

20th Century Latin American Art: Critical Issues of Influence

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Overview

"20th Century Latin American Art: Critical Issues of Influence" is the title of my curriculum unit for the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute. It was developed from the seminar, "Latin America; Culture and Civilization. This curriculum unit will develop how the European Styles, indigenism, social realism and surrealism influenced the Latin American Artist. It will also develop the influence of political and social issues, which directly influenced the subject matter of many Mexican muralists. This study and research will lead to a curriculum unit based on the various influences in the art of Latin America in the 20th century.

I will then develop lessons and art activities for my students, which constitute a similar influence and method. This curriculum unit will be designed for Middle School students.

Rationale

During the first two decades of the 20th century, Spanish modernists introduced Latin American painters to impressionism, postimpressionism, symbolism and art nouveau. Mexican painter Saturnino Herran used symbolism in his mural project, Our Gods, (1904-1918, Mexico City) which nobly posed native Mexicans as powerful symbols of Mexican identity. His mural served as a model for many large-scale murals that were commissioned in the 1920s. The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) also found a voice in the public mural. Diego Rivera as well as others defined this moment in Mexican history. He was influenced by European modernism, studying in Spain and Paris and working with Spanish artists Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris who were experimenting with cubism. Cubist techniques such as the use of a diagonal grid as the basis of large-scale organization abound in the works of Rivera and the other Mexican muralists.

Rivera also drew on pre-Columbian sources and the traditions of Mexican Folk art in murals that he did for the National Palace in Mexico City (1930-1932). He, as well as other muralists, expressed solidarity with the working and farming classes and shared the obsession with non-European aspects of Latin American culture that characterized the indigenism movement. These moments also inspired photography and the graphic arts toward social realism, or the depiction of the common people in a politically charged context. Artists such as Siqueiros and Orozco also painted emotionally charged murals expressing their sympathy with workers and their opposition to political oppression in portrayals of Mexican history. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros worked in the United States as well where they influenced public art projects in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as influencing the early work of American abstract expressionist artist Jackson Pollock.

Within Latin American Modern Art we see indigenism, social realism, and the stylistic aspects of the mural movement joined with an interest in surrealism. Surrealism emphasized the role of dreams and the unconscious in the creative process. To this, the Latin Americans added an interest in archetypes such as images, ideas, or patterns that have come to be considered universal models. These archetypes, which appear in mythology, religion, and art, make up what Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and others termed the collective unconscious.

In Cuba, the Modern Movement began to take place in the 1920s. The military populist Fulgencio Batista directly influenced it. Amelia Pelaez was the most attractive painter in this group. Her paintings were abstract in nature and she used brilliantly colored backgrounds. Cubism also flourished during the formative beginnings of Latin American Modernism. Artists such as DiCavalcanti and Rego Monteiro incorporated not only Cubist styles but the Art Deco style then dominant in the decorative arts and in architecture, which experienced a tremendous success in Latin America.

We are now realizing that it is precisely this hybridization which accounts for one of the strengths of Latin American Art and which lies at the roots of its vitality, originality and constant power to surprise. Latin American visual arts relate more closely to their social and political context than do European and North American equivalents.

Throughout this narrative I will develop the various cultural influences such as indigenous (native) American cultures that characterizes Latin America today. I will then discuss the early colonial period which lasted until about 1580 which mixed European and Indigenous traditions. I will then discuss how the Spanish modernists introduced the European styles of impressionism, postimpressionism, symbolism and art nouveau during the 19th and 20th century. The influence of Surrealism will then be discussed and finally the political and social movement that influenced Mexican muralist will be developed.

Pre-Columbian Art and Architecture

Pre-Columbian Art and Architecture is considered the art and architecture of the indigenous civilizations of the Mesoamerica and the Andes and of the neighboring cultures before the 16th century AD. For 3000 years before European exploration and colonization of the Western Hemisphere, the Native Americans of Latin America developed civilizations that rivaled the artistic and intellectual accomplishments of ancient China, India, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean world. The quality of these accomplishments is even more impressive because much of the essential technology of the Eastern Hemisphere civilizations was unknown to the Native American.

To distinguish the major characteristics of pre-Columbian civilizations, three general chronological divisions are used: the Pre-Classic period which was an age of experimentation (1500bc-300 ad), the Classic period, (300-900AD) and the Post Classical period which was characterized by frequent wars and an increase in population and technological development.

