

## Middletown Art Center showcases Latinx culture through art

The new Raíces Herosas exhibit aims to strengthen the sense of community and belonging for the Latinx population with works by Latinx artists. | 



### SLIDE 1 OF 10

Riviera Elementary School students Sawyer Post, 9, left, and Thomas Bond, 10, look for repeating patterns in pieces on display in the Raices Herosas "Gorgeous Roots" exhibit by Latinx artists at the Middletown Art Center Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024. (John Burgess / The Press Democrat)

### KATHLEEN SCAVONE

FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

March 6, 2024

Papel picado, traditional colorful square banners oftentimes seen at Latino celebrations, gently sway outside the Middletown Art Center as if to offer a welcome wave to those who are ready to experience the new Raíces Herosas exhibit.

The welcome event in mid-January hosted around 90 attendees, including nearly all of the Latinx exhibiting artists from Lake County, Sacramento, the Bay Area, Miami and Chicago. Of those 19 exhibiting, six were born in Latin America, four are in the LGBTQ+ community.

Raíces Herosas runs through May and includes contemporary interpretations of Latinx culture and identity with work by local and regional Latinx artists. The exhibit offers a video of each artist discussing their work.

"Each artist speaks from their own perspective," said Jez Flores-Garcia, guest curator for Raíces Herosas. "They do not attempt the impossible: to represent all things of an identity or an 'authentic' experience. Instead, each artist presented here engages in an artistic practice of exploring their place among varied and long-lived traditions- beautiful roots."

Middletown Art Center was able to hire Flores-Garcia, who specializes in Latinx art, to curate this specific exhibit and pick the artists. Funding for this project is provided by Specified General Fund for the Museum Grant Program under the California Cultural and Historical Endowment. Once a guest curator was secured, an open call was made for Latinx artists.

The artwork on display includes 55 sculptures, photography, textile work, collages, prints and paintings. And exhibit materials are in both English and Spanish.

Read more stories celebrating the local Latino community [here](#).

Haz clic [aquí](#) para leer la versión en Español.

# REPORT

Catch up on the essential news you may have missed today.

**Count me in!**

Lisa Kaplan, Middletown Art Center's executive director and art director, has spearheaded a variety of grant-awarded projects, including Raíces Hermosas.

For this exhibit, the California Natural Resources Agency gave the Middletown Art Center \$188,744 to put toward a yearlong program that will connect the Latinx community through art, events and education.

The Middletown Art Center is a nonprofit and grants support most of the museum's projects and generally comprise about 30% of their annual income.

## Some of the art, artists

Once inside, the exhibit bursts with color and texture across a broad spectrum of complex works, each vying for attention.

There's a mixed-media sculpture of cactus with a predominantly orange base and purple flowers blooming on its arms with black needles dotting the body. The piece is called "Inigeno Nopal" by Maria Mariscal. The queer Chicana artist is from Sacramento and specializes in multimedia sculptures, using items like cardboard, insulation foam and paper to create large-scale pieces.

"I am a Chicana artist who uses cactuses in my work to represent my people and myself. My artwork is what I use to communicate, express myself and share my story," said exhibitor Mariscal. "I aim to empower and create a safe space for people who relate to what I share."

Next, a striking oil painting using mostly neutrals contains layered images of a bear, a bird and the natural landscape. The piece is called "Chalk Mountain In Spring Valley/ Montaña De Tiza En El Valle De Primavera" by Catalina Gonzalez from Clearlake Oaks.

## If you go

Raíces Hermosas (Gorgeous Roots) includes 19 exhibiting artists, six of which were born in Latin America and four are in the LGBTQ+ community.

Raíces Hermosas runs through May 27 and includes contemporary interpretations of Latinx culture and identity with work by local and regional Latinx artists. The exhibit offers a video of each artist discussing their work.

**Location:** Middletown Art Center at 21456 State Hwy. 175, Middletown

**Hours:** 10:30 a.m.- 5 p.m. Thursday- Monday

**More information:** 707-809-8118, info@MiddletownArtCenter.org

**Website:** middletownartcenter.org

Continuing to gaze around the space, there's a canvas painted in oil by Mexican born artist Alex Blas called "Devon: Boy with a Basket of Bread." The subject has shoulder length hair that curls at the end. The shirtless man is carrying a large wicker basket that's overflowing with various types of bread and flowers.

"The Raíces Hermosas exhibit is an eye-opener to the various layers and complexities of Latinx people's experiences," said Middletown Art Center board member Zabdy Neria who attended the opening event. "Accompanied by both of my parents on opening night, the artwork provided a portal through which we could dialogue about difficult and taboo issues relating to assimilation, immigration, and hardship across generations."

