



EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

El Día de los Muertos

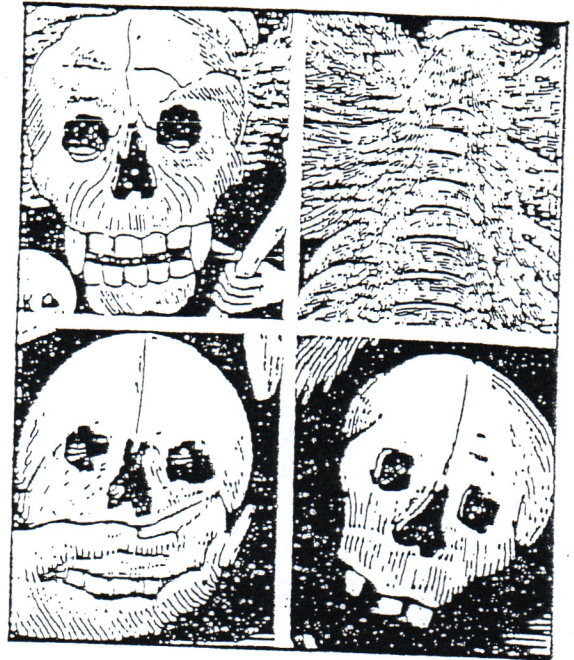
Vocabulario

1 -	celebración (celebration)	13 -	tres días (three days)
2 -	noviembre (November)	14 -	los muertos (the dead)
3 -	azteca (Aztecs)	15 -	la muerte (death)
4 -	fiesta (holiday)	16 -	México (Mexico)
5 -	comida (food)	17 -	Centro América (Central America)
6 -	familias (families)	18 -	pan de muerto (Bread of the Dead)
7 -	tumba (grave)	19 -	el día de los muertos (Day of the Dead)
8 -	flor (flower)	20 -	esqueletos (skeletons)
9 -	espíritus (spirits)	21 -	tamales (tamales)
10 -	negras (black)	22 -	agua (water)
11 -	velas (candles)	23 -	alfiñique (sugar-candy mixture)
12 -	amarillas (yellow)	24 -	ofrendas (offerings)



VIVA MÉXICO!

DIAS DE LOS MUERTOS: AN INTRODUCTION



Each year, starting on the evening of October 31 and continuing throughout the day of November 2, the people of Mexico celebrate *Días de los Muertos* (Days of the Dead). Although this holiday is celebrated in many countries, it is most frequently thought of as a Mexican celebration.

The practices of the Day of the Dead have their roots in the beliefs and customs of the early civilizations of Mexico. Ancient peoples' ideas about life after death and their rituals commemorating the dead were integrated into the feasts of All Saints' and All Souls' Days introduced in the "New World" by the Spanish conquistadors.

It might seem that a holiday that recognizes the dead would be solemn and refined. On the contrary, the way in which *Días de los Muertos* are celebrated is a combination of the festivities of the Fourth of July and Halloween. During the days leading up to the holiday bakeries are hard at work creating special breads and buns in the forms of animals and people. Candies are made in the shapes of skulls and decorated with bright icing. Skeletons appear in countless forms: puppets, papier-mâché masks and cardboard cadavers that pop out of coffins when a string is pulled.

Writers set up booths and create satirical verses called *calaveras* about famous, infamous and even not so famous people. It seems that no one is spared the cutting lines of the *calaveras*; neither politicians, nor police, nor even priests are exempt.

Días de los Muertos are special family days. On these days family members who have died are believed to return to their homes and grave sites. The family builds makeshift altars at the ancestors' home and/or graves on which they place special gifts of food, drink, or flowers. Often families who have suffered the loss of a young child will set off firecrackers to alert the young girl or boy to the location of the family home. A new toy is sure to be bought and the child's favorite food prepared.

The adult souls are honored starting on the evening of October 31. People travel from home to home singing songs celebrating the dead. At each home after the songs are offered, a portion of the food which was prepared for the deceased family members is shared with the singers. The following day the entire family travels to the cemetery bringing with them food, gifts and *zempesuchilli*, which are similar to marigolds, to decorate the grave site. Outside the cemetery vendors sell candies, incense, candies and drinks. Inside priests move from grave to grave bestowing blessings on the "souls of the dearly departed."