Outstanding in pre-Columbian artistic development were architecture, sculpture, painting and decorative arts such as pottery, metalwork and textiles. In Architecture we see structures such as pyramids palaces, tombs and platform temples. Stone and human labor were used rather than metal and machines. The majority of pre-Columbian sculptures are clay figurines and effigy pots. Carving was done with stone rather than metal and most sculpture is found primarily in Mesoamerica and only sometimes in the Central Andes and Intermediate areas. Some pre-Columbian cultures like the Maya of Mexico painted Frescos and murals to record their daily life. The Maya-Toltec painted their temple interiors with realistic frescos that depict historical events. Although primarily found in Mesoamerica, architectural painting has been discovered in the Intermediate Area in the geometrically patterned underground tombs at Tierradentro in Colombia and the mythological murals at Panamarca in Peru. Another type of pre-Columbian painting was the decoration of pottery. Within the decorative arts we see objects associated with burial offerings and ceremonial rather than are equal in design and execution to any of the finest examples of preindustrial art in any part of the world. Pottery succeeded baskets and gourds as containers in Colombia and Ecuador.

Throughout the entire pre-Columbian world, pottery became the most common surviving artifact. Decoration involved incising designs, carving or molding reliefs and employing various techniques of painting and polishing. Only in the Peruvian coast do we find major examples of early textiles. Buried in desert tombs especially in the Paracas Peninsula, 2,500-year-old textiles have been preserved because of

the dry climate. Besides woven patterns and images, textile designs were achieved through painting, stamping, embroidering, and appliqué.

Some Examples of pre-Columbian art could include:

Bonampak Fresco Cycle, Mexico (AD792?). This fresco takes up several walls and tells the story of the last dynastic succession at Bonampak. This scene depicts Maya warriors standing guard over prisoners of war, on whose heads the guards stand.

Maya Carvings. The Maya, a Native American people of Mexico and the Northern part of Central America, produced intricate relief carvings (Sculpture in which the figure project from the background surface). The relief art either adorned buildings or stood alone as stelae (inscribed stone slabs and pillars). Sculpture and other art forms were also used to record important events and to portray deities and their activities.

Classic Vera Cruz Ceramic Figure. An artisan working in clay made these figures from the classic Vera Cruz culture (600-800). The figures are men playing the ritual ball game know as tiachyli, which was an important part of the Classic Vera Cruz culture.

Aztec Mask. Pre-Columbian artists often incorporated mosaic work into their creations. These Aztec masks were made of wood and then covered with polished pieces of turquoise. The teeth and eyes were made of shell. These masks were probably used for specific dances or rituals.

Aztec Stone Carving. Aztec artisans created minute details on extremely rugged surfaces.

Paracas Textile. The Paracas culture flourished on the southern coast of what is now Peru between 300BC and AD 300. The Paracas are known for their intricately woven textiles, which many regard as the finest made by any pre-Columbian Andean culture.

Moche Pottery Vessel: Three fanged deities emerge from a bundle of corncocks in these Moche vessels from the 5th or 6th century. Made of terra cotta, they are made for ceremonial purposes as was most pottery produced by this Andean culture.

EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD

The early Colonial Period lasted until about 1580. It saw a mixing of European and indigenous traditions. In Hispanic South America the Spanish term mestizo is generally applied to this mixture of artistic styles as well as to people of mixed European and Native American ancestry. This is referred to as the Indochristian style. The colonists brought with them the Roman Catholic Religion and the clergy set about converting the native population to Christianity. They also provided education and training for artists. Because of the religious influence, Christian and Native American artistic traditions coexisted in the art. An example of this would be a traditional native art form known as plumeria, or feather mosaics, which was adapted for the depiction of Christian subjects. Illuminated manuscripts and wall decorations in some of the churches show this mixture of influences. By 1650, European styles became dominant in Latin America, especially in the cities. By 1600, European artistic traditions clearly dominated most of the large-scale commissions especially in Mexico and Peru. Spanish, Italian, and Flemish styles came into Latin America. These Diverse styles shared among other things the dramatic style known as Mannerism, which can be characterized by exaggerated postures, discordant colors and a shallow depiction of space that concentrated the action directly in front of the viewer.

