died, but it's also the last day that species stopped existing on earth.

A lot of my interest in endlings comes from an environmental perspective, but I also feel a strong kinship with them from a human perspective. I think a lot of us know how hard it can be to look around and not be able to find anyone else like you.

There are people who want to bring these animals back from the dead with modern technology — but nature is like a big game of Jenga. If you pull out one flower, you lose a bird species. If you pull out of bird species, you may get so many of the special bug species that you destroy a tree species. I'm not so sure we should bring any of them back while we're still actively destroying their habitats.

Humans aren't special or separate from other species on earth. We're destroying our own habitat as well. If we aren't careful, we will destroy it completely, and life on Earth will go on without us. As a reminder of that, I created the devotional candles with an Australopithecus - an extinct type of human primate - on the label.

My hope is that people will see this piece, and think a little bit about their place in the continuum of all living things, and how serious and sacred that responsibility really is.



Artist: Bailey Ballesteros-Prado
Title: Reflection of the Soul

The altar I have created, titled “Reflection of the Soul,” serves as a profound representation of my journey to connect my past, present, and future. Following the unexpected losses of my father, stepbrother, and several loved ones over the past two years, I was plunged into a deep spiral of grief and self-discovery, compelling me to explore my identity and heritage.

My spiritual journey emerged from a desire to navigate my shattered reality and confront the fear of the unknown. For the first time, I turned to my ancestors for guidance and inspiration, delving into the countless boxes of photographs found in my grandparents’ home. This process allowed me to rediscover my childhood and uncover memories of my family’s history that had previously been unseen. It was akin to piecing together a puzzle of my identity, unveiling forgotten moments and reconnecting with my roots. The mirror altar embodies this puzzle brought to life. It is crafted from trinkets, notes, ticket stubs, and memorabilia from significant events in my life, interwoven with items belonging to my dearly departed loved ones. The altar also celebrates the lives of those who remain, honoring the sacrifices and legacies of my ancestors.

Adjacent to the altar is a heartfelt letter I wrote to my father. In this vulnerable moment, I expressed my feelings for him, offered forgiveness, and conveyed my love—sentiments I never had the chance to share while he was alive. This piece is a tribute to my journey of healing and connection, inviting viewers to reflect on their own narratives and the legacies that shape them.



Artist: Angela Lin
Title: Untitled



Artist: L.A.C.E.R Afterschool Program at Marshall H.S instructed by Raquel Pacheco, Filip Tchorzewski, Amaya Becerril, Princess Alaya Lane, Piness Tida Lane, Adalyn Rivera, Irene Kang, Edith Maldonado, Ann Gozum, and Francis Alindada
Title: Untitled



Artist: Ernesto Martinez
Title: Acto de Posibilidad

My Altar seeks to remind us of individuals, children, and families who have sought migration to the U.S but have instead been forcibly positioned into a system of privatized incarceration. I hope to bring back into our consciousness those lives we have lost in detention centers and the irreversible effects on people's lives who have survived unjust treatment in those facilities. My altar highlights a loss that at times can feel ambiguous, as I hope to remind us of individuals, children and families that we have likely never met yet can easily connect to their sense of life and humanness - especially through they're guiding hopes and dreams to live a better life.