

Cultural Expression

As a bond of culture, the historical experience of migratory labor is an essential thread in the fabric of Mexican cultural customs and traditions persisting to this day in isolated rural areas of central Washington, the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and southern Idaho.

Traditionally, Chicanos maintained themselves in family kinship groups. It was *la familia* that established a core base of security and identity for individuals. Beyond the nuclear family, workers were linked as a united *parentela* (extended family) sharing a common language and systems of belief. The family, recreational patterns, belief systems, customs and traditions all exemplify broad and diverse options of a bicultural lifestyle. Although much has been lost or attenuated, Chicano culture in the Northwest survives as a coherent and dynamic signifying system of feelings, attitudes, assumptions and expressive forms through which a large segment of the population experiences a unified way of life.

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Eva Castellanoz, Corona (crown), paper, wax, wire, dye, tape, 1982, 10" x 6" x 12". Courtesy of the Idaho Commission on the Arts. Featured in *Folk Arts of Idaho* exhibit and catalog, 1984. Photograph by Kelley Powell.

A significant vernacular art tradition deriving from church practice is the creation of home altars. In the Northwest, altars are not as common as in the Southwest. Nonetheless, they are not unusual components in Mexican-American homes. Altares serve as private shrines for personal meditation. They can be arranged on a table top, on top of the radio or television set or on a wall shelf generally in the bedroom.



Popular forms of cultural expression are visible in emblems presenting symbols of ethnic, national and religious identity. Often associated with Chicano youth culture, these emblems appear in decals, T-shirts, posters, prints and other culturally expressive graphic forms.



The making of *flores enceradas* (waxed paper flowers) is a traditional handcraft maintained by Sra. Eva Castellanoz of Nyssa, Oregon. Her beautiful and fragile creations are related to communal observances for *El Día del los Difuntos* (All Souls Day) and *Quinceañeras* (Fifteenth Birthday Celebrations).

Coronas (arrangement of paper flowers dipped in wax) are made to be placed on graves during All Souls Day on November 2 or at other times of the year. *Coronas de Quinceañeras* are small exquisite arrangements of waxed flowers to be worn as headpieces during the celebration of a young woman's fifteenth birthday, symbolizing the purity and innocence of the quinceañera. Photographed by Steve Siporin, Folk Arts Coordinator, Idaho Commission on the Arts.

Doña Juanita Barrón and her granddaughter Juanita are posed next to the traditional bedroom altar maintained by Sra. Barrón in her Seattle residence. Photographed by Bob Haft.