SKELETONS AND SKULLS

Skeletons and skulls, whether human or animal, have always been prominent in Meso-American cultures, not only as a symbol of death, but also as an expression (often humorous) of the belief that the dead continue to have life and form.

Skeletons and skulls were used extensively in pre-Hispanic art and architecture. More recently, however, the term *calavera* (skull) has come to mean satiric verses, poetry, and mock obituaries. These compositions are unique in that their authors write as if the target of their abuse is dead. No one is exempt—neither ladies, gentlemen, priests, nor presidents.

Calaveras came from the Spanish *pasquines*, and gained popularity during the colonial period, especially after independence from Spain in 1821. In 1847, the first Mexican illustrated newspaper was published. It is considered the first true *calavera* broadside associated with the Day of the Dead. *La Calavera's* editor, Ignacio Díaz Triunfo, was arrested after the thirty-first issue was published, but his ideas have not been.*

Mexico's most prolific lithographer, José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) replaced the more straightforward, pre-Conquest images of skeletons and skulls with his stylized *calaca* images that mimed humans in every conceivable activity. To make the point that even the rich and powerful must come to terms with the inevitability of death, Posada created and personified the elegant Victorian lady *Calavera Catrina* and the mustachioed *Calavera Zapatista*.

This "common man of uncommon talent" continues to have an impact on the new generation of Indo-Hispanic artists, who employ his *calaca* images in a variety of artistic expressions, including theatrical costumes based on his work. Inspired by Posada, the papier mâché images made today, Leonardo, Felipe, and David—depict skeletons engaged in a number of "earthly" activities and occupations (from lounging in bikinis to crafting *piñatas*) are internationally acclaimed. The *cartoneros* also create unusual *alebríjies* that combine parts of reptiles, birds, and butterflies. Their work characterizes the art of Mexico since pre-Hispanic times with a profound dialectical concept of the duality of beauty and ugliness, humor and horror, life and death. Plate Nos. 21 & 22.

Don Juan Tenorio

Don Juan Tenorio is a popular melodrama performed in Mexico and Spain that is associated with the Day of the Dead. It was written by the Spanish playwright José Zorrilla y Moral and first performed in Mexico in 1844. Don Juan was a character in the Spanish play *El Burlador de Sevilla* written by Tirso de Molina in the early seventeenth century.

The first scene takes place in a tavern where Don Juan is known for his depravity and corruptness. The year before he had bet his friend Don Luis that he could kill more people than him within the year. The scene begins when the two men meet a year later. Don Juan has won the bet, since Don Luis has only killed thirty-two people to Don Juan's forty.

In the second scene, Don Juan kills his girlfriend's father and Don Luis. When Doña Inéz is told of her father's death, she falls dead at Don Juan's feet. Don Juan then leaves the country.

Years later Don Juan returns to find that his father was killed as punishment for his son's inhumanity. Don Juan's estate has now been turned into a burial ground for all his victims. It is nightfall when Don Juan enters the sepulchre. The ghost of Doña Inéz's father appears from the darkness of the tombs. He has come to vindicate his daughter's death. Don Juan challenges him, but Death comes forth to take his soul to Hell. Doña Inéz's soul intervenes at this moment and both souls go to heaven. Don Juan Tenorio's soul was purified and conquered by Doña Inéz's true love.

Flower of the Dead

Flowers have always played an important part in the everyday lives of Indo-Hispanics, whose poetry is filled with references to them.

Xochiquetzal (soh-chee-ke't'-sahl), a pre-Columbian Toltec goddess, is regarded as the guardian of graves. During Day of the Dead celebrations, her flower, the yellow marigold, is often used as an altar or grave site offering symbolizing the brevity of life. It is believed that their pungent smell is the "smell of death." A path of shredded marigolds may be laid between the home and grave to guide the soul returning home that day. Baby's breath, ruby coxcombs, white amaryllis, and wild purple orchids, called the "flower of the souls," are also considered appropriate offerings.