Some examples of Art from the Early Colonial Period:

Diego Quispe Tito, Rest on the Flight in Egypt with the Sign of Aquarius, 1681, Oil on Canvas. Cathedral of Cuzco, Peru.

Fresco, circa 1560-80. Upper Cloister, Convent of San Agustin, Acolman, Mexico.

Bernardo Bitti, Virgin and Child, 1590, Oil on Canvas, Iglesia de La Compania, Arequipa, Peru.

Alonso Vazquez, Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, 1605, Oil on canvas, Patronato del Hospital de Jesus, Mexico City.

MODERN ART

In the beginning of the 20th century, Spanish modernists introduced Latin American painters to impressionism, postimpression, symbolism and art nouveau. Impressionism though was thought of as a radical style. Where it appeared, it was usually filtered through the so called Spanish Modernists, Joaquin Sorolla y Bastida (1863-1923) and Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945) who combined impressionist technique and traditional academic values. Post-impressionism was even slower to make its effect. Paul Gauguin was the only significant influence in Latin America and this became evident in Mexican Muralism. Almost every European art movement from Impressionism and Symbolism onwards, made some kind of an impact among the painters and sculptors of Latin America. Two, which had special importance, were Constructivism and Expressionism. The artist Joaquin Torres-Garcia was a central figure in a number of avant-garde groups that were affiliated to international Constructivism. An example of his work is "Abstract Forms" 1929. Expressionism recurs in widely different contexts and can be described as naturally expressionist. Lazar Segall, an expressionist painter, was born in Russia but came to Brazil in 1913. He then went to train in Berlin but returned to Brazil to settle permanently to paint. He had a great impact on many Brazilian artists. An example of his work is "Profile of Zulmira" 1928.

In Cuba the Modern movement began to take root in the 1920's. Victor Manuel was a leader of the progressive movement in art. His paintings are deliberately "primitive" but also rather timid. His painting, "Gypsy Girl from the Tropics" takes much from Gauguin.

The most attractive of Cuban Modernists is Amelia Pelaez. Her paintings make use of very Cuban motifs. They show abstract still-lives, generally of fruit, against brilliantly colored backgrounds derived from the stained-glass windows found in old-fashioned houses in Cuba. From 1950 to 1962 she dedicated much of

her attention to decorating and designing ceramics and making murals. Two of her outstanding mural projects were one in Ceramics for the Tribunal de Cuentas in 1953 and another in tessera (now destroyed) for the hotel Habana-Hilton in 1958. During the 1960s, she concentrated again on oil painting using brilliant colors and still-life themes.

Examples from the Modern Movement:

Deposition, 1924

Rego Monteiro

A figure composition with primitive figures stylized and locked together so that it takes on the appearance of a carving in shallow relief.

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Still Life, 1942

Amelia Pelaez

Abstract still life with use of brilliantly colored background

Gypsy Girl from the Tropics, 1929

Victor Manuel

Primitive looking and takes on characteristics of Gauguin.

Surrealism

Surrealism emphasized the role of dreams and the unconscious in the creative process. To this the Latin Americans added an interest in archetypes—images, ideas or patterns that have come to be considered universal models. These archetypes, which appear in mythology, religion and art, make up what Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and others termed the collective unconscious. Muralism is sometimes contrasted with the Surrealism practiced by leading Latin American painters in exile, chief among them the Cuban Wifredo Lam and the Chilean Matta (Roberto Matta Echaurren.) In 1940, Mexico City was the scene of a major Surrealist exhibition, which included Diego Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo. In 1938 the French leader of the Surrealist movement, Andre Breton, visited Mexico. This visit had a lasting impact on the art in the Americas.

Examples of Surrealism

Antonio Ruiz, The Bicycle Race, Texcoco 1938.

Remedios Varo, Magic Flight, 1956.

Remedios Varo, The Encounter, 1962.

Leonora Carrington, The Distractions of Dagobert, 1945.

Leonora Carrington, The Old Maids, 1947

The Mexican Muralist Movement; The Political and Social movement that influenced Mexican Muralism.

Mural painting is one of the oldest and most important forms of artistic, political and social expression. Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, Jose' Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros revived this form of painting in Mexico. Their murals were based on the political and a social conditions of the times.

