



(Above) A 2009 linocut and watercolor, "Mestizo," depicts imagery often associated with Mexico, the birthplace of Arceo, who has lived in Chicago since the late 1970s. (Left) A 2002 linocut, "Mujer con rebozo," depicts a member of the Tarahumara indigenous group in Mexico



With decades of artistic production, a mature Rene Arceo produces a print in his Chicago studio.

## Art book celebrates Guadalajara emigre's trajectory as printmaker

By Elaine Halleck

In 1979, at the tender age of 20, Rene Arceo, born in Michoacan on the shores of Lake Chapala, moved from Guadalajara to Chicago, utilizing a classic route—bus to Tijuana, *coyote* and car trunk to Los Angeles, and direct flight to Chicago.



A 2007 linocut, "Transformation of Nahuatl."

Unless prevailing ideas about the classic path of Latinos in the United States are mistaken, these may have been the last classic steps Arceo took in his life. Early on, the young man did have unremarkable jobs in small factories in the Chicago area. However, steeped as he was in the highly political atmosphere of Preparatoria Número

Dos (a public high school within the University of Guadalajara system), once in Chicago, Arceo veered mightily towards education, community organizing, and especially to communicating his often political ideas. He did the latter via many forms of printmaking—woodcut, screen printing, intaglio (sugar lift, aquatint, drypoint, etching, varnishes, and so on)—as well as painting and drawing.

A limited-edition art book "René Arceo—Between the Instinctive and the Rational," celebrates Arceo's decades of artistic production. Tucked into its 153 pages are the remarkable facts behind the work—Arceo's acceptance just two years after crossing the border into the illustrious School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he tackled many artistic media, received a BFA and teaching certificate, and evidenced a love for collaborating with other artists, especially those working to build a Latino identity



A detail of an early (1984) woodcut of Arceo's depicts Rudy Lozano, a Chicago public official who was murdered.



"Futuro Obama" (2009).

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# GUADALAJARA REPORTER

[www.theguadalajarareporter.net](http://www.theguadalajarareporter.net)

Año LVII no. 24. June 27-July 3 2020. \$20 pesos Guad/Chapala; \$25 pesos Coastal Region

## Printmaker from 5 in Chicago.

Much of what can be said about Arceo is spoken by the images in the book, which range from 1983 to 2009 and focus on the human being, with touches of abstraction in the style of Picasso, whose influence Arceo acknowledges.

Elements that one may expect in “classic” Mexican art depicting pride of heritage—the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Mexican flag and heroic figures holding it—are scarce in the book, probably due to Arceo’s separation from religious and nationalistic influences, which were rooted in the humble class of Mexico. In fact, a biographer

notes, one reason his brother and cousin pulled him away to Chicago was a looming clash with his father, a service worker at the Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara, a “private ultra-right-wing institution...that went so far as to bestow an *honoris causa* [on controversial Chilean dictator] Pinochet.” Arceo’s father had been unhappy that the budding artist

“drew portraits of Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Salvador Allende on his bedroom wall” in Guadalajara.

In Chicago, Arceo’s political tendencies bloomed, and he depicted local figures such as Harold Washington, the first African-American mayor of Chicago. Likewise, he did posters, flyers and t-shirts publicizing events and causes,

and began to show a love of collaborating, including in group exhibitions and teaching, rather than obsessing on “the notion of ‘genius,’” as one biographer puts it.

Arceo still follows his collaborative instincts today, having worked with institutions too numerous to mention—the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago for 12 years, Chicago Public Schools for 20 years, and producing print

portfolio collaborations with artists from Mexico, the United States, Canada, Spain, France, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico.

Arceo notes that, while his book did not enjoy massive distribution, it is available in print or electronic form by contacting him ([renearceo59@gmail.com](mailto:renearceo59@gmail.com)) or his Etsy.com store (ArceoStudio). His website [ArceoPress.com](http://ArceoPress.com) offers more ways to view his work.