In the town of Valle de Santiago in Guanajuato, wreaths made from flowers (fresh or plastic), called "crowns of memory," are placed on the

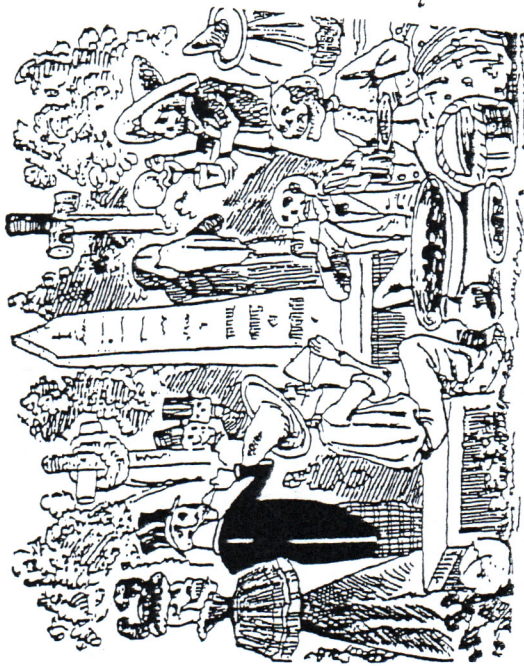
GRAVES

Altar offerings are made in the home or at the grave. Once the grave is cleaned and decorated, crosses and plaques, almost always noncommercial, are painted and set in place. The grave becomes a collage of personal memories of the deceased. Cemetery walls are "given life" with written axioms concerning mortality and paintings of crossbones and skulls. Offerings for the deceased who have no friends or relatives in the area to grieve for them are amassed on a catafalque on cemetery grounds.

The family arrives, carrying the flickering candles that will light the way for the guest being remembered. Baskets are bulging with offerings. Musicians play church hymns, funeral marches, *marimba* pieces, or lively music that is more conducive to celebrating than to mourning. Priests go about intoning prayers in ancient tongues and blessing graves. Relatives and friends keep vigil all night. Others review the year's occurrences, including the harvest with the "grave soul." It is believed that the dead are responsible for guaranteeing a good yield. Children play *lotería* or board games such as "The Anchor," or "The Goose," then fall asleep cradled in *rebozos* or wrapped in *sarapes*.

Dawn is shared by family and friends before everyone goes home to eat *pozole*, which has been prepared ahead of time for the occasion. The decorations at the grave will be dismantled in one to two weeks and the artifacts discarded; they are ephemeral.

Pre-Columbian funerary offerings included household objects, jewelry, pottery, toys, and food. Jadeite and other valuable gems and objects were placed next to the corpses to be used as bribes if the gods demanded payment before allowing them to enter the afterworld. Records of these ceremonies are found in altars and temples, mosaics, and carvings in crystal, wood, and jade.



Masks

Masks

By putting on a mask, a person becomes another being--someone who may or may not be of this world. Masks are linked to cycles of nature or religious occasions. They are ceremonial objects, often used to influence supernatural powers. Many indigenous people still depend on masks for the effectiveness of their rituals or dance performances, especially in areas where the indigenous culture has remained a dominant element in village life. Masking is most prevalent today in Latin America during Catholic holidays, saints' days, and Carnival.

Some masks date back to 1000 BC when they were used for protection during times of war. Beginning in the sixteenth century, masks were used in dramas that were introduced as a means to restructure the beliefs of the indigenous people and promote the acceptance of Christianity. Masked performers enacted morality plays espousing the never-ending struggle against evil and susceptibility to temptations. Mask makers fashion replicas of women, children, men, animals, imaginary beings, buffoons, and historical figures, utilizing a vast range of artistic expression. Materials include wood, tin, cloth, leather, hemp, clay, quartz, feathers, shells, papier mâché, stone, gold, beads, animal hair, and horns.

Masks crafted for the Day of the Dead are worn in processions through towns to local cemeteries, and as part of dance dramas that stress the cycles of life and death.