These three Mexican muralists came to prominence during the cultural revival in Mexico stemming from the Mexican Revolution. General Obregon, who was one of the many Revolutionary leaders struggling for power after the war, helped establish a political and social environment for the muralists to emerge. This environment included many revolutionary ideals, such as land reform, civil liberties, welfare and public health, public education for all and other liberal reforms. The Secretary of Education Jose' Vasconcelos commissioned these artists to paint murals throughout Mexico City and they later traveled to the United States where private organizations funded some of their acclaimed works.

The Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros was very much involved with politics. He fought in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War. He articulated ideas of the artist's social and political responsibility. He also spent time in exile and was arrested a total of seven times because of political beliefs. Squires often painted the glory of the revolution, the honor of the revolution and the promise of technology.

Siqueiros used the fresco process to paint his murals. Paint is applied to freshly applied plaster on a wall. He also painted frescoes on concrete and began to use the innovative technique of airbrushing much like graffiti

artists do today. He taught and trained many artists such as Jackson Pollock in workshops he held in New York and Los Angeles.

Rivera turned to the Pre-Columbian narrative reliefs, and took many elements from the Cubists, from Gauguin, from Rousseau and from fifteenth century Italian fresco painting. His murals also took on his political beliefs as his mural, which was to be for the Rockefeller Center in New York, was destroyed before it was done because he refused to remove a likeness of Lenin. He regarded himself as a natural Communist but was frequently on bad terms with the Soviet Union. He left the Communist Party because he was at odds with orthodox Communism but was reinstated in 1954 after many apologies and artistic compromises.

The three muralists all held the view that mural painting was the only true art. Their art had the purpose of educating people, portraying what the people believed in and setting ideals for the people. It was the art for the people and the most "modern" art of the 20th century, thus challenging all of the innovative, but private, movements going on in Europe at the time.

All three muralists used themes of rewriting history, commenting on social and political issues and creating a common national identity, even though they did not hold the same viewpoints. Pre-Columbian society, the devastation and contributions of the conquest, contemporary political and cultural issues and the predictions and hope for the future permeate their works' content and imagery. Within their work we see also their use of perspective, historical icons and symbolic images.

Examples of Siqueiros's Art:

Accidente en las minas (Accident in the mines)

Siqueiros depicts a scene of miners suffering, a casualty of capitalism.

Cain en los Estados Unidos (Cain in the United States)

Based on the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible.

Collective Suicide

An example of Siqueiros experimenting with materials and style. Pseudo-abstract, very powerful imagery.

Memorial a Cuauhtemoc (Memorial to Cuauhtemoc)

Cuauhtemoc was the Aztec war king who ruled at the time the Spanish landed in Mexico. The Spanish are depicted in a mechanical inhuman nature clad in metal, with a fierce ravenous dog looking like he might attack the brown flesh of Cuauhtemoc and the Mexica.

Examples of Diego Rivera's work:

Crossing the Barranca

From the Palacio de Cortes murals

His finest series of murals

Sailor at Lunch

An example of how he incorporated Cubism in his work

Creation

From the Anfiteatro Bolivar mural

An example of how he went to the classical style as inspired by Cezanne. He also made a trip to Italy and studied Giotto, Uccello, Mantegna and Michelangelo.

The Offering

From the Secretaria de Education Publica murals, Mexico City.

A fusion of styles from pre-Columbian, cubists, from Gauguin and from 15th century Italian fresco painting.

Lesson 1—Mexican Mural Painting

Objective

The first modern artists from a Hispanic country in the Western Hemisphere whose art attracted worldwide attention were the painters known as Mexican muralists. During the beginning of the 20th century, Mexico went through a political and social revolution. The government began to commission a number of huge frescos to celebrate its achievements. The best known of the Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera Filled the walls of public buildings in Mexico and the United States with enormous murals praising social revolution. He was part of the group known as "Los Tres Grandes". Siqueiros was another of the three great Mexican muralists, and probable one of the greatest muralists in the history of art. He was also active with the political revolutions of his country. Jose Clemente Orozco was the third famous muralist and is thought to be cruder than Rivera and his pictorial language may be less sophisticated, but he is more directly moving.

Discuss the life of Siqueiros and Rivera. Talk about Diego Riveras Crossing the Barranca from the Palacio de Cortes murals, Cuernavaca, Mexico. When discussing his mural, discuss his style and how social issues, that are a part of public art, particularly murals, are addressed. Discuss the styles, themes and topics of other murals, such as those by Siqueiros; Portrait of the Bourgeoisie and his Apologia of the Future Victory of Medicine over Cancer.

