

ENGLISH

OFRENDAS

CELEBRATING
EL DÍA DE MUERTOS



September 23–November 5, 2023

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, the Southwest Detroit Business Association, Mexicantown CDC, and the local community. Committee members were Dorota Chudzicka, Georgina Garcia-Pffeuffer, Maria Elena Rodríguez, Marlon Lara, Raymond Lozano, and Yoselin Serrano. 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. Douglas James
2. Christine Stamper
3. Regina High School Students and Their Teachers: Michalyn Gret, Melanie Hendrick, and Patricia Willoughby
4. Cristin Richard
5. Brianna Bryant
6. James J. Rodriguez
7. JoJo Diaz-Orsi
8. Mary Gagnon
9. Valeria Zozaya and Maritere De La Fuente
10. Amyre Alta Loomis
11. Wayne State University – Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies (CLLAS)
12. Consulate of Mexico in Detroit
13. Ronald Diego Rodriguez and Mari Martin

Roadworker

Douglas James ♦ *Newburgh, New York*

1

“Roadside crosses mark fatal traffic deaths. Belief holds that the soul hovers at the fatal scene. This roadworker was killed on the job by an errant vehicle. Family and coworkers erected this descanso, this resting place, as a memorial. It is a reminder to drivers to drive with caution. This painting was painted in my New Mexico studio in 2009.”

A first-generation Cass Corridor artist, who was born in Detroit and who has exhibited in Detroit and New York City, Douglas James is a painter with a passion for chronicling the American scene.

Connection

Christine Stamper ♦ *Wolverine Lake, Michigan*

2

“This piece honors my beautiful niece, who lost her life to mental illness and suicide at the age of seventeen. The branches symbolize the Tree of Life and remind us of our connection to each other and our ancestors. Each marigold was created by someone who was touched by my niece’s presence. They are a visual reminder that we do in fact matter to those around us and even at our darkest times, we are never truly alone.”

Art has always been part of Christine’s life, who creates with her hands or captures images through her camera lens. She believes art helps us all recognize the beauty that surrounds us.

A Memorial Celebrating the Mexican Heritage of Inspiring, Resilient, Women Across Time

Regina High School Students and Their Teachers: Michalyn Gret, Melanie Hendrick, and Patricia Willoughby ♦ *Warren, Michigan*

3

“Our memorial is a symbolic, sculptural representation, celebrating the Mexican heritage of four prominent women: feminist, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–1695), botanist, Ynés Mexía (1870–1938), artist, Frida Kahlo (1907–1954), and musician, Selena Quintanilla Pérez (1971–1995). Symbols depicting the careers and contributions of each woman are displayed. In addition, mirrors are added, signifying the ability of girls to see themselves in these important women.”

Regina is a Catholic girls college-preparatory high school in Warren that offers thriving visual arts, music, and Spanish classes. Regina High School students love visiting and serving the people in the city of Detroit.

In My Blood, Pumping through My Veins, Straight from the Heart: For My Italian-American Grandparents, Catherine and Gregory DiGregorio, on *Jornu di li Morti*

Cristin Richard ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

4

“Through a process of osmosis, we take on the form of what we absorb around us. My grandparents, Catherine and Gregory DiGregorio, provided a great deal of structure, love, and affection that helped shape me into the person I am today. Their Italian influence has given me a unique sense and understanding of the American dream. I’ve decided to replicate their silhouettes and style as a way of honoring them.”

A woman artist from Detroit, with French and Italian roots, Cristin Richard’s creativity and connection to community is fueled by fashion, history, and an allegiance to the natural world.

I Think About You Everyday

Brianna Bryant ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

5

“From a student perspective, it hits home when someone your age, or if someone younger who reminds you of your sibling, passes away. This ofrenda is a remembrance for the students’ lives lost to gun violence. Most recently in 2023, our community experienced a tragic experience at Michigan State University. The gown and flowers represent the beauty in their lives, educational path, and dreams to change the world.”

Brianna Bryant is a Detroit-based multimedia artist. Bryant’s work consists of storytelling through the lens of photography, film, and installations. Her work is rooted in the intersection of activism, feminism, and community.

Sustenance

James J. Rodriguez ♦ *Dearborn, Michigan*

6

“My ofrenda honors the life of my grandparents Lydia and Alfonso Cortez. It features my painting of the community around Lake Chapala that nurtured and sustained Alfonso before he married Lydia in Detroit. There is also a calendar flanked by my plein air paintings of Ballet Folklórico and Los Galanes restaurant, which are part of the culture and community that sustained them and are still important to their descendants several generations later.”

