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## Day of the Dead a celebration of souls, not a scary affair

■ Day of the Dead event a celebration

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### Artists make catrinas



Agueda Navarro paints details on the face of a catrina at Plaza Santa Cecilia in preparation for Day of the Dead. JOHN CLANTON / Tulsa World

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Posted: Thursday, October 31, 2013 12:00 am | Updated: 2:44 pm, Thu Oct 31, 2013.

By JASON ASHLEY WRIGHT World Scene Writer | 0 comments

A chair is saved for Pancho, Katia Anaya's

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is the first altar that Juan Miret, a native of Venezuela, has built. The Dio de los Muertos altars traditionally have three levels. The first identifies the person or people to whom the altar is dedicated, the second layer holds their favorite items and foods, and the third contains religious symbols. JOHN CLANTON / Tulsa World

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#### Dia de los Muertos

Images of the traditional pan de Muerto and Catrinas under construction

great-great grandfather.

The sombrero is also his, as are the catrinas, or female skeleton figurines, and the pan de muerto bread of the dead.

They are set below a black-and-white photo of Pancho on a temporary altar made in his memory.

"This is one of my favorite traditions," said Anaya, a member of the fifth generation of Pancho Anaya's family, who own three bakeries in town. Pancho himself started the family baking business a century ago in Mexico.

He may be gone, physically; but Pancho's spirit is celebrated this time every year leading up to Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, which falls every Nov. 2.

The holiday is celebrated in some Latino cultures, especially in Mexico. But with the growing influence of Latino culture in the United States, Day of the Dead is steadily gaining more notoriety nationwide including Tulsa.

Perhaps that's most evident by the 19th annual Dia de Los Muertos Arts Festival 5-11 p.m. Friday at Living Arts, 307 E. Brady St.

One of the highlights of the festival will be the "Altared Spaces" exhibit of more than 30 altars created by locals honoring loved ones.

Among them will be an altar by local writer Juan Miret, whom we met along with Anaya one recent morning at Pancho Anaya Bakery, 2420 E. Admiral Blvd.

A native of Venezuela, Miret had never built an altar for Day of the Dead.

"It has been a wonderful, intense and colorful experience," said Miret, who constructed the altar with his wife and mother to honor two friends who died a few months ago.

Making an altar is a key element of Day of the Dead, he said.

"Death can mean pain and sadness, but for the Latino culture, the Day of the Dead is an event of celebration and family enjoyment," said Miret.

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Perhaps the best way for the non-Latino community to think about Day of the Dead is as a commemoration equivalent to Memorial or Decoration Day, said Sara E. Martínez, coordinator of the Hispanic Resource Center at Martin Regional Library, 2601 S. Garnett Road.

"When I lived in Mexico, that was what struck me as most important about the day," she said. The point is to honor those who have passed on, especially loved ones and family members. In many communities, it serves as the time when everyone pitches in to clean up the cemetery.

In Mexico, Day of the Dead evolved from pre-Hispanic, indigenous traditions that merged with Catholic rituals of All Souls and All Saints Day with the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors, Martinez explained. Now, that has merged with Halloween "to the dismay of many."

**'Beautiful tradition'**

"It's not supposed to be scary," Anaya said of Dia de los Muertos. "It's really a beautiful tradition."

Even after years of celebrating the holiday, Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack sometimes has difficulty explaining it to friends.

"People think it's something to be feared," said Sharpnack, author of the popular Muy Bueno blog that has been highlighted before by Ree Drummond's Pioneer Woman website. "They just don't understand the story behind it."

In the weeks leading up to Nov. 2, Anaya helped construct the altar for her great-great grandfather. Traditionally, the altars have three levels representing the person's life on Earth, purgatory, then heaven.

The altar to Pancho, which sits to the left of the entrance at the Kendall-Whittier bakery, is surrounded by Mexican cempasuchitl, or marigold, the traditional flower used during the holiday.

Where Martinez lived in Mexico, families would prepare an ofrenda, or offering, at their home dedicated to dead family members. If there had been a death in the family during the previous year, the ofrenda would be especially abundant.

The ofrenda should include foods that the family members liked to eat or other items that they might indulge in, such as tobacco or booze, Martinez said. A typical ofrenda consists of items such as arroz con leche (rice pudding), mole, fruit, pan de muerto, calaveritas (sugar skulls with the person's name inscribed), cooked pumpkin, papel picado (perforated paper) drawing and copal incense.

In addition to her grandmother's rolling pin, Sharpnack placed pomegranates on an altar. Her grandmother had a pomegranate tree and would give Sharpnack a broomstick to knock fruit from the branches for dessert. This year, she's placing pan dulce, or sweet bread, on the altar.