Questions that can be asked of students to stimulate discussion of the murals painted by the Mexican muralists.

"What are some of the political and social issues reflected by Mexican muralism?"

"How can art shape or influence the way we think?"

"Identify some of the styles you feel have influenced these muralists?"

"How has art influenced you in your life?"

"What media would you use to express your feelings about a political or social situation?"

Procedure

Students will first discuss various political or social issues that effect their lives. Sketches will be made to illustrate their feelings. Visual resources such as magazines and photographs of Latin American art will be available. Students will then transfer drawing to large illustration board and opaque paint. Work can also be done on canvas with acrylic paint.

Assessment

Students will discuss their work and it's meaning. They will have successful completed a mural painting with a significant meaning to them. Composition and color will also be discussed.

This lesson will have covered all Content Standards within the area of Arts and Humanities.

Lesson 2—Creating Dream Images

The influence of surrealism in Latin American art was very significant in the 20th century. The visits by the French poet-philosopher Andre Breton, the founder of Surrealism , to Mexico in 1938 and 1940 proved to be a catalyst for the development of this style in American. Artists like Agustin Lazo and Argentine painter Antonio Berni combined social realism and surrealism to develop what we call today social surrealism. To the surrealist, reality means more than the world that e can see with our eyes. Reality can also mean the unconscious world we see in our dreams. The science of psychology suggested that the visions and images found in dreams are clues to our inner feelings and desires. The emphasis this style places on the irrational, the emotional and the personal seems to be very congenial to the Latin American temperament. Mexican painter Frida Kahlo blended native folk imagery, psychological intensity and dreamlike subjects into powerful compositions. She painted intense portrayals of her self in various transformations. Her double self-portrait, The Two Fridas, reveals her dual inheritance-the proper nineteenth-century Western lady on the left and the swarthy indigenous woman from Tehuantepec, on the right, linked by the same blood system, which she has cut to suggest her own infirmity and mortality.

Questions that can be asked of students to stimulate discussion of Surrealism in Latin American painting.

"How exactly does one 'paint a dream' or illustrate unconscious thoughts?"

"Have you ever tried to remember the details of a dream?"

"How can you make visible something of which you are not really aware?"

"What techniques did the surrealist artist, Salvador Dali, employ in his work to achieve an unconscious level of meaning?"

"How would you use your 'unconscious' to create an unusual work of art?"

Strategy

Students will be asked to create an unconscious and surreal mood by dealing with change in one of two ways. First, we will pick an object and change its form so that it suggests something else. Or, secondly, we can

change the surroundings of the object so that we see it in a new and surprising context ("juxtaposing" the object with other objects or the background). The student can work either two or three dimensionally.

Students can choose a common object and begin to sketch it out or model its basic form in plasticine. As you work on the object, allow the way it looks to suggest ideas to you. (What began as a pencil can become a figure, which then can become a tree.) The student can start out with one idea and then develop others.

Some directions the student may take.

Ordinary objects can be combined or juxtaposed in new ways. A hat and an apple core transform a bunch of grapes into something almost human.

Give objects an "environment, such", as a shoe box. Your choice of background and color can heighten the "surrealistic" effect.

Changing the object's scale makes us see it differently.

The meaning of the object can change by having it suggest another object.

The form can be in the process of changing from one object to another.

Assessment

Students will discuss their work and its meaning. Student will try to determine if, their "unconscious" came into play as they worked on their object. Students will successfully complete a object that creates a unconscious and surreal mood. The object can be two or three dimensional.

This lesson will have covered all Content Standards within the area of Arts and Humanities.

Lesson 3—Mixed –Media Expressions

The 20th century Mexican- American Artist were protesting injustices on the West Coast of the U.S.,and other groups of Latino artists are creating their own political art on the East Coast.. Juan Sanchez, an African-Puerto Rican artist who lives in New York City creates powerful statements about Puerto Rico. He calls his mixed-media pieces "Rican/structions." In them the artist restructures reality by painting it, photographing it, writing about it, then tearing it all up and rearranging it. Mixed Statement, is about violence suffered by the Puerto Rican nationalists in the United States. At the top of it a Puerto Rican flag is ripped in two; the same flag either protects or smothers the men in the photos at the bottom.