James J. Rodriguez has degrees in literature and history, and with a love of art he shows how his family’s past, present, and sense of community are alive and remembered.

The Last House

JoJo Diaz-Orsi ♦ *Hamtramck, Michigan*

7

“My family and many other families who do not have legal status cannot return to their home countries to attend the funerals of their loved ones. With technology we have found new ways to mourn through our computer and phone screens, but one is still deprived of personally participating. In this ofrenda I wanted to honor my loved ones and other undocumented families who were never given the opportunity to properly mourn.”

JoJo Diaz-Orsi is an artist who works primarily in music production and sound design. They find inspiration from their experience as an undocumented immigrant brought to the United States at a young age.

Thimble and Thread

Mary Gagnon ♦ *Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan*

8

“My ofrenda honors the life of my late father, who passed away in 2015. I honor his journey as an immigrant, his ability to create a life filled with literary and textile art, and his faith and devotion to Allah. My father’s and mother’s prayer rugs provide a base on which sit the people (photographs), music, food, spiritual items, and poetry that filled his life. My father’s dream was for his poetry to be recognized for its true magic. I want to pay tribute to his genius and give the world a chance to experience his talent and the tribulations he drew inspiration from.”

Mary Gagnon is an artist, author, a first-generation daughter of Lebanese immigrants and a devout Shia Muslim woman. She currently works as a writer-in-residence for InsideOut Detroit, a nonprofit literary organization.

Family Tree

Valeria Zozaya and Maritere De La Fuente ♦ *Rochester Hills, Michigan*

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“This ofrenda is dedicated to our ancestors, our family tree, our beloved ones, the ones who have paved the paths of our lives. A tree is the purest representation of life; with this tree, we represent life after death—a path to eternal life. They will always live in our hearts as long as we remember them.”

Maritere De La Fuente’s experience in plastic arts is extensive, particularly building papier-mâché figurines. Valeria Zozaya’s background is in architecture, design, and the visual arts. They both love to collaborate on creative projects that showcase Mexican traditions and culture.

The Queen Tree's Branches Blossom

Amyre Alta Loomis ♦ *Southfield, Michigan*

10

“Honoring the lives of my mother and ancestors, this ofrenda is inspired by a handwritten family tree of my mother’s father. Our matriarch passed away in 2021, a month before her eighty-eighth birthday. An artist, traveler, mother of six, wife, and appreciator of fine things, Victoria Suane Milton Loomis was born into a family of doctors and vanguards in metro-Detroit with African blood in her veins and French roots in New Orleans.”

Amyre is a writer and visual artist with degrees from the University of Michigan and Richmond American University in London and is an MFA candidate at Long Island University.

The Fire Was Mistaken

Wayne State University – Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies (CLLAS) ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

11

“In 1562, Franciscan friars in the Yucatán Peninsula fed countless ‘idolatrous’ Mayan books and sacred artworks to ravenous bonfires. This desecration could not erase ancestral memories; instead, the flames seared them into Mayan hearts. In the centuries since, defiant truth-tellers of the Américas, such as those remembered here, endured incendiary edicts, hellish prisons, exile, and execution for their words and songs. They would not be silenced, and neither shall we.”

WSU–CLLAS was founded in 1971 by southwest Detroit community activists. First-year students, led by instructor Alicia M. Díaz, produced this installation in a summer 2023 Latina/o/e/x cultural immersion course.

Chabelo

Consulate of Mexico in Detroit ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

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“Xavier López Rodríguez, better known as ‘Chabelo,’ was a Mexican children’s TV legend and one of the last actors of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. His show having ran for 47 years and with more than thirty feature films and music albums, ‘Chabelo,’ shaped generations of children throughout Mexico. His generosity toward children greatly impacted the community and, in honor of the happiness ‘Chabelo’ created, we dedicate this altar.”

The Consulate of Mexico in Detroit collaborates annually with the DIA’s ofrenda exhibition. Established more than a hundred years ago, the Consulate of Mexico in Detroit brings together people of different cultures.

Empty Chairs

Ronald Diego Rodriguez and Mari Martin ♦ *Sterling Heights and Taylor, Michigan*

“In 2022, our family lost three members. We are hoping that making this display will bring some form of therapy, as the pain is still intense. In our display, we are honoring Greg Martin, Jason Rodriguez, and Wanda Martin. We will exhibit photographs of them in happy times as well as objects of theirs that gave them pleasure in their leisure time, such as gardening.”

Ron Diego Rodriguez works out of 333 Midland studios, is a clay sculptor for GM and enjoys bringing together creative people to collectively make art. Maria Martin is a retiree from United Airlines, partner to Greg Martin and mother of three children.