

INTO THE CENTER:

IMAGES FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

THE DEPARTMENT OF ART, WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

RINTMAKERS FROM TALLER MEXICANO DE GRABADO, CHICAGO

CARLOS CORTEZ, RENÉ ARCEO, TOMAS BRINGAS

-Dylan Miner

Hidden within the vast agricultural fields of the Midwestern United States lies an immense community of both *Mexicanos* and Xicanos. Although mainstream North America holds the perception that the Xicano population is confined to the southwestern United States, the truth is that as early as 1960 Chicago emerged as the third largest Mexican-origin city in the United States. By 1970 Xicanos and *Mexicanos* in Chicago exceeded the population in all other states with the exceptions of California and Texas. Migration into the Midwest and Chicago began in the early 1900s, when Mexicans began heading north to fulfill both the industrial and agricultural labor needs.

The lifeways and migration of Mexicans both to and from Chicago has kept the city culturally unique compared to many *colonias*, *barrios* or Midwestern Mexican communities. While the majority of the communities have had little continued immigration, Chicago has continually had high numbers of transnational migrants. Because of this continued migration to Chicago, the *Mexicano* and Xicano community has been able to maintain aspects that are both uniquely Mexican and also uniquely Xicano, as the experience of each is quite different. The three artists chosen for the *Printmakers from Taller Mexicano de Grabado, Chicago* exhibition overtly display the generational, migrational and class differences that have occurred within Chicago.

The work of Carlos Cortez Koyokuikatl expresses the life of a Xicano born in the Midwest and tied to both agricultural and industrial labor. His voice is that of the Midwestern Xicano. The works of Rene Arceo have many influences and his personal pattern of migration can be seen through his works, as he grew up in Mexico and moved to Chicago, where he attended art school. Tomas Bringas is the third example of the history within Chicago's Mexican community. Born and schooled in Mexico, he recently moved to Chicago, and his work expresses his level of acculturation into the United States Xicano community. Each artist is unique and representational of the various elements that are the Xicano and *Mexicano* community of Chicago.



Mestizo, '95 - Linoleum cut print with color pencil - 6" x 8" - Courtesy of the artist

RENÉ ARCEO

By Dylan Miner

Rene Arceo was born in Mexico, where he attended public school through his junior year. He relocated to Chicago where he graduated from Holy Trinity High School. Immediately following high school he attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and received a B. FA degree in Art Teaching and Printmaking. Arceo has shown extensively throughout the Midwest and has had either group or solo shows across the United States, Mexico, Canada and in Latin America and Europe.

Arceo's work often includes references to the various Mexican greats including Alfredo Zalce, Leopoldo Mendez and other popular printmakers and muralists. Human, social and political themes are often addressed, but done in what Arceo calls a "non-dogmatic fashion." He uses the personal, political, historical and cultural to reach a commonality that is universal. Arceo's *mestizo* reality is a repeated creative and inspirational element.

By using the popular media of block printing, Arceo focuses on creating art that is both more

affordable and more accessible to the populous than the majority of fine artwork. He works in a very figurative manner, but regularly strays away in many eclectic directions. This spawns from the artist's spontaneous approach to creating print work. Arceo first creates non-representational organic forms on the linoleum and eventually transforms them into figurative designs, as he cuts away the surface. He regularly departs without an idea, and the work eventually takes on its own persona.

He has held various positions within art organizations in Chicago, including the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum and Chicago Public Schools, where he currently serves in an administrative position. He helped found the Taller Mexicano de Grabado (Mexican Print Studio) and has been actively involved within local *Mexicano* and Xicano artist collectives in the Chicago area.

In 1999, Arceo called upon one of the great Xicano artists from Chicago and created *Homage to Carlos A. Cortez*. (Cortez is discussed earlier in this catalogue). The 10.25" by 18" linoleum block print portrays Cortez using jutting, multi-directional, emotional lines. In the center of the composition is Cortez, wearing his usual regalia of glasses and broad-rimmed hat, while twisting away from the face is Cortez's nowfamous moustache. Behind Cortez, Arceo has placed multiple cultural signifiers and personal paraphernalia. To the left of the work looms the famous 19th-century Mexican printmaker Jose Guadalupe Posada Aguilar wearing a printmakers' apron. In front of him floats a United Farmworkers Union poster with its stylized logo of an eagle. The UFW iconography has been used, reused and manipulated by Xicano artists to meet their intended goals within each artist's work. Here Arceo has left the image almost untouched, as he attempts to simulate the interconnectedness between Carlos Cortez and the work of agricultural and industrial labor groups within the Midwest.

To the right of the work, sit three items that appear to be historical prints from various stages in Mexican and Xicano art. Two items recreate the *calaveras* of Posada, while the third item is the singing coyote of Cortez's signature. The most important elements of the work, calling upon both pre-Cuauhtemoc Aztec codices and also the works of Cortez and numerous other contemporary Xicano artists, are the curvilinear paisley-esque forms. As previous stated, these items call reference to the indigenous heritage of generations of Mexican people.

Another work of Arceo is his *Mestizo* from 1995. A much smaller work at six by eight inches, the handcolored linocut print portrays the split personality that often accompanies the bicultural and bi-racial *mestizo*. To the left is the skeletal figure wearing colonial period native clothing and to the right bursting from the flames of destruction is a figure of the historic *revolucionario* or revolutionary. Like many Xicano and Mexican artists Arceo pays homage to his indigenous past and his *mestizo* present. By using colored pencil over a linoleum block print, the artist has personalized a multiple object and created a one-of-a-kind out of the popular art form of printmaking.