Frank Romero, also a Latino mixed media artist out of Los Angeles, bases many of his images on the automobile of Southern California. Pedro Perez, Who was born in Cuba, works in the American tradition but always includes some specifically Cuban subjects. Many of his mixed-media pieces satirize the religious imagery the artist remembers from his childhood. Mixed -media artist, Julio Galan feels his painting is very universal but draws on his Mexican origins. He uses photos, postcards, and posters. His art reveals his fascination with the innocence of childhood. He will combine realistic painting techniques with real objects such as ribbons, jewels and dried flowers. This can be seen in his composition, What's Missing?.

Questions that can be asked of students to stimulate discussion on Mixed-Media Compositions.

"What kind of media do you see these Latino artists using in their works?"

"Is the media part of the artists statement? Is there a strong expressionistic overtone created with these objects?"

"What kind of objects would you want to put into a composition that makes a statement about you?"

"Why do you think the Latino artist uses mixed-media for his compositions?"

Strategy

Students will be asked to collect small discarded objects and develop a method for sorting through, categorizing, and storing objects. Students should keep in mind that they will be creating a small figure sculpture. This figure can take on an ironic or humorous statement regarding social or political trends. Or the student may want to express feelings about his own unique background. The student should visualize differing ideas about gender roles, generational or cultural clashes they have experienced in their own family. If they can't come up with a theme, they can begin by selecting objects that interest them. Eventually a theme should emerge.

You don't have to create a full figure. You can combine fragments or substitute other items to suggest or represent a figure. Students should try to select objects with strong expressionistic overtones or objects that become expressive when placed next to one another. Students should employ contrast in meaning, color, shape, size, texture, natural versus mechanical.

Students should plan piece and then practice joining test pieces together. Try various glues, nails, wire and screws to see what works best. Begin to fasten objects together. View the sculpture from all sides so your composition is balanced. Painting so areas should enhance the expressionistic feeling.

Assessment

Student will discuss their compositions and its meaning. They will have successfully completed a expressionistic figure made from found objects that has some meaning for them.

This lesson will have covered all Content Standard within the area of Arts and Humanities.

Lesson 4—Los Dias de los Muertos: The Day of the Dead; Paper-mache' Floral Skulls.

Objective

Every autumn Monarch Butterflies, which have summered up north in the United States and Canada, return to Mexico for the winter protection of the "oyamel" fir trees. The locale inhabitants welcome back the returning butterflies, which they believe bear the spirits of their departed. The spirits to be honored during Los Dias de los Muertos.

Los Dias de los Muertos, the Days of the Dead, is a traditional Mexico holiday honoring the dead. It is celebrated every year at the same time as Halloween and the Christian holy days of All Saints Day and All Souls Day (November 1st and 2nd). Los Dias de los Muertos is not a sad time, but instead a time of remembering and rejoicing. The townspeople dress up as ghouls, ghosts, mummies and skeletons and parade around the town. The "corpse" within smiles as it is carried through the narrow streets.

In the homes the families arrange "afrenda's" or "alters" with flowers, bread, fruit, and candy. Pictures of the deceased family members are added. In the late afternoon, candles are lit-it is time to remember the departed, the old ones, their parents and grandparents.

The next day the families go to the cemetery. They bring hoes and picks. They also bring flowers, candles, blankets and picnic baskets. They come to clean the graves of their loved ones. Flowers, candles, fruit and bread are placed on the graves. The families will stay the night. Skeletons and skulls are found everywhere. Special loaves of bread are baked called "pan de muertos" and decorated with bones.

The celebration of Los Días de los Muertos, like the custom of Halloween evolved with the influences of the Celts, the Romans and the Christian holy days. But with added influences from the Aztecs of Mexico. The Aztecs believe in an afterlife where the spirits of their dead return as hummingbirds and butterflies. Even images carved in the ancient Aztec monuments show this belief—the linking of the spirits of the dead and the monarch butterfly.

Questions that can be asked of students to stimulate discussion of Los Días de los Muertos; The Day of the Dead.

"How does the Mexican look upon death?"

"How do our holidays of Halloween and All Saints Day differ from The Day of the Dead?"

"Do you know of any other customs in other countries that are similar to The Day of the Dead?"

"What would you put on your altar?"

"What is Papel Picado and how do the Mexicans use this folk art?"