Sometimes, petals from the marigolds are sprinkled to form a kind of path for the spirits to follow from the door to the ofrenda, said Martinez.

Photos are important, too, as are mementos from the deceased. And all ofrendas must have a small dish of salt, a glass of water and candles, she said.

Salt represents the continuance of life. Candles are used to welcome spirits or guide them

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on their journeys, Sharpnack said. Water or sometimes tequila or the deceased's favorite beverage is placed on the altar to quench the spirit's thirst following the journey.

Some alters even have toys for children spirits, Martinez said.

"Supposedly, children spirits visit the ofrenda on Nov. 1 (All Saints) and adults on Nov. 2 (All Souls)," she explained. On the following morning, according to tradition, all the essence and flavor is gone from the elements in the offering.

Children will visit house to house, and be given fruit or pastries from the ofrenda, said Martinez. In Mexico City, they would receive coins.

There's a story behind everything, said Sharpnack. Once people unfamiliar with the holiday learn these stories, they have a better appreciation of Day of the Dead.

"Tulsa is multi-cultural, multi-faith," Miret said. To celebrate Day of the Dead, "You don't have to be Catholic. You don't even have to be a religious person."

Moreover, the holiday is a chance to bridge any gaps between cultures.

"When we have an opportunity to wave a flag and say, 'Hey, we're here!' we'll do it," Miret said. "And what better opportunity than this."

For more, visit [livingarts.org](http://livingarts.org)

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### Artists make catrinas

There is no Day of the Dead without catrinas, Juan Miret said.

Mexican cartoonist José Guadalupe Posada was the original creator of the catrina by way of a metal engraving, said Miret, a local writer who is participating in this year's Dia de Los Muertos Arts Festival at Living Arts on Friday night. But it was muralist Diego Rivera who gave those bones life with his mural "Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park."

Rivera was the one who christened those beautiful creatures as catrinas.

Catrinas are a way of reminding us that we are passing through this life, Miret explained.

Marina Lozano-García, a papier-mache teacher and native of Guanajuato, Mexico, has been in Tulsa leading workshops on catrinas. One of her best students, Agueda Navarro, created the bride and the groom pictured on this page.

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### Dia de los Muertos Arts Festival

The 19th annual Dia de los Muertos Arts Festival will be held from 5 to 11 p.m. Friday at Living Arts, 307 E. Brady St.

Expect Mexican food vendors, a skeleton dance and fire dancers, plus more than 30 artists' booths showing and selling their works at this event.

The "Altared Spaces" exhibit showcases more than 30 altars to the dead. An area will also be dedicated for letters to the dead, where you can write a letter to your departed loved one.

You'll also find an exhibit and silent auction for Dia de los Muertos artwork, with an

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artwork installation in the corner gallery.

Cafe de Muertos will serve churros, Mexican hot chocolate and pan de muerto, and a children's activity area will highlight sugar skulls and chalk altar-building.

The Day of the Dead murals contest will be found on the building's north side, as will loteria, a Mexican bingo-like game.

At 7:30 p.m., Father David Medina will arrive for the blessing with the matachines dancers in costume.

Here's what else is happening at the festival:

### Main Stage

5-6 p.m.: Eleganza

6:15-6:45 p.m.: Tierra Mestiza

7-8 p.m.: Brujo Roots

8:15-9:15 p.m.: Salsabor

9:30-10:30 p.m.: Lamento Show

10:30-11 p.m.: Parade and fire dancers

### Outside Stage:

5-6 p.m.: Tulsa Youth Orchestra

6:15-7 p.m.: Jose Torres

7-8 p.m.: Otoniel (marimba player)

8:15-9:15 p.m.: Tribalero

9:30-10:30 p.m.: George Priet

For more, [livingarts.org](http://livingarts.org)

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### 'Aliens, Immigrants and Other Evildoers'

José Torres-Tama will perform his piece "Aliens, Immigrants and Other Evildoers" at 8 p.m. Saturday at Living Arts, 307 E. Brady St.

Part of the appeal of popular science fiction is the way it allows an examination of race relations outside of our cultural associations. Klingons and Vulcans working side by side in "Star Trek," for instance, or the "Star Wars" cantina scene transcend contemporary society's woes and give audiences a sense of perspective.

Torres-Tama, a New Orleans-based performance artist, explores this transcendence and turns it on its head in his piece performance, which approaches illegal immigrants as science-fiction aliens. The absurd double meaning of the homonym matches the paradox of contemporary American culture's dependence on and revulsion at Latino immigrants.

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## 19TH ANNUAL DIA DE LOS MUERTOS ARTS FESTIVAL

**When:** 5-11 p.m. Friday

**Where:** Living Arts, 307 E. Brady St.

**Admission:** \$5 admission (ages 12-younger free)

[livingarts.org](http://livingarts.org)

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