Zabdy Neri's mother, Leidy, is a local businesswoman who was part of the team that helped establish the event.

ADVERTISEMENT

Moving through the space, visitors will see more thought-provoking and beautiful emissaries of culture and place.

"In my art practice, I use photography and archival research to explore often-overlooked collective histories related to identity erasure, formation and assimilation within the Mexican American experience," said exhibiting artist Damon Casarez, a Los Angeles based photographer and MFA student in Stanford's Art Practice Program.

His image called "Uncle Ted's Room" is part of my series titled "Good Neighbors" that focuses on suburban life of Latinx people who have lived in the greater Los Angeles area since the 1950s and 1960s.

## Lasting impact for Latinx community

The goal of Raíces Hermosas is to strengthen the sense of community and belonging by reeling in a significant portion of Lake County's population who traditionally have not been included or represented.

The exhibit began as a collaboration between the art center, board member Neria and her mother. Gilbert Rangel and Ana Santana are both local Latinx community members who also helped with the project.

The Press Democrat

# Daily Headlines

Wake up to local news everyday. Sign up and start your day in-the-know, exclusively from the Press Democrat newsroom.

**SIGN ME UP!**

"The title, 'Raíces Hermosas', comes from a compilation of ideas that my mother, and myself distilled to the essence of the project in two words: 'Gorgeous Roots'," said Neria. "I thank the MAC (Middletown Art Center) for valuing and uplifting Latinx perspectives. I am certain that Raíces Hermosas will have a lasting impact on our diverse community."

And the grant money the museum received for this project is helping to maximize the impact of these Latinx artists and their work.

The grant Kaplan secured for Raíces Hermosas also helps with related projects and activities that go along with the exhibit like guided school field trips to the museum for 3,600 Lake County students.

Curriculum for visiting school groups was designed by Lauren Schneider, Sabrina Klein, Leah Fernández and Kaplan, with support from exhibit curator Flores-Garcia.

## Students learn about Latinx culture

When students go to the exhibit, they will go through a series of activities that will allow them to connect to their fellow students, the community and themselves through art appreciation, critical thinking, art analysis and art making.

In January, the Middletown Art Center's classroom was abuzz with activity as the Lake County International Charter School's sixth to eighth grade students were busily working a project. Students were asked to choose a favorite card in the Lotería, a traditional Mexican game that's similar to Bingo, which depicts an object with its meaning in Spanish. Some picked a card and drew their own interpretation while others chose to write a story about the picture.

The activity involved Spanish lessons, art and insight into Mexican culture presented by Samara Zepeda, an exhibiting artist who's work is part of Raíces Hermosas.

Zepeda has two pieces in the museum which displays their photography that has been printed on handmade paper. The Wesleyan University graduate said the art they makes involves "many mediums, including photography, painting, mosaic, sculpture and more."

"I am mainly working as the cultural educator, teaching students about symbols and iconography specific to Latinx cultures, predominantly Mexican since most of the art is made by artists with Mexican backgrounds," said Zepeda who moved from Mexico to Roseland when they were 5 years old.

They also have another project underway that focuses on their community in Mexico.

"I am working on a social venture which focuses on helping out Indigenous women from my homeland of Jalisco who are in need of refuge," they said. "I have a dream to help steward the birth of a community garden for the women so they may have the access to clean food and connection to the land."

With Zepeda's work as well as the work of the 18 other artists showing, there is lots to take in and a lot that's open for interpretation when the world of color on canvas, sculpture, and brush strokes converge in the form of Latinx art.

Guests of the Raíces Hermosas exhibit can linger and let art enrich, educate and transport them to new understandings of culture and place, which is the hope for the artists and museum coordinators.

"Look at art. Just do that," Flores-Garcia said. "Suspend your judgments and just observe. Take time. Go away. Come back and look some more. Keep looking. It's that easy and it is that difficult."

### EVENING REPORT NEWSLETTER

4:30 PM WEEKDAYS

News you may have missed today.

Enter your email address

Subscribe Now

Opt out anytime. [Read our Privacy Policy](#)

### Sponsored Content on Press Democrat



#### Tips And Advice For Creating A Beautiful And Bountiful Garden

By Friedman's Home Improvement

As the days get longer and the sun starts to warm the earth, it's time to welcome the beauty of summer into your...

### Around the Web

REVCONTENT

Neuropathy Breakthrough:  
Experts Speechless  
Wellness Gaze Neuro

Top Doctor: If You Eat  
Oatmeal Every Day, This Is  
What Happens  
GundryMD

Restaurants In Glenhaven  
With Good Senior Discounts  
TheWalletGuru