Strategy

Students should become familiar with how the skulls looked by through investigation at the library under Mexican Folk Art or through information and pictures that can be found on various web sites. A list of sites can be found under "Web sites and Internet sources for Students and Teachers". Sugar skulls are a traditional folk art from Southern Mexico and used to celebrate Day of the Dead. They are brightly decorated and usually bear the name of the deceased.

For our purposes we will be making our skull with paper-mache.

Materials needed:

Round Balloon

Newspaper

Paper-Mache Paste

Plastic Wrap

Decide what size and shape of mask or head you want and choose the appropriate sized balloon. Blow up the balloon and tie it closed. Find a bowl or cup your balloon can sit in while you work on it. Completely cover up the cup or bowl with plastic wrap so the paper mache does not stick to it. Also cover the table or work surface under the cup with the plastic wrap. Set your balloon in the cup or bowl and set it aside.

Tear several newspaper pages into strips. You will want them 1 inch wide and about 6-8 inches long. Set them aside. Use a large bowl to prepare your paper mache paste (Following directions for making paste.

Dip the newspaper strips into the glue and spread them onto the balloon. Completely cover the balloon, except for the area where it is sitting in the cup. Set aside and let this first layer dry.

Once the first layer is completely dry, use various supplies to make the facial features on your balloon if desired. You can make a nose, ears, thick eye brows, lips, etc. Use the cardboard, masking tape, foil or other items. Use masking tape to hold everything in place.

Add at least two more layers of paper mache to your balloon. Allow each layer to dry completely before putting on the next layer. Once it is dry, pop the balloon and remove it through the opening left at the bottom (If you cannot get the balloon out, don't worry about it to much- no one else will see it)

You can now paint and decorate your mask or face as desired. You can add hair using yarn, thin scraps of material, or anything else you desire.

Assessment

Students will successfully complete a paper-mache Floral Skull. Students will discuss their work and its meaning for them.

This lesson will have covered all Content Standards within the area of Arts and Humanities.

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers and Students

The following books were chosen because they have reproductions that are of high quality, and readable texts for both students and teachers. They are also available at either local libraries or at the libraries of local colleges.

Castedo, Leopoldo, A History of Latin American Art and Architecture. Frederick A Praeger, Publishers, New York, 1969.

A good overall history book of Latin American art from pre-Columbian times to the present. Small illustrations, most in black and white.

Fane, Diana. Converging Cultures. Art and Identity in Spanish America. This publication was organized by the Brooklyn Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers. 1996.

An invaluable book for the historian and art historian interested in Art and Identity in Spanish America. Excellent reproductions of high quality. Essays precede the catalogue entries in each regional section. Individual works are arranged in thematic groupings that reflect a general historical development.

Smith, Edward Lucie, Latin American Art of the 20th Century. Thames and Hudson, 1993.

This was one of my main resources. It did an excellent job of describing the political climate during the 20th century which directly influenced the art. It also developed the other influences on art in the 20th century. Illustrations are not that great but they were satisfactory.

Scott, John F. Latin American Art. Ancient to Modern. University Press of Florida, 1999.

A good overview of the art produced in Latin America and a introduction to the artistic heritage of the regions. This book presents the main cultures and periods without being immersed in any particular one. Illustrations are mostly in black and white.

Enslow, Sam. The Art of Prehispanic Colombia. McFarland and Company, 1990.

This is an account of the art and cultures of a land considered by many to have been the true home of a prince so rich that he wore only powdered gold. This book discovers Colombia's golden heritage of treasures. It was not a good overall help but it did have some good illustrations.

Scholastic Art. Latino Artists: Working With Mixed Media. April/May 2000, Vol. 30, No. 6, National Gallery of Art.

Excellent resource for students with great information about Latino artists and their political agenda. Always has great activities for students and colorful illustrations.

Scholastic Art, Sandy Skoglund, Working with Fantasy. March 2000, Vol. 30 No.5, National Gallery of Art.

Excellent resource for students with great information about the artist today uses fantasy in his art. Great illustrations and great activities.

Art and Man, Salvador Dali . Vol.11, No. 5, March 1981,National Gallery of Art.

A good overview of Salvador Dali's life and work. Discusses Surrealism today . Great activities for students and good illustrations. Student discussion of art work.

Internet Sites

Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Deluxe 2000: Latin American Art; Painting, Architecture

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