

BEYOND THE GRAVE



'The Moors Meet the Christians,' by Cynthia Charat, is on display at Maude Kerns Art Center.

COURTESY PHOTO

Exhibit honors 'Day of the Dead'

Día de los Muertos combines the Catholic holy days and ancient harvest rituals

By Amy Spindler
Freelance Reporter

Sugar candy skulls, sweet "bread of the dead" and bright marigolds mark the coming of the fourth annual El Día de los Muertos at the Maude Kerns Art Center, which is celebrating the Day of the Dead with a special exhibit that opens today and will run through Nov. 14.

The exhibit features folk art, paintings, traditional altars and photographs. In conjunction with the exhibit, festivities to celebrate the holiday include a costume ball, gallery walk, altar tour and a lecture and slide show titled "Death and Fiesta: Mexico to Eugene."

Día de los Muertos blends the Catholic holy days of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day with the more ancient harvest rituals associated with the Aztec god of the dead, Mictlantecvhtli. Altars are decorated with flowers, photos, candles, food and drink in order to honor the dead, who are believed to return briefly to share in the activities of the living.

"Every aspect of the altar has a symbolic meaning," said Jim Garcia, assistant director of Multicultural Affairs. Garcia also heads the Ganas Project, which focuses on issues that empower Chicano and Latino students.

The exhibit includes an eight-foot altar for the dead titled "Tzonpantli," which signifies a rack of skulls used in Aztec, Toltec and Mayan cultures.

"The piece was done by a group of visual and graphic artists and architects who call themselves Encontrarte Arte en Contra Arte," said Sandra Dominguez, education coordinator and curator for the event. "The group lives in Puebla, Mexico. It's one of the highlights of the exhibit."

Friends of Survivors, El Bracero and the Ganas Project each created altars for the exhibit.

The featured artist, Maria Elena, is a painter who lived in Mexico for most of her life and now resides in Cottage Grove. The ex-

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Jim Garcia
Assistant director of Multicultural Affairs

hibit will show six of her paintings that reflect her personal experiences celebrating El Día de los Muertos.

"She's a national treasure in Mexico," Dominguez said.

The art center will communicate via fax, e-mail and phone with Encontrarte Arte en Contra Arte as they open a similar exhibit in Tehuacan, Mexico. Lanranza, in Washington, D.C., and the Hispanic/Latino Student Association at the University of Wisconsin will also participate in a Bilingual Virtual Poetry Performance. Poems, stories and drawings will be exchanged and will become a part of each of the exhibits.

The Costume Ball Fiesta Nov. 1 from 7 to 11 p.m. will be an evening of traditional food, dance and music. El Grupo Juvenil Azteca will perform "traditional ballet folklore with a twist," Dominguez said. Raza Sin Fronteras will sing traditional Mexican songs, and El Bracero

and Sabor Tropical will perform salsa and a variety of other music. The event will benefit the art center and Ganas.

Local galleries will display altars designed by various community groups and individual artists. The gallery walk and altar tour, which will begin at 5:30 p.m. on Nov. 7, will feature altars created by different community groups and artists, including the Committee in Solidarity with the Central American People, Whitebird, Regan Lee, Los Niños and El Centro Latino Americano.

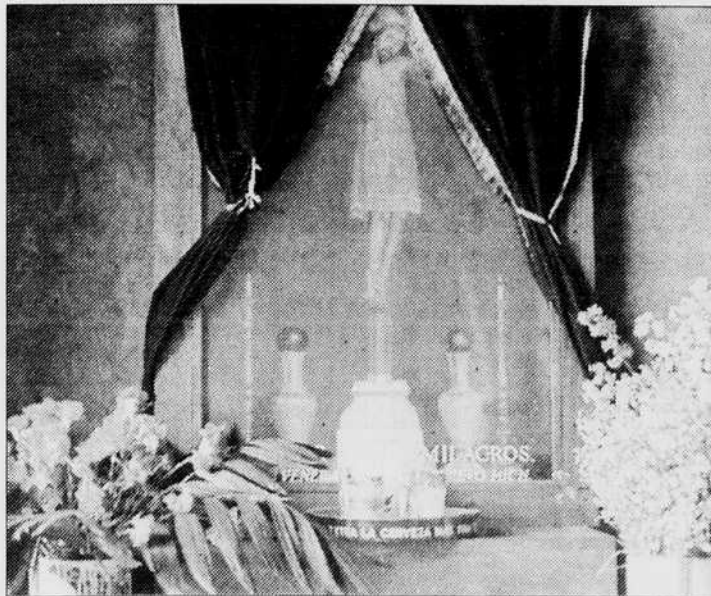
The Committee in Solidarity with the Central American People will make a political statement with their altar by honoring Ernesto "Che" Guevara, a Cuban revolutionary, said Katy Menacho, a member of CAP.

"This is the 30th anniversary of his death, and we want to honor him," she said. "He is a symbol of revolution and was killed in Bolivia for his work."

The Maude Kerns Art Center, 1910 E. 15th Ave., is Eugene's only non-profit community center for visual arts.

The art center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday.

For more information on the El Día de los Muertos exhibit and activities, call 345-1571.



COURTESY PHOTO

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